

E-SQUARED MAGAZINE

A R T + S C I E N C E



“To see a wren in a bush, call it ‘wren’, and go on walking is to have (self-importantly) seen nothing. To see a bird and stop, watch, feel, forget yourself for a moment, be in the bushy shadows, maybe then feel ‘wren’ - that is to have joined in a larger moment with the world.” – Gary Snyder

James Prosek's work as a visual artist and a writer questions accepted notions of how we understand and interpret the natural world. Prosek's interest in taxonomy, and in general how we join words to the world, began with his passion for nature. He discovered that the process of taking nature and partitioning it into units that can be labeled for convenience of communication is problematic. He explores, among other things, the points at which language fails, and those points are opportunities for communication through other tools, like drawing.

Examining the ways in which we name and order nature, the systems we use to try to harness nature, our classifications and taxonomies, and the limitations of language in describing biological diversity, Prosek invites us to reflect on what these systems say about our culture, our priorities, and our values. Likening to that of John James Audubon, Prosek studies, documents, and illustrates species in their local habitat. He often collaborates with biologists in creating works and exhibitions. His most recent project involves research on species migration in and out of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Working closely with an ecologist studying elk migration, he explored the lines that are drawn in nature but nature does not always follow. His work takes the form of paintings, sculptures, installations, murals, and film.

James Prosek is the author of eleven books and has written for *The New York Times* and *National Geographic Magazine* and won a Peabody Award in 2003 for his documentary about traveling through England in the footsteps of Izaak Walton. He co-founded a conservation initiative called *World Trout* in 2004 with Yvon Chouinard, the owner of Patagonia clothing company, raising money for coldwater habitat conservation through the sale of T-shirts featuring trout paintings. He has exhibited at places like the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Aldrich Contemporary Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, DC. His work is currently exhibited at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming. He is currently working on a book about how we name and order the natural world.



ARTIST
WRITER
NATURALIST

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James Prosek. Detail of *Yellowstone Composition No. 1*. 2016. Oil, acrylic & mixed media on sintra & wood panel. 120 x 120 in.



James Prosek. Detail of *Bison Cow*. 2016. Watercolor, gouache and colored pencil on tea-stained paper. 27 x 30 in.