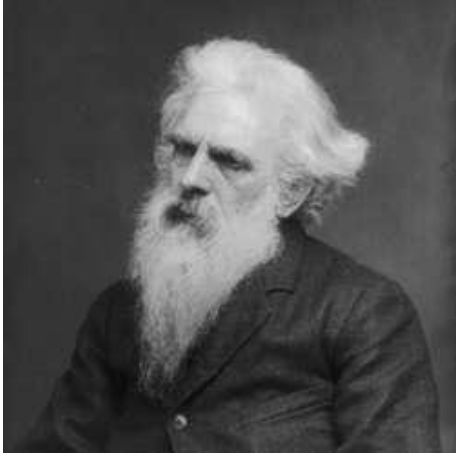


Eadweard Muybridge

Born 1830. Photographer of motion.

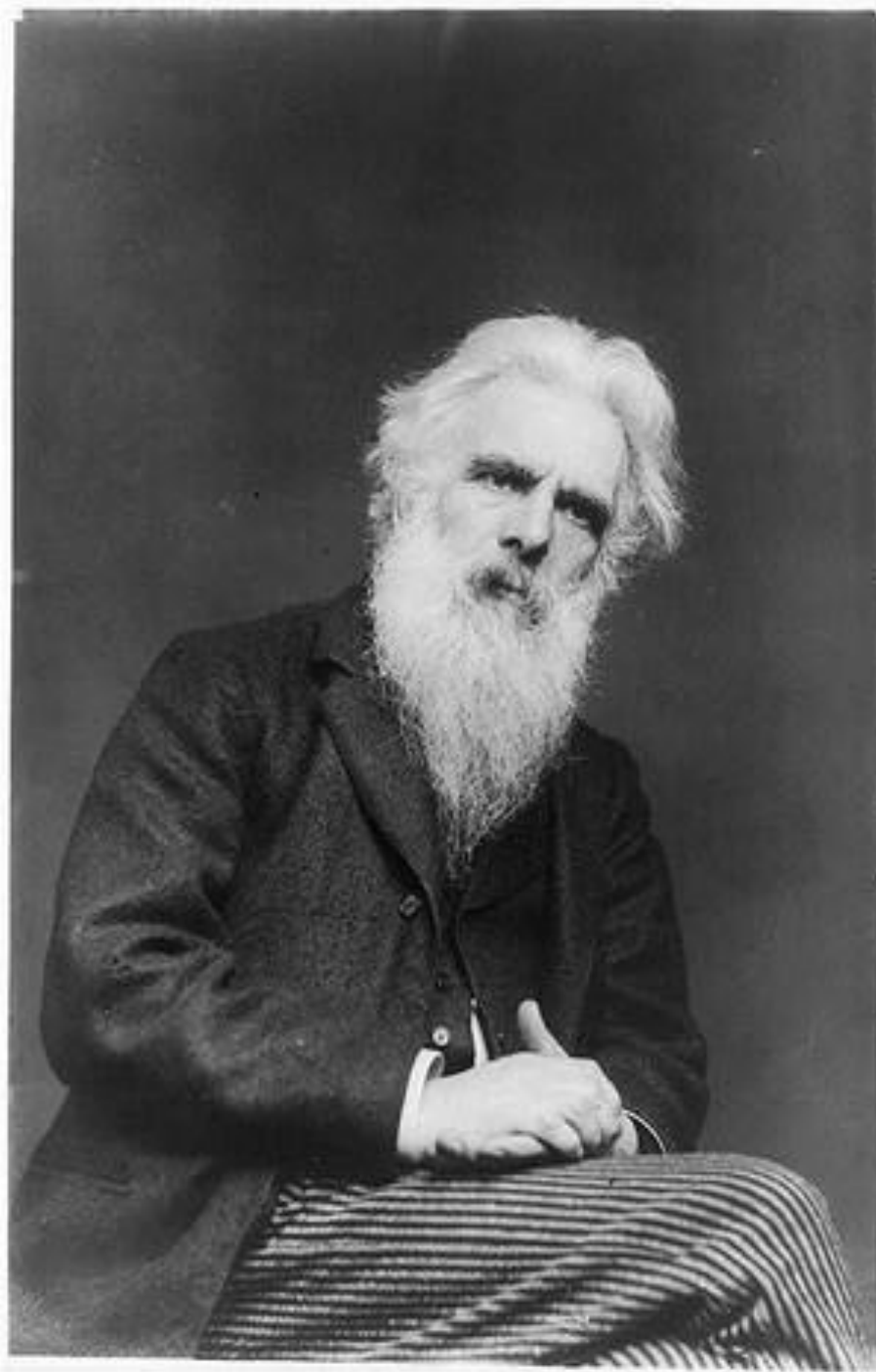
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1. Introduction



The following introduction was extracted and archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from Wikipedia.

Eadweard Muybridge (9 April 1830 – 8 May 1904, born Edward James Muggeridge) was an English photographer important for his pioneering work in photographic studies of motion, and early work in motion-picture projection. He adopted the first name Eadweard as the original Anglo-Saxon form of Edward, and the surname Muybridge, believing it to be similarly archaic.

Born in Kingston upon Thames in the United Kingdom, at age 20 he emigrated to America as a bookseller, first to New York, and then to San Francisco. Planning a return trip to Europe in 1860, he suffered serious head injuries in a stagecoach crash in Texas. He spent the next few years recuperating in Kingston upon Thames, where he took up professional photography, learning the wet-plate collodion process, and secured at least two British patents for his inventions. He went back to San Francisco in 1867. In 1868 he exhibited large photographs of Yosemite Valley, which made him world-famous.

In 1874 Muybridge shot and killed Major Harry Larkyns, his wife's lover, but was acquitted in a jury trial on the grounds of justifiable homicide. In 1875 he travelled for more than a year in Central America on a photographic expedition.

2. Career

The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of the Atlantic at www.theatlantic.com. The article was written by Weston Phippen, and was published in July 2016.

Drawing Horses

The first humans who put paint on stone drew deer, buffalo, horses. They drew all the beasts man knew, and they painted them running.

It started on a cave wall in France some 40,000 years ago with animals that seemed to move with their hindquarters planted, torsos rigid, their front legs stiff and raised ever so off the ground. These Paleolithic artists were primitive, of course, but for the thousands of years to follow, neither the ancient Greeks, nor the Japanese masters, nor the 19th-century French artist Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier (regarded for his pictures of horses) could seem to understand how to draw an animal in motion.

Especially horses. Even as humans increasingly spent their lives around horses, the greatest artistic talents of their time drew them running with all four legs splayed, as if mounted to a rocker. Man has always sought to understand the natural world—if for no other reason than to bend it to our will. But an invisible life existed in the motion of the horse, hidden from our eye, and thus from human understanding. Until the 1870s, when the man who founded Stanford University became obsessed with this mystery—so much so that he hired the photographer Eadweard Muybridge.



The galloping horse became Muybridge's greatest achievement, but it would also become as obscure as his many other accomplishments.

Recognition

As he neared death, it's said Muybridge panicked over the idea he'd be forgotten. And he almost was. No major museums had staged a retrospective of his work until six years ago at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, when the curator Philip Brookman thought to put one together, partly because no one else had. Last month, the National Gallery of Art (which absorbed the Corcoran in 2014) presented *Intersections*, which offers another chance to consider Muybridge's mind and his legacy, and to see the work of another 19th-century pioneer of photography, Alfred Stieglitz.

In its earliest years, photography rode an unsure line between science and art. It transported facts of the world to the public. It offered pretty images. Few people knew what to do with it. But Muybridge and Stieglitz changed that. Stieglitz was an artist, born in Hoboken and trained in Berlin, who proved photos could tell stories and reveal the world as profoundly as paintings.

Muybridge's work, at first, concerned itself with questions of understanding—a mostly scientific pursuit. He was born to an English coal merchant, and at 20 he left for America, where he traveled west in search of success in the new country. In California he opened a bookstore, was absolved of killing a man, then busied himself with photographing the intricacies of women's ankles crossing creeks, blacksmiths swinging hammers, with chickens fleeing torpedoes.

Muybridge would take his photographic discoveries on tours across America and Europe. During his lifetime he advanced the chemicals that develop film. He quickened camera shutter speed to a fraction of a second. And by aiming dozens of lenses at the same subject, he found ways to stop time and stretch it like elastic. After seeing Muybridge's work in London in 1882, one reporter wrote that "a new world of sights and wonders was indeed opened by photography, which was not less astounding because it was truth itself."

Truth of Motion

Muybridge labored all his life to uncover the truth of motion, but by the time he died of cancer in 1904, he saw his work diminished by the lightning pace of innovation. He'd advanced photography to the point where it could capture constant movement, and developed a machine to reanimate this motion. Rightly so, he yearned for the world to remember him as the man who made cinema possible. But when that time came, other men, younger men, would claim his legacy. It's only recently, thanks in large part to the popularity of the GIF, that people can appreciate the genius of Muybridge's work.

Enter Leland Stanford

Leland Stanford picked up the hobby of breeding, racing, and training horses after he served as the governor of California in the 1860s, having made millions investing in the Central Pacific Railroad. His 8,000-acre stables south of San Francisco, near Palo Alto, eventually became Stanford University. Here he kept some of the fastest horses in the world. But, as a man who'd bored America's first train through the Sierra Nevada Mountains, he figured if he could understand how horses ran, he could make them run even faster. In this quest, a question troubled Stanford: He wanted to prove that when a horse galloped, all four of its hooves left the earth, that for a moment it became airborne.

That idea had countered logic, as The New York Times put it, "since the world began."

A Thread Across the Dirt

In 1877, at a track in San Francisco, Muybridge strung a thread across the dirt at horse-chest height. It led to a trigger attached to his camera. Stanford had funded Muybridge's work for years, and this was their most meaningful trial yet, so when Stanford's horse trotted down the track at 40 feet per second, Muybridge was ready with his camera.

When Muybridge began his work with Stanford's horses, photography had barely been around 50 years. The craft was so sensitive that a slight breeze on leaves in a landscape, or the shift of a neck in a portrait, could ruin a picture. A camera's shutter speed determines how long it's exposed to light, which means anything moving while it's open can look blurred. Before Muybridge, photographers exposed light to the film by removing the lens cap with their hands, then jamming it back on. This is why most people in photos at the time look like zombie facsimiles of themselves, stiff with rigor mortis. But in the early 1870s, Muybridge invented mechanical shutters, a system that used a trigger and rubber springs to snap two planks shut in front of the lens at one-thousandth of a second.

The photo Muybridge took was completely disappointing—to Muybridge, at least. Yes, it pictured the horse with all four hooves off the ground, which was by no means a small achievement, because no one else in history had done this. A few newspapers ran the photo. But it was a single image. In order to understand motion, Muybridge needed to separate a movement into its parts, to slice the seconds that make a moment, then splice them back together with his photos. This would take another year.

A Stagecoach Crash

At this time, Muybridge had spent just a little more than a decade as a serious photographer—he hadn't even started in the medium until he was in his mid-30s. In 1855 when he first arrived in San Francisco, Muybridge owned a bookstore. On May 15, 1860, Muybridge ran an advertisement saying he'd sold his store and planned to travel for Europe.

On his way, his stagecoach crashed in northeast Texas down a mountainside into a tree, smashing the stagecoach to pieces, and hurling Muybridge and seven other passengers into the rocky hillside. One man died. Muybridge hit his head so hard that for a while he lost his senses of taste and smell. He'd later say his first memory was waking up 150 miles away in Arkansas, with a doctor over him who said he'd never fully recover. Muybridge spent about six years recuperating in England, and little is known about his time there.

A Masterful Landscape Photographer



A photograph by Muybridge of the Valley of the Yosemite, from Rocky Ford.

But after his return to the Bay Area in 1866 he quickly became a masterful photographer. He captured Yosemite National Park's thousand-foot waterfalls and its vast granite mountains—photos that would later inspire Ansel Adams. He shot lighthouses. He photographed himself pretending to be a lumberjack, his legs spread wide as he looks up the trunk of an insurmountable redwood tree.

People obsessed over landscape photos at the time. The images represented the fierceness in American spirit that had settled the frontier, but with the ease of travel brought by train seemed already to have faded.

Photographers tried to bring moments of that wildness back to cities as best they could. But while shutter speed could capture stationary lakes and mountains, the passing sky overhead looked like bland white sheets.

Inventing the Sky Shade

To make scenes more convincing, photographers sometimes painted or superimposed clouds into their pictures. Muybridge, instead, invented the “sky shade.” This screen shielded the sun’s light enough to capture the landscape, but still rendered the sky’s tones. Now the people in East Coast cities could look into a photo and feel as if they stood in valleys of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, or atop granite peaks. Muybridge signed these photos under the name “Helios,” the Greek personification of the sun.

Muybridge looked like a mix of Walt Whitman and Zeus. He was tall and lean, with a long white beard, and bushy brows that shadowed his eyes and made him seem thoughtful and deviant.



Marrying Flora

In six years he’d already gained some fame for his landscape photos, and in 1871, while in his 40s, he married a woman half his age named Flora Shallcross Stone (right). One year later, Stanford telegraphed Muybridge about an idea he had to photograph his horses, and for three years Muybridge worked on the technology to do exactly that.

Enter Harry Larkyns

That work stopped in October 1874, after Muybridge found a letter his wife had written to a drama critic named Major Harry Larkyns.

Muybridge found the letter in his midwife’s home. In it was a photograph of his seven-month old son, upon which his wife had written the boy’s name as “Little Harry,” which led Muybridge to believe his son was not in fact his son.

“He stamped on the floor and exhibited the wildest excitement,” Muybridge’s midwife remembered after he found the letter. “He was haggard and pale and his eyes glassy ... he trembled from head to foot and gasped for breath.”

A Crime of Passion

Muybridge caught a train that afternoon north from San Francisco to Vallejo. It was night when he knocked on Larkyns' door. As Larkyns stepped forward, Muybridge shoved a revolver at him and said, "I have brought a message from my wife, take it."

Larkyns died from the gunshot. At trial, Muybridge pleaded insanity. Stanford hired a lawyer to defend him, and friends testified that the stagecoach crash had jarred something loose, had transformed a genial bookstore owner into an emotionally unmoored photographer. A friend and fellow photographer, William H. Rulofson, at trial said Muybridge sometimes slipped into bursts of grief or anger, and just as easily into a placid daze, "immovable as stone."

Damage to the Orbitofrontal Cortex

It's hard to tell whether this personality change was real or a story conjured by a creative lawyer, but one theory about Muybridge's injury is that it damaged his orbitofrontal cortex. If that is true, along with altering his emotions, it could explain why Muybridge became so possessed with his work.

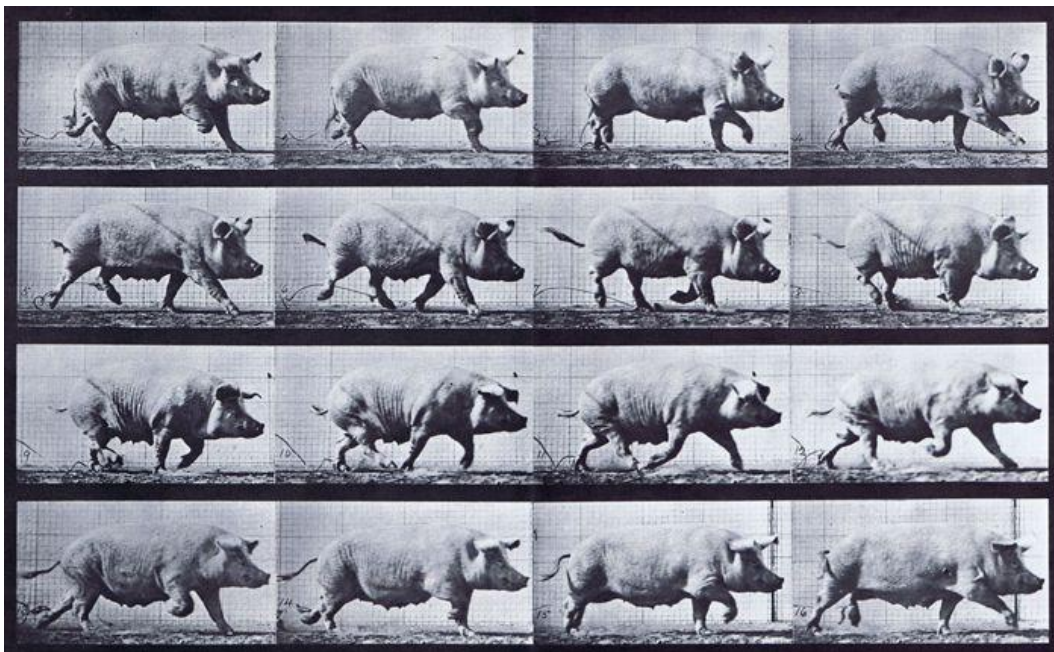
Injuries to the orbitofrontal cortex are sometimes connected to obsessive-compulsive disorder, and it was through Muybridge's microscopic fixation on motion that his photos became art. He photographed birds flying, cats leaping, and the American bison galloping at a time when the nation had nearly hunted the animal to extinction. His obsession with all manners of motion drove him to capture women lifting bedsheets, raising cigarettes to their lips, or the quasi-absurd, like in his series Crossing brook on step-stones with fishing-pole and can.



Maybridge motion photos of woman walking downstairs.

The series consists of 36 pictures taken from three angles, and it follows a woman as she raises her leg, hops onto a stone, then another, then hops off, all the while she holds a fishing pole in one hand and a can in the other, her arms bent like the wings of a bird. Artists have used this work to study motion. Edgar Degas, himself obsessed with the movement of dancers, studied photos like it. As did Marcel Duchamp, particularly in his 1912 painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, which became one of the most famous modernist paintings, and looks just like Muybridge's photo series, *Woman Walking Downstairs*.

Muybridge's work at this time mimicked human curiosity. Machines had increasingly become part of life—trains, cars, and the factories of the Industrial Revolution—and soon people began to notice how their bodies resembled those machines. In Muybridge's photos of the woman crossing the creek you can see her ankles, knees, shoulders, and elbows, rotating along their individual joints, but also in unison as her weight shifts to contract a muscle that pulls on one tendon and relaxes another, a repeating system of pulleys. This interested the University of Philadelphia for the potential insight it offered in the fields of sports, medicine, and physiology. It was there that Muybridge created more than 20,000 photos for his first book, *Animal Locomotion*. The Corcoran's curator, Brookman, called the work a "veritable atlas of imagery about movement and time."



Muybridge motion photos of sow trotting.

Acquittal and Divorce

The state charged Muybridge with murder for killing Larkyns. In closing arguments, Muybridge's lawyer argued that "every fiber of a man's frame impels him to instant vengeance, and he will have it, if hell yawned before

him the instant afterward.” The jury of mostly old and gray men seemed to agree, and the photographer was acquitted.

Muybridge and his wife divorced. She died five months later of an illness. And even though he’d given his son the middle name Helios—the same he signed his photos—he abandoned the child at an orphanage.

Back to Horses in Motion

In 1877, Muybridge was back working for Stanford. By now, the racetrack on Stanford’s ranch had a photo shed that housed a bank of dozens of cameras. On the other side was an angled white wall, and in between them Muybridge spread white powdered lime on the dirt so the horse would pop out as it raced toward the cameras. In June 1878, Muybridge greeted reporters and told them to prepare for, as one writer would recall, a photographic feat that marked “an era in art.”

A series of wires ran from the angled wall every 21 inches to the shed where they pulled triggers connected to an electrical circuit. This was the complex technology Muybridge had worked with Stanford’s engineers to develop—unimaginable just five years before. When the horse ran down the track it would trip the wires, pull the trigger that closed the electrical circuit, and release rubber springs loaded at 100 pounds of pressure that snapped the shutters closed at one-thousandth of a second. The reporters at the racetrack that day waited. Then Stanford’s horse galloped down the track, tripping the cameras lines, one after another.

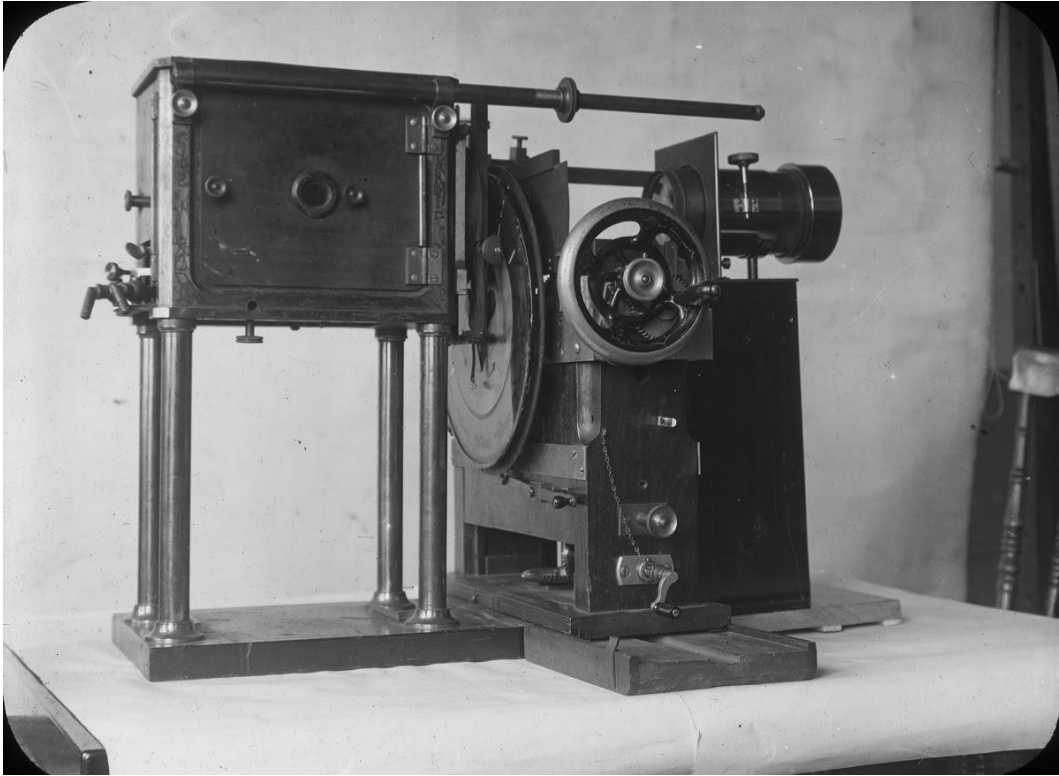
Muybridge developed the film in front of reporters so there’d be no doubt he’d taken them that day. In one photo series from these experiments, called Sallie Gardner at a Gallop, all four hooves of the horse clearly leave the ground in the first four of 16 photos. What’s certain in the pictures is that a horse in gallop looks nothing like any artist ever imagined. Stanford would later meet with the French artist Jean-Louis Ernest Meissonier—so famous at the time that The New York Times referred to him simply as, “the great artist Meissonier”—and asked him to draw a horse, then to draw that same horse in stride a foot later.

Dumfounded, Meissonier said, “I can’t do it.”

“And yet Meissonier many years ago drew the picture of a horse that would have irretrievably damned any other artist than himself,” the Times wrote.

Another reporter called Muybridge’s accomplishments with camera technology as important as the phonograph and the telephone. But Muybridge’s legacy today is not what he wanted. Beginning with his first single-frame photographs of galloping horses, Muybridge had worked toward recording sequences of movement using dozens of cameras as a way to pause and reanimate motion. Now, we’d call that film.

The Zoopraxiscope



The Muybridge Zoopraxiscope.

One year after the reporters watched the horse snap the camera lines on Stanford's ranch, Muybridge developed the zoopraxiscope, the precursor to cinema.



The machine used a glass disc spun around a projection lantern, and when Muybridge showed his photos of horses to people in 1880 at an exhibit in San Francisco, one reporter wrote that “nothing was wanting but the clatter of the hoofs upon the turf and an occasional breath of steam from the nostrils.”

The animated images lasted only a few seconds, and looked uncannily like a GIF. It’s nearly impossible to view Muybridge’s work through a zoopraxiscope today, but since many of his photos have been turned into GIFs we can again see Muybridge’s art as he did.

In his photo grids an action begins and ends. But in constant, repeated motion, the action spills into a circle of infinite movement, as if the two naked blacksmiths will pound that anvil forever, or the couple will waltz together long past midnight. There’s something mesmerizing and voyeuristic about Muybridge’s photos as GIFs, because it reveals the world as we see it in passing, but not as we understand its parts. And that is what Muybridge tried to do all his life. So it’s today that Muybridge has come perhaps the closest to being remembered as he wanted to be remembered—as the creator of early cinema.

A Flop at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair



The 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

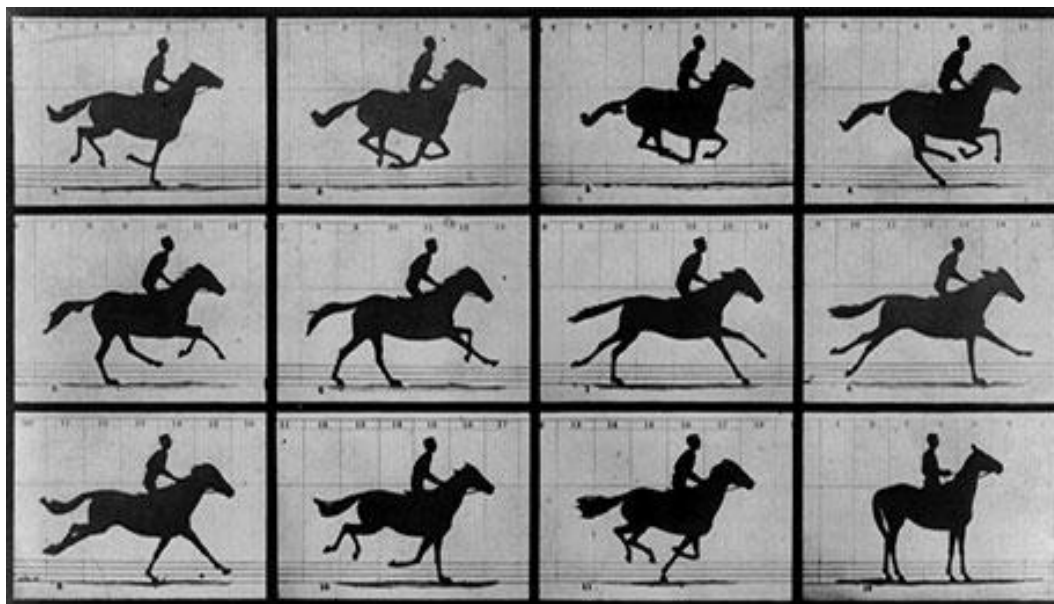


The world's first Ferris Wheel at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

At the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, Muybridge planned to give 300 lectures in his Zoopraxigraphical Hall, discussing his life's work. The fair featured other inventions like the debut of the original Ferris Wheel, and the inventions of Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison, who were both locked in their own war to be immortalized. Muybridge's exhibit was a complete flop. Other minds had advanced upon his zoopraxiscope, and in two years an audience in France would watch a 46-second projection shot by the Lumière brothers of women leaving a factory. It was the first public screening of cinema. It had been just 18 years since Muybridge's horse experiments, and already his work was something to be displayed in museums. A small stone in a path toward something greater.

That he is largely remembered for his work capturing the motion of horses is somewhat tragic. He had pushed photography to its uttermost limit, willed it to do what he wished, until it became something entirely new. But for some 40,000 years, man had tried to understand the unseeable motion in those four legs of the horse. Da Vinci, Meissonier, everyone had failed. Then came Muybridge with his cameras. Suddenly the horse's back legs

swing up in neat lines at the joints, the front legs reach forward, then curl inward and upward to the belly, first the left, then the right. And for a moment, thanks to Muybridge, the horse is airborne.



3. The Scoundrel Harry Larkyns

*The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Guardian website at www.theguardian.com. The article is a review of *The Scoundrel Harry Larkyns* by Rebecca Gowers. It was written by P. D. Smith and was published in December 2019.*

On 17 October 1874, Edward Muybridge travelled from San Francisco – by ferry, train and two-horse buggy – to confront Harry Larkyns, the man who had been having an affair with his wife and who he believed was the father of her child. It was dark by the time Muybridge reached the ranch in the rural community of Calistoga, Napa County. As Larkyns stepped out on to the porch, Muybridge said: “I have a message from my wife.” Then, without warning, he drew his Smith & Wesson revolver and shot him through the heart.

Muybridge made no attempt to escape and the policeman who arrested him noted that he was “very cool for one who had just killed a man”. Even when he was remanded in custody, the press reported him to be “very calm and collected, and apparently feeling entirely justifiable in the killing of Larkyns”. His remarkable self-confidence was well-founded. Within four months a local jury decided unanimously that he was not guilty. Reporters said the courtroom “shook with applause” at the verdict. Muybridge’s murder of his wife’s lover was, the jury said, wholly in accordance “with the law of human nature” and they decided “they could not conscientiously punish him for doing what they would have done themselves”.

This astonishing case is now remembered only as a footnote to the life story of Muybridge, who became famous for his photographic motion studies of horses, proving that they lift all four feet off the ground while galloping. His zoöpraxiscope was also the first device to project moving pictures. An arrogant and eccentric man, he later changed his name to Eadweard, an Anglo-Saxon affectation that the press mocked as “an eadvertisement”. Until now little has been known of Larkyns.

Rebecca Solnit dismissed him as a “rogue whose tales of his life before San Francisco are heroic beyond the reach of credibility”. However, as this biographical study by the novelist and non-fiction author Rebecca Gowers shows, this is unfair. He had an extraordinary life, one in which heroism, tragedy and deception were mixed in equal measure. The inspiration for Gowers’s book was the discovery that Larkyns – who was born Henry Larkins – was a distant relative of hers, the brother of her great-great-grandmother, Alice. According to Gowers, he “had a childhood no one could envy”. Born in India in 1843, he and his sister were brought up by relatives after his parents were murdered during the siege of Cawnpore in the 1857 Indian rebellion. Having spent his childhood in boarding schools,

Larkyns joined the army at 16, and served in eight regiments in India for six years.

He became adept at reinventing himself. Constantly searching for the love he never had as a child, as an adult he became “a footloose spendthrift”, living beyond his means, playing on his good looks, wit and charm. Deception came easily to him. Spending money he didn’t have to impress a series of actresses, he lived life on the edge, in and out of jail for fraud and debt. After being awarded the Légion d’honneur in 1871 for fighting for the French against the Prussians, he ended up as a theatre critic in San Francisco at the age of 28, described by acquaintances as “the prince of confidence men”. It was there that he met Flora Muybridge.

There’s much to enjoy in this painstakingly researched (if at times too detailed) account of a forgotten and troubled ne’er-do-well; it’s a story that is as eventful as it is tragic.
