

BENEATH THE PRAIRIE SKY:

Photography by
Jim Richardson

2016 FRIENDS OF THE BEACH MUSEUM OF ART
GIFT PRINT ARTIST

March 8 - June 26, 2016



Artist's Statement

"I've designed this show as an invitation to viewers to enter into an alternative way of seeing the Great Plains.... Framing the entrance are two large, vertical images... sort of a Great Plains version of the lions flanking the temple gate (or the masks of Greek tragedies). Inside the Wefald Gallery the images march down the wall, side by side, each a moment connected to the next by the trajectory of the photographer during decades of travel and observation and introspection... fixing that one particular instant so that it can be seen over and over again. In that way the photograph takes a moment and makes it a repeatable commodity, easily reproducible so that it can be experienced by others far removed. Each image is a stopping point... but it's also part of a whole, an understanding of how the conditions on the Great Plains created a unique mind set and sometimes peculiar orbit of life, one both elliptical and erratic."

– Jim Richardson

Beneath the Prairie Sky features photographs of Kansas and the Great Plains taken by Jim Richardson in an installation designed by the artist himself. The exhibition title reflects his quest to understand how a particular topography can mold the perspective, character, and cultures of its residents. Richardson observed that people living in the Great Plains do not have geographical features such as mountains, rivers, or seashores on which to project the drama of the human condition. Instead, they have wide-open spaces, physically unassuming plant life, majestic cloud formations, and a view of a vast horizon touching the sky. These forces of nature figure prominently in the psyche of Kansans, for they impact human lives in immediate, forceful, and sometimes frightening ways.

Included in this exhibition are photographs of the Flint Hills published in *National Geographic* in 2007. The Flint Hills are home to the largest expanse of tallgrass prairie in America. Richardson's aerial views reveal the terrain's patterns and rhythms. Viewpoints from the ground detail prairie inhabitants such as wildflowers and birds. Complementing this series is another about Cuba, Kansas, a town of 500 when Richardson started photographing it more than 35 years ago, and only 200 inhabitants counted now. Having grown up on a farm near Cuba, the artist clearly benefited from a deep familiarity with his subjects, producing insightful narratives about humanity under a prairie sky.

Richardson has described his method as a search, within his subjects, for ways to express certain concepts in his mind. *Beneath the Prairie Sky* is a lifelong meditation about what it means to live in the Great Plains. Prairie grasses and wildflowers in the Flint Hills flourish in shallow soil and rocky ground, and spring to life with renewed vigor after a prairie fire. A land that has resisted the plow is preserved as a complex grassland ecosystem consisting of hundreds of plant and animal species. Similarly, the photographs of Cuba reveal its residents' quiet modesty, tenacity, and celebration of community, qualities that have enabled the town to survive in spite of harsh conditions brought on by nature and economic changes.

– Aileen June Wang, Associate Curator



The Water Witcher, Kansas, 1975, pigment ink on fiber rag paper, 44 x 44 in.



Mrs. Mary Krasny, Cuba, Kansas, 1979, pigment ink on fiber rag paper, 76 x 44 in.



The Pitch Player, Paxico, Kansas, 1975, pigment ink on fiber rag paper, 76 x 44 in.



Bison at Sunset, South Dakota, 2003, pigment ink on fiber rag paper, 44 x 44 in.

Biography

Jim Richardson is a photographer for the magazine National Geographic and a documentarian recognized for explorations of life in remote places around the world. His first story for the magazine was published in 1985, and every year since, Richardson has been working on his next National Geographic story. He has more than 30 to his credit, with new projects slated for the magazine in 2016 and 2017.

Richardson began documenting rural Kansas life as a photographer for the *Topeka Capital-Journal* in 1970. His first project, published in 1979 as a book, *High School USA*, examined adolescence in Rossville, Kansas. His work with the people of Cuba, Kansas, has been featured in many publications, including National Geographic and LIFE. Richardson and the people of Cuba have been profiled twice by "CBS News Sunday Morning," first in 1983 and again in 2004. The audio-visual production "Reflections from a Wide Spot in the Road," about his photography in Cuba and other rural Kansas communities, toured internationally and won an International Crystal AMI Award.

Richardson has focused recently on the challenges of feeding peak global population, care of native grasslands, and threats to night skies and clean water. These stories have taken him around the world and into the lives of people dealing with issues and landscapes – from scientists and public policymakers to advocacy groups and individuals. He and his wife returned to their native state in 1997 after nearly 20 years in Denver, and now live in Lindsborg, Kansas where they operate Small World Gallery.

For more information about Jim Richardson, go to www.jimrichardsonphotography.com and www.natgeocreative.com.



Drawing the Curtain, Cuba, Kansas, 1991, pigment ink on fiber rag paper, 2016 Friends of the Beach Museum of Art Gift Print

Friends of the Beach Museum of Art Gift Print

The Friends of the Beach Museum of Art (FOBMA) commissions a printmaker or photographer to produce a limited-edition print for sale to Friends and the public each year. Kansas State University's "Friends of Art" started the gift print program in 1934 as a reward for members. The program still serves this purpose and recognizes outstanding contemporary printmakers and photographers associated with Kansas. Since the mid-1990s this honor has also included an exhibition organized during the release of the gift print edition.

For more information about becoming a FOBMA member or purchasing a gift print, call 785-532-7718 or go to beach.k-state.edu.

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