



Ele Embryo, 1966

## PETER BEARD

### HOW ONE TRIP TO AFRICA LED TO A LIFETIME CAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF ITS INHABITANTS

In the late 1970s and 80s, Peter Beard's milieu read like the society pages of *Vogue* magazine – Andy Warhol, Truman Capote, Bianca Jagger and Francis Bacon were all friends of Beard's and part of the creative orgy that was the crux of Manhattan cool. Beard's early career was taken up with shooting supermodels and the rock glitterati – Mick Jagger and David Bowie were both shot numerous times by Beard.

Since 1949 (aged 11), Beard has compiled collage diaries of his work – something that, as he developed as a photographer and explored foreign continents, would take up most of his energy. In fact, his photographic work effectively became an extension of his diaries. Since his first trip to Africa in 1955, inspired by Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*, Beard has been fascinated with the indigenous wildlife of the continent.

Hundreds of trips later, Beard is still creating beguiling photo collages the way he always has – combining photographs of African animals with dried leaves and insects, drawings by African artists, old sepia photographs, transcribed telephone messages, newspaper clippings and, occasionally, his own blood. He documents his relationship with the natural world in such a way affords it an incredible sensuality – you can almost smell the dusty African air, rich with the scent of the earth, the skins of wild animals and the dankness of a thousand piles of dung. This image of an elephant embryo is taken from the re-release of *The End of the Game*, Beard's famous study into the destruction of the African elephant. ELEANOR MORGAN

"While at school in New York, I attended the Natural History Museum with Teddy Roosevelt out front on a horse, and Africans and Indians either side. Inside the African hall were dioramas of all the animals I wanted to see in their natural habitat. I escaped to eastern Africa in 1955. I always took photographs, like a parasite of subject matter. It was easy. Adding a bouquet of related materials, drawings, clippings, photographs, and even diary details of the day seemed like a natural way to represent what was on my mind at the time and afterwards. *The End of The Game* concerns the end of the play period, which we have enjoyed within the diversity of nature. This embryo picture represents the first pregnancy out of 200 female elephants in a population dynamics study in Uganda, as the over-population of elephants had reduced the dense woodland to a veritable wasteland. Marking the reality of over-population – separation of the sexes comes first (normally every cow elephant is either pregnant or has a young one) – this was the only pregnancy in 200 females. Every mature elephant had heart disease from density and stress, but they were cunning – they adapted to their own damage and learnt to eat solid wood. This picture was taken in 1966 in Murchison Falls Park and, as I took it, I realised that the entire ecology of the elephant is more similar to human beings than any other animal. In short... we're next."

*The End of the Game* is published by Taschen