

Related events

Thursday, February 9, 6 p.m.
Opening Reception

Thursday, February 23, 5:30 p.m.
The Veterinarian's War: Lieutenant Harry Hunt in the World War

Thursday, March 9, 5:30 p.m.
Gallery Walk with Lee Penner

Thursday, April 13, 5:30 p.m.
Anthrax & Abattoirs: The Archive of Colonel Frank Caldwell Hershberger

Outside image: Detail, Tom Mohr, *July 17, 2007*, 2007, inkjet print mounted on aluminum, courtesy of the artist

Inside image (top): Tom Mohr, *October 27, 2004*, 2004, inkjet print mounted on aluminum, courtesy of the artist

Inside image (bottom): Tom Mohr, *April 1, 2006*, 2006, inkjet print mounted on aluminum, courtesy of the artist

KANSAS VETERINARIAN AT WORK
A PORTRAIT BY **TOM MOHR**

February 7-June 17, 2017



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Tom Mohr, a native of Rochester, New York, came to Kansas in 1967, attracted by Kansas State University's architecture program. During his first year, Mohr befriended Lee Penner, the subject of *Kansas Veterinarian at Work*. This series marked a turning point in Mohr's practice, when he decided to shift his focus from studio-based photography to making portraits of people and the places where they live.

After studying architecture for one year at K-State, Mohr decided to transfer to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, and graduated with a BFA in painting. While at Pratt, he developed an interest in the school's photography program and eventually realized that his true passion lay in that medium.

He refined his knowledge of color photography while working for Frank Tartaro Color Labs in New York, specializing in dye transfer printing.¹ A few years of being in the industry convinced Mohr that color photography was increasingly moving toward computer-based platforms, so he moved to Applied Graphic Technologies to gain training in computer graphics. Just a few years later, in 1994, Kodak discontinued the production of dye transfer materials. After his post at Applied Graphic Technologies, Mohr became a color photography specialist in *Barrons* magazine's art department. Alongside his professional endeavors, Mohr pursued his own art photography practice, working in his New York City apartment near Wall Street.

Mohr lost his apartment when terrorists flew two planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. He and his wife, Jil, were on vacation in Utah. Mohr's studio was destroyed. Since he could only use his 35mm camera, he took to the streets to photograph his city and fellow residents. He discovered himself enjoying the fast pace of the work and social interaction after having concentrated for several years on studio-based photography. Mohr recalls, "The aftermath [of 9/11] for us was the worst time of our life, but the best thing that ever happened to us."² Mohr quit his day job, bought a trailer, and embraced a 13-year nomadic life across the United States with his wife, pursuing his photography. The couple also lived in Venice for two years during the decade. He recalled spending his days walking into churches and admiring paintings by Venetian Renaissance artist Tintoretto, whose ability to convey spontaneity and immediacy, in Mohr's eyes, foreshadowed contemporary photography. One of Mohr's Venice works is in the collection of the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York.

Kansas Veterinarian at Work was one of the earliest series Mohr started after leaving New York. Mohr purchased his trailer in Junction City, Kansas, and while doing so, reconnected with Lee. He discovered that his old college friend had become a large animal veterinarian, serving many of the small family farms in Kansas. Mohr accompanied Penner on his rounds, initially intending to send a mutual friend a prank photograph. But, as Mohr recounted, "Within minutes, I became fascinated with what he did, the farmers, and the farm environment."³ Mohr returned to Kansas several times over the next decade, riding with Penner in his dusty blue van.

The resulting series captures rural Kansas life from on high, as well as up close. Some of his panoramic compositions capture expansive blue skies with sculptural clouds and soil and greenery as far as the eye can see. Other works show beige expanses of dusty ground dotted with people, cows, barns, and farming vehicles. Mohr gets up close in other photographs, documenting the personal connections forged on the land: farmers taking a rest and

laughing with Penner in fields or backyards, clients and doctor coming together for a family dinner. Penner explained that his clients were also his friends, and there was nothing that he would not do for them.⁴ *September 8, 2012* shows him making an evening visit to take a horse's blood sample for a competition the next day; his client had forgotten to call him earlier. *July 16, 2007* presents Penner on the front steps of a foreman's house caring for the family dog, even though small animal care was not part of his practice.

Mohr's photographs are stitched together digitally. Each image in *Kansas Veterinarian at Work* comprises multiple exposures made in sequence, typically three to 12. A large-scale picture like *July 17, 2007* includes 25. Recently, Mohr has begun to compose landscapes with exposures taken during different times of the day.

Mohr's working methods fulfill his artistic mission technically and metaphorically. Through digital stitching, he creates photographic tapestries that tell stories about the networks and bonds formed among human and animal communities.

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Aileen June Wang, Associate Curator

¹ In this process, cyan, yellow, and magenta dyes were added one at a time by pressing a dyed matrix, or relief film, into contact with blank paper for a short time. Exact registration of the dye imprints was crucial.

² Artist's email correspondence, October 4, 2016.

³ Artist's email correspondence, October 12, 2016.

⁴ Interview with Lee Penner, February 22, 2016.