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Haunted Air



Synopsis

Anonymous Halloween photographs from c.1875–1955—truly hauntingÂ Americana, with a foreword by David LynchÂ The photographs in Haunted Air provide an extraordinary glimpse into the traditions of this macabre festival from ages past, and form an important document of photographic history. These are the pictures of the dead: family portraits, mementos of the treasured, now unrecognizable, andÂ others. The roots of Halloween lie in the ancient pre–Christian Celtic festival of Samhain, a feast to mark the death of the old year and the birth of the new. It was believed that on this night the veil separating the worlds of the living and the dead grew thin and ruptured, allowing spirits to pass through and walk unseen but not unheard amongst men. The advent of Christianity saw the pagan festival subsumed in All Souls' Day, when across Europe the dead were mourned and venerated. Children and the poor, often masked or in outlandish costume, wandered the night begging "soul cakes" in exchange for prayers, and fires burned to keep malevolent phantoms at bay. From Europe, the haunted tradition would quickly take root and flourish in the fertile soil of the New World. Feeding hungrily on fresh lore, consuming half–remembered tales of its own shadowy origins and rituals, Halloween was reborn in America. The pumpkin supplanted the carved turnip; costumes grew ever stranger, and celebrants both rural and urban seized gleefully on the festival's intoxicating, lawless spirit. For one wild night, the dead stared into the faces of the living, and the living, ghoulishly masked and clad in tattered backwoods baroque, stared back.

Book Information

Hardcover: 216 pages

Publisher: Random House UK (October 28, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0224089706

ISBN-13: 978-0224089708

Product Dimensions: 7.5 x 0.8 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (49 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #462,331 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #46 inÂ Books > Arts &

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> Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Holidays #566 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography >

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Customer Reviews

Old pictures have always given me a strange feeling for one reason or another. It can be a simple picture of a family or some scenery, but the grainy-ness manages to give me an uneasy feeling that I have trouble putting into words. Maybe it's the lack of color. Not knowing exactly how these images looked in-person is just one of those weird things that leaves me staring at such pictures for longer than it probably should. Haunted Air is a collection of Halloween-themed photographs from 1875-1955, presented neatly like a photo album. As you can see in my video, the book has one picture on a page, very rarely using the back of the page to display another picture. I'm 50/50 on this, as leaving it blank ensures that the picture shown will be getting your full attention, but at the same time, it's mentioned in the introduction that the man who collected all of these pictures, Ossian Brown, had many more than what's shown here. These just happen to be some of his favorites. The guy did a great job picking photographs that will keep your interest though, that's for sure. Maybe it's just me, but looking at these pictures of long gone people in crude masks and costumes, there's something strange about it all. And yet, they're just posing for a picture! Once again, it's the lack of color and picture quality that causes me to create stories in my head of what could possibly be going on. A child dressed up as a cat on all fours by himself, a group posed in front of the American flag, several people in the back of a truck...what exactly were these people doing? Nothing bad, I'm sure, but I still can't help but think. It sounds paranoid, I know. Just look at some of the images and see for yourself, and let your mind run free with the images.

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