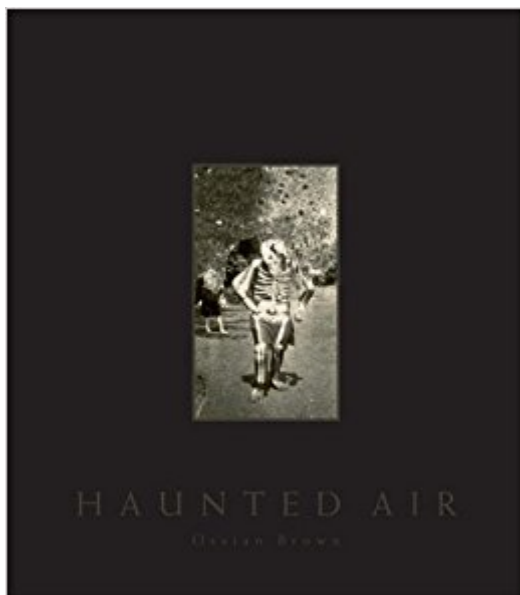


The book was found

# Haunted Air



## Synopsis

Anonymous Halloween photographs from c.1875-1955; truly haunting Americana, with a foreword by David Lynch. 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, and 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

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## Customer Reviews

"for those into the history of Halloween and the common-day costumes worn, this book may be necessary in your collection." "Selectism" blog "an exquisite collection of antique vernacular photographs of Halloweens past" •Boing Boing "recommended for collectors of Americana and those with an interest in the history of Halloween." •Library Journal's Xpress Reviews "delightfully dreadful." •NPR's "The Picture Show" photo blog "The emotional triggers of these moments in time have only become more subtle and complex with age." •GeekTyrant.com "bewitching collection of found American Halloween photographs from 1875-1955." •VMAN Magazine "Creepy." •Rolling Stone

Ossian Brown is an artist, musician, and composer who was a member of the music group Coil, and is a cofounding member of Cyclobe. David Lynch is the author of *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity* as well as a three-time Oscar-nominated director whose popular and critically acclaimed films include *Eraserhead*, *Wild at Heart*, *Twin Peaks*, *Blue Velvet*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Inland Empire*. Geoff Cox works in film and is the author of *Anna & the Witch's Bottle*.

The photos work best outside of context, and certainly without "Halloween decorations on all the blank pages," as another reviewer suggested. This is a macabre art book... "found art" created by anonymous people of past times, the art being both in the documentary nature of the unprofessional imperfect snapshots made on black and white film using not the greatest cameras (but not "bad" either, just off enough to enhance the sense of mystery), and more especially in the "Otherness" created by the subjects of the snapshots. Originally the snapshots were taken by friends or family of people in costume, at a time when most Halloween costumes were homemade, and Halloween was still a time to look weird and scary, and wasn't so associated with store-bought cross-marketed super-hero or princess dress-up." The photos are here presented simply, unaltered, without explanatory text beyond the the preface and introductory notes. It is this presentation that helps them to take on a mysterious, even scary, power. The pictures are helped along if the viewer possesses a "what's happening in the shadows" sort of imagination, and the possible contexts provided by the viewer can add real value to this collection. I don't even like to think "Halloween" when I see these old photos. I rather look at them as a window through which one can see, and imagine, a context or story or just a feeling, of something very strange, something I don't want to know about but can't look away from.. It gives me the same sort of vibe that the first season of *True*

Detective sometimes delivered with its odd byways briefly pointed to, but left undeveloped and unexplained, something potentially horrifying because of the lack of investigation and resolution, and also of the short fiction of Thomas Ligotti... precisely because the "reveal" isn't given and enough space and ambiguity is provided to allow mysterious possibilities to hang and fester in a darker closet within the viewer's imagination, which, depending on the viewer, is an always potentially darker place than any media can reveal and explain. Anyway, it isn't a book about Halloween, the history of Halloween, a mere scrapbook, or not only these things... The homemade costumes are, outside of the Halloween context, or even within it, outright spooky, and they are presented in an uncluttered and simple way so that each image can open up a mystery for the imagination to create possible narratives for, and the imagination doesn't even need words to open up possible worlds suggested by the photos. Simply spend some time with one photo, and forget Halloween, and let your mind be guided to possible other frightening or strange places and possibilities. Also, check out Cyclobe, one of the central musical projects of Ossian Brown. That music goes very well with these photos, and hearing what Brown does with music (or part of what he does, as his involvement in music and other creative pursuits is diverse) gives one a better understanding of why this collection exists and is presented in this manner... not necessary, but does add some insight into Mr. Brown's proclivities. David Lynch's contribution is minimal, but I can certainly understand why he would love these pictures. Highly recommended for any who know of and enjoy the work of any of the names I've dropped here.

This book will not be everybody's cup of tea, for as previous reviewers have stated, the photos are very small, probably left at their original size, rather than being blown up. To me I appreciate something about that, as if I am viewing it for the first time the way the person who took the photograph might have. Despite the small size, the printing is glossy, highly detailed, and of great quality. The foreword by David Lynch is a perfect preface to flipping through this book is very emotive and slightly mysterious, I can hear him speaking it in his nasal voice. The photos are from the collection of Ossian Brown, best known as one of the full time musicians in Coil. His hobby in collecting and presenting these photos seems to have been meticulous. Some of the photos are masterworks of amateur photography, and some poorly shot and out of focus, but all with a sort of out-of-time sense of the macabre that will appeal to vintage photo collectors and fans of Halloween alike. The photos are mostly of children, which adds an air of innocence and playfulness to the eeriness.

This speaks to my dark side and how I love to creep myself out. The photos are disturbing and quite beautiful, haunting. Some are also funny. I find it interesting that then, these were palatable costumes, today they would scare the bejesus out of kids for sure and most adults, perhaps they are even more disturbing to adults. This book has been presented beautifully. The subjects of the photographs have been respected in this presentation and I appreciate that. If the cover of it appeals to you, buy it.

I am a child of the late fifties - early sixties. Halloween at that time was scary - not the diluted, cutesy costumes and decorations we have today. I love this book - not only as a historical reference but as a remembrance of a time when the macabre was front and center for the day and people addressed their fears.

If you are a fan of the esoteric and the melancholy, of nostalgia and Americana, get this book. Leafing through this beautiful collection never gets old. The short foreword by David Lynch and concluding essay by Geoff Cox also help bolster the book's aforementioned atmosphere. I've yet to find another book or collection of photographs that come close to this. Buy this collection, you will not regret it.

This is a great book and whoever put it together was very smart. It has an excellent fabric binding and cover and the images are re produced exceptionally. The only thing keeping me from giving it the 5th star it really deserves is the publishers strange decision to print on glossy paper. Its really distracting. Otherwise, a great book and a lot of fun to own.

Great photos. These photos do show a historical seriousness to this holiday which sadly no longer exists in modern society. Excellent eyecandy thattakes you back. It will be my reference for many days to come. I love it.

A glimpse into the lives of people that had nothing and made the most of it. Creepy homemade costumes, worn by the very human men, women and children dressing up and (hopefully) enjoying themselves. Pictures speaking thousands of words and leaving thousands more questions.

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