

below

**Untitled #1**

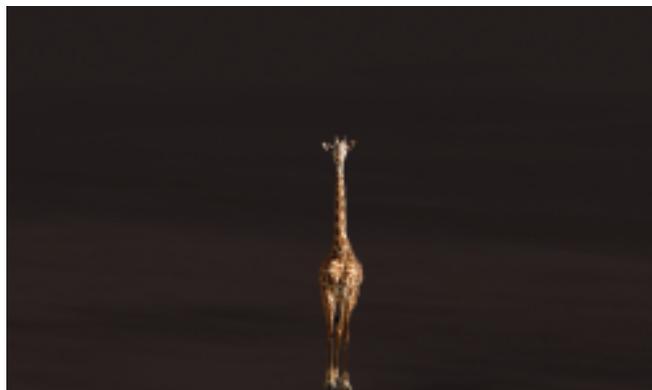
2005, 30 x 50 inches  
Digital chromogenic print



bottom

**Untitled #5**

2005, 30 x 50 inches  
Digital chromogenic print



A giraffe (*Untitled 5*) appears out of a sheer intensity of color that does not construct a coordinated space that would enable the beholder to find his bearings. Such darkness marks a collapse of the anthropocentric symbolic, pointing to a space in which a human finds itself at a loss to read it. The giraffe may be advancing toward the spectator but the spectator doesn't know anything about the world it is coming from because such a world is utterly new and unknown to him.

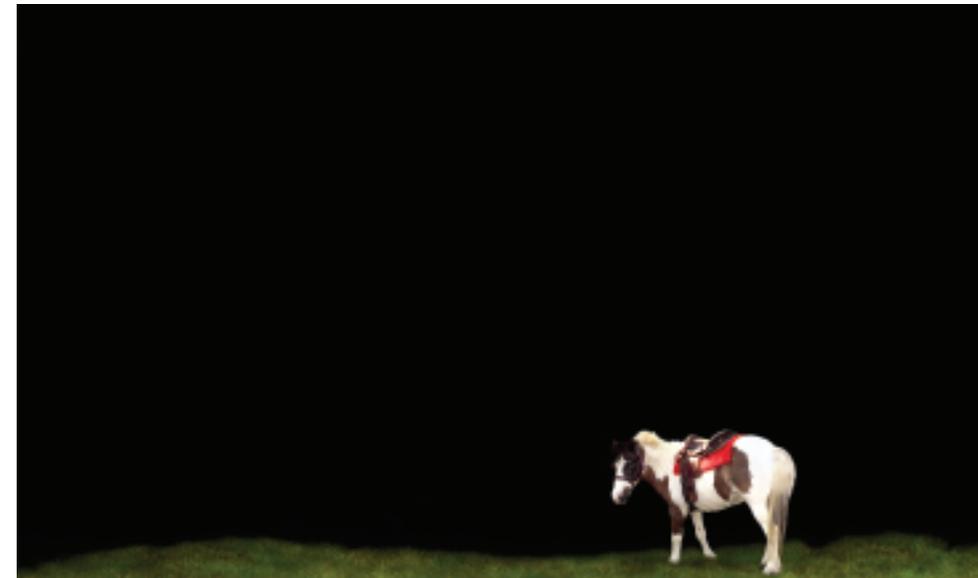
The seal (*Untitled 6*) jumps out of darkness into a circle of lighted water. But the light here comes from within the darkness without suggesting any other source of light other than itself. The light appears so that the seal, and not the observer, can see. The horse (*Untitled 7*), the only animal that bears a trace of its connection with man (a saddle), is ready to cross a sharp edge between light and darkness that is not night, for it is denser and blacker than the nights we know or imagine. It is not a darkness humans share with horses but a new intensity humans will have to learn how to inhabit.

Because the backgrounds don't depict a structured space, it can hardly be said that animals form a foreground; they don't seem fixed or rooted which is why the space of Hunter's photographs is closer to the ruses of two-dimensional fresco painting than to the tradition of three-dimensional perspectival seeing. In fact, animals are dislocated from the center of the photograph so as to frustrate the desire of our gaze to find a center and position itself within it. In addition to the absence of center, the size of the photographs – 30 x 50 inches – forces the gaze of the spectator to float, without ever being able to see the whole. Our desire to appropriate the seen is disturbed by the fact that the photographs are "untitled." Language here collaborates with the visual in its effort to emancipate animals from the horrifying power of our naming and identifying.

The animals' gazes don't intersect with ours. Sometimes we see its back (*Untitled 3, 6, 7, 10*), sometimes its gaze is far above us and the animal doesn't see us (*Untitled 5*), whereas at other times (*Untitled 4, 9*) we can see its face but its gaze passes us by. The animals are neither expecting us nor fearing us for they don't see us; rather they are indifferent to us. The spectator sees animals that no longer accompany him. They do see and react to something but what attracts them comes from the photograph itself. They are thus absorbed in their own world and the spectator realizes that if they, the animals, seem distant – without triggering an emotion in us – it is because the photographs eradicate the presence of the human observer: nothing points to the observer or asks for him, everything remains dedicated to the animals themselves. In beholding these photographs the spectator thus bears witness to his own absence. The radicalism of these photographs is in the power by which they force the observer to start searching for something other than himself. Once seen without the shadow of human habitation, and emancipated from the apprehending power of human naming, animals will appear different and for the first time a modest man will understand himself as the one who accompanies them. That will be new.

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All images can be viewed at [www.allisonhunter.com](http://www.allisonhunter.com)  
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# Simply Stunning

ALLISON HUNTER

October 19 – November 25, 2006

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## Regarding New Animals: Photographs by Allison Hunter

What makes an animal new?

Most of the animals we see in Allison Hunter's photographs (the *Simply Stunning* series) recall the violence of Gods and men and evoke images of silent suffering and muted death. A sheep (*Untitled 1*, *Untitled 4*) appears as both the figure of the innocent soul and of its slaughter; a horse (*Untitled 7*) connotes a history of docility and faithful service to men, whereas a deer reminds us of an animal transfixed by the headlights of a car and killed on the road. Most of the animals we see in these photographs are therefore kind of human, trapped in an anthropocentric vision of ours, so much so that we cannot even think of them without thinking about this or that ethical or religious value. These are the animals we think we know, old animals, imprisoned in the consciousness of man.

The radical gesture of Hunter's pictures is the way she turns the moment of "taking" a photograph into an act of freeing, since her pictures release animals from their suffering contexts. Hunter does not take photographs of the animals we see; instead, she takes an already photographed animal out of its photographed context (the circus environment, for example), and then relocates it on the surface of a non-identifiable space. It is as if the symbolic emancipation of animals here required an actual intervention upon another photograph, or as if in order to see new animals, photography itself had to change so that it no longer "takes" an image but gives it back to what is photographed. So freed animals are let be in an environment about which we cannot say much, as environment that refutes our efforts to understand it on the basis of familiar concepts.

Not even the basic dichotomy between background and foreground quite works here. The background is not behind and doesn't evoke anything human; it can hardly be called a landscape for it is not even certain that these animals are placed on the earth; in some instances (*Untitled 1*, *5*) they seem to be floating as if to refute the force of gravitation. The pinkish whiteness that produces the problematic background of some of the photographs (*Untitled 1*, *2*, *3*, *4*) resembles sand, a desert in formation (*Untitled 2*, *4*), or dense, cloudy air (*Untitled 1*, *3*), as if signaling that animals are making a new union with the elements in order to create a new world.



*cover*

**Untitled #7**

2006, 30 x 50 inches  
Digital chromogenic print

*above*

**Untitled #2**

2005, 30 x 50 inches  
Digital chromogenic print

**Untitled #9**  
2006, 30 x 50 inches  
Digital chromogenic print



**Untitled #6**  
2006, 30 x 50 inches  
Digital chromogenic print