

R. J. Kern - The Best of the Best

“The Best of the Best” records champion animals at the 2018 Minnesota State Fair, one of the most competitive animal contests in the world. Animal breeding, like photography, has been an area of both technical and material evolution. This series explores the relationship between the present and the past, drawing parallels between early animal contests at agricultural fairs and the first major exhibition of photography at the 1851 World’s Fair in London.

“In The Best of the Best, I wanted to document an event in which 12 pairs of animal species are judged supreme champion—the best of the best. Using a digital camera, I photographed winning exemplars of domesticated animals then combined 19th-century salt printing techniques and contemporary inkjet technology into images that emphasize changes in breeds over time and advances in photographic technology. It is science and art; it renders both an objective typology of animal husbandry and commentary on animal contests at this time and place. The hand-crafted portraits reference similarities between the history and development of photography and the advent of animal contests.”



*Supreme Champion Boer Goat Male / Female Pair
2018 Minnesota State Fair, salt print over archival pigment
print, 20 x 24" 2019*

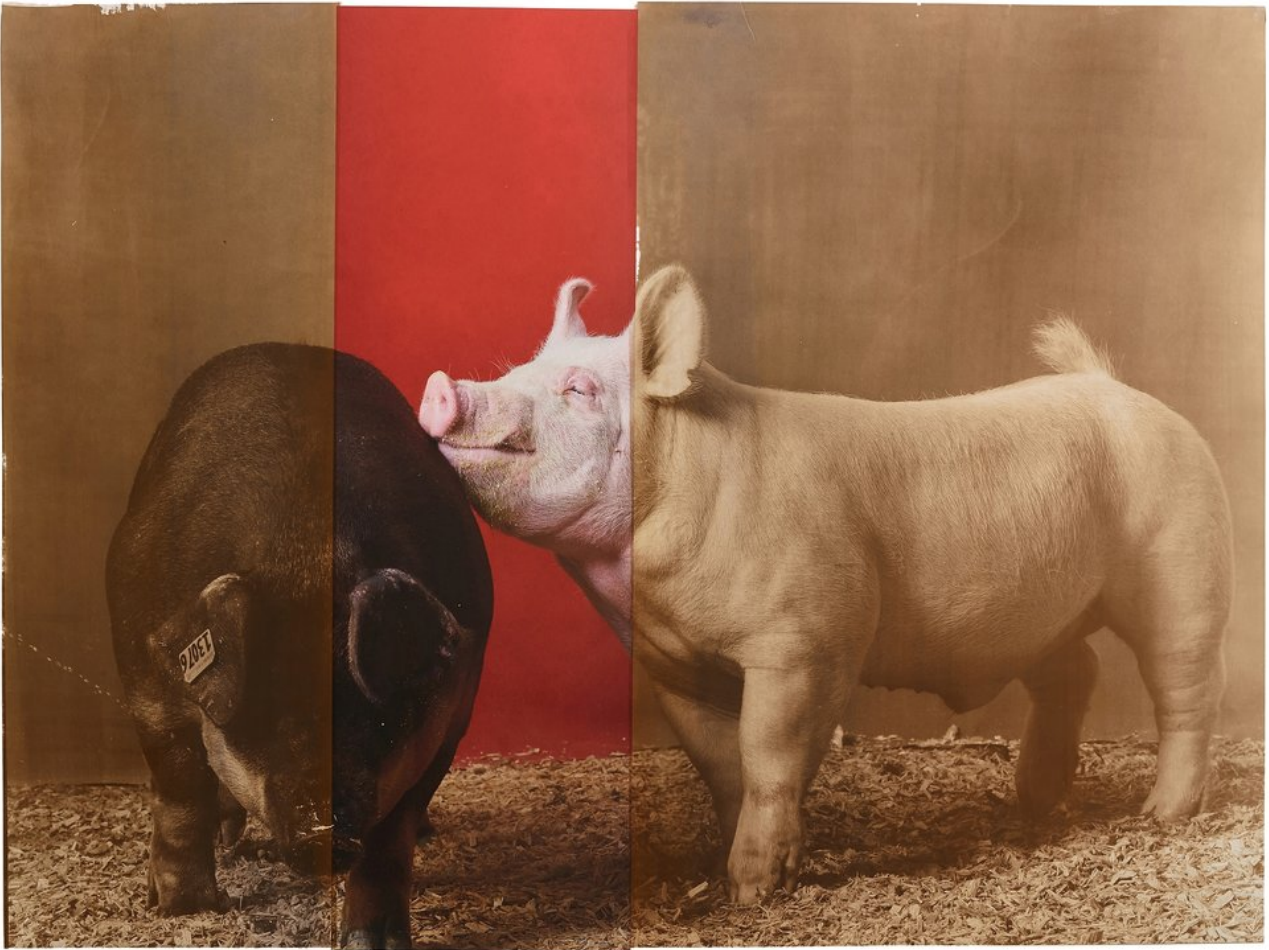


*Supreme Champion Turkey Male / Female Pair,
2018 Minnesota State Fair, salt print over archival pigment
print, 20 x 24 inches, 2019*

The color red is a unifying element and a nod to French photographer Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, 1820–1910), who used the color in marketing his work. Historically, the color red has represented life, health, and victory. It also symbolizes a shared characteristic between the animals: the color of blood, whose principal ingredient is salt- an essential element for mammals and birds, that also propelled the evolution of photography.

Salt prints, a photographic process popular between 1839-1860, connects to photography's historical roots; printing on them digitally connects to the present. The subtle tones of salt printing express mood and emotion, a contrast to the sharpness of a digital print. Subject, process, emotion, science, and

combine to make both an immediate document and a comment on photography's past, present, and future.



*Supreme Champion Swine Male / Female Pair,
2018 Minnesota State Fair, salt print over archival pigment
print, 20 x 24 inches, 2019*

About the artist



R. J. Kern (b. 1978) is an American artist whose work explores ideas of home, ancestry, and a sense of place through the interaction of people, animals, and cultural landscapes.

His work has been exhibited in a number of notable exhibitions, including the Museum of Modern Art (Tbilisi, Georgia), the National Portrait Gallery (London, UK), the Yixian International Photography Festival (Anhui, China), and a solo exhibition at the Griffin Museum of Photography (Boston, MA). Awards and accolades include *PDN's* 30 2018, Critical Mass 2018 Top 50, CENTER 2017 Choice Award Winner (Curator's Choice, First Place), the 2017 Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize (Finalist), and two Artist Initiative Grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board (2016, 2018).

Public collections holding his work include the Center for Creative Photography, the Griffin Museum of Photography, the Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art, the Plains Art Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.

R.J. Kern – The Best of the Best
August 8 – 31, 2019
Burnet fine Art & Advisory
Wayzata, MN

Framing Specifications



Supreme Champion Goose Male/Female (wing detail)

2018 Minnesota State Fair, salt print over archival pigment print, 20 x 24 inches, 2019



METRO GALLERY FRAME

Profile: 102

Type: Thin Gallery Frame

Wood & Finish: walnut frame with clear finish

Purchasing Option: joined wood frame – contrasting maple splines

Custom Wood Strainer: 3/4" wood frame strainer

Custom Frame Mats/Sized Boards: 4 ply white mat

Custom Frame Backing Board: 3/16" acid free foamboard cut to size