



Muybridge's photographic sequence, the first to show motion in such detail, would "extend vision to a new realm," says biographer Solnit.

Man of Action

*An eccentric photographer and a racehorse made history one day in 1878.
The world would never look the same* — BY VICTORIA OLSEN

ON JUNE 15, 1878, members of the San Francisco press gathered at a racetrack in Palo Alto, California, to witness a historic event. Eadweard Muybridge, an eccentric Englishman and photographer who not long before had murdered his wife's lover, claimed to be able to photograph a horse running at full speed—a feat considered impossible with the era's balky cameras, which had wooden shutters and insensitive glass-plate negatives. The horse as well as the track belonged to Leland Stanford, the railroad tycoon, United States senator, former governor of California and, later, co-founder of the university that bears his name. The half-second run would not only revolutionize photography but would also set the stage for the next century's dominant art form, movies.

Stanford had initiated the collaboration with Muybridge six years earlier, and hanging over their photography experiments was a question with surprising repercussions: when a horse runs, do all four hooves leave the ground at

the same time? No photograph survives from their earliest efforts. On that June day Muybridge placed 12 box cameras 21 inches apart alongside the track. They were attached to tripwires and outfitted with metal, electric-operated shutters capable of opening and closing far faster than any before. Muybridge had also modified the emulsion on the glass-plate negatives, making them more reactive to light. The reporters watched Abe Edgington, a champion trotter, dash by, his legs a blur, and waited for Muybridge to develop the plates on the spot.

As advertised, he produced a series of photographs showing the horse virtually stride by stride. And flying in the face of conventional wisdom, Abe Edgington was at times definitely airborne. "There is a feeling of awe in the mind of the beholder," one reporter wrote of the pictures. Muybridge's astounding photographs were published in newspapers around the world. When Stanford showed the pictures to the French painter Jean Louis Ernest Meissonier, who special-