

# RPS



JOURNAL

September 2003

RPS 150th Anniversary Awards

Patrick Lichfield FRPS

Marc Riboud

Michael Kenna

Simon Roberts ARPS

The RPS Collection at the NMPFT



# 150th Anniversary Issue

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*Every good wish to Roy Green in his retirement from the RPS Journal. As members will be aware, Roy was Editor for 14 years until July 2002 and, for the past year, has been in charge of layout and production. We wish him all the best.*

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*Clive Insley is no longer engaged in the sale of advertising for The RPS. Our thanks go to Clive for his help over the years.*

**PRINTING**

The Friary Press, Bridport Rd,  
 Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1JL

Telephone: 01305 265656

Fax: 01305 263665

RPS JOURNAL is provided free to all members of The Royal Photographic Society. It has been published continuously (formerly as *The Photographic Journal*) since 1853 by The Society. 2003 Copyright of the entire contents is strictly reserved in all countries on behalf of The RPS and the authors. ISSN 1468 8670. The RPS JOURNAL is published for \$110.00 per year by The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, Milsom St, Bath BA1 1DN, UK. Periodicals Class postage paid at Middlesex, NJ. Postmaster: address changes to RPS, c/o PO Box 177, Middlesex NJ 08846. US Agent: Pronto Mailers International, 200 Wood Ave, Middlesex, NJ 08846.



Cover picture: Golden Jubilee portrait of RPS Patron, HM Queen Elizabeth II by Rankin HonFRPS.  
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# Time and Motion

The work of three photographers, whose concern with representing time and movement led to highly singular image making, is on show in Birmingham, as Richard Sadler FRPS explains

In spite of Birmingham's unsuccessful bid for the title European Capital of Culture, it has not been discouraged in its support for photography, as the excellent exhibition *Time/Motion* confirms.

Peter James, the curator of the Birmingham Central Library's internationally renowned photographic collection, has brought together the key works held there by Eadweard Muybridge, and Harold Edgerton with that of Jonathan Shaw, a Birmingham-based designer photographer, born in 1972, in an exhibition elegantly designed and laid out by James, Shaw and Victoria Osborne.

All three photographers developed technological solutions to explore concepts of time and movement with cameras and photographic processes.

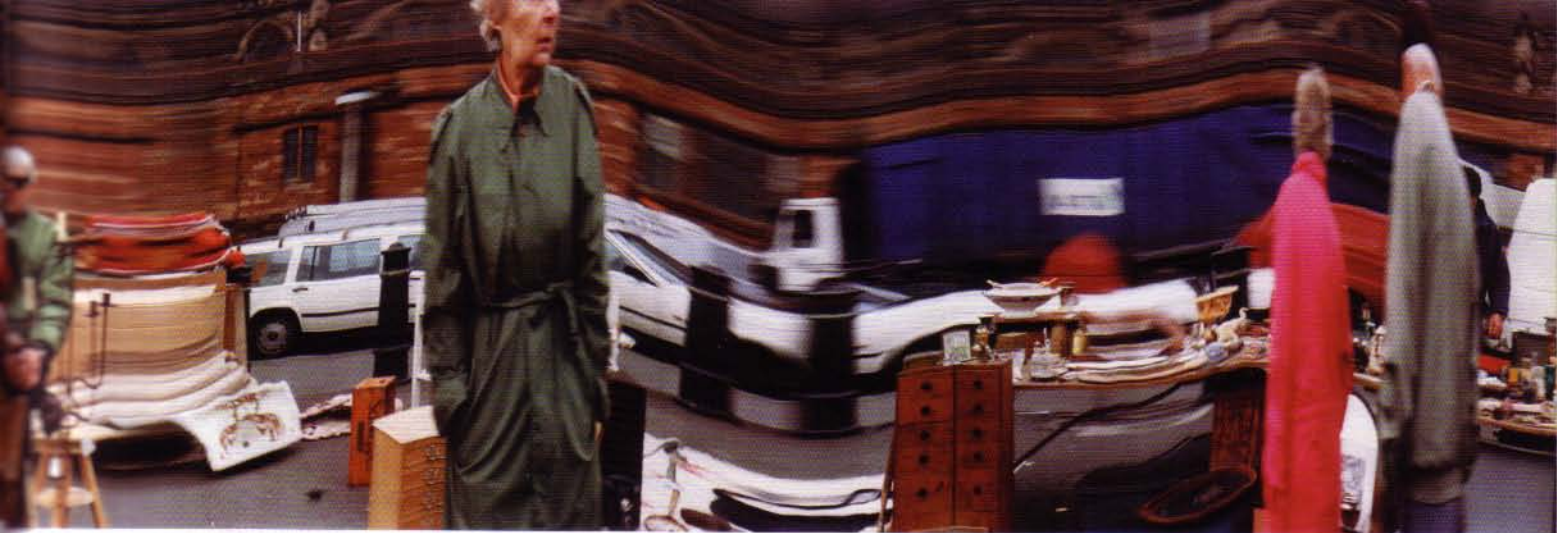
We are all aware of, and can see in this exhibition, the development of what reputedly started off in 1872 as wager between the railroad millionaire and horse breeder Leyland Stanford and English born Eadweard Muybridge, a United States Government photographer. Muybridge accepted a challenge to produce a single image that would reveal whether or not there were moments in a trot when a horse was entirely free of the ground.

Using the fastest shutter available, Muybridge was able to provide only the faintest image. He was more successful five years later when, employing a battery of cameras with mechanically tripped shutters, he showed clearly the stages of the horse's movement: at top speed, a trotting horse had all four hooves off the ground simultaneously, and in a different configuration from that of a galloping horse.

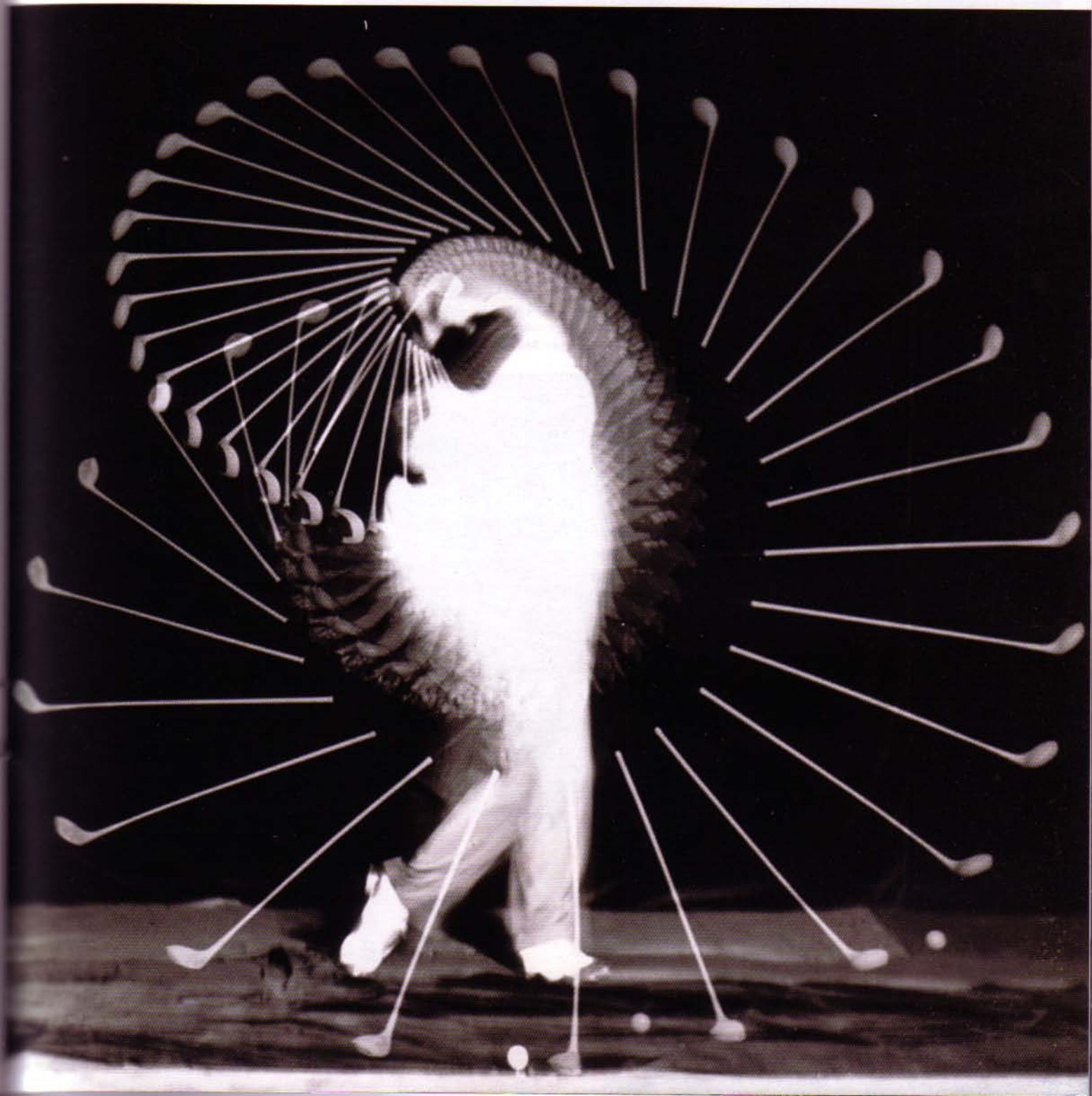
These images radically changed artistic interpretations of horses in motion and won the bet for Muybridge. They of course did more than that; challenging notions of how photography was seen then and now as 'true to nature'.

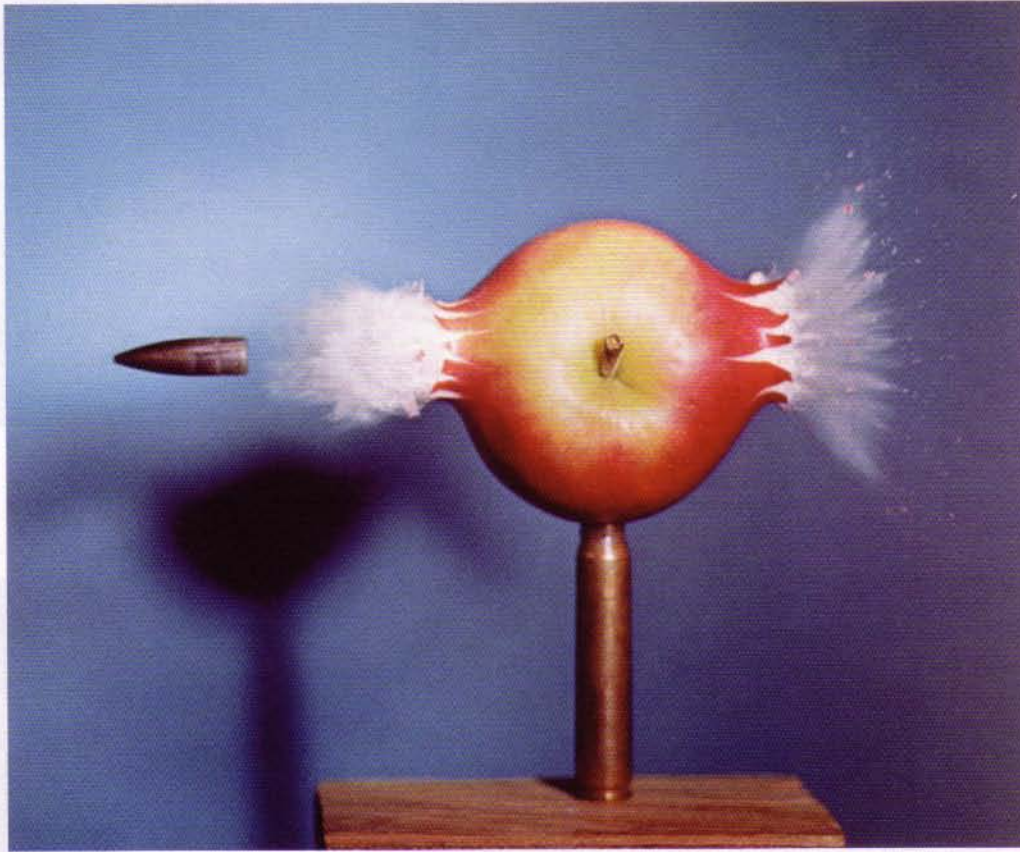
On show are enlarged copies from selected pages of the 11 volumes of Muybridge's published work, *Animal Locomotion*, as well as some of the original volumes. The catalogue published for these volumes at the time is also on show, and gives us some idea of the subjects photographed. The famous galloping horse images are on plate 627, but we also have *Lady Stepping out of a*





Above: *Father Christmas, Bull Ring, Birmingham, 1999, Lambda print by Jonathan Shaw.* Left: *Pole Vaulter, David Tork, 1964, dye transfer print.* Two multiflash strobes in trainable spot reflectors were directed on the vaulter. A camera with a fast-operating shutter was required to prevent blur from ambient light at Boston Garden. Below: *Golf Drive by Densmore Shute, 1938, gelatine silver print.* A multiflash exposure of a white painted club against a black velvet background. The light frequency was 100 flashes per second. (both Harold Edgerton, Harold & Esther Edgerton Foundation, 2003 courtesy of Palm Press, Inc).





**Above: Bullet and Apple c.1964, dye transfer print. A .30 calibre bullet is photographed shortly after it has penetrated an apple. The exposure time is about 0.5 microseconds. This image first illustrated a lecture by Edgerton called 'How to make Apple sauce at MIT'. Right: Action at the Rodeo, 1940, gelatine silver print. Cecil Henley is on his way off a bronco called Home Brew. A strobe housed in a searchlight reflector, aimed from the second balcony of the Boston garden, put a spot of light on the horse wherever he went. A 400 watt-second strobe lamp was used to capture this image of horse and rider separated from each other and the ground. (both Harold Edgerton, Harold & Esther Edgerton Foundation, 2003 courtesy of Palm Press, Inc.) Below: Basketball, Wembley Arena, London, May 1996, Lambda print by Jonathan Shaw.**

Bath Wiping Her Feet, and Baseball Catching and Throwing.

Seemingly every human activity is represented, classified by age, gender, occupation and even marital status. Animals too were recorded in their activities including, rather bizarrely, Chickens Scared by Exploding Torpedo', but then the life of Muybridge himself was a rather bizarre one, which is another story.

Dr. Harold Edgerton's beautiful colour prints were made by the dye transfer process in the 1960s. Cutting the Playing Card Quickly, Bullet and Apple, and the stroboscopic sequence showing Pole vaulter David Turk, were taken at various exposures, from a fifty thousandth to a millionth of a second. Edgerton's black and white strobe sequences Golf Drive by Densmore Shute 1938, and Swirls and Eddies of a Tennis Stroke 1939 are scientifically informative and aesthetically rewarding.

We are indebted for the opportunity of seeing all this, we are told in the exhibition credits, to Geoffrey Holt, a photography lecturer at the Stourbridge College of Art who, in 1976, brought for the first time from the USA the work of Edgerton to the Birmingham Ikon Gallery, from where it toured the UK. Some of those original prints are in this show.

Jonathan Shaw's work was commissioned by the Birmingham Library, and the Museum and Art Gallery. Aware of the work of Muybridge and Edgerton, and equally fascinated by concepts of time and motion, Shaw began to construct mechanically driven cameras and enlargers, which enabled him to escape from the studio and capture the natural movement of a subject in other environments.

Having studied photography, then computer graphics and graphic design at MA level at the

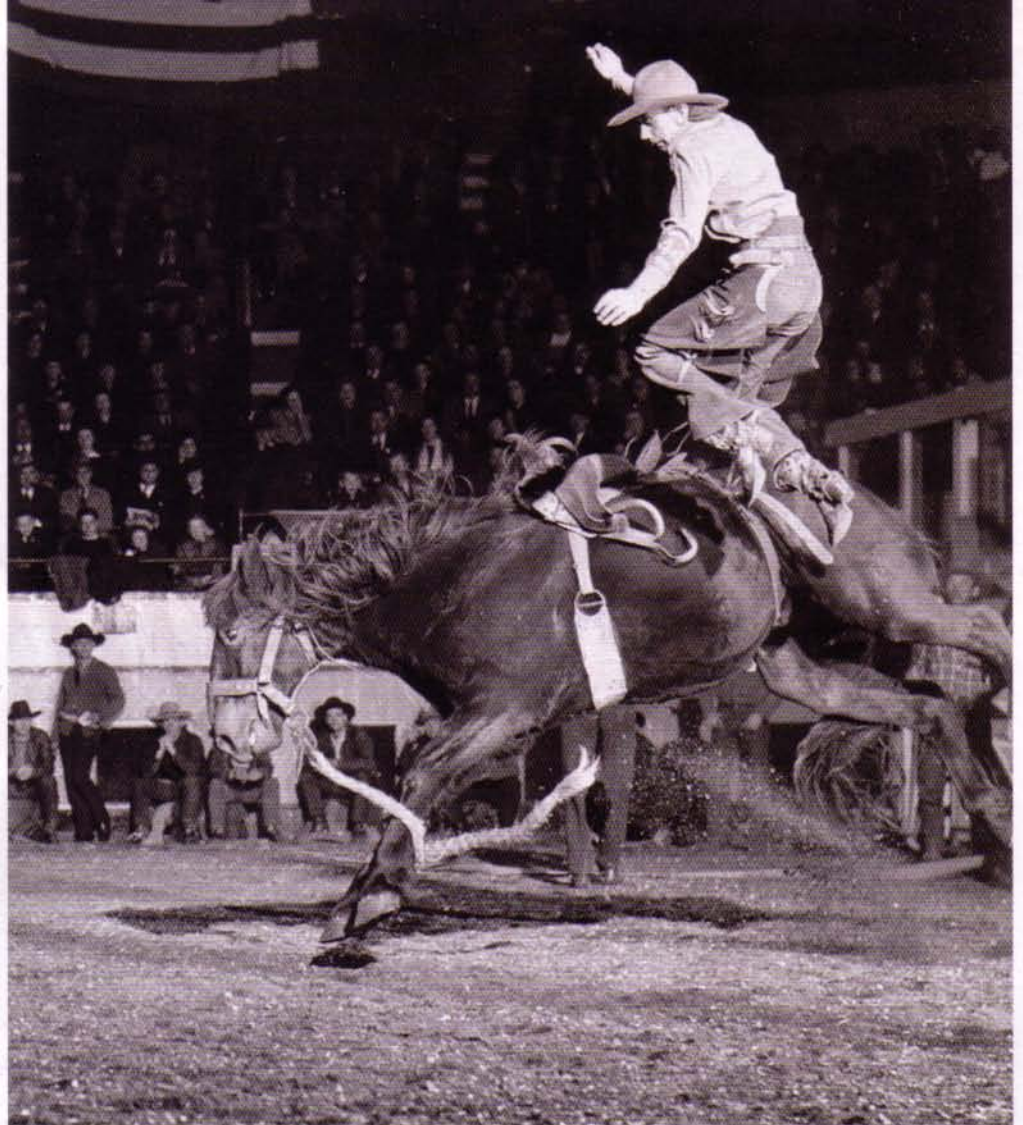


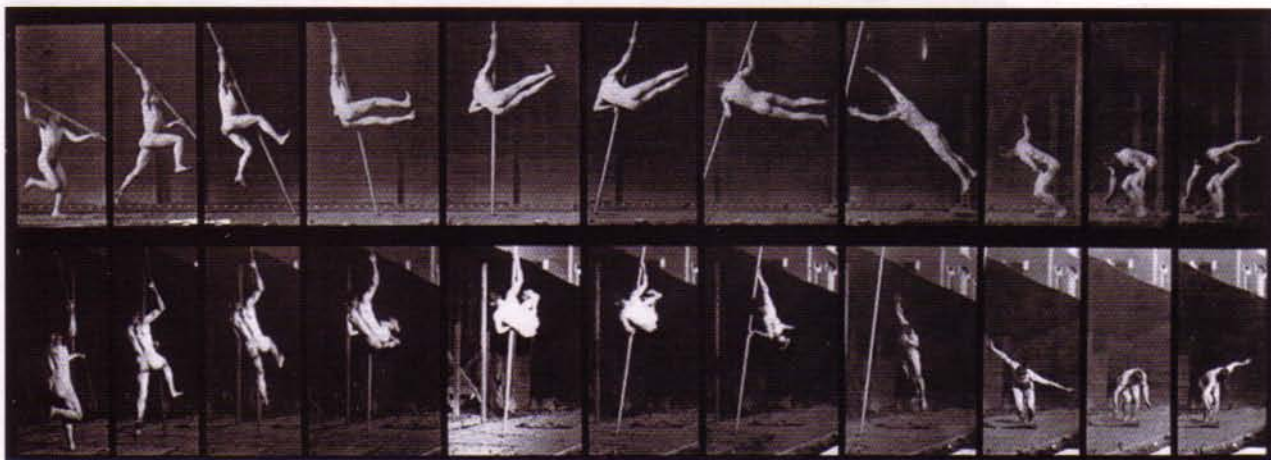
University of Central England in Birmingham, his work was taken up by advertising and commercial design agencies and galleries. In his Basketball and Royal Ballet work, we can draw parallels with the stroboscopic work of Edgerton. The Guide to Ecstacy work, with its distortion, focus on key elements of movement and enhancement of the prints' colour palette is both sensual and erotic.

However, it is the within the Birmingham work that we see the real show stopper: a 13-metre colour, life size, digital Lambda print, Gallery 13 Saturday August 10th 2002, the largest print ever to be exhibited in the museum. It is like a magic mirror, reflecting something that occurred in the same space: spectators in the museum, at an exhibition opening perhaps, chatting or gazing at the works of art. It was set up painstakingly, over a number of hours by Jonathan, using visitors, friends and associates. Gradually, the subject's staged poses lapsed into naturalness. A second exhibit, a digital projection unit which the spectator can control, examines similar issues. It is part of Jonathan's current Investigations into the moving image. This is indeed an exhibition to be seen and enjoyed.

**Richard Sadler FRPS**

*Time and Motion is at the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Galleries 12 & 13 until 28 Sept. Mon-Thurs & Sat 10.00-17.00, Fri 10.30-17.00, Sun 12.30-17.00. Free.*





## Time and Motion: the book.

Published by Dewi Lewis, with design and layout by Jonathan Shaw, this is not just a smart illustrated catalogue of an exhibition with the usual dumbed-down or over-extended text, but a continuation of Shaw's work. In it, he pays due respect to the work of his mentors and fellow exhibitors, visually and in the text while, at the same time, continuing to explore, within the format of a book, his exploration of time and movement.

The choice, layout and sequence of the images and their interrelationship within the cover, text and page, gives the book a sense of movement and pace. Images fill the page, or sweep panoramically across each other. In the section on Muybridge, a series of small photographs of a lady in various stages of leaping over a stool is printed sequentially, page after page. When the book is flicked through rapidly, the image becomes animated.

There is also an implied pace in the colours of the pages, their order in the book, and the montaging of text with some images. Light typeface columns of



text adjoin bold typeface columns of text, giving an impression of depth and movement. The reproductions in black and white or colour remain faithful to the exhibited originals they illustrate, and the explanatory text is informative and concise.

£14.99 from the Birmingham Art Gallery Shop or Dewi Lewis publications. ISBN NO 1-904587-4-6

**Richard Sadler FRPS.**

*Richard Sadler is Chair of The RPS Contemporary Group.*

*Top: Animal Locomotion, Jumping: pole vault, 1887.*

*Centre: Animal Locomotion, Movement of the hand: drawing a circle, 1887.*

*Below: Animals and Movements. Horses: Gallop; saddle; bay horse, 1887 all by Eadweard Muybridge.*

*All Photos: Birmingham Libraries.*

