

TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

**ATU PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
GRANT
2005-2008**

DAVID MUDRINICH

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ART

B. RESTATEMENT OF PROBLEM RESEARCHED USING CREATIVE WORK

TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PROJECT

This project involves creating a series of artworks based on my experience investigating the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve near Pawhuska, Oklahoma. This preserve is a rare and sensitive ecological area that is contained within the watershed of the Arkansas River. I created a collection of images, on location, that examined the visual design quality of the ecosystem. Seasonal aspects of space, light, color and texture were depicted, with a variety of art materials, in order to discover the underlying design of nature within this environment. My field sketches are in the process of being translated into more detailed studio works that interpret the scope of this location.

Another component of this research included visiting the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, where I examined the field notes and drawings of 19th century artist Thomas Moran.

C. REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND CREATIVE WORK

Three seasonal trips were made to the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in the months of November 2005, December 2005 and May 2006. On each trip, I would remain on the Preserve from morning into early evening. During this time I would travel to different areas of the preserve and conduct field observations, recorded in a variety of art medium. These would include the vast areas of treeless open space; the watersheds of Bird Creek and Sand Creek; close-up texture views of vegetation, weather, ground surface and the utilitarian effects of ranching and oil drilling. Discussions with local ranchers and preserve personnel gave me additional insight into the land. Individual artworks would take anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours to complete. Weather :

conditions as well as the complexity of the view influenced this research time.

At the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, I reviewed in detail, over 150 drawings and paintings of Thomas Moran. This included examining his choice of subject matter, his use of contour line, his limited selection of color, his written notes, and the amount of detail he rendered in each piece.

D. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

During my three visits to the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, I created 45 observation field studies. These were produced using a variety of art media which included pencil, ink, watercolor, chalk pastel, oil pastel, and conte crayon. In addition, I took 265 photographs of all aspects of the area.

The expanse of the land and sky met with my expectations. I was able to record design elements of related shapes and colors between the clouds and the grassland. The light from different times of the day, as well as different seasons, influenced the colors and the aesthetic mood of the study piece. I also rendered works that interpreted the stunted cross timbers of post and blackjack oak. These were often found upon a ridgeline above a water source.

A herd of 3000 bison roam over the Preserve and present additional shapes that sometimes resemble the tree lines. Their trails also provide line contours that accent the grassland.

Unexpected was the visual influence that ranching and oil drilling presented to the land. Several of the finished studio pieces will include elements relating to these activities.

In comparing Thomas Moran's approach to field study to mine, I noticed two main similarities and one major difference. We both share a common interest in the use of line

and detail. Concerning finished studio work, we both utilize photos with sketches occasionally for certain structural detail. I was surprised to discover that a lot of his color applications, especially in watercolor, were often added back at camp instead of at the location he was rendering from, which I almost entirely do.

E. CONCLUSION

There will be a public exhibition and gallery talk of the art work created in this project in the Norman Hall Art Gallery at Arkansas Tech University in March 2008. This exhibit will include field drawings and studio finished works to reveal the complete process involved in portraying this specific geographic place. I have applied for a sabbatical in Fall 2007 in order to complete the studio interpretations of this experience. Once the remaining work is completed, I will be submitting additional exhibit proposals to other venues in Arkansas and Oklahoma.

Today's society has a continuing concern for the preservation of natural places. My intent is for this project to provide a venue for deeper understanding of this complex and sensitive environment.

Dair Mednic



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March 1, 2007

David Mudrinich
293 Wheeler Bend Road
Russellville, AR 72802

Dear Mr. Mudrinich,

This letter is to confirm your scheduled exhibition "Tallgrass Prairie" to be held in the Norman Hall Gallery March of 2008. Thank you for your participation and I am looking forward to the exhibit. If you have any questions concerning your show please feel free to contact me.

Thanks again,

Neal Harrington
Assistant Professor of Art
Norman Hall Gallery Director
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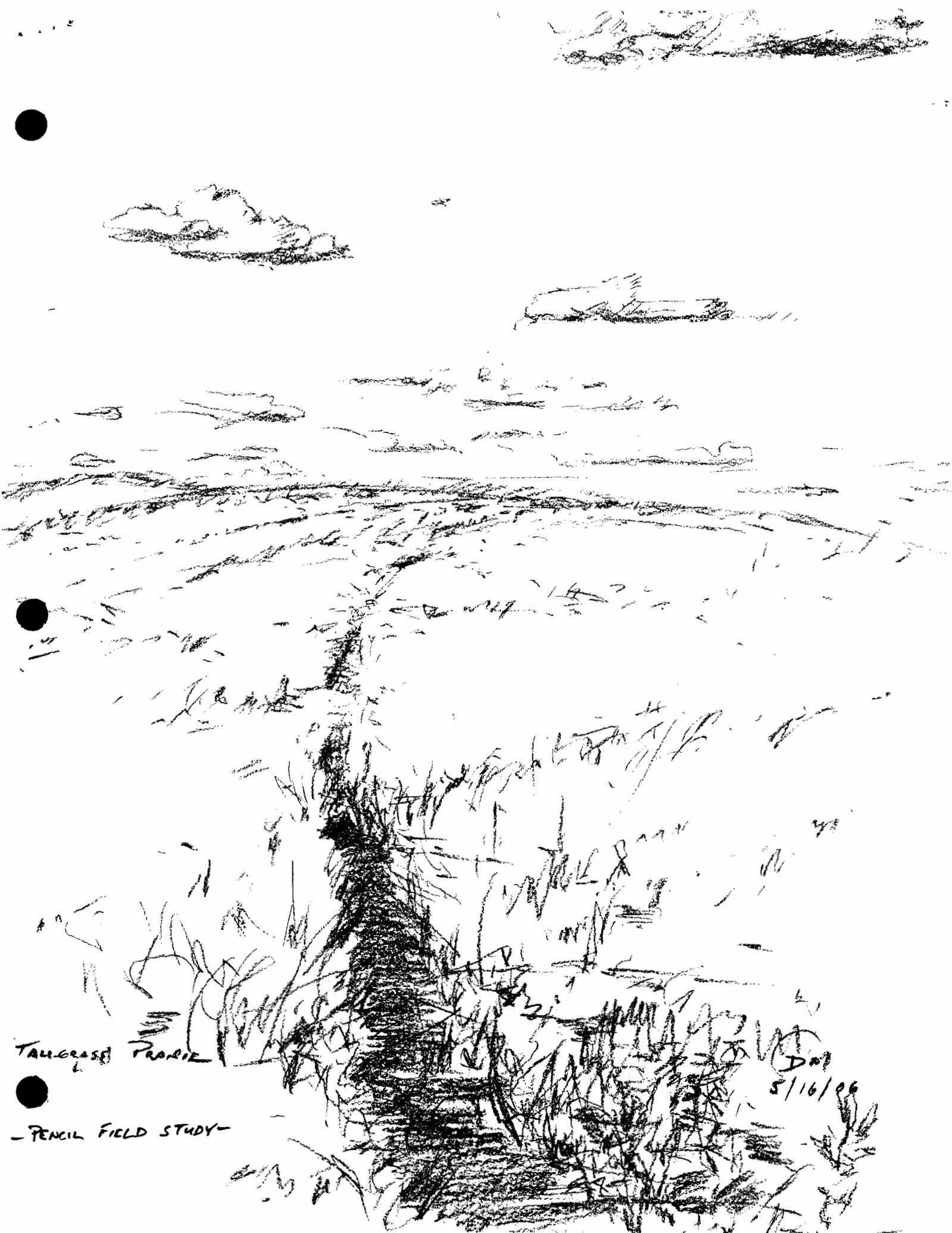
- WATERCOLOR FIELD STUDY -

-WATERCOLOR FIELD STUDY-





—WATERCOLOR FIELD STUDY—



TALLGRASS PRAIRIE

Day
5/16/96

- PENCIL FIELD STUDY -