

Roots

Jessie Homer French

June 30, 2022 – August 13, 2022

Various Small Fires is proud to present *Roots* by Jessie Homer French. The exhibition of new paintings is the regional narrative painter's fourth solo exhibition with VSF and first at the gallery's Texas location.

Mostly executed during the pandemic, a series of six new paintings paying homage to the United States Postal Service (USPS) compose the core of this exhibition. French lovingly portrays post offices as quiet protagonists, painting regional post offices she has known well at one point or another in her life. These include the artist's current post office (located half an hour away from her rural Mountain Center, California home and studio), the one from her childhood in Upstate New York, and the Winter Harbor, Maine post office used by her long-time best friend, June.

For decades, French has eschewed the use of computers and cell phones for correspondence, preferring handwritten letters delivered by USPS mail. These postal sites remain understandably significant to the artist and were even more meaningful during the former Trump administration. Traditionally a non-partisan institution, the USPS suddenly became a political flashpoint as conservative lawmakers ridiculed its business model and refused to provide financial support in the wake of pandemic-induced struggles. Furthermore, baseless accusations of absentee voter fraud ran rampant, putting the USPS at the center of a contentious election cycle. French, known for portraying the delicate ecosystems of the natural world surrounding her, shifts gears in this work to preserve sites of social importance that have come to be threatened.

The additional paintings in *Roots* include subject matter that French covets. *Mojave Burning*, 2021, depicts the 2020 Dome Fire of the Mojave National Preserve and demonstrates French's unique ability to capture environmental perils poetically. Two cemetery scenes reflect the artist's life-long fascination with these locations where French recalls joyfully playing as a child. *Farm Country*, 2021, provides a sweeping panoramic view of a cemetery site across a five-foot-long canvas. Underneath the rows of gravestones French paints the deceased cleanly dressed in neat boxes. In *Roots*, 2021, a network of roots from a large tree trunk expands underground to intertwine with the burial sites below. These works are far from macabre, evidenced by the presence of lush green foliage and the initials of French and her late husband of over 50 years lovingly inscribed within the tree trunk of the latter work.

French, a self-taught artist, makes use of bright, flat fields of color and intriguing depictions of pictorial space. With great care and attention to detail, she paints her scenes in a simplified, sophisticated manner that beckons for one to slow down and appreciate what might slip from existence.

Jessie Homer French (b. 1940, New York, New York, lives and works in Mountain Center, California) is a self-taught, self-proclaimed "regional narrative painter" who routinely, perhaps even obsessively, paints archetypes of death, nature, and rural life. She has held solo exhibitions at Massimo De Carlo, London; Various Small Fires, Los Angeles and Seoul; Mother's Tankstation, Dublin and London; the Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, California; Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica, California; Winchester Gallery, Victoria, British Columbia; and Ankrum Gallery, Los Angeles. Her work has also been included in group exhibitions at Francois Ghebaly, Los Angeles; CLEARING, New York; the Palm Springs Museum; Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach; and Samuel Freeman Gallery, Santa Monica. French's work is included in the permanent collection of the Palm Spring Art Museum, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the Dallas Museum of Art. Her work is currently on view in the 59th Venice Biennale.