

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Carver County Historical Society opens *The Unchosen Ones: Portraits of An American Pastoral* November 2024

The Unchosen Ones: Portraits of an American Pastoral featuring archival quality photographic prints by R. J. Kern will open on November 22nd.

The exhibit encompasses a series of portraits, taken in 2016, of young people posing with the animals they had raised, cared for, and groomed for entry into a best animal competition, with dreams of the glory of moving on to State Fair victory. No victory is shown here, however. These animals and their young owners were not deemed champions; they came in second or third or not at all. Here, on the sidelines of the main events, these disappointed children and their beloved animals illustrate a small backstory, preserving a moment of failure, loss, love, and hope, as only photography can.

Four years later, R. J. Kern re-photographed many of the subjects of the original series. In some cases, the animal and its handler are photographed together again. In other cases, the child has moved on and replaced the animal with some new pursuit; a tractor, a chicken, a fishing pole. Once a series about the love, pride, joy, and disappointment that comes with being passed over, *The Unchosen Ones* is now a record of the original sitters choosing how they will live the next part of their lives.

The Unchosen Ones depicts the bloom of youth and the mettle of the young people who grow up on farms, reminding us how resilient children can be when confronted with life's inevitable disappointments. The formal quality of the lighting and setting endow these young people with a gravitas beyond their years, revealing self-directed dedication in some, and in others, perhaps, the pressures of traditions imposed upon them. The portraits capture a particular America, a rural pastoral world, and a time in life when the layered emotions of youth are laid bare.

R. J. Kern 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.

Join us from **November 22, 2024, to January 10, 2025**, to see these stunning photographs and learn more about the participants in this exhibition. Admission is free.

The exhibit will be open Monday through Friday 9 to 4:30 and on Saturdays from 9-2pm.

Exhibition: *The Unchosen Ones: Portraits of An American Pastoral*

Host Organization: Carver County Historical Society

Runs: November 22nd, 2024 – January 10th, 2025

Gallery Hours: Mon – Fri 9 am – 4:30 pm, Sat 9 am – 2 pm

Location: 555 W First St, Waconia MN 55387

Admission: Free

Contact: Call 952-442-4234

www.carvercountyhistoricalsociety.org

About R. J. Kern

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. 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 in solo exhibitions at the Griffin Museum of Photography (Winchester, MA) and the Plains Art Museum (Fargo). *National Geographic* published photos from his series *The Unchosen Ones* and *Out to Pasture* in its November 2017 issue. Awards and accolades include CENTER 2017 Choice Award Winner (Curator's Choice, First Place), 2017; Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize (Finalist), 2017; Critical Mass 2018 Top 50, 2018 and 2021; Royal Photographic Society International Photography Exhibition 160 (Silver Medal), 2017; and three Artist Initiative Grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board (2016, 2018, 2020). Monographs include *The Sheep and the Goats* (Kehrer Verlag, 2017) and *The Unchosen Ones* (MW Editions, 2021). Public collections include Minneapolis Institute of Art and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

About Carver County Historical Society

The Carver County Historical Society is a private, not-for-profit 501(C)3 organization serving the residents of Carver County and beyond. We are located across the street from Bayview Elementary School in downtown Waconia. We have five affiliate groups: Chaska Historical Society, Chanhassen Historical Society, Willkommen Heritage and Preservation Society of Norwood Young America, the Watertown Area Historical Society, and the Waconia Heritage

Association. In 2022, it celebrated its 82nd anniversary. The Historic Andrew Peterson Farmstead was added in 2015. The museum houses five local history exhibits, a veterans exhibit and a local history and genealogy library. There is no charge to visit the museum or library. The CCHS is open Monday through Friday from 9 am to 4:30 pm and on Saturdays from 9 am to 2 pm.

The Carver County Historical Society's mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret the history of Carver County.

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The Unchosen Ones: Portraits of an American Pastoral features photographs by artist R. J. Kern of kids and teens who had not won 1st prize ribbons at county fairs across Minnesota. The project began in 2016, where each participant was photographed with their hardworking show animal. Kern followed up in 2020, photographing many participants again. This time, he asked them what they had taken from their previous experience. Some of the kids are photographed with their current show animal but others had moved on to new interested showcased in the photographs.