

REYNOLDS GALLERY

For Immediate Release

JAMES PROSEK

Recent Works

January 13 – February 24, 2017

Opening Reception
Friday, January 13
7 – 9 pm



Atlantic Cod, 2015, oil, acrylic, and mixed media on panel, 45 x 56 inches
Image courtesy of James Prosek and Schwartz • Wajahat, New York

Reynolds Gallery is pleased to announce the opening exhibition of recent paintings and sculpture by artist and writer James Prosek. Combining elements of his well-known naturalist style with new formats, Prosek displays a body of work which includes watercolors on tea-stained paper alongside mixed media sculptures and his latest silhouette works on panel. *Recent Works* opens with a reception for the artist on Friday, January 13 from 7 – 9 pm and continues through February 24, 2017.

James Prosek's paintings teem with life, presenting a diverse collection of vertebrates—both dwellers of the air and water. An avid traveler and researcher, his inspiration stems directly from life observation of subjects and their habitats mixed with art historical references from the canon of natural history painting and beyond. His direct observations infuse the work with an instinctual, and personal quality. He treats his subjects as individual creatures rather than wholesale members of a species. The works are rendered with precision, radiating with crimson freckles or emerald bands, illuminating the tawny tea-stained paper or off-white panels. An Atlantic cod gleams with wetness, appearing slippery, while a tanager's feathers extend beyond the frame, seemingly caught in a breeze, casting a shadow on the petal of a Virginia magnolia.

It was Prosek's introduction to South Asian miniature paintings in 2007 that spurred the use of tea-stained paper, a common background used in the region. Adapting the neutral background, he layers over it a trilogy of objects that create a triangular composition. The orders of objects that he composes allude to archetypal schema for documenting species—family trees, classification hierarchies and food webs—yet Prosek's subject choice artfully challenges this scientific reference. Instead of arranging species based on their relatedness, names or classifications, he explains he assembles subjects based on their "proximity, color, shape, form, and size," often arranging biologically unrelated species. His priorities are his own and are mostly experiential and aesthetic. He describes them as personal taxonomies, and they convey the idea that the way we choose to order nature shapes our perceptions of the things around us. Prosek revels in the paradoxes his arrangements might create, which are harmonious yet unscientific. They employ the narrative frameworks of science but they are unmistakably art and question the desires of our pattern-seeking brains, the inherent human urge to name, classify, and accurately organize the environment.

Further dissecting ideas of classification and re-contextualization, his new body of work depicts silhouettes painted on contrasting white backgrounds. The format originates from old field guides, which lists birds' names and descriptions in correlation with a numbered silhouette drawing of each species. In pieces like *Atlantic Cod*, Prosek organizes and numbers each creature, yet doesn't provide a key explaining what the animals "are." He states, "I had grown critical of how people go out in nature just wanting to know the name of something and check it off a list, so I started making works where I painted the silhouettes and numbers but did not provide a key. I wanted the viewer to become frustrated that they could not satisfy their urge to know 'what it is.' Because knowing the name of something isn't necessarily knowing it. There are ways of making observations in nature without letting the language part of our brains take over." By presenting both tea-stained and monochromatic paintings, *Recent Works* synthesizes the two formats, truly allowing Prosek's themes of conservation and environmentalism to emerge.

The Connecticut native graduated from Yale University in 1997 and currently lives and works in Easton, CT. He has exhibited in Abuja, Nigeria and Ghana, Africa, both of which hosted *Art in Embassy* shows (and is working on a large permanent installation for the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan); The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA; Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Academy of Sciences, both, Washington, DC; Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY. His work is held in major private and public collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; The National Museum of Wildlife Art, Jackson, Wyoming; Try-me, Richmond, VA; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; and the North Carolina Museum of Art, among others. Beyond his artistic career, Prosek is a well-noted author and conservationist. He has written for the New York Times and National Geographic Magazine, and has published eleven books, many of which received national recognition. In 2003 he received a Peabody Award for his documentary on the life of author and naturalist Izaak Walton. Prosek co-founded World Trout, a cold-water conservation organization with Patagonia which fundraises by selling t-shirts with Prosek's paintings. In 2012 he was awarded the Gold Medal for Distinction in Natural History Art (Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia).

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