



Death approaches. This horse was dragged by a chain around his neck and asphyxiated after being suspended for several minutes. Mexico. Aitor Garmendia

Hidden in plain sight

Some 80 billion land animals are killed for food, clothing, experiments, sport and tradition. **Keith Wilson** tells the story of *HIDDEN*, the first photo book to document the stories behind these practices

This darkest of stories begins with a bright, sunny day in May. The year is 2018 and I’m sitting on a step at Somerset House, London, overlooking the marquees erected in the Georgian courtyard for that year’s Photo London. With me is the Toronto-based animal rights activist and photojournalist Jo-Anne McArthur. We are not entirely strangers to each other as a few

days earlier I interviewed her for a magazine profile and then we were both the focus of attention as part of the group behind the campaign and publishing project, Photographers Against Wildlife Crime, culminating in the launch of a book of the same name and an exhibition in Mayfair. Sitting in the warm spring sunshine, it really did feel like we were basking in the afterglow of something remarkable: the fulfilment of the

efforts by a group of outstanding photographers, using their images to raise the profile of an issue that much of the world had let slip past their gaze. Now, Jo-Anne gives me insight into an area of photography that has been the primary focus of her life for the past two decades: documenting the short, brutal lives of the animals who live amongst us, those we exploit and consume for our food and clothing, or in the name of tradition, entertainment and research. For much of this time, her photographs have provided a rare visual record of the suffering endured by these animals. She has entered numerous factory farms at night, taken part in vigils outside slaughterhouse gates, and even stepped inside them, camera in hand, to photograph the carnage that follows. Then there are the zoos and wildlife shows, fur farms and puppy mills, wet markets and sale yards, hunts and blood sports; in short, wherever you find animal suffering or death, you are likely to find Jo-Anne McArthur moving silently in the darkness, focusing and framing, barely stopping while always keeping one eye open for a discreet exit.



‘When I take photos, I try to think of images as open wounds that can’t be ignored. They should communicate pain’ – *Konrad Łozinski*

No way out. A rabbit looks up from among hundreds of others crowded into metal cages. Spain. Aitor Garmendia

A new genre of photography This is the little-known world of animal photojournalism, and in the 20 years since she took up the mantle, there has been scant recognition of this genre as a bona fide form of photography. As Jo-Anne defines it, ‘Animal photojournalism captures, memorialises and exposes the experiences of animals who live amongst us, but who we fail to see.’ So, with our meeting on those worn stone steps began the process to open people’s eyes – not just to see, but also to engage with the experiences depicted in these photographs. Central to this ambition was to produce a book devoted to what Jo-Anne calls ‘the war on animals’, a volume of images akin in scale to the war and conflict photography of James Nachtwey’s *Inferno*. I was astounded by her vision, but not surprised given the tenacity and highly developed sense of purpose that has carried her this far, and for so long. Although *Inferno* was her inspiration, this as-yet-unnamed book was to feature photographs by a multitude of photographers, not just Jo-Anne’s work. She already had a list of names in mind, many of whom had worked with her through her animal rights and journalism collective, We Animals Media. That list grew significantly over the following months as the picture search widened across six continents. My role was to be her co-editor, as well as the book’s principal writer and researcher. Our



A sick pig left to die on the floor of a farm corridor. Finland. Kristo Muurimaa



‘Animal photojournalism captures, memorialises and exposes the experiences of animals who live amongst us, but who we fail to see’ – *Jo-Anne McArthur*



working title was *Animals in the Anthropocene*, and while we toyed with many main titles and cover concepts for what seemed like an eternity, it was our designer David Griffin who came up with the title *HIDDEN*. It was the perfect choice: one short word that summed up the status of the animals depicted between its covers.

Initiation and selection

Unlike Jo-Anne and the rest of the photographers, this was a subject area that I had never witnessed first-hand nor engaged with on an emotional level. All that changed when the picture editing and sequencing began. In some respects,

it felt like an initiation, beginning with a seemingly endless supply of pictures of doomed pigs in factory farms and some of the world’s grimmest slaughterhouses. But it was an image by Louise Jorgensen – a close-up of the eye of a pig on its way to slaughter – that provided me with a profound moment of insight into the depth of feeling felt by an animal that most of us only see as a chop or sausage. This photo and a similar one by Louise, showing the frightened eye of a cow, also being trucked to slaughter, were among the first photos chosen for the book. I decided they would be best used as a pair and Jo-Anne and David agreed without hesitation.

Top left: Garbage day. A dead pig waits for collection outside a farm entrance. Denmark. Selena Magnolia

Above left: A pig looks out from a transport truck after reaching her final destination. Canada. Louise Jorgensen



Another photo which quickly won its place in the book was a portrait of a caged rabbit, by Spanish photojournalist Aitor Garmendia. Like many of the photos in *HIDDEN*, it was taken in the murky light of a huge factory farm. The rabbit is surrounded by hundreds of others, but she is the only one to raise her head above a mass of pink ears and grey cage bars, a figure of hope gazing towards the ceiling where a weak ray of light illuminates the darkness. It was Jo-Anne’s idea to juxtapose this photo with a quote by Leo Tolstoy about suffering that has been adopted as a universal pledge by the animal rights movement: ‘When the suffering of another

creature causes you to feel pain, do not submit to the initial desire to flee from the suffering one, but on the contrary come closer, as close as you can to him who suffers, and try to help him.’

Communicating pain

Not surprisingly, there is hardly an image in the book’s 320 pages that doesn’t depict suffering or death. For this reason alone, it is not disingenuous to compare the similarities of the animal photojournalism in *HIDDEN* with the conflict imagery of Nachtwey’s *Inferno*. The commitment of many of these photographers, and the psychological price they pay is

Above: Steel barriers, concrete floors, tiled walls and push-button technology make up the habitat of the modern-day dairy herd. Poland. Andrew Skowron

Right: A macaque performs in a popular street show in Jakarta, known locally as Topeng Monyet (Mask Monkey). Indonesia. Joan de la Malla





‘We must always remember that those animals portrayed in the photos will be dead when the public sees them’ – Stefano Belacchi

also comparable: some have been beaten and arrested, others treated for PTSD. Following such stories for years is bound to take its toll, and it was the words of another contributing photographer, Stefano Belacchi, which reminded me of my own responsibility when editing everyone’s images: ‘We must always remember that those animals portrayed in the photos will be dead when the public sees them. I feel a big responsibility when I think about that.’ Another photographer, Polish animal rights activist Konrad Lozinski, who took the book’s cover photo, declared: ‘When I take photos, I try to think of images as open wounds that can’t be ignored. They should communicate pain.’

Where possible, matching powerful words to powerful pictures is one of my personal objectives when editing photo books. It can also prove to be revelatory: with *HIDDEN*, the pull-out quotes weren’t limited to some of the book’s photographers; relevant quotes by historical figures including Martin Luther King, Alice Walker, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and George Orwell, as well as Tolstoy, were included too. The juxtaposition of their words

from the past with these images of the present served to illustrate how animal rights has been a longer-running issue than many of us, myself included, have realised.

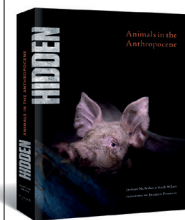
Unforeseen circumstances

Creating a book of this scale requires meticulous planning and healthy financing. As publisher, We Animals Media took on the responsibility of raising funds for the book, most of which came through a crowd funding campaign that surpassed our target twice over. Of course, even the best-laid plans cannot account for unforeseen circumstances, and none of us foresaw the outbreak of Covid-19 and the challenges it brought. However, the pandemic also presented an opportunity for *HIDDEN* to take on greater relevance to a mainstream audience by the linking of animals sold at markets with the transmission of zoonotic viruses. Photos depicting wet markets and the wildlife trade were always considered part of our coverage, but the onset of Covid-19 gave these images a greater significance.

The pandemic also helped to give added weight to two of the most

Above left: Clubbing, used to stun pigs before their throats are slit. Thailand. Jo-Anne McArthur

Above: Day-old chicks are packed into crates at an industrial hatchery. Poland. Konrad Lozinski



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controversial images to be found in the book: one from China showing pigs about to be buried alive after an outbreak of African Swine Fever; the other from South Korea where a dozen or more masked officials in white hazard suits herd thousands of ducks into a pit, also to be buried alive, after contracting avian flu. Unsurprisingly, the photographers behind both images chose to remain anonymous.

Other catastrophic events that arose while we were editing the book included the widespread burning of the Amazon rainforest during the summer of 2019 and Australia’s climate fires of 2019-2020. Here were two devastating outbreaks that helped to make clear the connection between climate change and people’s use and exploitation of animals. In the case of the Amazon, ranchers continue to light illegal fires to clear land for cattle grazing to meet the world’s insatiable demand for beef. We already had images by Daniel Beltrá showing the Amazon ablaze and cattle grazing in their aftermath, but the events in Australia required fresh images. So, Jo-Anne flew out and spent two weeks covering the incineration of vast tracts of forest

and wildlife. One of her photos, depicting a surviving kangaroo and her joey surrounded by burnt-out forest, became our opening image for the chapter entitled ‘Catastrophe’. It went on to win the Man and Nature category in the 2020 Nature Photographer of the Year awards.

Triumph and tragedy

There are many other award-winning images in *HIDDEN*: some

of the photographers, Paul Hilton, Tomasso Ausili, Britta Jaschinski, Aaron Gekoski, Francesco Pistilli, Kuni Takahashi, Joan de la Malla, as well as Daniel and Jo-Anne, are already renowned for their success in the World Press Photo and NHM Wildlife Photographer of the Year awards. Editing the work of such an esteemed group of photographers is both a privilege and a pressure. Fortunately, *HIDDEN* has been very well received and acclaimed by

Below left: A kangaroo and joey after the 2019-20 bushfires. Australia. Jo-Anne McArthur

Below right: A cage of dogs watches as others are killed and dismembered before cooking. Cambodia. Aaron Gekoski



reviewers and other prominent photojournalists, including Brent Stirton and Nick Brandt. Ultimately, even an epic undertaking such as *HIDDEN* has to be judged by sales, and in that respect we have also succeeded: two weeks after its November 2020 release date, the book sold out. As I write this, a reprinted edition is rolling off the presses in Italy.

Media coverage has been extensive too and there are plans for speaking engagements and exhibitions in 2021, Covid permitting. The first European exhibition is scheduled for a two-month run in Berlin from the middle of February. With displays such as this, strong sales and media interest, Jo-Anne and I feel that the work of the 40 photographers featured in *HIDDEN* is giving much-needed prominence to the emerging new field of animal photojournalism, as well as providing a chance for more people to engage with a global issue that has been overlooked for far too long.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention the sacrifice of one of the animal rights activists who died while we made this book. On 19 June 2020, 65-year-old Regan Russell was knocked down and killed by a truck laden with pigs as she protested outside Fearman’s Pork slaughterhouse in Toronto, Canada. Luckily, we still had time to acknowledge her death in the book before we went to print, but not with the official dedication, as that remained as we had always intended: ‘For the animals. They have no choice.’ We have no doubt that Regan would have approved of our choice.

