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Portfolio: Sanna Kannisto

By Robert Epstein | Sunday 8 May 2011



In the late 19th century, the English photographer Eadward Muybridge did much to enhance our knowledge of how we and other animals move with his studies of motion – most famously showing that a horse raises all four of its hooves simultaneously while galloping.

In "The Act of Flying", the series shown above, which is part of a broader project scrutinising myriad flora and fauna entitled Fieldwork, the Finnish photographer Sanna Kannisto similarly

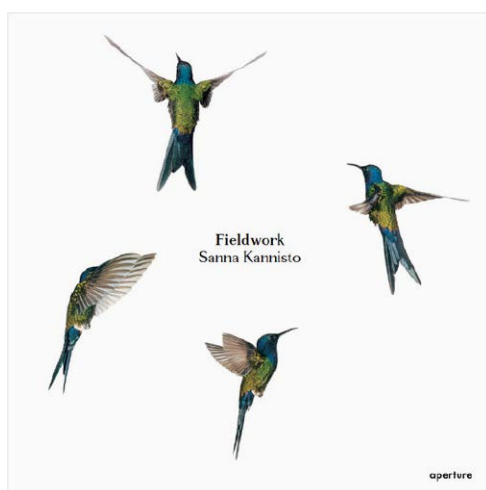
reveals the delicacy of the movements of a hummingbird; but rather than the study of motion, Kannisto is interested in the sphere of scientific representation itself.

For *Fieldwork*, she spent eight lengthy trips living with biologists in the rainforests of Latin America, studying the way they studied the phenomena they unearthed. And, while "field science is a lot about measuring things", Kannisto is fascinated by that which slips away.

Thus, setting up shop in a makeshift, portably work-station in Costa Rica in 2006, she has produced something more akin to sculptural contemporary art than nature photography. The white background, created using screens, "brings to mind scientific documentation, 16th- and 17th-century still-life paintings, natural-history drawings and perhaps curiosity cabinets", she says – and certainly the series looks like fine-art drawings with the sharpness of its details.

But the real fun is to be seen in the images in which the bird disappears out of shot – the antithesis of Muybridge's pioneering prototype of motion photography. Like the forest in which it lives, Kannisto's hummingbird is ultimately uncontrollable – and empirical scientific knowledge itself, it is suggested, has its own constraints.

'Fieldwork', by Sanna Kannisto, is published by Aperture, priced £32.50 ●



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