



(left) Corinne Botz, *Private Residence, Harlan, Kentucky* from the series *Haunted House*.

(bottom) Corinne Botz, *Parsonage Parlor (doll)* from the series *The Nutshell Images of Unexplained Death*.



Alumna as Haunted House Sleuth

FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, **Corinne May Botz '99** (photography) chased a paradox—she was a visual artist trying to capture the unseen. In creating *Haunted Houses* (The Monacelli Press, 2010), her recent book and related exhibitions at The Kennedy Museum of Art in Athens, Ohio and California State University in Sacramento's Design Gallery, Botz photographed and collected oral ghost stories throughout the United States. By focusing on the invisible and the layers of memories that are imbedded in everyday spaces, she revealed the emotional and psychological connection that people have with their homes.

Botz was inspired by turn-of-the-century spirit photographs and ghost stories written by women in the Victorian age.

"The stories were often used to express domestic discontents," she explained. "Ghosts were a vehicle to explore topics, such as abuse, property rights, loss, and unfulfilled desire. Many of these authors were considered ghostlike themselves—alienated and marginalized by society. I wanted to understand this connection between women, ghosts, and houses. When I traveled to these spaces, I thought about the legacy of the women who had lived there, and I tried to pay tribute to these lost histories."

She used a large format camera during the project, a method evoking the spirit photography she'd been inspired by, with exposures ranging from a few seconds to a few hours. Unlike the photography that inspired her, she wasn't attempting to capture images of ghosts—she was capturing an idiosyncratic-visual image of the physical spaces they haunt.

In collecting the oral histories of the living who inhabit these spaces, Botz found that they share a unique bond with the ghosts who share their homes.

"I met this family in Pennsylvania who had lived in their house for over 40 years, a house where in the 1930s a brother and sister were violently murdered," Botz said. They knew this when they moved in. "The family experienced the ghost in a number of ways over many years. Once, the contents of an entire bedroom were thrown about, for example. Yet they were never afraid. They felt for this past inhabitant and the unjust way she died. They made space for this woman in their lives."

"There's an interesting issue of ownership and sharing space that comes up with haunted houses. I was pleasantly surprised by the openness of the people I met and how they are willing to

acknowledge that their houses have a history independent from them,” she continued.

The exploration of domestic space and its discontents can be seen in her previous work, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death* (The Monacelli Press, 2004), which focused on a collection of miniature crime scene models built by noted criminologist Frances Glessner Lee in the 1940s and '50s. Created to train detectives to assess visual evidence, Botz discovered the miniatures while talking to a prosecutor in Baltimore who collected doll houses, but not dolls, as she didn't want to be reminded of humans and the crimes they commit. That conversation led to the discovery of Lee's miniatures, which were housed at the Baltimore Medical Examiner's office. Botz went on to produce more than 500 color photographs of the miniature crime scenes—eerily domestic in spite of their bodies and blood spatters. These photographs formed the basis of a solo exhibition and book, and exposed the irony of Lee advancing in a male-dominated field by using a feminine tradition of miniatures.

“Lee lavished loving care onto these scenes of perfectly ordered chaos. There are more female than male victims, and the majority of crimes were committed by family members or by individuals intimate with the victims. The models are a reminder that domestic space can be safe as well as terrifying,” Botz said.

When starting on *Haunted Houses*, Botz knew she wanted to concentrate on haunted domestic spaces, and while she knew the oral histories she was collecting were an important part of the work, she didn't know what form they would take or how they would integrate with the images. She created a framework that allowed her to develop the project in an organic fashion, using the documentary tradition as a starting off point.

She said, “I love journeying into a world where I am influenced and inspired by the people and places I visit. The very notion of ghosts invites irrationality, surprise, and wonder.”

Botz's current work, *The Secret Life of Objects*, a collaboration with the National Study Group in Chronic Disorganization, is related to her interest in how objects connect with memories and sense of self. “I'm interested in the act of parting with sentimental objects. The current photographic installation I'm working on is inspired by objects sent to me from people who have difficulty parting with objects—which I'm relating to how I collect and transform the world around me photographically.”

Her work has been reviewed by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *Art Papers*, and *The Village Voice*, to name a few. Her investigations, whichever way they lead, will undoubtedly continue to spark widespread interest and acclaim.



Bryant Molloy, Halloween poster, 2010.

Halloween Mayhem at MICA

MICA'S ANNUAL HALLOWEEN PARTY, one of the College's most well-known student traditions, is famous for the inventive costumes crafted for the event. Attracting nearly 1,000 students every year, its music, food, and good-natured mayhem are outdone only by the Costume Contest Parade. Students compete for a range of awards, such as Best Group, Best Use of Material, and Best Performance. In recent years, winning costumes have depicted the BP oil spill, a realistic replica of Mount Royal Station on roller skates, and an elaborate performance based on Adobe Photoshop. The next party will take place on Saturday, October 29.

Visit fyi.mica.edu for more Halloween-related images, especially additional works at Green Mount Cemetery.