

Art and the Occult

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Figure 1, Gallery

“Curiosity is such a basic component of our nature that we are nearly oblivious to its pervasiveness in our lives.” (Hayden, Kidd, 2015). Many people have a morbid curiosity towards the sinister; be it true crime or the occult, innumerable people find themselves unable to look away. Ghosts and the paranormal cause many discomforts, and while there is no definitive proof of the existence of ghosts, many have varying opinions; and it is thought to be split between the believers and non-believers. Author and clairvoyant James Van Praagh says; “Having travelled around the world, I can say without a doubt that ghosts are among us everywhere”. (Praagh, 2008, pg. 15) Conversely, people believe that if they haven’t seen it themselves, that they cannot be real. No matter where you stand on the matter; our gallery has been curated to put you in an uncomfortable place.

We’re taking the sinister, the things that make you scared, and putting you within proximity. Rather than watching the horrors on your screen, you’ll be right there, reading the stories of these pieces, and witnessing them all first-hand.

OAnnabelle



Figure 2 (One_Horror_Universe, 2019), Annabelle the Doll.

Our first horror is arguably our most well-known. Inspiring the movies such as *The Conjuring* and *Anabelle*, most people would recognise the doll from the films. However, the doll itself looks much less threatening. It's a rather typical raggedy-Ann doll.

In the 'true' story, Anabelle was a doll given as a gift to Donna in 1970, a nursing student who at first, thought nothing of the doll moving around the house, and writing notes on parchment that neither her nor her roommate owned. However, when Donna came home to find Anabelle sitting on her bed, her hands covered with a blood-like liquid, Donna decided it was time to enlist the help of a medium. The medium told the girls that their apartment was formerly a field in which a young girl had been found dead; feeling sorry for the young girl, they kept her around. (Lusky, n.d)

This proved to be a mistake, as soon after, Anabelle attacked a friend of Donna's, which is when The Warrens were called in. The Warrens claimed Anabelle was a demon, pretending to be the ghost of a young girl. A priest exorcized the house- and The Warrens decided to take Anabelle to their home (avoiding highways on the way, as Anabelle tried to stop their brakes from working, and made the engine and steering fail multiple times.

Anabelle caused havoc in The Warrens home too, which is why she's in the glass case she's in today. This case was made specifically for Anabelle- the cross there to deter her from escaping. (Haunted Rooms, 2020)

Anabelle sits next to her 'counterpart', another haunted doll called Robert. They sit on a pedestal in the middle of the gallery, and while pictures are permitted, it is discouraged that you taunt the dolls in any way.

The Hands Resist Him



Figure 3, (AwkwardFish, 2013) *The Hands Resist Him*

“The photograph Bill Stoneham’s parents took of him when he was 5 years old wasn’t worth a thousand words, it was worth a ***million nightmares***.” (Alfonso III, 2020)

This painting is an unnerving one to say the least, and we think given its haunted status, it definitely belongs in our gallery.

The patting is inspired by a poem written by Stoneham’s wife in 1974, *Hands Resist Him*. The poem was about Stoneham’s experience being adopted. Based on a photo taken with a neighbourhood friend when he was five, the painting takes an eerie turn, not only because of the disembodied hands reaching out for the child, but because of the stories behind it.

Since the paintings creation, three people involved with it have sadly passed away; the critic who reviewed the painting (Seldis in 1978) the man who owned the gallery it was originally displayed in (Feingarten in 1981), and the actor who purchased it (Marley, in 1984; although he sold the painting before his death). However, this is not the only thing that gives this painting its haunted acclaim.

In 2000, the painting resurfaced as a listing on eBay. The seller wrote about their experiences with the painting, detailing some rather horrific and unbelievable events.

The sellers 4-year-old daughter had claimed that the children in the painting were fighting and coming into her room. The father set up a motion-sensor camera to reassure the daughter that nothing was awry, however I’m sure you could understand the families horror when the video showed the children coming to life, and the young girl using a gun held in her hand to force the boy to leave the painting.

The eBay listing was viewed over 30,000 times, and people who hadn’t even bought the painting wrote in reviews about how just ***looking*** at the painting made them ***sick***, it made them hear ***voices***, and some even complained about ***blackout and mind control*** experiences. (BBC Derby, 2002)

The gallery is ***not*** responsible for any ill-affects that may occur during your time in the gallery.

Robert the Doll



Figure 4, (weberb68, 2014) Robert the Doll

Robert is certainly our least malicious guest at the exhibition. He's over one hundred years old and lived much of his life with Robert Eugene Otto. He was an eccentric artist and he had a weird relationship with the doll (to say the least). But there is a reason the doll is haunted. From a young age, Otto blamed mishaps on the doll, and this continued through his life. He brought the doll everywhere and talked about it in first person as if the doll were alive. For much of the time, this was put down to a child's imagination. But soon, adults started noticing the odd occurrences, especially as Otto grew older. (Robert the Doll, n.d)

When Otto became an adult, he kept Robert in an upstairs window. Schoolchildren swore the doll would disappear and reappear, often avoiding Otto's house for fear of the doll. When Otto died and a woman called Myrtle Reuter purchased the house in 1974, and essentially became Robert's new 'caretaker'. She kept Robert for 20 years and says that he often moved around the house on his own, guests to the house claimed that Robert's expression would change whenever someone said negatives things about Otto. Reuter gave Robert to the Martello Museum in Key West Florida in 1994 and now he's briefly with us for this exhibition. (Ghosts and Gravestones, 2020)

We will warn you- you must ask Robert permission before you take photographs of him! It's been rumoured that photos will turn up distorted if you do not ask before you photograph him.

The Crying Boy



Figure 5, (Tales of Luna, 2018) The Crying Boy 1



Figure 6, (Wikipedia, n.d), The Crying Boy 2

Our last painting is actually a series; however, they're all of one thing in particular- a crying boy.

In the middle of the night, a house in South Yorkshire was enveloped in flames. The living room was completely charred and coloured black by the fire; everything had burned to ash- except for one thing. A painting of a crying child. (Zarrelli, 2017)

But this wasn't the first time something like this had happened- on October 24th, 1985, The Liverpool Echo published the article "*Curse of Crying Boy In Fire Riddle*"- telling the story of the painting and its supposed 'curse' on anyone who bought it. The article states that over 50,000 copies of the painting were sold, and that in every house that had burned down, the painting remained completely unscathed, baffling firefighters. (The British Newspaper Archive, n.d)

The paintings, done by artist Giovanni Bragolin (also known as Bruno Amadio), are certainly an odd choice for masses of people to keep in their homes. However, as the paintings were mass produced and readily available in the 1950's to the 1970's, many young couples had them in their home. Many threw their paintings out for safety's sake; despite not understanding how all the prints could be cursed. People feared their houses burning down due to the curse; but now we display them here, in our gallery (and we can only hope the building doesn't burn down).

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