

MINNESOTA STATE FAIR

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Lara Hughes • Marketing & Communications Supervisor • Media Hotline: 651-288-4321 • Media Email: media@mnstatefair.org

State Fair's 2019 Official Commemorative Art by R. J. Kern is Unveiled

June 6, 2019

St. Paul, Minn. - The Minnesota State Fair's 2019 Commemorative Art was unveiled at the State Fairgrounds on Thursday, June 6, by Minneapolis fine art photographer and artist R. J. Kern. Surrounded by State Fair enthusiasts, he presented his photograph publicly for the first time. The 2½-foot-by-5-foot piece will be on display in the Fine Arts Center during the 2019 Great Minnesota Get-Together, Aug. 22 through Labor Day, Sept. 2, and can be viewed at mnstatefair.org/commemorative-art/.

In his photographs, R. J. Kern, the first photographer to be chosen as the State Fair's Official Commemorative Artist, explores ideas of home, ancestry and a sense of place through the interaction of people, animals and cultural landscapes. His interpretation of the Great Minnesota Get-Together shares the unique experience of how animals are chosen as "Supreme Champions" at the State Fair – the best of the best – and how this tradition honors the past and inspires the present. His completed artwork pays homage to this legacy, highlights the spirit of competition, and documents champion livestock.

"I love seeing the spirit of competition alive and well today, as demonstrated through the hard work, pride and passion of the exhibitors at the Minnesota State Fair," Kern said. "Some of the earliest animal contests coincide with the first major exhibition of photography at the 1851 World's Fair in London. For this photograph, *Minnesota State Fair Supreme Champion Pairings from 2018*, I created portraits of the top male and female open-class exhibition winners in the goat, swine, poultry, sheep, llama, rabbit, beef cattle, draft horse and stock dog categories. Moments after being awarded the title "Supreme Champion" in 2018, the animals were escorted to my photography studio on the fairgrounds (with safety as a top priority, of course). After the 12 days of fun, I composited the portraits together to create the final print. Hidden in the artwork is a little surprise inspired by my children, ages 2 and 3, who love to 'horse around'."

Kern's work has been exhibited at notable exhibitions around the world, including the National Portrait Gallery (London, UK), the Museum of Modern Art (Tbilisi, Georgia), the Yixian International Photography Festival (Anhui, China), and a solo exhibition at the Griffin Museum of Photography (Boston, USA). Awards and accolades include CENTER 2017 Choice Award Winner, Curator's Choice (First Place), *PDN's* 30 2018, *Photolucida* Critical Mass 2018 Top 50, the 2017 Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize (Finalist), and two Artist Initiative Grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board (2016, 2018). 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" and awarded Bronze by the prestigious *Deutscher Fotobuchpreis* 2018-19. Collections holding his work include the Center for Creative Photography; the General Mills Corporate Collection; the Griffin Museum of Photography; the Plains Art Museum; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg. He is represented by Klompching Gallery in New York and Burnet Fine Art & Advisory in Minnesota. He lives in Minneapolis with his wife, Krista, and two children.

The commemorative poster and a limited number of signed prints and other merchandise featuring the art are available for purchase at mnstatefair.org, and will also be available during the fair at State FairWear Gift Shops and Bargain Book and State Fair Poster Carts on the fairgrounds. Proceeds will support the Minnesota State Fair Foundation 501(c)(3) mission to preserve and improve State Fair buildings, fairgrounds and educational programs.

The 2019 Minnesota State Fair Commemorative Art is the 16th in a series of artwork created annually by Minnesota artists for the Great Minnesota Get-Together. In past years, artists have included: Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher (2004), Mary GrandPré (2005), Nancy Carlson (2006), Michael Birawer (2007), Edie Abnet (2008), Leo Stans (2009), Deborah Voyda Rogers (2010), Steve Thomas (2011), Joe Heffron (2012), Marie Olofsdotter (2013), Emily L. Taylor (2014), Adam Turman (2015), Michael Sweere (2016), Ta-coumba Aiken (2017) and Kristi Abbott (2018). A gallery of past artwork is available at mnstatefair.org/commemorative-art/gallery/.

About the Minnesota State Fair: The Minnesota State Fair is one of the largest and best-attended expositions in the world, attracting more than 2 million visitors annually. Showcasing Minnesota's finest agriculture, art and industry, the Great Minnesota Get-Together is always 12 Days of Fun Ending Labor Day. Visit mnstatefair.org for more information. The 2019 Minnesota State Fair runs Aug. 22 - Labor Day, Sept. 2.

-MSF-