

## **Prairie Grass**

**Beth Galston, Artist**

**2014, Northwest Service Center, San Antonio, TX**

**with Bartek Konieczny**

*Materials: Stainless steel, galvanized and powder-coated steel, stone, lighting*

*Dimensions: 18' H x 16' W x 20' L*

*Prairie Grass* is a walk-through, kinetic environmental sculpture based on the form and movement of wild grasses. It was commissioned by the City of San Antonio, TX and is sited in front of their Northwest Service Center, a new public works facility.

The piece was inspired by watching wind blow through a field of tall grasses, causing them to gently sway in unison. I was struck by the elegance of each stalk, which has a slender stem that is straight near the ground, then curves and tapers as it rises, terminating in rounded seed elements at the tip.

After taking photographs and videos of the grasses, I made study models using piano wires and beads, with a fan to create movement. I was excited by the beauty of the model in motion. I wanted to transform my original experience and make a large-scale piece that people could walk through and view from an "ant's eye" view.

The sculpture is made of 21 stainless steel stalks, ranging from 10' to 18' high, each with 6 to 8 spherical "seed" elements at the tip. The spheres range in size from 2" - 3 1/2" in diameter, and are made of steel hemispheres that are welded, machined, galvanized, and powder-coated a golden yellow color. The stalks are arranged in three groupings, with space between them for people to walk. The sculpture is sited in a rectangular area with a ground cover of warm-toned 3/8" stones. It is illuminated by 8 small up lights, causing the stalks and spheres to glow dramatically at night.

The piece is engineered to withstand 90 mph wind gusts. Using a stiffer stainless material at the base where there is more stress, and a more flexible stainless material at the top, some of the movement from the original model was preserved. All of the stalks gently sway in wind gusts of 10 - 15 mph. Standing on site, one can see the landscaped vegetation moving in the wind in synchronicity with the sculpture.