## Biography

R. J. Kern (b. 1978) is an American artist whose work investigates ideas of home, ancestry, and a sense of place. His portraits focus on intimate, interdependent relationships of people, animals, and landscape as a means of exploring how ancestry shapes identity and how myth intertwines with personal history. His camera has led him from an inquiry into his lineage in the farming communities of Scandinavia and Ireland to the examination of similar communities near his home in Minnesota. Increasingly, his attention has been captured by the next generation of young people, who may or may not be the stewards of rural communities and economies in the future.

Inspired by master landscape painters of the 19th-century, Kern embraces the heightened expressivity of natural and artificial lighting techniques. To draw sharper connections between traditional and modern farming routines, he adopts both historical and current photographic processes. While illuminating the ephemeral beauty of youth, Kern probes the current realities of agrarian practices, aspiring to enhance awareness and interest in the changing face of American pastoral life.

His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Zurab Tsereteli Museum of Modern Art (Tbilisi), the National Portrait Gallery (London), and the Yixian International Photo Festival (Anhui, China), among others, and solo exhibitions at the Griffin Museum of Photography (Winchester, MA), the Plains Art Museum (Fargo, ND), the Masur Museum of Art (Monroe, LA), and the Blanden Art Museum (Fort Dodge, IA). Kern's work has been shown at commercial galleries including Burnet Fine Art & Advisory (Minneapolis), Klompching Gallery (Brooklyn), Olson-Larsen Galleries (Des Moines), and Veronique Wantz Gallery (Minneapolis).

Awards and accolades include CENTER 2017 Choice Award Winner (Curator's Choice, First Place), 2017; Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize (Finalist), 2017; Critical Mass Top 50 (2018, 2021); Royal Photographic Society International Photography Exhibition 160 (Silver Medal), 2017; PDN's 30 2018; and six grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board (2016, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2024). Kern was the Commemorative Artist for the 2019 Minnesota State Fair.

Kern's work has been presented in a number of publications, including a feature in *National Geographic* (November 2017), with his series *The Unchosen Ones* and *Out To Pasture*. Kern published his first monograph with Kehrer Verlag titled, *The Sheep and the Goats*, awarded one of "The Most Beautiful German Books 2018," by Stiftung Buchkunst and was awarded Bronze by the prestigious Deutscher Fotobuchpreis 2018-19. His second monograph, *The Unchosen Ones: Portraits of an American Pastoral* (MW Editions, 2021) was listed as a 2021 Top 10 Favorite Photobook by *What You Will Remember*.

Selected collections holding his work include: Blanden Art Museum (Fort Dodge, IA), Center for Creative Photography (Tuscon, AZ), Center for Photography at Woodstock (Woodstock, NY), Elkhorn Valley Museum (Norfolk, NE), Fidelity Corporate Art Collection (Boston, MA), General Mills Corporate Collection (Minneapolis, MN), Griffin Museum of Photography (Winchester, MA), Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art (Tarpon Springs, FL), Masur Museum of Art ( Monroe, LA), Minneapolis Institute of Art (Minneapolis, MN), Minnesota Historical Society (St. Paul, MN), Museum of Fine Arts (Houston, TX), Museum of Fine Arts (St. Petersburg, FL), Nevada Museum of Art (Reno, NV), North Dakota Museum of Art (Grand Forks, ND), Oklahoma State University Museum of Art (Stillwater, OK), Plains Art Museum (Fargo, ND), and Rourke Art Museum (Moorhead, MN).