BANG! Unprecedented news from the Library in Hell and the British Library

DIABLERIES

Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell

500 photographs all in full colour
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- ‘Diableries, Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell’. (press release on Halloween 2013)

**Stereo-Diableries** are an intriguing set of 19th. century humorous, satirical and political inspired 3-D photographs. These albumin stereo prints depict daily life in hell, a world inhabited by male skeletons and demons, often in contrast with provocative and surprisingly realistic women modeled in clay. Many of the images show political critique and satire on the Napoleonic regime. When it comes to originals, for collectors the most attractive version of the Diableries are the so-called ‘stereo tissues’, back-colored albumin photographs showing ‘day & night’ effects similar to the techniques used in diorama paintings, peepshow views, the Polyorama Panoptique and various other immersive early media devices and images. Diableries are a colorful depiction of an enthralling Hell we look forwards to enter by gazing into the stereoviewer.

Allegiance to the Devil, even a book choice disclosing these rare stereo-photographs can be misleading. Two new titles on the subject are announced for 2013, however only one is worth to purchase or even look at. A detailed comparison of both publications clearly distinguish the work of the thorough researcher from "The work of Satan", so to speak.

This review of ‘**Diableries, Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell**’ is based on an exclusive pre-publication preview of this forthcoming title announced for Halloween 2013. The other, recently published, title reminds more plagiarism (*based on an incomplete 1978 publication*) instead of historical research.

Obviously, the only right choice is ‘**Diableries, Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell**’ by Denis Pellerin, Brian May and Paula Fleming.

Firstly because this book is based on more than a decade academic research by an established French photo historian & collector, **Denis Pellerin**. As a result, the important hidden meanings of these satirical images are explained for the majority of these 180 scenes from Hell. Pellerin has written several books and articles on 19th. century stereo photography and currently works on his PHD.

I would like to emphasize that this Diablerie book is the result of a collaboration of 3 specialized author’s, mentioned above, bringing together their scholarship, writings and Diablerie originals used to illustrate this unprecedented book. Where necessary some of the Diableries are digitally restored by the use of untrimmed diableries from the ‘Visual Media’ collection. Original 19th. century tissue Diableries in mint condition are rare to find which explains the use of various ‘key collections’. For the very first time all known diableries are illustrated in stereo, complete and in close colorful detail. Both photographed with front light and light-shining-true effects.

Second author is **Brian May**, founding member of QUEEN, world renowned guitarist as well as doctor in astrophysics and passionate stereo photo collector. A previous photo book by Brian May & Elena Vidal, ‘A Village Lost and found’, unravels the stereo photographs of
Thomas R. Williams. For his true first book May returned to astrophysics and co-authored ‘BANG! The complete history of the universe’.

Third author, Paula Fleming, is an established American photo historica & collector with a special interest in stereo photography. She is the retired photo archivist of the world famous ‘Smithsonian Institution’ and shares the same passion for the stereo Diableries with the other authors. Fleming published extensively on 19th century photography and curated many photographic exhibitions.

Secondly, in addition to the so-called original series of 72 devilish scenes (named the Block or A series) ‘Diableries, Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell’ also illustrates 6 more Diablerie series; B, C, D, E, EH & F, which are not subject of study in the incomplete (non)competitive Candice Black book. This makes ‘Diableries, Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell’ (soon published by CanopusBooks), the most complete survey on the subject to date!

Judging more than 180 diablerie titles (created between 1860-1890), life in Hell looks quite similar too daily life on earth. These scenes are tabletop miniature modeled dioramas photographed with a stereo camera to produce 3D photographs. Unfortunately none of the original sculpted diorama scenes (nor the original negatives) where ever found back. However their sculptors are known, Pierre Adolphe Hennetier (1828 - 1888), Louis Alfred Habert (1824 - 1893) & Edmond Cougny (1831 - 1900).

Hopefully this unprecedented publication will lead the authors to the discovery of the original dioramas and props ..., if still, somewhere, in existence? For example in ‘memento mori’ or ‘Danse Macabre’ collections. Since the former collecting fields are often characterized by secrecy (as frequently also seen in conjuring, freemasonry and erotic/pornographic collections), alertness and help from suchlike ‘discrete’ collectors will be most welcome.

Included in the slipcase of this high quality hardcover edition you find ‘The Owl’, a foldable book-stereoscope designed by Brian May to experience the stereo illustrations in spectacular 3-D. The book illustrates each Diablerie in both, the monochrome sepia and transparent colored version. The photo on the cover of the slip-case shows a 12-layer lenticular of ‘La guerre, départ de l’Enfer’.

Denis Pellerin's many years of research unravels a great amount of new information regarding the above sculptors of these rare 19th century photo gems and their true political & satirical meaning. These stereo cards display various dimensions in different meanings of the word. At first sight they are just great fun. The diorama or ‘day and night’ effects add another dimension to these photographs. The most spectacular dimension is the 3D experience or illusion when viewing these images through a stereoscope. But less ‘visible’ for today’s viewers are the underlying dimension of social and political comments, also unveiled in this book for the very first time.

“Subtle messages - satire and comment - relating to the political and social events of this period in French history” as can be read on the accompanying website, a project which further expands the possibilities of the book.

Indeed, parallel to the book ‘Diableries Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell’, Brian May launched a detailed website on the diablerie subject, hosted on the server of the ‘London Stereoscopic Company’. The LSC website demonstrates in an interactive dissolving manner
the day & night effects of these curious scenes from Hell. Diablerie enthusiast are strongly advised to check this website after the purchase of the book. It will show Diableries in an interactive way, gradually changing from front light to back light effects. See: Access to sets.

The other inferior publication; 'Diableries: A Trip to the Underworld, 19th Century Images of Satan and Hell' (published by Sun Vision Press) has the appearance of a softcover re-edition based on the book by Jac Remise, published by Balland, 1978. The new (copied?) title by Candice Black however seems to be based on the absence of historical research. Less than no effort is done to interpret the devillish scenes. When you read the excerpt on Amazon.com you have read almost the whole book which has even less text than the 1978 Balland publication. None of the illustrations is in stereo and the author doesn't seem to quite understand stereoscopy since the excerpt explain "These cards consisted of the same image presented twice, side by side, which when viewed through a stereoscope gave the illusion of 3-D", a major error regarding the true working principle of stereoscopic images.

The incomplete collection of diableries in Black’s book is reproduced in lifeless black & white showing poor quality due to high contrast. It even seems that the author not even had acces to good quality copies of the Block series since, when comparing the Sun Vision Press and the older Balland edition, these are undoubtely the same illustrations from the same source, hence their high contrast. One can guess for the true author since Candice Black is only refered to as editor. One can also guess for the true reason of producing such plagiarism?

For all the above (and much much more), 'Diableries: A Trip to the Underworld' looks as bad plagiarism indeed. it is incomplete and withholding the reader from the most spectacular visual effects and color (such as red glowing eyed skeletons) of the Diableries, not to mention the complete absence of the diableries social historical backgrounds. By this as it may, 'Diableries: A Trip to the Underworld' is strongly inadvisable for the more curious and studious reader.

Conclusion:

'Diableries, Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell' (to return to the former and thorough researched study!) by Denis Pellerin, Brian May and Paula Fleming is unmistakable the only possible and right choice when it comes to historical authenticity, realistic reproductions (both front and backlit) and the goal to achieve completeness.

The only book which opens a new universe for the stereo diablerie collector and enthusiast will see his European press launch in the British Library on HALLOWEEN 2013.

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Book Details for ‘Diableries, Stereoscopic Adventures in Hell’

Page Size: 235mm x 310mm

Extent: 280 pages

Illustrations: 500 photographs all in full colour

Text: approx. 70,000 words

Binding: Hardback

Also available is a limited deluxe edition

Slip-case: with 3D lenticular applied, including OWL stereo viewer in envelope

Please order from the London Stereoscopic Company or via AMAZON.

A series - No. 70

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