



*Philip Juras keeps about eight different colors on his palette and does “a great deal of mixing”, painting thinly to stay in control of the effects he is striving to produce and hasten drying time.*

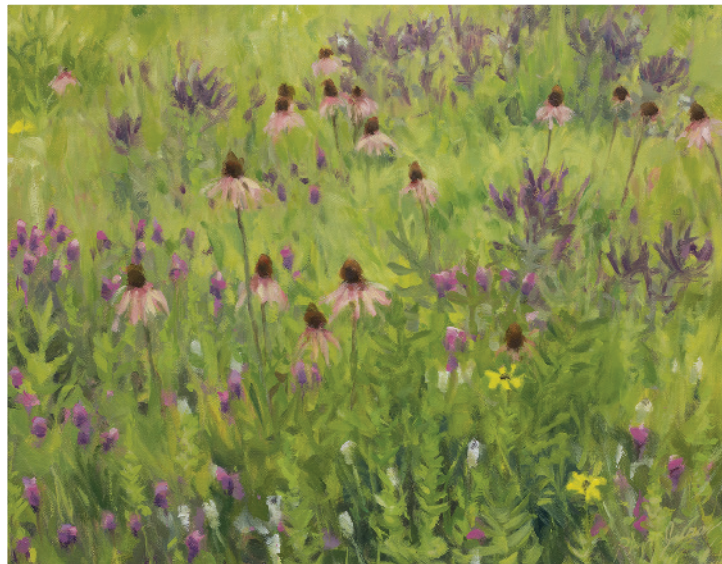
## Picturing the Prairie

CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN FEATURES PHILIP JURAS' PAINTINGS UNTIL SEPTEMBER 12

**W**HAT CAN A LAND DONATION ACCOMPLISH? Consider Grigsby Prairie. This sprawling 44-acre tallgrass prairie took root when Peggy (Grigsby) Richards initially donated 14.5 acres of land to Citizens for Conservation (CFC) in memory of her father, B.J. Grigsby in 1980. Richards appreciated the progress she saw and gifted additional acreage to CFC over time. As CFC's first prairie restoration project, Grigsby Prairie has been a catalyst transforming a small volunteer-based nonprofit organization into a large, locally based source of knowledge, and a source of seeds. For artist Philip Juras, Grigsby Prairie is one source of inspiration and conservation that he shares with a wider audience through his paintings, books, and presentations.

### PHILIP JURAS RETURNS TO GRIGSBY

For Philip Juras, the opportunity to document rare grassland ecosystems of Illinois was fascinating. Based in Athens, Georgia, Juras was not new to grasslands, as he'd already examined pre-settlement grasslands of the southeast for his MLA thesis and created an exhibit of 68 oil paintings depicting pre-settlement southern wilderness, but Grigsby Prairie opened a door to wonder. Juras recently returned to Grigsby Prairie on May 8 to join a group of CFC members to walk the landscape that he has captured in some of his paintings.



*“Grigsby Prairie Flora” illustrates the biodiversity of this local resource.*



*CFC members walk Grigsby Prairie on May 8, 2021, to learn about conservation and some of the prairie areas that Philip Juras chose to paint. Photo: QB Staff*

Describing his encounter with Grigsby Prairie as one of “aesthetic abundance at every turn,” Juras’ first challenge was to select an area he wanted to capture on canvas. “I found it challenging as a landscape subject because there is not much there to create a composition. In 18th and 19th century [paintings], trees and rocks frame the view,” described Juras. “The prairie can be flat without anything to break that horizontal plane, but Grigsby has a lot of botanical variation.”

Purple and white prairie clovers, pale purple coneflowers, leadplant, co-reopsis, and black-eyed Susans beckoned him to a drier upland part of the site on July 11, 2017. “Floral details and coarse-shaped leaves of forbs, such as compass plant, were nicely set off by a grassy background of fine-textured prairie dropseed,” noted Juras.

“Before I began painting, I was distracted by the remarkably loud and constant buzz of pollinators, but upon completing my painting a few hours later, all had gone silent,” observed Juras. Later that day, the artist would



Philip Juras in the Joutras Gallery, Regenstein Center at Chicago Botanic Garden where his paintings are on view until Sept. 12.

learn that 64 kinds of bees collect prairie clover pollen and nectar, and that the pollen is usually exhausted by 10 a.m. "To have just witnessed that interaction, where the prairie (and prairie clovers) had been absent for a century, seemed miraculous."

#### A PAINTER'S POINT OF VIEW

This trip to Grigsby Prairie was one of a dozen visits over the course of six years, Juras used to photograph, paint, and research the ecology and history of prairies from the Wisconsin border to the Ohio River for "Picturing the Prairie: A Vision of Restoration". The mid-size (14" x 18") "Grigsby Prairie Flora" field painting Juras created in one morning has a soft, impressionistic feel in contrast to larger paintings that engage peripheral vision. "I finish a lot of smaller work on-site very quickly, in one to four hours, but studio painting takes 10 to 40 hours. Small [landscapes] convey the immediacy of painting directly in the field, but the large studio works have the more subtle information I want to convey to the viewer," shared Juras.

Both the painting and the landscape share intention and pattern. "From a painter's point of view (who is ecologically grounded), I'm seeing patterns of vegetation that are responding to moisture content and the type of soil," observed Juras. "Prairie restoration is bringing species back to the specific parts of a site they are adapted to, not just throwing out seed in hopes it will sort itself out. I had no idea what level of expertise was needed. It was a completely intentional landscape. I was amazed by that."

To purchase "Picturing the Prairie: A Vision of Restoration", contact Chicago Botanic Garden. Individual paintings may be purchased directly from the artist via <https://www.philipjuras.com/artwork/>. Plan your visit to see Juras' work at [chicagobotanic.org](http://chicagobotanic.org).



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

April Anderson  
is a naturalist and  
freelance writer who  
can be contacted at  
[team.nature.ed@  
gmail.com](mailto:team.nature.ed@gmail.com).



ARTFULLY CREATING SUSTAINABLE SPACES  
FOR EVERY LIFESTYLE

Consult with us today regarding your  
custom build or renovation project



MATTHEW GOYKE DESIGN LLC

architecture + design + project management

630/338-2310

[www.matthewgoyke.com](http://www.matthewgoyke.com)

chicago + h o n o l u l u



PLANNING  
SPRING  
PROJECTS?

We'll make your dreams  
come true.

CP Landscaping  
224-848-1751  
[www.cp-landscaping.biz](http://www.cp-landscaping.biz)



DEPENDABLE & PROFESSIONAL  
COMMERCIAL & RESIDENTIAL SERVICES YEAR-ROUND