

HELEEN PEETERS PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Modern times have changed the human relationship with nature and animals. The horse has transformed from being a working animal, helping farmers in the field or soldiers during battle, to a domestic pet with a more status.

Seventy years ago my grandfather began a business in what many now consider to be a taboo: horsemeat. At the time people were poor, recovering from the struggles of WW2. Horsemeat was in demand: it offered high quality meat for an affordable price and quickly became a staple in most European countries.

Two years ago, my brother, sister and cousins (the third generation) foresaw that the horsemeat business was no longer doable. Before the company was sold I decided to document the end of the era: the closure of the family business and the horsemeat industry in general. By now the majority of horse slaughterhouses, horse butchers and specialized restaurants have disappeared.

The series brought me to places far outside of Europe:

- Argentina; the biggest exporter of horsemeat. Remarkably the country that is known for beef shies away from eating their horses
- The United States, who take it a step further; there a new law is in place to make sure horses are no longer slaughtered for human consumption.
- Kyrgyzstan; in order to comprehend why horsemeat is controversial I also visited a place with the opposite stance. This nation eats horsemeat out of respect for horses. The meat is expensive and solely kept for special occasions.

The final result is a layered documentary that investigates the topic from multiple perspectives. The photographs are combined with newspaper clippings, archival imagery and illustrations from pop culture. In doing so the story goes beyond a family history and horsemeat. It aims to be seen at large: questioning where we came from, where we are today and how it might be in the future. There must be a change in animal welfare and food production, but there are big differences as to which route to take. How sustainable do we deal with the earth? What is the role of the consumer? And how do we relate to animals?