

# APPARITIONS



curated by Stephen Romano  
with introduction and essay by  
Alexa Jade Frankelis





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# Alexa Jade Frankelis Apparitions



Jack Edwards Seance with spirit trumpet above. central figure is Ethel Post-Parrish. 5 x 4 inches

Death and the afterlife have always been prominent themes throughout the history of photography, but spirit photography has allowed the Victorians, and generations to follow, an emotional outlet for grief in a society that pushes discussions surrounding death on the border of taboo. What had begun with two sisters in a small house located in rural upstate New York in 1848 would soon launch into an international phenomena drawing attendees “...into the humid backroom of spiritualism”. Katie and Maggie Fox established their career as mediums with a national tour of séances and spreading information on communicating with the dead. Soon, it wasn't too long before other individuals started popping up claiming the same capabilities. This made the public curious and drew in people from all over; skeptics and believers alike occupied the séance rooms to reconnect with departed loved ones and fed their curiosity in life after death. For many, the sisters' abilities and the movement that was rising around them was the confirmation they needed that there was an afterlife, and that their lives on Earth still meant something.

While the practices of Victorian Mourning were more concerned with materialism, photography of the 1860's offered an outlet for the “immaterial” parts of death, like “...auras and apparitions...and the spirits of the deceased,” and capturing the communications with these spirits during seances, being attributed to being the “...material manifestation of spiritualism.” Unlike post-mortem photography of the time that was decorated elaborately with flowers and other relics in order to beautify the dead, spirit photographs remained often empty in order for the central focus to be on the sitter and spirit's interaction. Boston photographer, William Howard Mumler, introduced spirit photography to the United States in 1861. Hannah Mumler, his wife and spiritualist medium herself, was present at every photo session with placing her hand on the camera during the capture. It was significant that Mumler's wife would do this, as if she was using the camera as an invocation of some sort. During these shoots photography was used as the medium in placement of the spoken word or writing/drawing used in a traditional séance.

According to Freudian ideas, spiritualists tried to cope with death and justify a possible afterlife by communing with deceased individuals based on the same disembodied experience associated with an invention like the telegraph. The Freudian uncanny results from repressions of unconscious material that are supposed to remain separate from consciousness. Spirit photography would later transform the photo studio into a subliminal, pictorial (dream-like) space by others (with no clear distinction between the sitter and the apparition) or into an extension of the uncanny space of the seance room.

It is due to our “conservatism” towards death or anything unknown that forces us to consider death and the uncanny to be taboo. The fear of the uncanny is not only a fear of the repressed

thoughts in one's mind, but also a fear of unexpected voices of others, that the images in this show bring us into exploration of through these apparitions. While sitting upon the images from William Hope and other specters through the centuries, it will soon become apparent that "...everything that ought to have remained hidden and secret,...yet comes to light."

1. Walter Benjamin, *Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (1929), 209.

2. Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 13-71.

3. Allison Ferris, *The Disembodied Spirit*, (Brunswick: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 2003), 35.

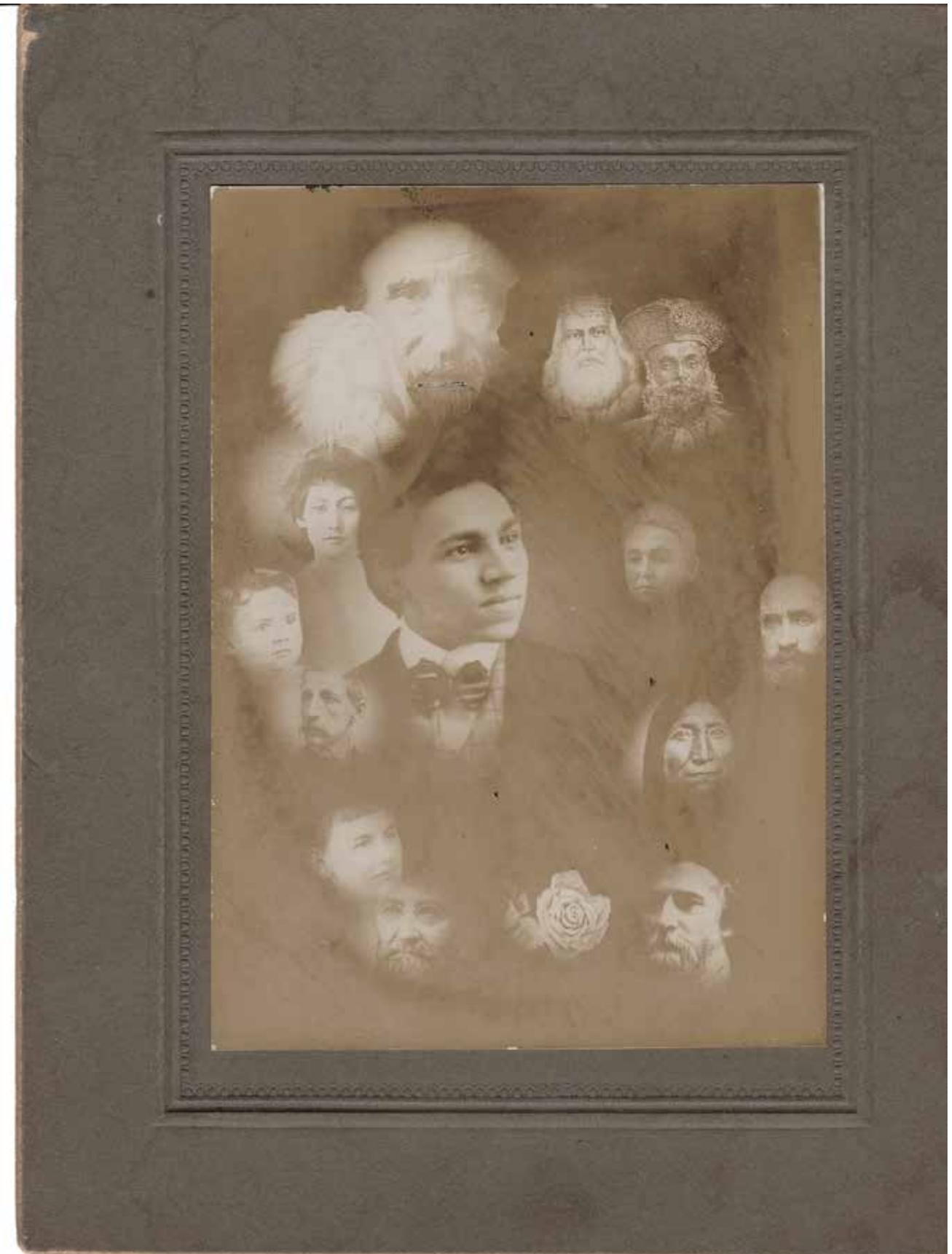
4. Jen Cadwallader, "Spirit Photography and the Victorian Culture of Mourning," *Modern Language Studies* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 14. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40346958>.

5. Christa Cloutier, "Mumler's Ghost," in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, ed. Pierre Apraxine, Stephen E. Braude, Denis Canguilhem, Clément Chéroux, Crista Cloutier, Andreas Fischer, and Sophie Schmit (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 20-22.

6. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," trans. by Alix Strachey (*Imago V*, 1919): 4-14.



Robert Bournell "Spirit Photograph with Apparition" circa 1900 5.25" x 3.75"



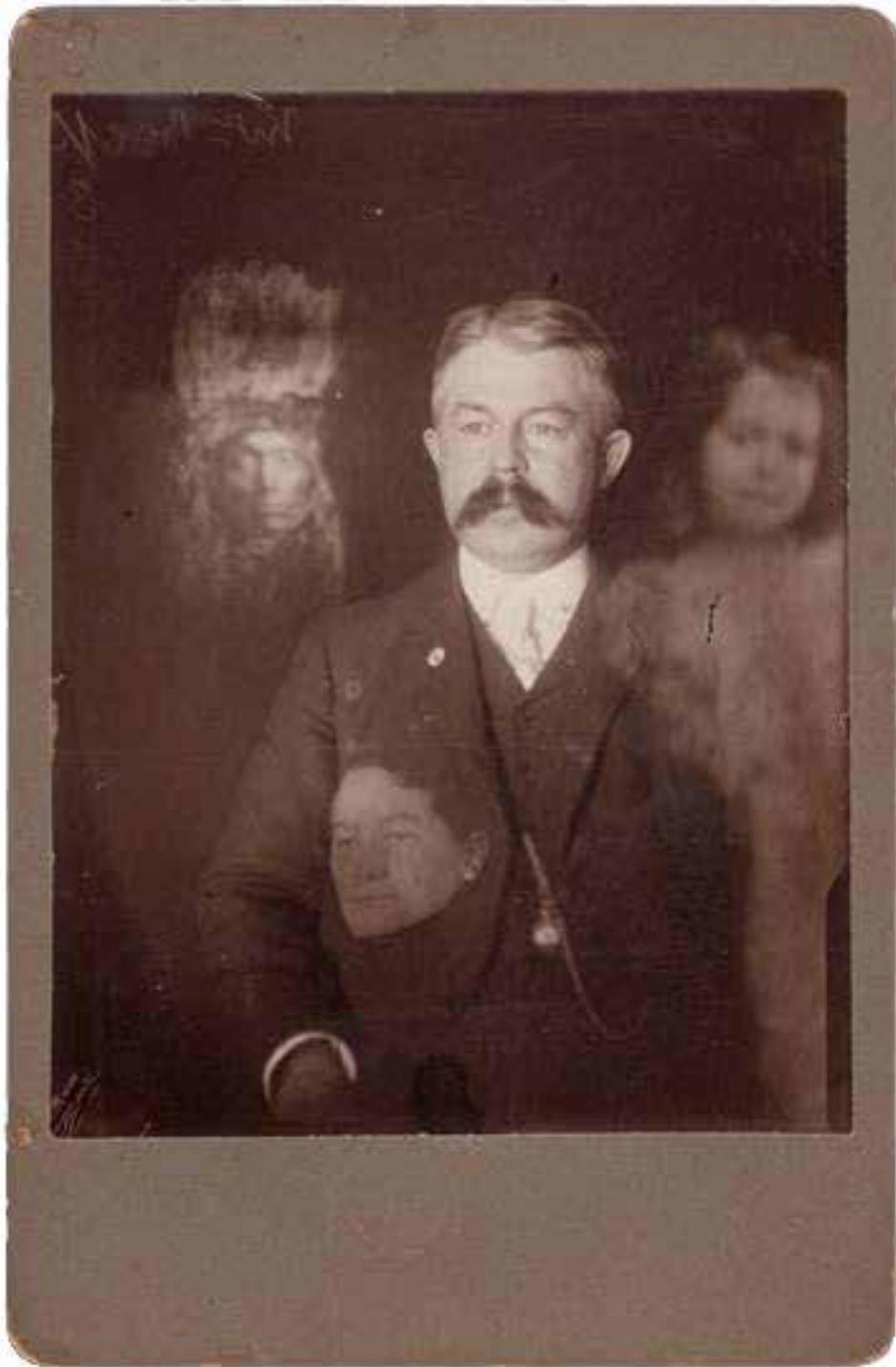
Unknown photographer "Native Man with Ancestral Lineage", circa 1900



Cabinet Photo, "Cheshire Ghost Spirit" 1870's 6.5" x 4.25"



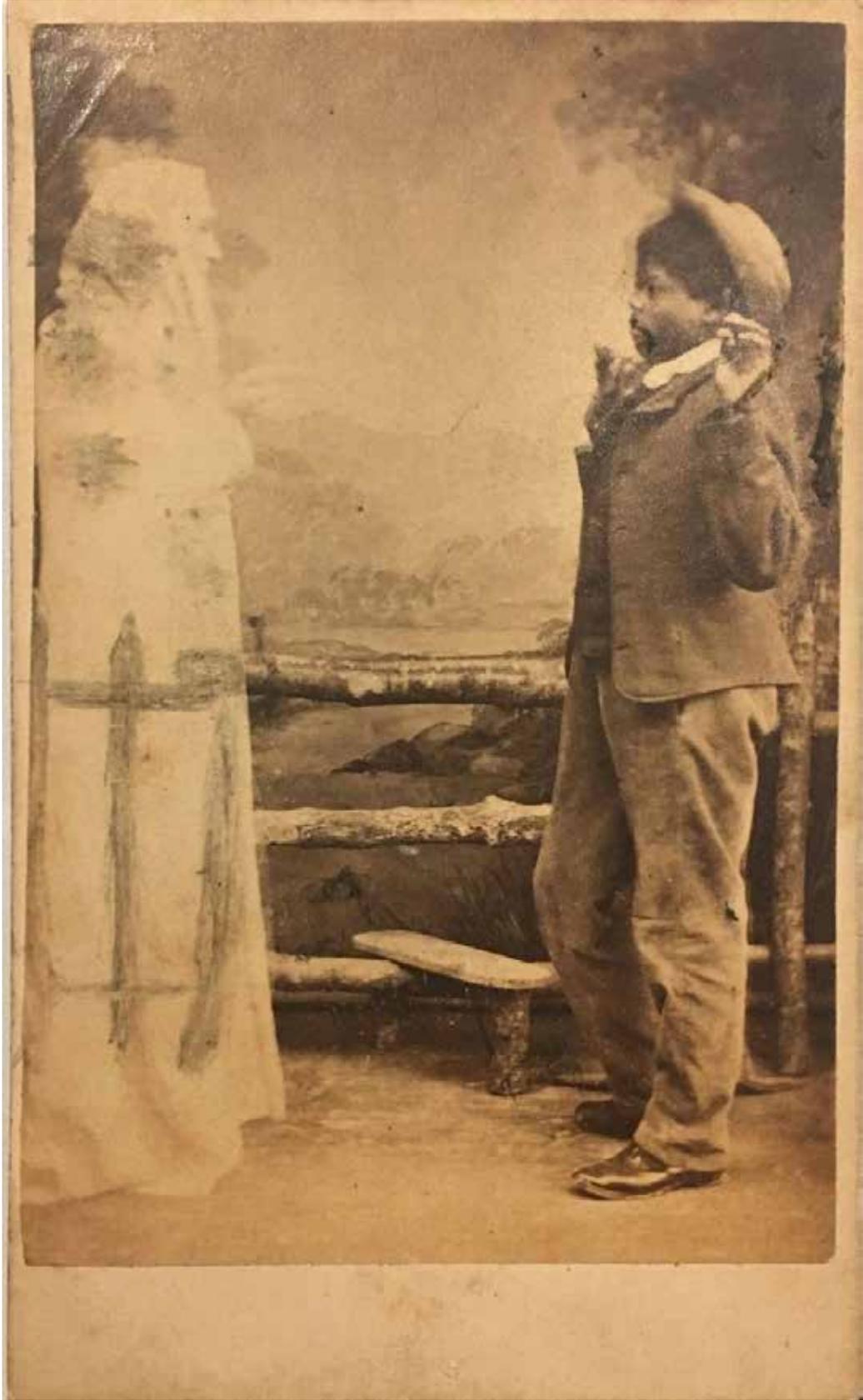
Unknown photographer "Ghost of Bernadette Soubirous, Nun Spirit"  
carte de visite, circa 1880 4.25" x 2.5"



Unknown photographer, "Indian Spirit Apparition", circa 1890 6.5" x 4.25"



John Myers "Spirit Photo Seance", 1933 3.75" x 5.5"



George Parker "Untitled" 1860 from Gloucester England



Falconer Brothers "Spirit Photograph Apparition" circa 1930 2.5" x 2.25"



Falconer Brothers "Spirit Photograph Apparition" circa 1930 2.5" x 2.25"



William Hope, Group of 3 spirit photo, photo postcards London UK c. 1920's



These Pictures were taken by  
Mr Hope at Creve. England.  
he purchased the plates in  
Goudon the same day they  
never left our hands, he  
not only put them in the plate  
holders, developed them  
afterwards and possibly  
know that no exchange was  
made.  
with a magnifying glass  
many additional records may  
be seen.

FOR CORRESPONDENCE  
FOR ADDRESS ONLY

POST  
CARD



William Hope, photo postcards (writing on verso)



SPIRIT (G)--This strange photograph of "ectoplasm" assertedly issuing from the mouth of a medium was one of the many used by the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in an attempt to prove the existence of a spirit world whose inhabitants can return to the world of the living.



Édouard Isidore Buguet, "Spirit Photograph of Madame and the materialization of Allan Kardek May 28 1874". Kardek was the founder of the "Revue Spirite" Part of the message of the sign reads: "Amis, continues propager notre doctrine, adieu pour toujours" "Friends, continue to spread our doctrine, goodbye forever"

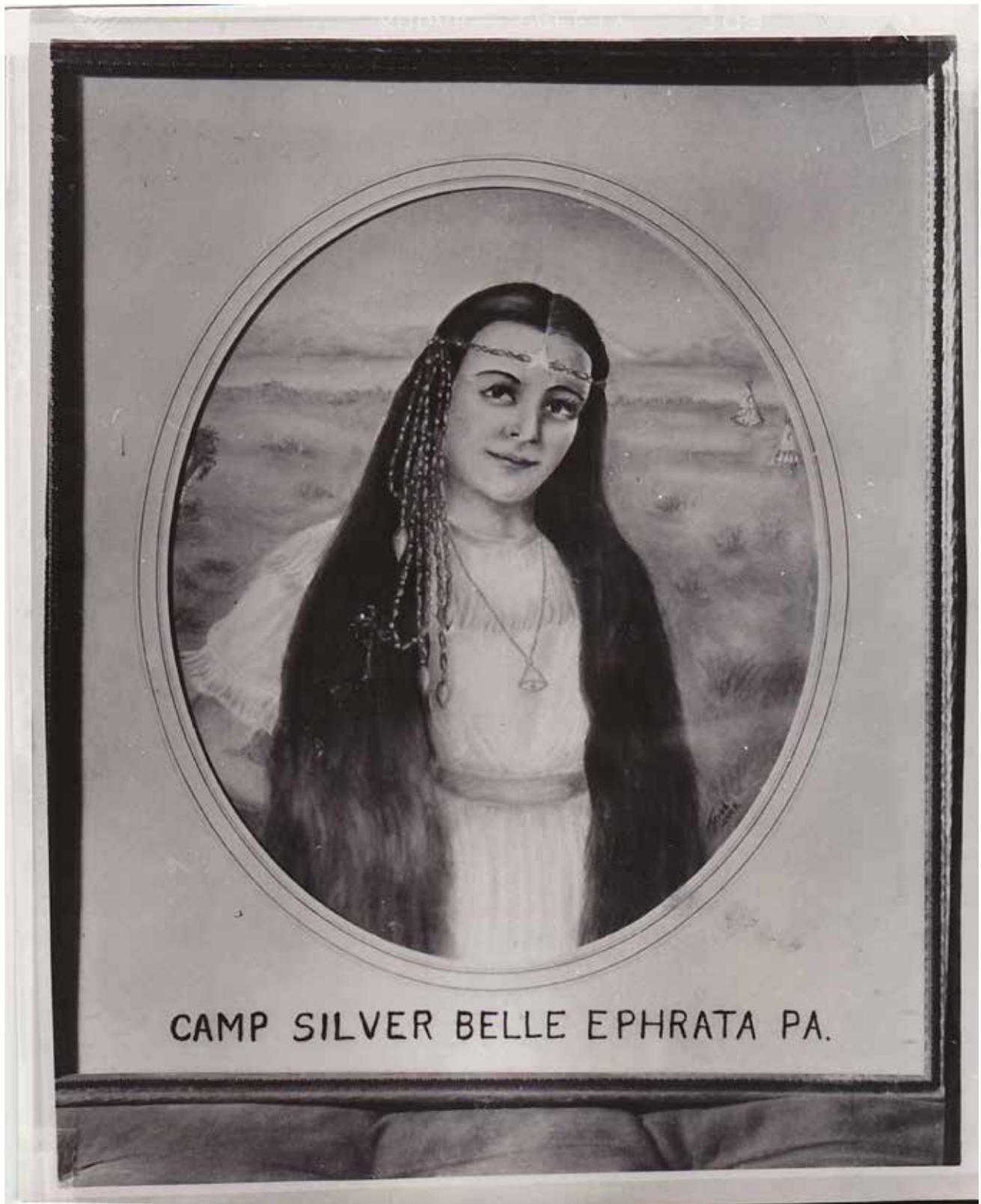


John Beattie "Spirit Seance" England 1874 CDV



Jack Edwards "Seance and Spirit Photo at Camp Silver Belle", circa 1950's. 5 x 3.75 inches





Jack Edwards Portrait of the spirit known as Silver Belle, who materialized and spoke through the mediumship of Ethel Post-Parrish. 1940's



Jack Edwards "The Chapel at Camp Siver Belle". circa 1940's 4 x 3 inches



Jack Edwards "Interior View of the Chapel at Camp Silver Belle", 1940's



An unknown patron and spiritual seeker of Camp Silver Belle. circa 1930's 3.75 x 2.5 inches



Photograph of Mt. Spring Hotel, where guests of Camp Silver Belle would stay.  
4 x 3 inches



detail - Jack Edwards Seance, central figure is Ethel Post-Parrish. 1940's



Jack Edwards "Seance and Spirit Photo at Camp Silver Belle", circa 1950's. 5 x 3.75 inches





Jack Edwards details of "Seance and Spirit Photo at Camp Silver Belle", circa 1950's. 5 x 3.75 inches





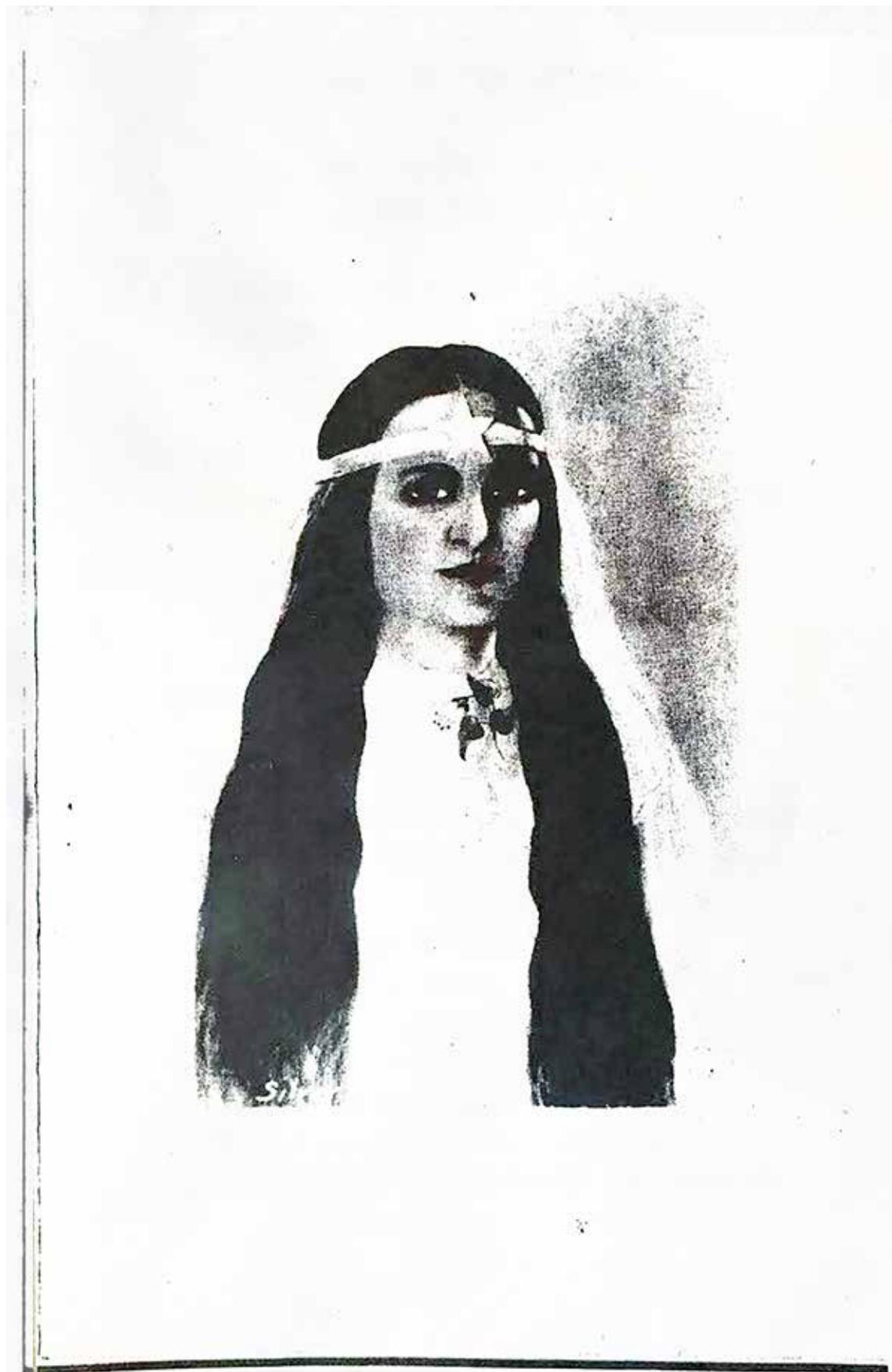
Jack Edwards "Spirit Photo from Camp Silver Belle", circa 1930 - 1940. 6.5 x 4.5 inches





Jack Edwards "The Apparition of Silver Belle", circa 1930 - 1940





“JOYAS DE MI HUERTO TO SILVER BELLE”  
“Prayer pamphlet from Camp Silver Belle 1950’s

JOYAS DE MI HUERTO

.....

TO SILVER BELLE

(In Spirit)

Thou that mak'st a day of night,  
Give us this day thy eternal light;  
Bless us with thy love  
    wherever we may dwell,  
Oh Sweet Silver Belle !  
Sweet is thy voice, soft and inspiring  
    thy queenly presence;  
Young and old alike rejoice  
    when thou mak'st known  
Thy spell sublime; 'tis comforting,  
'Tis The Lord's Prayer  
    in all its gradiose essence;  
Thou healeth the sick  
    and restoreth sight to the blind;  
And our gratefull hearts turn to thee  
    with our Faith revived.  
Oh Sweet Silver Belle,  
In the name of Jesus, The Prince of Light,  
May the LORD'S Blessings,  
HIS Eternal Love, HIS Loving Care,  
HIS Everlasting Grace,  
Be with thee any place, anywhere,  
BE THINE FOREVER; FOREVER AND EVER THINE !  
    In HIS Name - - - A m e n !



Jack Edwards "Spirit Photo of Congregation Inside the Chapel at Camp Silver Belle ". circa 1940's. 5 x 4 inches





Detail of "Spirit Photo of Congregation Inside the Chapel at Camp Silver Belle".



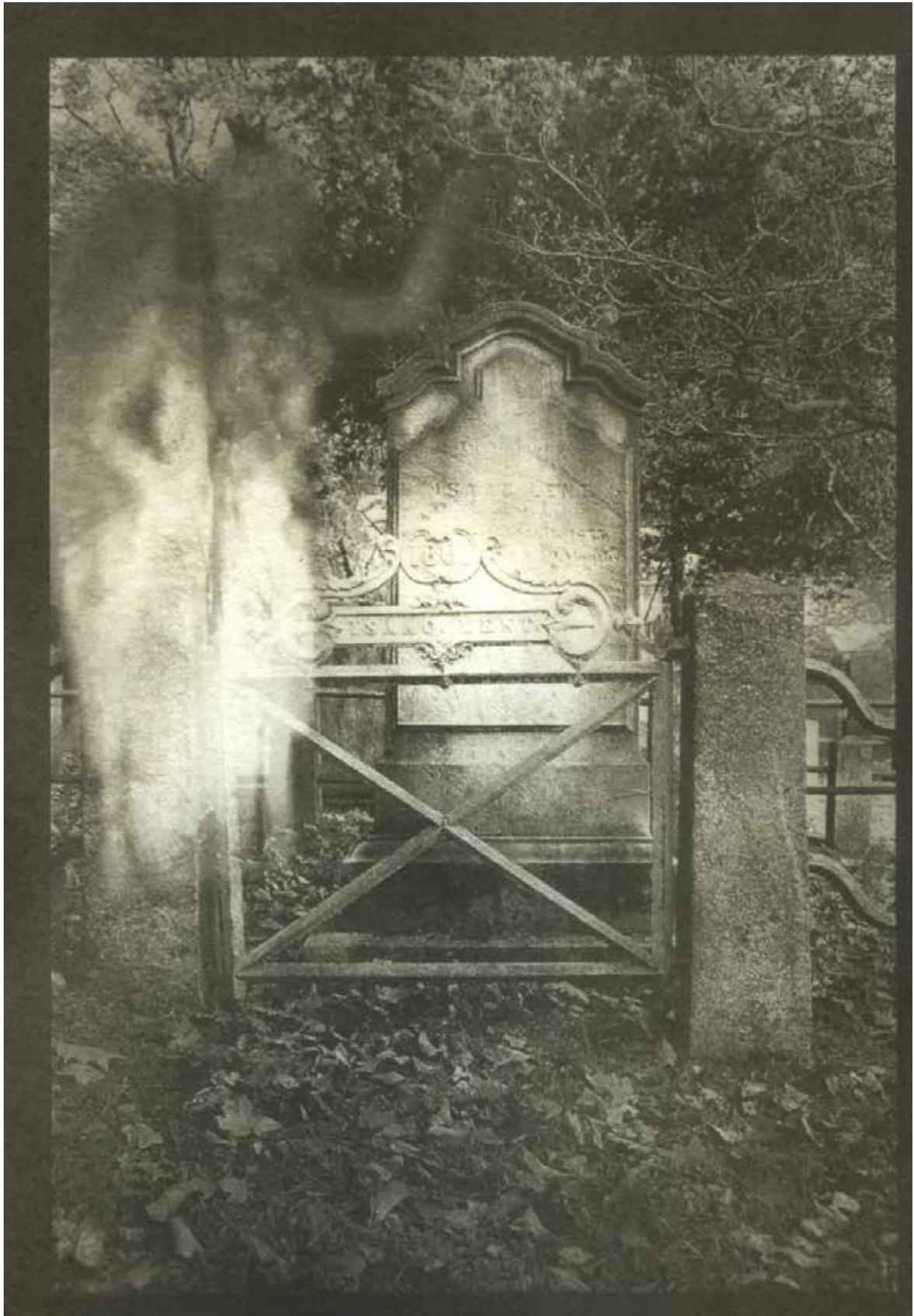


Detail of "Spirit Photo of Congregation Inside the Chapel at Camp Silver Belle ".





Alexa Jade Frankelis excerpt from the "Specter" suite, "Hidden" 2019



Alexa Jade Frankelis excerpt from the "Specter" suite, "Visitant" 2017

Alexa Frankelis

08/13/2020

## Phantoms of Photography: A Correlation Between Death & Imagery

It's no secret that humans are quite the morbid bunch. Before the invention of modern medicine and advancement in technology, short life spans and high mortality rates were quite common for most of history. It was a miracle if you lived passed birth. People dealt with death by reflecting their experiences and emotions through art and literature. With advancements in technology over a few hundred years, projecting images with the camera obscura to the magic lantern, and then capturing moments of time with the invention of photography, people resorted reflecting their grief into these new inventions. Death and the afterlife has always been a mystery of both spirituality and science. The creation of photography in 1938, with the belief of Spiritualism following ten years later in the spring of 1848, it was no wonder that spirit photography was to be introduced into society during the 1860s, playing on the superstitious Victorians' beliefs.

Before discussing more about spirit photography during the nineteenth century, it is important to examine two factors that led to both the invention, and popularity of these images. One factor was the reputation of phantasmagoria, which predates the invention of photography and Victorian mourning culture. Phantasmagoria was a horror theater production used by traveling entertainers and magicians throughout Europe, rising to success during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was in part due to the birth of Romanticism, spiking the public's interest in the gothic novel. The magic lantern was a device that reflected images on to a wall, more clearly than a camera obscura, by using a painted glass plate backlit with candlelight. Although it was used for bizarre spectacles, it was originally invented in the late 1600's as a tool for education and science. Phantasmagoria was birthed in the 1790's when showmen, Paul Philidor, put the magic lantern on wheels, in doing so, turning it into a moving apparatus. Images could now change in size and became clearer due to the advancements in technology. The growth in popularity resulted in Philidor building a unique theater in Vienna that was "...draped completely in black cloth, and outfitted with skulls and a white magic circle." His shows opened with an image of a person that was recognizable to society, but appeared in spirit form. The apparition would then proceed slowly out from the floor towards the audience. This was believed to be the first phantasmagoria performance.

Philidor later moved his show to Paris in 1793, where a man by the name of Etienne-Gaspard Robertson took over the shows, raising phantasmagoria to be the spectacle we know it as

today. Due to the growing interest in illusionists and the increase of deaths caused by the French Revolution in the late 1700s, phantasmagoria became Paris's main attraction. Robertson had invented and coined the term "fantoscope", which played an essential role in his production in order to scare the audience with blurry images rising out of smoke. He was also known to lock the doors to theater, trapping attendees in total darkness for several minutes at a time. Robertson took great pleasure out of fooling and scaring the audience into believing that the apparitions were real. In doing so, he played on society's fear of death and the unknown of the afterlife, just like how in years to follow a man by the name of William H. Mumler would do the same, but with photography.

In the mid-nineteenth century the magic lantern had still existed, but was slowly on its way out with the creation of the daguerreotype, which is considered to be the start of modern photography. On the other hand, the mourning culture surrounding Victorian etiquette and interest in spiritualism was on the rise. Due to Victorian's materialistic culture, it was only a matter of time before they developed etiquette centered on mourning. Even a middle class family spent a great deal of money on a funeral during this time. There were a plethora of mourning artifacts acquired during one's funeral including, mourning cards, stationary, fan, and ear trumpets, coffin plates, jewelry and/or wreaths made from the deceased's hair, and most importantly post-mortem photographs. Although these items seem to be superficial, the Victorians were known not to be expressive of their emotions because it was not socially acceptable for the period, so they resorted their grief into these artifacts. Interest in photography grew during the 1850s and 1860s since, though still not the cheapest item produced, people had more access to photo studios and more cost efficient formats had become available. With photography becoming more accessible, post-mortem photography would soon become an admired memento. Due to this, Victorians were more likely to have a portrait of their loved one in death to commemorate them, rather than an image of them alive, in order to help aid in the grieving processes since many families could not afford to have multiple images made of their children. Also with infant mortality rates being so high for the time period, there was a good chance that a family didn't even have the opportunity to take an image of their child while alive, creating a culture of post-mortem imagery.

Similar to the histories of phantasmagoria in the eighteenth century, and Victorian mourning etiquette of the nineteenth century, Spiritualism rose to popularity because of death being such a strong presence in peoples' lives due to catastrophic events like the Civil War. Spiritualism began in March of 1848, centering on the Fox family who were from a small farm town in upstate New York. The Fox sisters heard raps in their room and claimed be able to communicate with spirits.

The news of the event and their abilities quickly spread. They soon became a nationalized name and held séances all across the country. This inspired others to come forth claiming to be psychics and mediums, initiating a widespread movement and belief system of communicating with those who crossed over into the afterlife. Séances were soon a common occurrence, happening daily in major cities like New York, Boston, Cincinnati, and so on. Though with Maggie Fox's speech outing the sisters as frauds, the sisters would soon fall into despair, since no one would trust their word anymore. Nevertheless they were able to spawn a movement that swept the whole nation, but at the same time, took advantage of people's grief.

Images of spirits did not die with the magic lantern, but reappeared in the 1860s during the height of spiritualism and mourning culture through photography. William H. Mumler (originally based in Boston in 1861), while developing a self-portrait in a friend's studio realized another figure appeared in image he had captured when he was alone. Originally he dismissed it as a dirty plate (wet-plate collodion was the popular photographic process at the time), but although not a Spiritualist himself, believers of the movement convinced Mumler it was an image of spirit. To see if it was true, Mumler produced more images with different sitters and repeatedly found images with apparitions in them. He soon opened his own studio and exploited the grievers of the Civil War. At the same time though, Mumler was actually able to help mourners cope with their losses through spirit photography because people were able to get portraits with their loved ones that they might not have been able to get before they were sent off to war. He had become so successful that in 1869 he moved to New York City and opened up his own studio there. Prominent figures of society visited his studio to get their photos taken by him. For example Mary Todd Lincoln, a known spiritualist, had gotten her infamous image with Lincoln's ghost captured by Mumler himself. Mumler certainly had his critics though, with one of them being P.T. Barnum who had testified against Mumler when he was committed of fraud in the April of 1869. To disprove Mumler, Barnum produced his own portraits with Lincoln's ghost in them (with help by photographer Abraham Bogardus) to show the public how easy it was to produce these spirit images. Mumler would not be charged with fraud, but his reputation was certainly tarnished and he had ultimately died in poverty.<sup>1</sup>

People's interest in death and the afterlife will always be a topic of discourse because it is the mystery behind the unknown that people are so fascinated with. Images of spirits are still present in the everyday. Whether its paranormal investigator TV shows or orb photography on cell phones, the vernacular proves that this fascination with the image of an apparition trying to make contact with the living will never end; rather just changes and advancing with technology,

not disappearing from it. Though frauds will always be present, one main difference is people then did not abstract death like we do now. Victorians found beauty in it and confronted death for what it was. In society today we do not use horror movies or paranormal research as a way to help us grieve or confront our mortality; we only use it as a scare factor to be something of entertainment or spectacle. As the artist Marion Peck wrote in *Beyond the Dark Veil*, we have developed a “numbness towards death”, making us “hollow and “less alive”, and like the Victorians we must honor death to make us pause and reflect on what truly matters in our fast moving world.

### Endnotes

(1) A subset of spirit photography that was also highly criticized like its counterpart and relied on spiritualism for credibility was images of ectoplasm being emitted from a medium’s body during an séance. These images were more widely taken during the twentieth century, after the Fox sisters and Mumler’s apparition images fell out of the spotlight, but spiritualism was still a present force in society. Proving that after one fad of images involving spirits and death fades out of popularity, a different type of image will be invented and take rise. Karl Schoonover, “Ectoplasms, Evanescence, and Photography,” *Art Journal* 62, no. 3 (2003): 31-43, doi:10.2307/3558519.

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doi:10.2307/3558519.

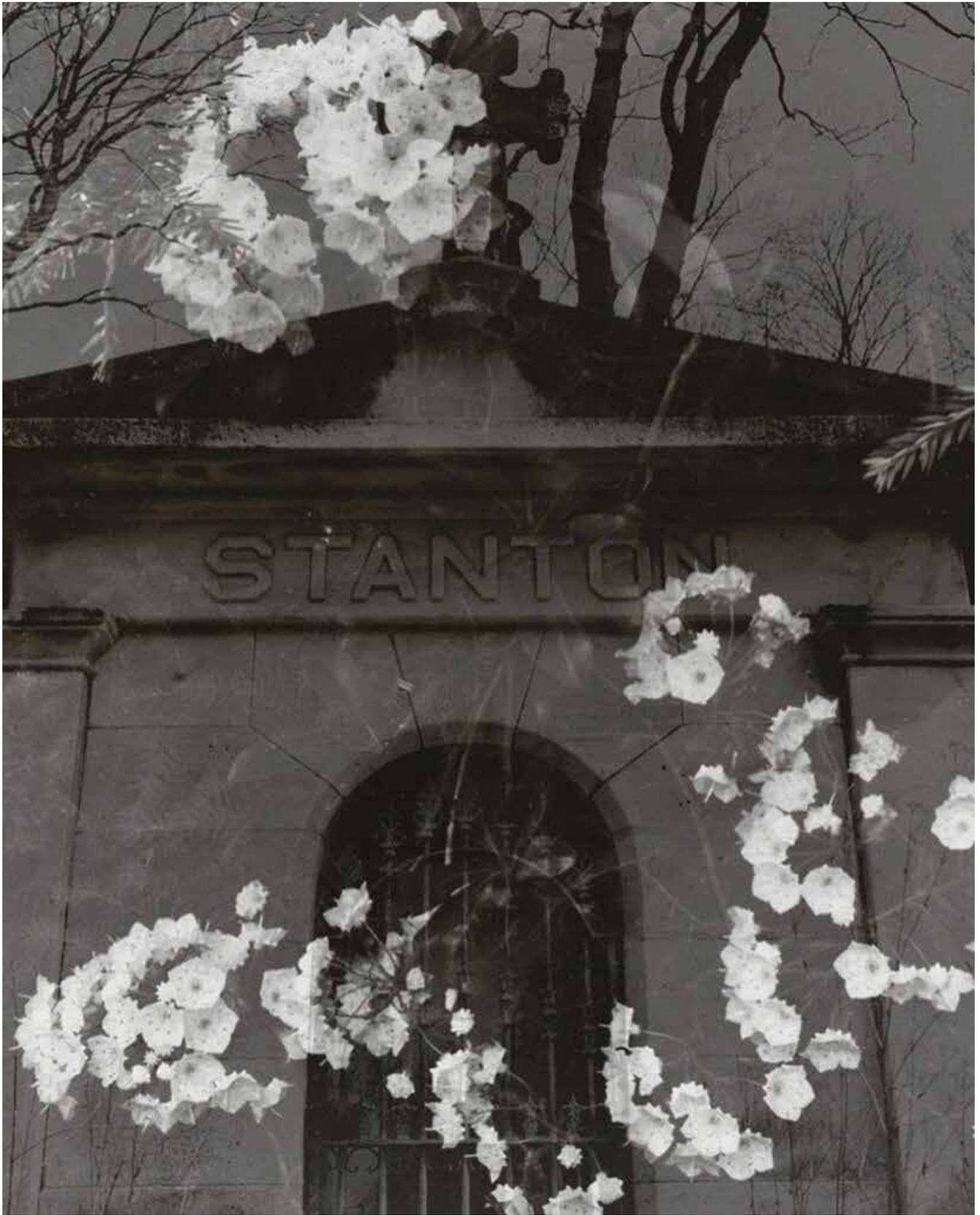
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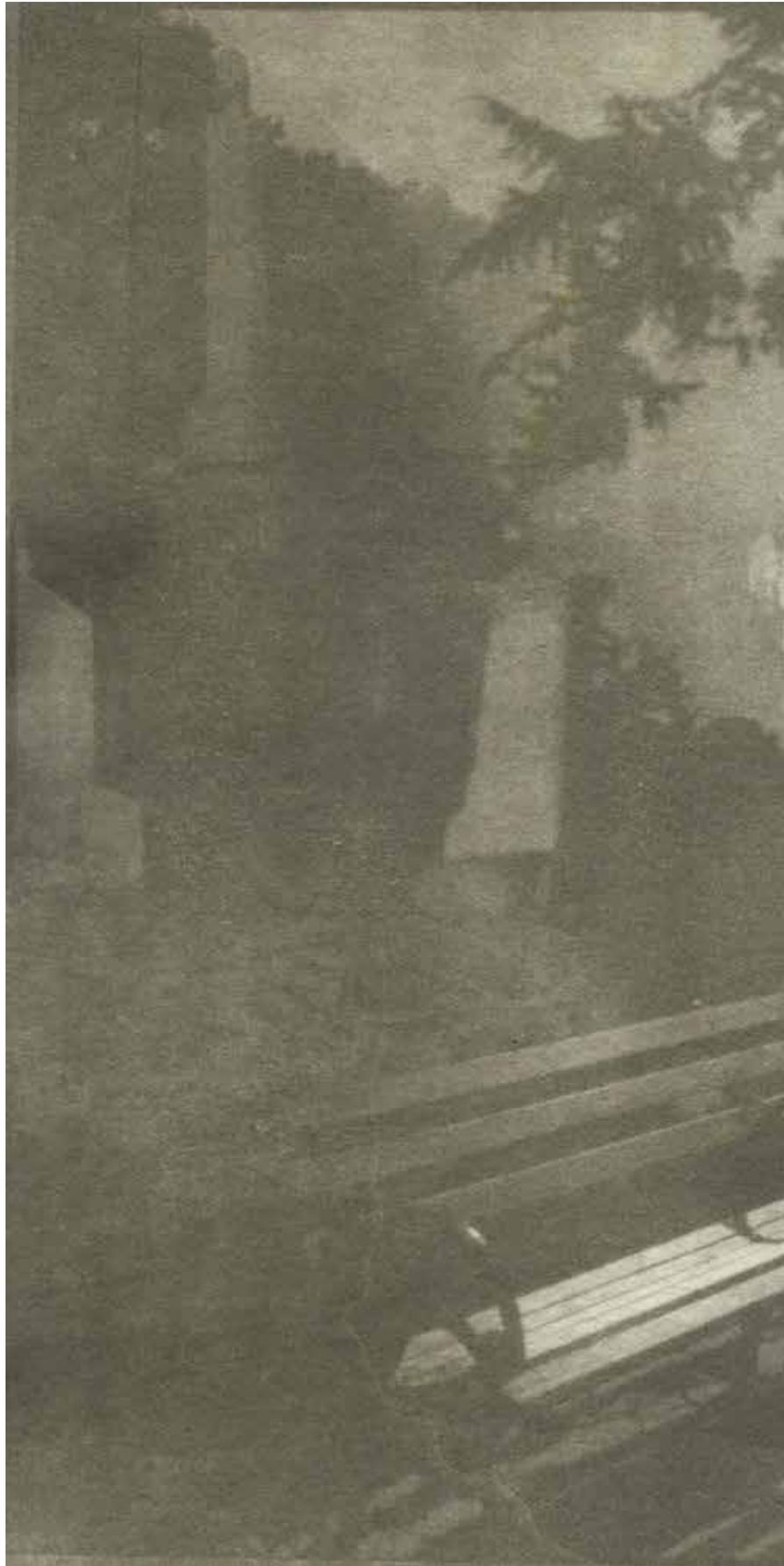
Alexa Jade Frankelis excerpt from the "Materialization" suite, "Untitled" 2020



Alexa Jade Frankelis excerpt from the "Specter" suite, "Underwood" 2019

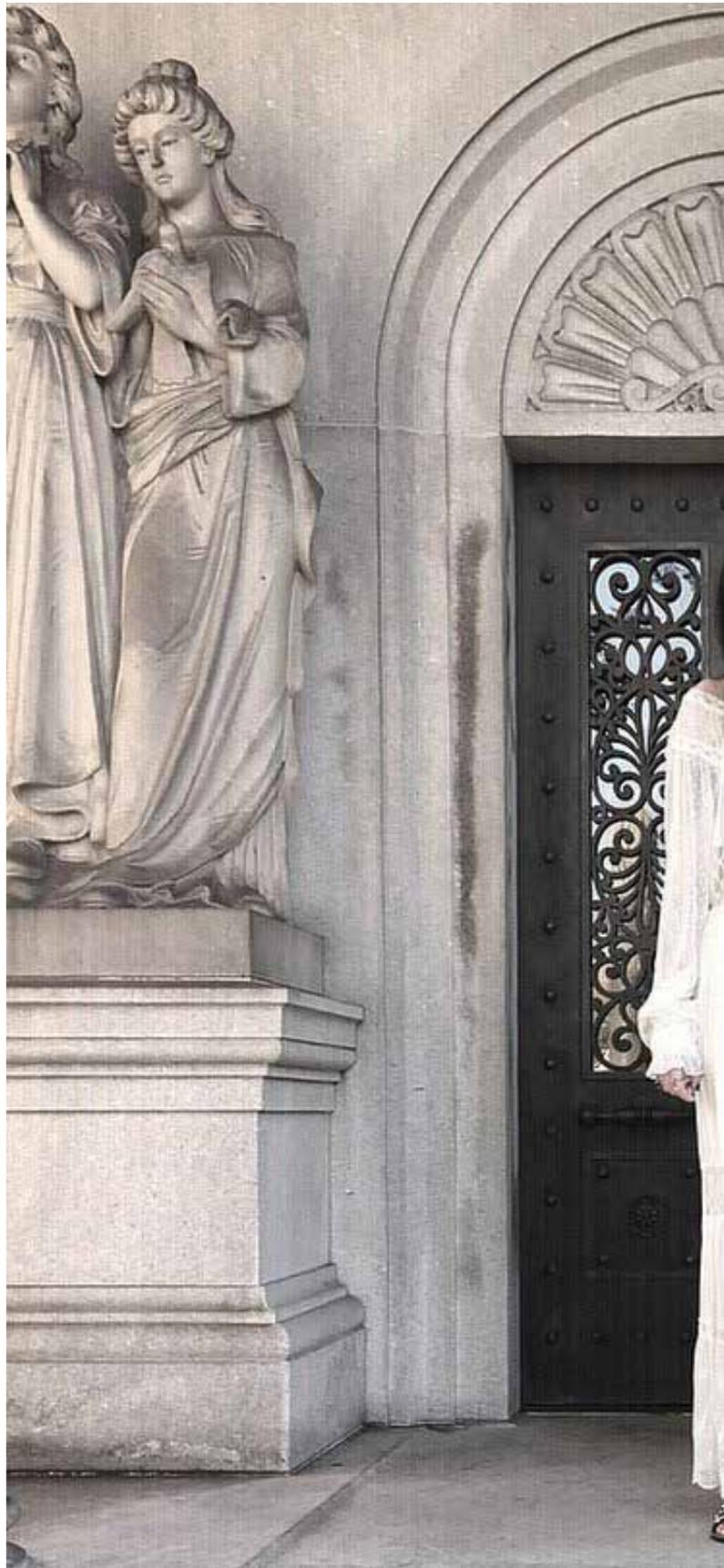


Alexa Jade Frankelis excerpt from the "Specter" suite, "Dissolution" 2020



Alexa Jade Frankelis excerpt from the "Specter" suite, "Nightfall" 2017





Alexa Jade Frankelis "Metamorphoun" 2018





John Everard "Apparition" 1935 Photogravure



Walter Bird "Devil Dancer" photogravure 1930



William Mortensen "The Incubus Suite" 1928





William Mortensen "The Old Hag with Incubus" 1928 Unique print.





William Mortensen excerpt from "A Pictorial Compendium of Witchcraft" 1928





William Mortensen excerpt from "A Pictorial Compendium of Witchcraft" 1928





Ray Robinson "Old Nick" acrylic on panel 2016



Ray Robinson "From Hell" acrylic on panel 2016



Ray Robinson - "Vision After The Sermon, The Gift" 2015 Acrylic on Board 24 x 32 inches



Ray Robinson - "Birth of a Witch" 2016 Acrylic on Board 24 x 32 inches



Unknown photographer, works found in California mid 20th century



Unknown photographer, works found in California mid 20th century



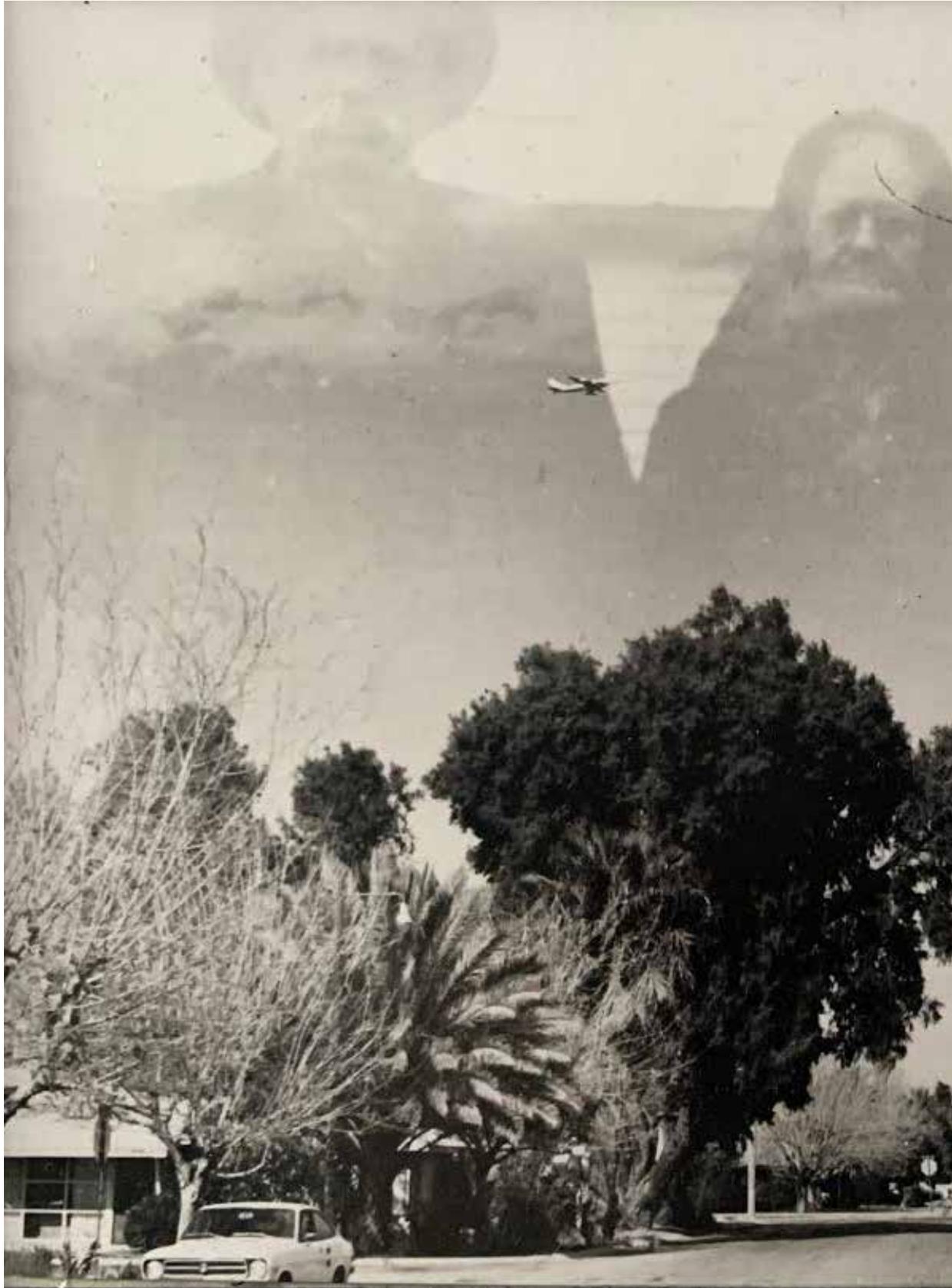
Unknown photographer, works found in California mid 20th century





Unknown photographer, works found in California mid 20th century





Unknown photographer, works found in California mid 20th century

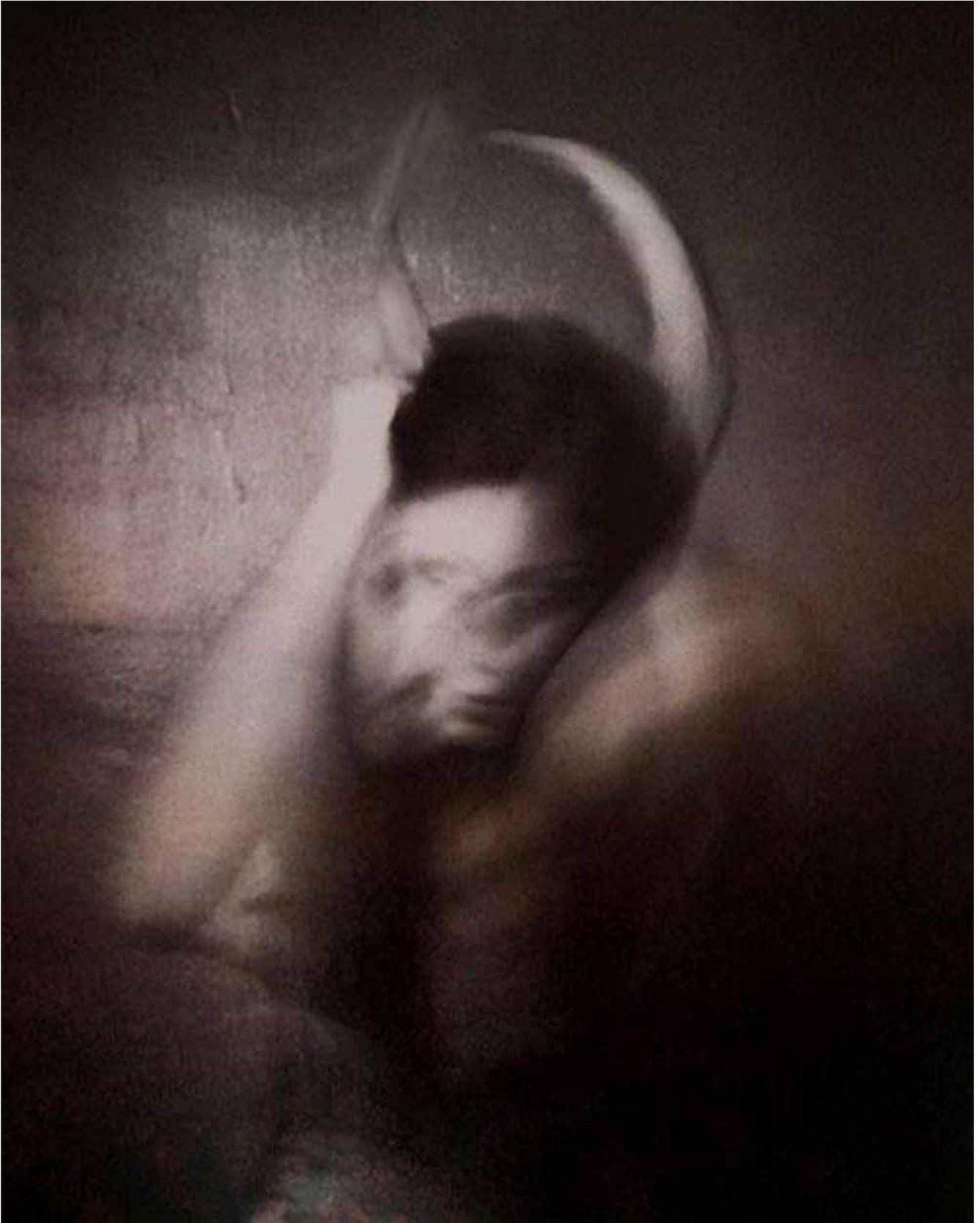




Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



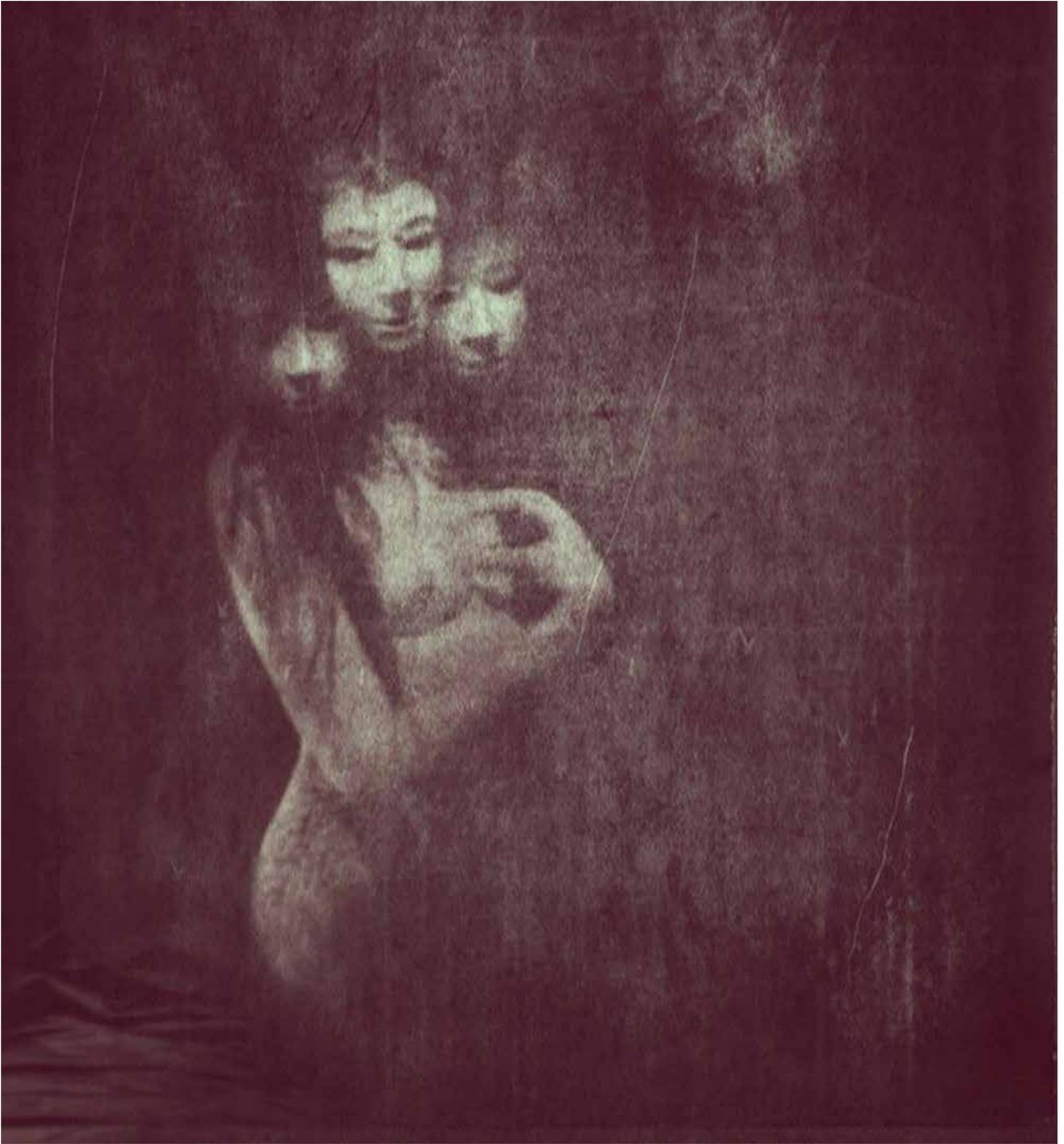
Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019



Nahw Yg, "Untitled" photograph 2019

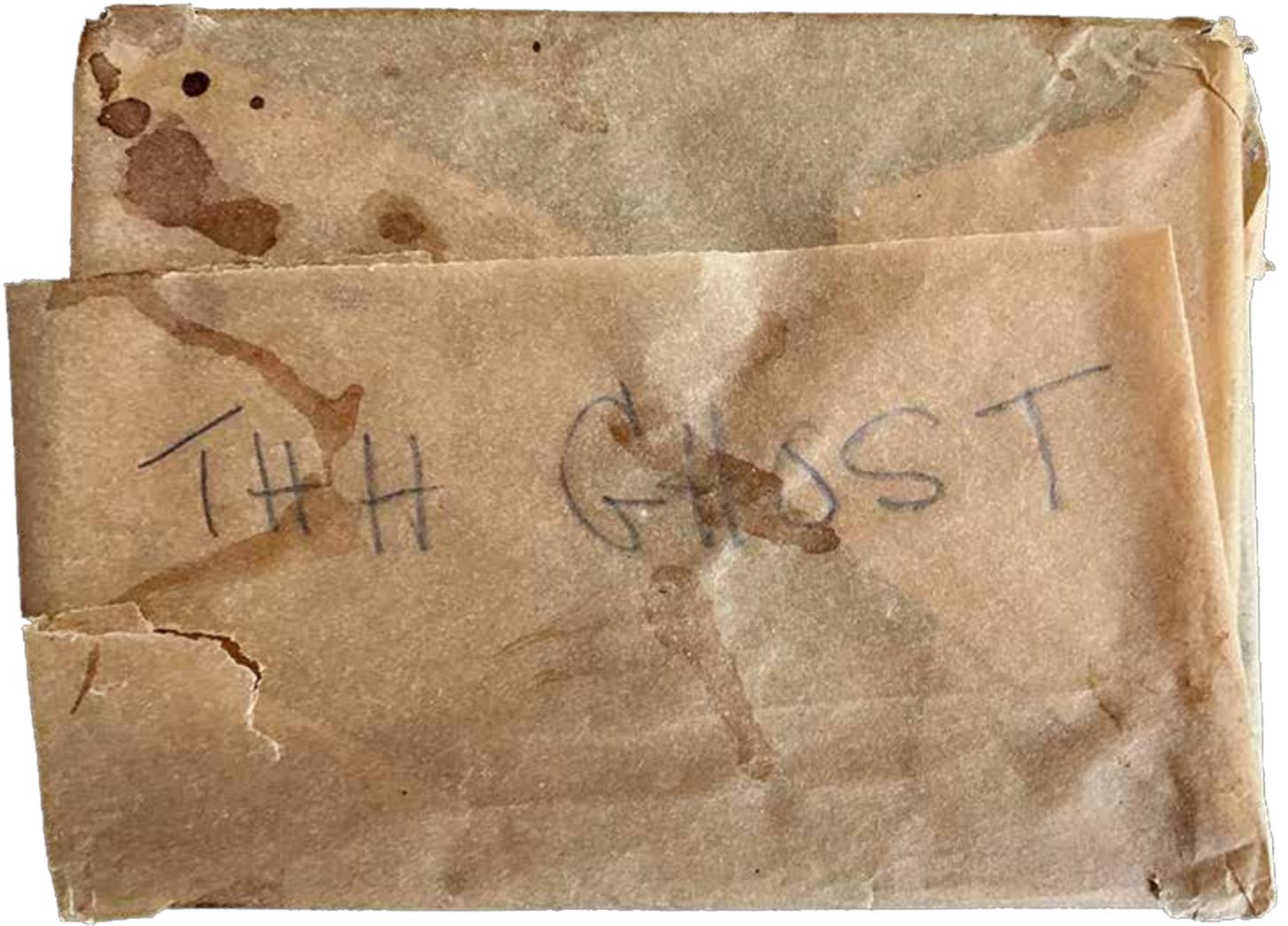


Unknown photographer, photograph of a seance in progress, 1930's American





Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1930's



Unknown Photographer "THH GHOST" circa 1880 - 1900 Glass plate negative with wax paper wrapping with pencil.



Unknown Photographer "THH GHOST" circa 1880 - 1900 Glass plate negative with wax paper wrapping with pencil.





Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, date unknown



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, date unknown



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, 1949.



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, 1941.



Unknown photographer, "ELECTROPLASM"©, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1930's



Unknown photographer, "ELECTROPLASM"©, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1930's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1940's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1940's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1920's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1940's



November 7, 1910

Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1920's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1940's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1920's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1940's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1920's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1920's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1920's



Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1920's

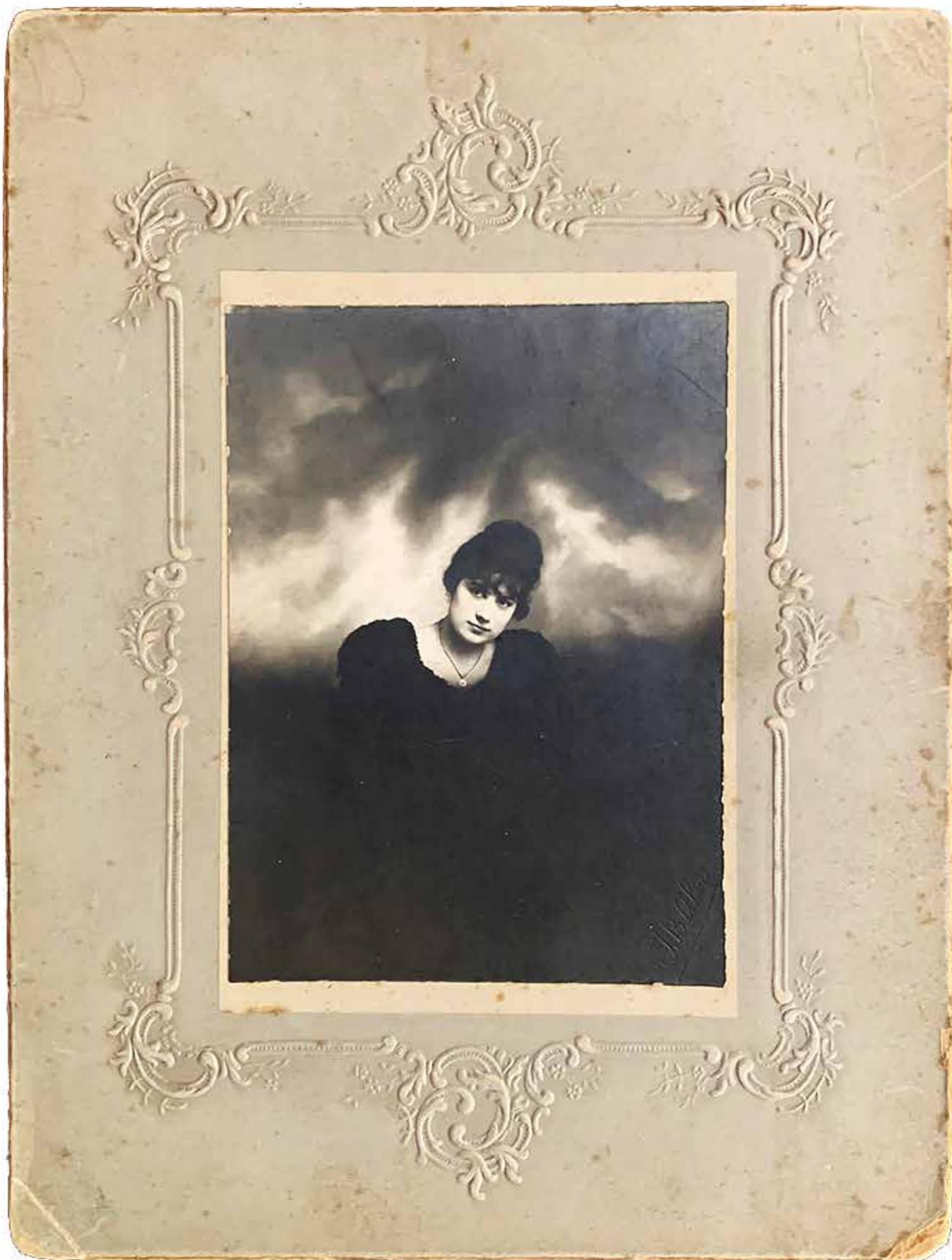


Unknown photographer "Native Tibetan Devil Dancers with Masks, Lamas" 1910, postcard.





Unknown photographer, Vernacular snapshot, circa 1920's



Unknown photographer, Mourning Woman, circa 1875.

## Acknowledgements

Stephen Romano would like to thank Alexa Jade Frankelis for her collaboration in this project. Alexa's art and writing has inspired a renewal to the importance of the art of spirit photography and our deeply essential connection to the etherial and esoterica..

Stephen Romano would like to also thank the french artist Nahw Yg for lending her images to this project. It is always exciting to discover an artist whose affinities and sensibilities open the psyche in exciting new way.

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