What Sebastião Salgado sees in places untouched by humanity.
Sebastião Salgado began working on "Genesis," his most recent project, seven years ago. His idea was to photograph 20 places where the landscape was still pristine, relatively untouched by humans. He traveled to southern Africa and to the Amazon rain forests, to the South Sandwich Islands in the southern Atlantic and to Patagonia. The pictures in this portfolio document his journey to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Alaska. A friend of his, who worked for the Unesco World Heritage Center, had spent a lot of time in Alaska and spoke to him often about the refuge. "He gave me a book about it," Salgado says. "For me, it became a big dream to go there."

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge covers more than 30,000 square miles from the coast of the Arctic Ocean across the Brooks Range mountains and into interior Alaska, covering several ecological zones that include barrier islands, coastal lagoons, salt marshes and rivers. Salgado visited the region in the spring and summer of 2009, when the caribou
“You cannot say, “O.K., I have one week to go,” and then they don’t come in a week.”

I traveled to the coastal plain to give birth and raise their young. He set up base camp in the village of Kaltova and traveled by small plane, boat and on foot to capture the migrating herd.

“You must have a big latitude of time,” Salgado says. “You cannot say, “O.K., I have one week to go,” and then they don’t come in a week.” The pilot would drop Salgado—sometimes alone, sometimes with the Inuit Eskimos who served as his guide (and caught fish for their needs)—in an area where the animals were said to be headed, and he would wait. “You know, you can’t make an appointment with them.”

Salgado shot only in black and white, which sharpened the contrasts in an already-dramatic landscape. As cold fronts collided with warm fronts, “you had the most stunning battle, with half-snow, half-rain, half-sunlight, all at the same time,” Salgado says. “It brought me great luck. I was in a photographer’s paradise.”

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*Into the Wild* Read John Biewer’s interview with Sebastião Salgado and see additional photographs at nytimes.com/magazine.