



Polvaredal

by Marcos Furer



Published in *LensWork* and *LensWork Extended* #124

Commentary

If I were inclined to wager, I would bet that something in excess of 98% of all photographs are taken from a height of 62-inches, \pm 5-inches or so. Why? That's the distance from *terra firma* to eyeball height, the position most commonly assumed when we position the camera for taking a photograph. If no other reason than the rarity of exception, any camera angle *other* than this will capture our attention simply by being different.

Furer's camera in this image appears to be just a few inches off the ground providing such an incredible point of view — and perhaps a significantly precarious one. (I do find myself wondering if the camera survived this exposure!) Without such a low position, this photograph would likely be forgettable.

Every photographer uses their own legs to adjust their position on the X and Y axis by a move closer or farther away from the subject, sidestepping left and right to find the right angle. But in our three-dimensional world, it's curious that so few photographs are made by varying our position on the Z axis, up and down. One of my most useful tools in photography is an important piece of non-photographic equipment — my stepladder. It goes with me everywhere. Even if I fly to some remote destination, the first thing I do is stop at a hardware store and buy a 2-foot stepladder. That extra height can make all the difference. Similarly, I insist my tripods have fully articulated legs so that I can position my cameras low, as Furer did in this image.

Part of what makes this image so successful is a *consequence* of the low angle — namely, the fact that from this angle the cow's hooves are clearly seen suspended in mid-stride above the turf. From a camera angle even a few inches higher, that separation, that gravity defying gesture, would be diminished. The combination of that mid-air suspension, the intensity of gaze we see in the creature's eye, the dust, and the incredibly good fortune of a perfectly placed background cloud, make this image incredibly *movementous*. Yes, I just invented that word.

Do we care that Furer's composition includes a few rule-breaking elements? Do we mind the Dutch angle, or the unidentifiable blurry mass on the right side of the image? Or are we so swept up in the moment and movement that is emphasized by the angle of this photograph that we don't care about these other elements? Good composition that engages the viewer will trump a lot of photographic "flaws."

I find myself looking at this photograph and ever-so-slightly leaning to the right — to get out of the way of the oncoming stampede. As photographers, we want our viewers to be engaged; I suspect a reactive bodily flinch is a high compliment for an image like this one.