



NEW RELEASE

The Sheep and the Goats

R.J. Kern

Texts by R.J. Kern, Stuart Klipper, George Slade, Lisa Volpe

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R.J. Kern's animal portraits offer perspective on the meaning of pastoral in contemporary time

The Sheep and the Goats represents two bodies of work, *The Bovidae: Divine Animals* and *Out to Pasture*, in visual conversation. The work calls attention to the cultural landscapes surrounding domesticated animals. *The Bovidae: Divine Animals* looks at animals and environments in Kern's ancestral heritage: Ireland, Germany, Norway, and Iceland. *Out to Pasture* responds as a meditation on rural America from his home state of Minnesota, USA. Together, these projects offer perspective on the meaning of pastoral in contemporary time. Among Kern's influences are the landscape painters of the nineteenth century, especially regarding the use of light and composition.

R. J. Kern is an American photographer whose work explores ideas of home, lineage, and the sense of place. He uses both natural and artificial light to document interactions of people, animals, and cultural landscapes. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In R.J. Kern's portrait, the sitter seems to possess wisdom and self-assurance. Maybe it's the sitter's slight tilt of the head, a posture of confidence and certainty. Or it could be the determined glare that stares down the camera lens. Perhaps it is the silvered hair, shot through with patches of white. This sign of age suggests it is wisdom born of experience. Or it could be the calm confidence that is conveyed in his unperturbed stillness, though storm clouds swirl in the distance. This goat is poised and wise.

Animals have always been a canvas onto which mankind projects emotions or ideas. Kern's personal examination of his ancestry in

Ireland, Germany, Norway, and Iceland resulted in an artistic project in which goats and sheep represent issues of identity and history.(...)

Kern's evocation of nature as a device to understand his own sense of self draws upon historical precedence: the use of animals as metaphor and the pastoral tradition. Yet the artist's broad concept—his exploration of identity—is firmly grounded in a contemporary context. This tightly knit series of images, which together characterize the author, is common to our age of social media. Kern's aesthetic, however, emphasizes clarity and projects a warm stillness that is a balm to an overstimulated society. This contrast too—the ties to digital media and the rejection of its characteristics—deepens this pastoral project.

Yes, it is a photograph of a goat, but it is also more than that. Just as man's relationship with the animal world is multifaceted, so too is Kern's work.

— from the introduction by Lisa Volpe

Exhibitions

Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize 2017

National Portrait Gallery, London

November 16, 2017 – February 4, 2018

Klompching Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

May 9 – 30 June 30, 2018

The Unchosen Ones, The Griffin Museum of Photography,

Winchester, MA, from October 2018

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