

Animals

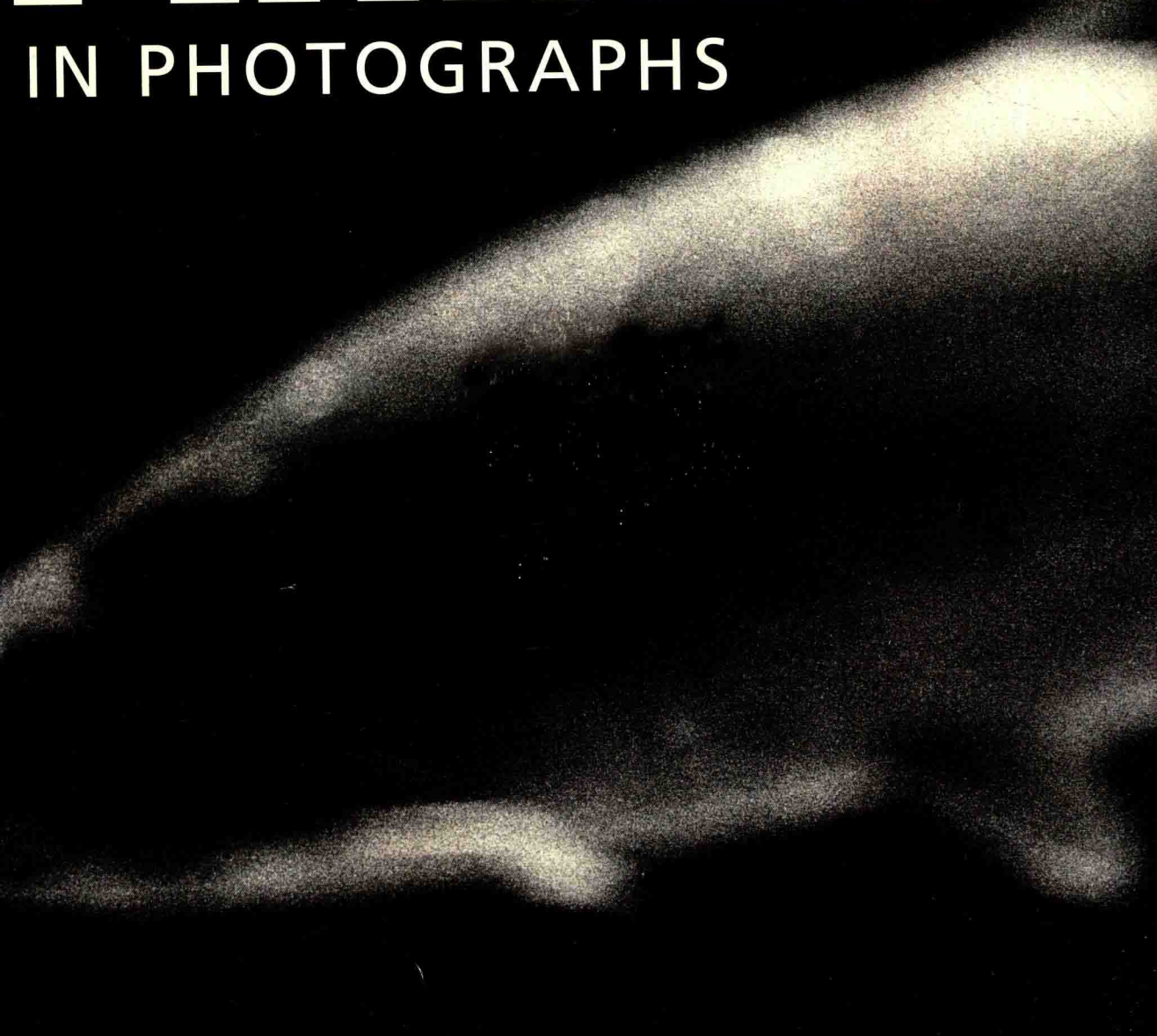
IN PHOTOGRAPHS



Arpad Kovacs

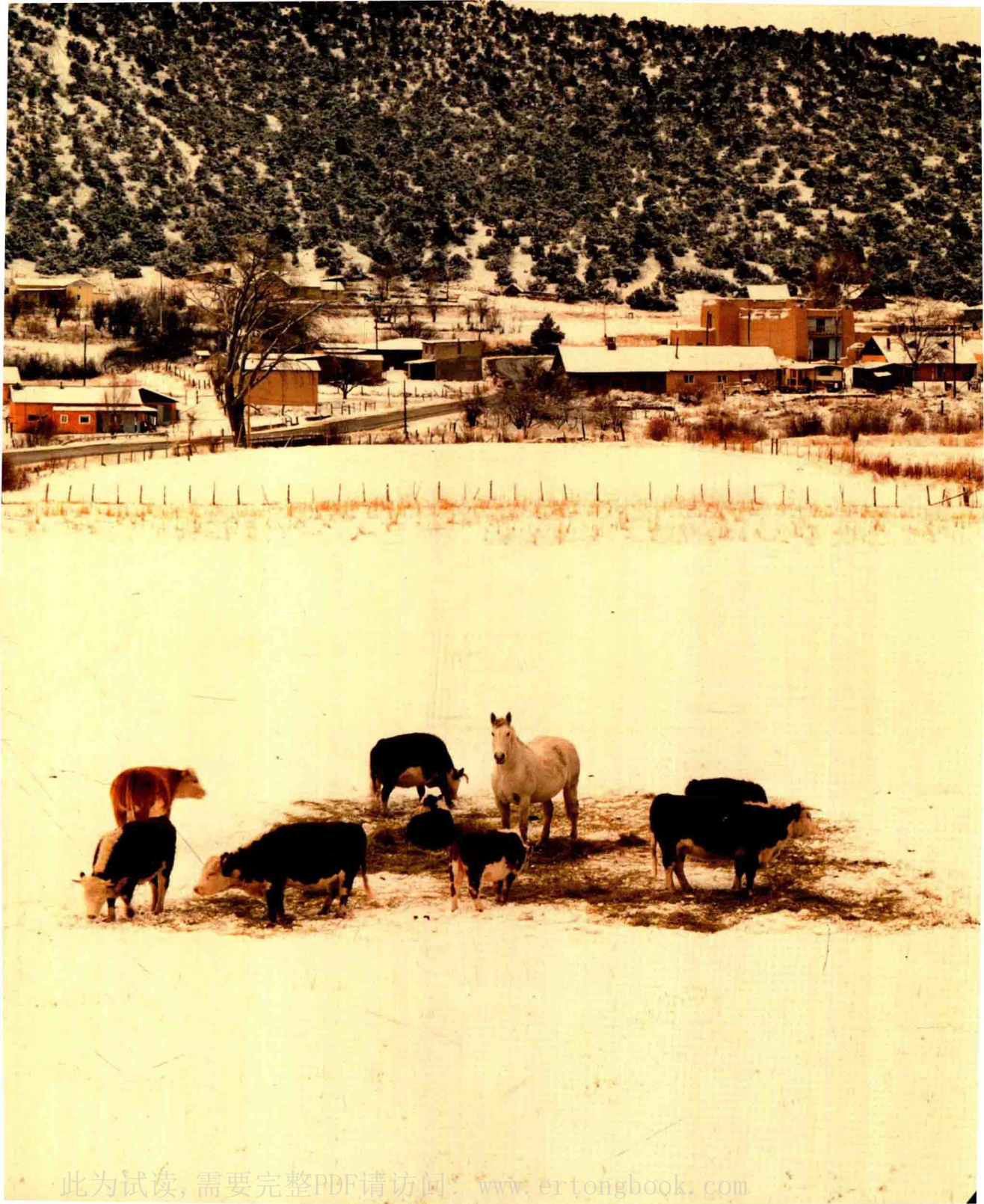
Animals

IN PHOTOGRAPHS









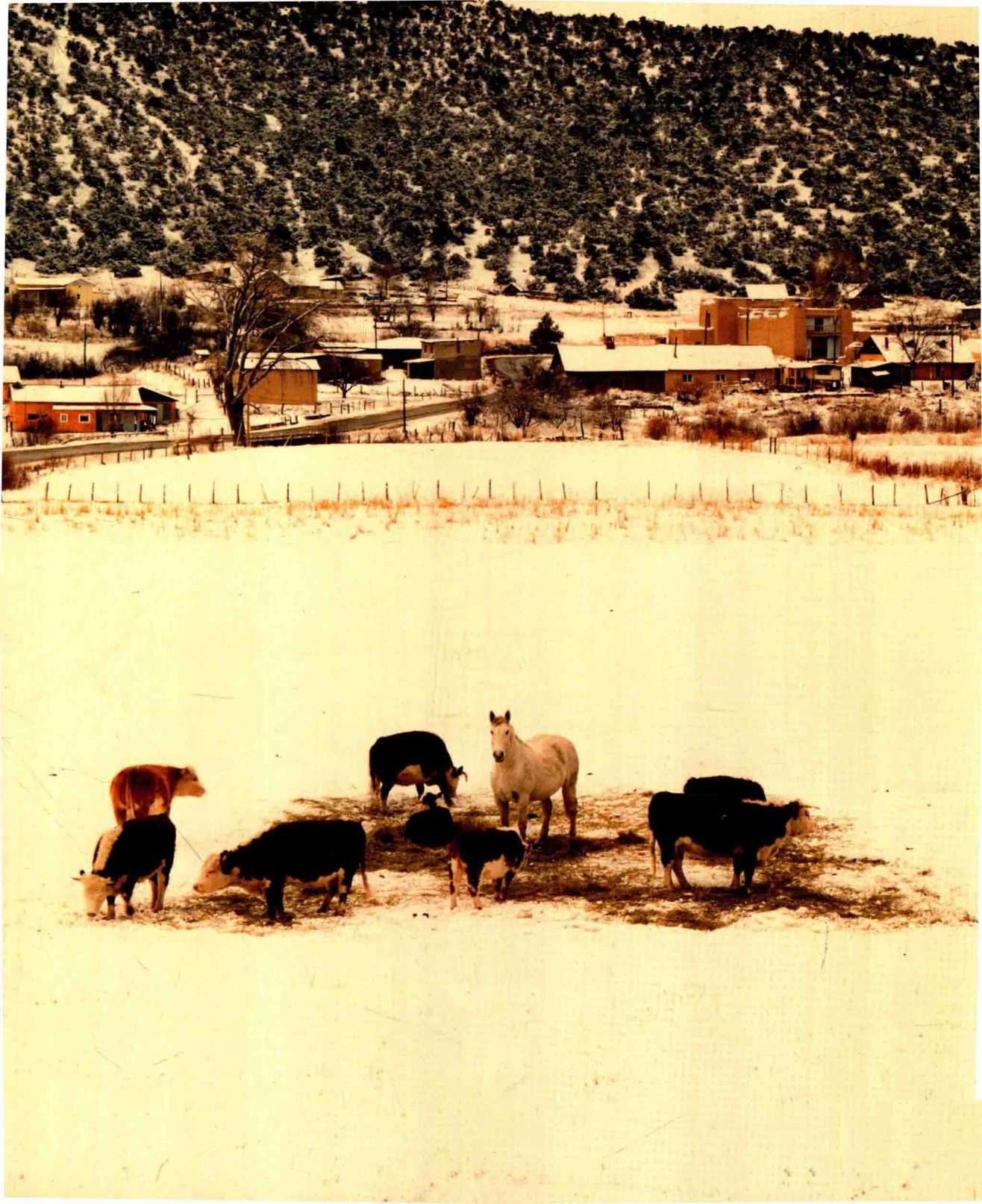
The image is a dark, abstract photograph. A horizontal band of light, possibly a beam of light or a reflection, stretches across the middle of the frame. The light is bright and textured, with some darker areas within it. The rest of the image is very dark, almost black, with some subtle textures and variations in tone. The overall effect is mysterious and dramatic.

Arpad Kovacs

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

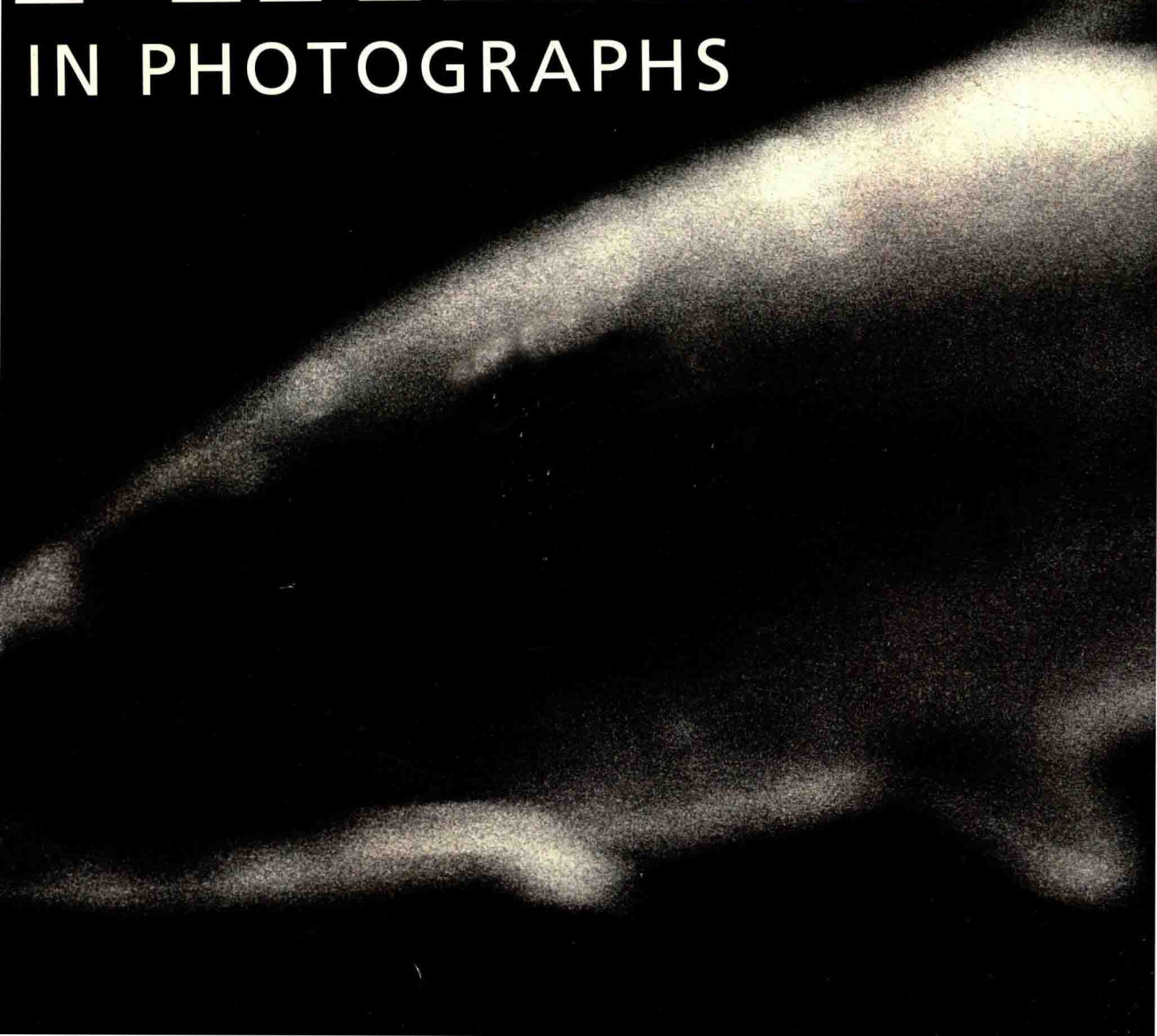






Animals

IN PHOTOGRAPHS





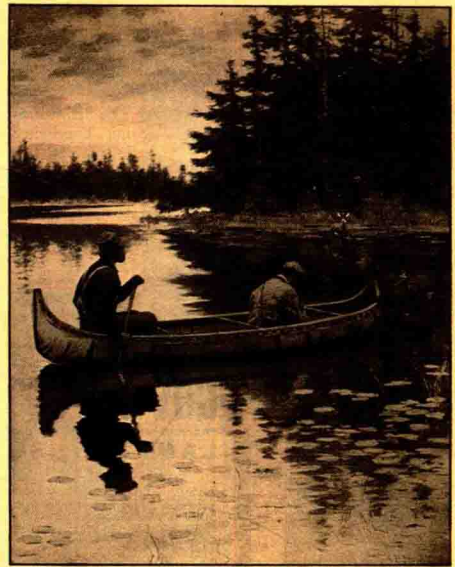
Arpad Kovacs

Sit, Stay, Pose: Photographing Animals

*Zoos, realistic animal toys and the widespread commercial diffusion of animal imagery, all began as animals started to be withdrawn from daily life. One could suppose that such innovations were compensatory. Yet in reality the innovations themselves belonged to the same remorseless movement as was dispersing the animals.*¹

—John Berger

A 1905 illustrated advertisement for the Eastman Kodak Company depicts two men in a canoe, one of whom is aiming his camera at a deer carefully wading into the shallow waters of a lake (fig. 1). The copy under the image, drawn by the illustrator and graphic artist A. B. Frost, announces, "There are no game laws for those who hunt with a Kodak." This advertisement embodies two notions that seemed to be of equal concern to Kodak and its potential audience. First and foremost is the camera's association with rifle hunting, an idea that has its roots in Sir John Herschel's application of the shooting term "snapshot" to photography in the 1860s.² The idea of hunting with a camera gained a strong foothold among amateur photographers, especially those who sought to photograph animals in the wild, amid the introduction of roll-film cameras in the late 1880s. Writing in 1900,



Drawn for EASTMAN KODAK CO. by A. B. Frost.

There are no Game Laws for those who

Hunt with a Kodak

The rod or the gun may be left out, but no nature lover omits a Kodak from his camp outfit.

EASTMAN KODAK CO.
Rochester, N. Y.

1905 Catalogue free of the
dealers, or by mail.

the American art critic James B. Carrington argued that photographing animals in their natural habitats was even more difficult than hunting with a gun. He explains: "To get a picture of some shy animal or bird calls for all the resources and knowledge of woodcraft that the best of sportsmen may command, and pits the intelligence of one against the other."³ Along with conflating the camera and the hunting rifle, the Kodak ad also calls attention to the newly emergent nature-and-wildlife conservancy movement. Its reference to hunting laws is a nod to the Lacey Game and Wild Birds Preservation and Disposition Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1900, the first national legislation for wildlife conservation.⁴



Companies like Kodak played a significant role in fueling and shaping popular conceptions of wildlife photography well before images of exotic animals began to appear on the glossy pages of *National Geographic* in the early years of the twentieth century. However, it was during the previous century that amateur and professional photographers alike initially exploited the aesthetic possibilities afforded by advancements in camera technology. Despite the limitations imposed by lengthy exposure times, successful photographic representations of animals were created in the early 1840s, not long after Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot made their respective announcements of the invention of photography in 1839. During a visit to Paris in the spring of 1843, Talbot photographed a townhouse with a row of horse-drawn carriages waiting at street level (fig. 2). This salted paper print, taken from a window in a building across the street, captures the idling horses, including blurred sections where movement did not register on the negative. A few years later the Swiss nobleman and amateur photographer Jean-Gabriel Eynard focused the lens of his camera on a reclining white foal (plate 1). The subject is perfectly centered, and the half-plate daguerreotype reveals a considerable degree of visual detail that was likely achieved by Eynard's decision to photograph the animal at rest. These two early examples of photo-



graphic representation of animals demonstrate one of the fundamental limitations of the medium, which would persist for several decades and made animal photography particularly challenging: the difficulty of capturing a subject in motion. Similar to these images, most early photographs of animals can be divided into three categories: those whose subjects are captive, domesticated, or dead.

In 1857 *The Photographic Album*, the journal of the London-based Photographic Exchange Club, included an albumen print entitled *Piscator*, No. 2 (fig. 3). Depicting a heron standing in a small pond surrounded by lush vegetation, the photograph was taken in June of the previous year by the British photographer John Dillwyn Llewelyn, a cousin of William Henry Fox Talbot.⁵ By centering the bird in the picture frame, the photographer demarcated space and achieved visual balance, improving upon the natural setting that was presented before the camera lens. According to the accompanying caption, this image required

FIGURE 2. William Henry Fox Talbot (British, 1800–1877), *Boulevard des Italiens, Paris*, May 1843. Salted paper print from a calotype negative, 16.8 × 17.3 cm (6½ × 6¾ in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.XM.478.6

FIGURE 3. John Dillwyn Llewelyn (British, 1810–1887), *Piscator*, No. 2, 1856. Albumen silver print, 24.1 × 19 cm (9½ × 7½ in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.XA.871.5.20



a twenty-minute-long exposure—a length of time that establishes that the bird was taxidermied, not a live animal.⁶ Llewelyn's photograph is a staged scene that sought to emulate contemporary literary and painterly conventions for the realization of a harmonious composition.⁷ Thus, rather than signaling a feat of technical accomplishment, the bird's presence offers insights into the relationship between early practitioners of the medium and academic pictorial traditions of the period, particularly those deployed in the realm of landscape painting.

The popularity of zoological subject matter during the mid-nineteenth century was largely due to the work of the French Barbizon painters and their contemporaries in The Hague School. Artists in both movements incorporated motifs of working animals into their paintings, in the process reviving the genre of animal art that had flourished in the seventeenth century in the hands (and brushes) of Dutch and Flemish painters such as Roelant Savery and Frans Snyders. Paintings of animals by members of the Barbizon School, including Constant Troyon (fig. 4) and Philippe Rousseau, were prominently featured at the French Salon during the mid-nineteenth century, and their work suggested a need for reference photographs for artists who did not have access to livestock.⁸ This need was met by photographers such as Édouard Baldus, Léon Crémère (plate 17), Louis-Jean Delton, Camille Silvy, and Adrien Tournachon, who marketed their animal photographs to painters as technical aids.⁹

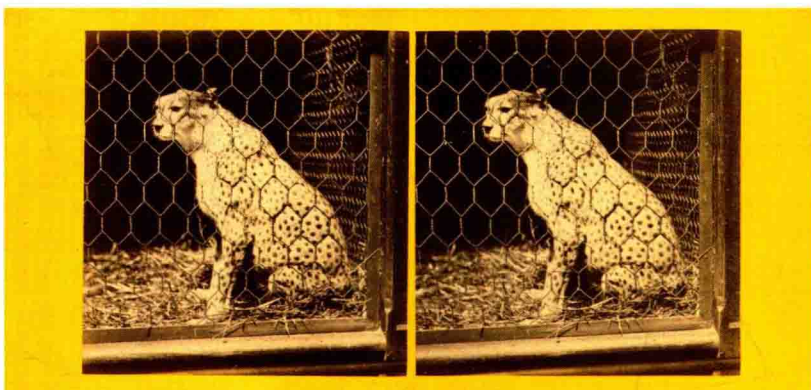


FIGURE 4. Constant Troyon (French, 1810–1865), *Cattle Drinking*, 1851. Oil on oak panel, 78.4 × 51.8 cm (30 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 20 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.), Baltimore, MD, Walters Art Museum, 37.59

FIGURE 5. Frank Haes (British, 1832–1916), *The South African Cheetah (Felis Jubata)*, ca. 1865. Albumen silver print, 8 × 17.7 cm (3 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 7 in.), Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.XC.873.5354



Photographers with ready access to farm animals took pictures of cows, bulls, and sheep, while others documented horses, hunting dogs, and, increasingly, wild and exotic animals housed in aviaries and public zoological gardens (fig. 5). The genre of equestrian photography, featuring horses positioned against elaborately painted backdrops, was made popular by Delton and Tournachon, among others, both of whom produced albums for well-heeled customers (fig. 6). Tournachon, whose brother Félix (better known by his pseudonym, Nadar) was a highly successful photographer in Paris, focused his camera on racehorses (plate 11). Crémère frequently photographed livestock, but also became renowned for his posed photographs of hunters with their hounds, along with dynamic groupings of dogs who seem to be patiently awaiting the hunt (plate 17).

The French photographer André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri's introduction of the multiple-lens carte-de-visite camera in 1854 helped to popularize portrait photographs among the middle and upper classes.¹⁰

The carte-de-visite camera permitted small sections of a single glass negative to be exposed at different times, enabling the printing of multiple images on one sheet of paper; these small prints, mounted on board (essentially the same size as calling cards), were collected in vast numbers, and often exchanged among friends and acquaintances. Studios equipped with props and elaborate backdrops opened in large cities across Europe to fill the growing demand for portrait photography, a genre in which animals would play an important role. Some studios provided stuffed dogs and horses to pose with clients, and, later, studios began to photograph people with their pets (plates 8, 9).¹¹ These intimate images presented animals as social markers and family members, but other types of animal imagery also thrived during the middle of the nineteenth century.

The revival of animal subject matter in painting served to enhance the popularity of another type of animal photography: that realized within the context of still life. In the mid-nineteenth century, painters began



revisiting the work of masters of the genre, including that of the seventeenth-century Flemish painter Adriaen van Utrecht (fig. 7) and the eighteenth-century French painter Jean-Siméon Chardin (fig. 8). The French commercial photographer Adolphe Braun (plate 14) started photographing animals around 1860, after acquiring a farm in the Swiss village of Dornach that provided him with specimens of various working animals.¹² Along with photographing livestock, he staged still-life scenes with game and floral arrangements. Braun initially entered the field of animal photography as a means of producing accurate points of reference for those who wished to incorporate animal motifs into their canvases but who were not able to observe these subjects directly from nature. He quickly shifted from making merely useful images, however, to “creating products that arranged subjects from nature in deliberately artistic ways.”¹³ Braun’s staged compositions—often featuring wild hares, pheasants, and boar—were modeled on prototypes popularized by successful painters of the genre. Published in Disdéri’s *L’Art de la photographie* and Léopold Mayer and Louis Pierson’s *La Photographie considérée comme art et comme industrie* (both 1862), these photographs, often quite large in



FIGURE 7. Adriaen van Utrecht (Flemish, 1599–1652), *Still Life with Game, Vegetables, Fruit, and a Cockatoo*, 1650. Oil on canvas, 120 × 250.5 cm (47¼ × 98⅞ in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 69.PA.13

FIGURE 8. Jean-Siméon Chardin (French, 1699–1779), *Still Life with Fish, Vegetables, Gougères, Pots, and Cruets on a Table*, 1769. Oil on canvas, 68.6 × 58.4 cm (27 × 23 in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003.13

scale (see plate 14), were no longer intended to serve as visual aids but as artworks in their own right, designed to compete with decorative lithographs of more expensive paintings.

The earliest attempts to photograph animals in their natural habitats can be traced to two separate expeditions to the African continent.¹⁴ The first, undertaken in 1858, was an exploratory mission to the Zambezi River and its tributaries, organized by the Scottish missionary David Livingstone.¹⁵ Accompanying the group was the explorer James Chapman, who packed two cameras with the intention of photographing zebras, wildebeests, and elephants, among other exotic creatures. The second expedition occurred five years later, when the German explorer Gustav Fritsch journeyed to South Africa, equipped with a camera and plates.¹⁶ In both cases, the difficulties of working with wet-collodion materials in the field, combined with unpredictable weather and unwilling subjects, resulted in the failure to produce a single photograph of a live animal. During the second expedition, the only animal photographs made were of game that had first been shot and killed by Fritsch's companions.¹⁷ Shooting to kill one's animal subject was a well-established practice among photographers and other artists, as the alternative, using taxidermied specimens, often produced less than satisfying results (plate 22). The French-American ornithologist and illustrator John James Audubon, who executed meticulously rendered drawings and watercolors of birds, famously remarked, "I shot, I drew, I looked upon nature."¹⁸

Perhaps the first successful photograph of a living wild animal in the field is that of a stork on its nest, taken by the Boston-based Charles A. Hewins in 1870 while traveling in Strassburg, Austria.¹⁹ Six years later the goal of photographing animals in their natural habitats was finally realized, as the result of the HMS *Challenger* expedition to Antarctica (1872–76), made up of both scientists and photographers. Organized by the Royal Society of London and complete with darkroom equipment on board, the *Challenger* expedition returned with photographs of penguin rookeries and even breeding albatrosses.²⁰

By the early 1870s animals began to play a prominent role in the technical development of photography. Several photographers in the United States and Europe deployed animal subjects in their investigations into the possibilities of recording movement. In his 1873 essay "On Photographing Horses," published in the *British Journal Photographic Almanac*, the London-based photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander "proposed using a battery of cameras and 'quick-acting lenses' ready charged and loaded" to create a sequence of images depicting motion.²¹ The following year Étienne-Jules Marey's *La machine animale: Locomotion terrestre et aérienne*, detailing locomotion's central role in the science of movement, appeared in English translation as *Animal Mechanism*. In this text Marey theorized that there were moments when, during a horse's gallop, all four of the animal's hooves were off the ground, contributing to the animal's speed.

Among those convinced by Marey's theory was the American industrialist, politician, and avid horseman Leland Stanford. Seeking visual proof, Stanford commissioned the photographer Eadweard Muybridge to photograph his prized thoroughbred, Occident. Utilizing Marey's largely untested methods and equipped with considerable sums of capital provided by Stanford, Muybridge devised a system for simultaneously tripping the shutters of twelve cameras arranged on a low shelf twenty-one inches apart as the horse moved across a racetrack.²² The shutters were mechanized by means of an electromagnetic release, for which Muybridge applied for a patent on June 17, 1878, describing it as a "method and apparatus for photographing objects in motion."²³ Muybridge's invention succeeded in visually halting the motion of a rapidly moving horse (fig. 9), something that the human eye is unable to do, and demonstrated Marey's theory to be correct. Muybridge continued to refine this technique to photograph the movements of other animals and people engaging in various activities. In addition to Marey in Paris, other photographers, such as Ottomar Anschutz in Berlin, likewise sought to refine this method of producing photographic studies of motion, known as "chronophotography."