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Paper Gallery

Mysteries And Truths In Black And White

By DANA JENNINGS

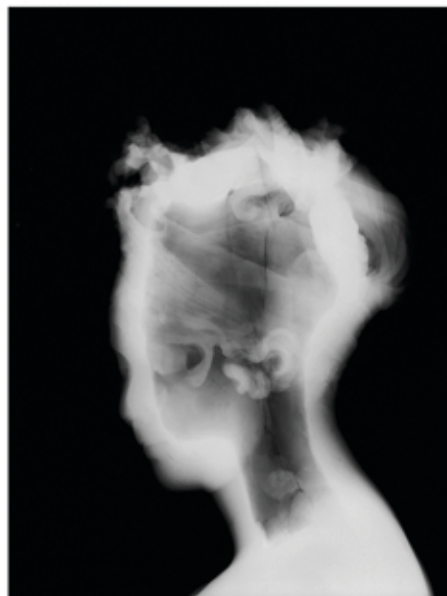
FOR those of us of a certain age it's black and white that defines our cultural imagination. The early and best Popeye cartoons (wonderfully animated by the Fleischer brothers) and the Three Stooges shorts were in black and white, as were the first and most resonant images of Sinatra, Elvis and the Beatles. And weekends meant diving into the delightful late-night abyss of monster movies like "Them!" and "The Thing From Another World." And I don't know about you, but I (mostly) dream in black and white.

Even our first forays into writing and drawing were in black and white (or black and buff, if your grammar school went for the cheap paper). We weren't quite Neanderthals smearing charcoal on limestone walls, but some of us sure looked as if we'd wrestled with our tooth-nibbled No. 2 pencils. Didn't every second-grade class have a kid nicknamed Smudge?

Even today, B/W seems better suited to sounding the depths of our dark interiors; color seems to have a way of sucking up the cultural oxygen that our imaginations need to thrive. There's a mysteriousness, for example, to an old deckle-edge snapshot taken with a Brownie Starmite that a color Polaroid lacks.

And when a truth appears to be beyond doubt, we say that the facts in question are black and white. But the truest poetry is often found in all those poignant shades of gray, as I'm sure the following artists — from an 18th-century engraver to 20th-century photographers — would agree.

(By the way, the first draft of this roundup was written in longhand — black ink, white paper.)

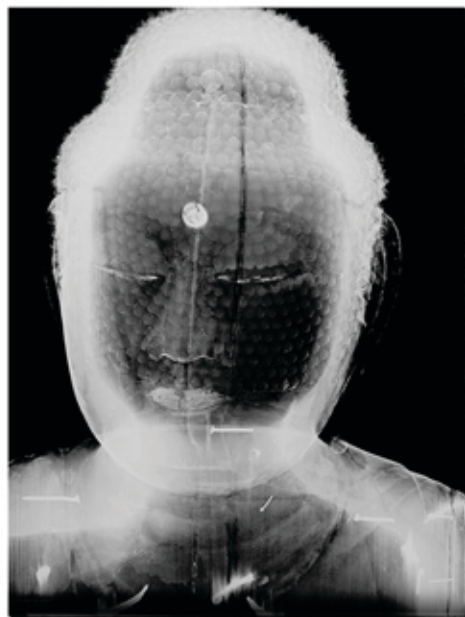


History's Shadow

By David Maisel

72 pages. Nazraeli Press. \$75.

THE ARTIST WITH AN X-RAY EYE In "History's Shadow" it seems as if David Maisel is reviving the once-dormant souls of inanimate objects, if not those of their makers. To alchemize these beautiful but disturbing images Mr. Maisel rephotographed and manipulated conservation X-rays of three-dimensional objects from two California museums. In doing so he's conjured revenants — of masks, sculptures, bowls — that, he says, represent a confluence of art, time and technology. These images "make the invisible visible" and express "the shape-shifting nature of time itself," Mr. Maisel writes in the afterword to the book, which includes a new short story in the tradition of Borges by Jonathan Lethem.



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