

# Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America

By Stanley B. Burns

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## Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America By Stanley B. Burns

Sleeping Beauty is coveted for having played a large role in the rediscovery of the normalcy of postmortem photography. In 1990, Dr. Stanley B. Burns' landmark publication *Sleeping Beauty, Memorial in Photography in America*, ushered in a new era of appreciation of the importance of these images. Since the publication of *Sleeping Beauty*, exhibitions based on the 3-book series of memorial images have been created regularly. Perhaps the most prestigious was *Le Dernier Portrait* at Paris' Musée d'Orsay in 2002. To accompany the exhibit, *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family, American & European Traditions* was produced. In 2011, *Sleeping Beauty III: Memorial Photography, The Children* was written. Numerous other documentarians and feature filmmakers have utilized these poignant photographs, most notably in *The Others*. The Burns Archive serves as the premier source of images related to death, mourning and medial practices.

Postmortem photography is the taking of a photograph of a deceased loved one, and was a normal part of American and European culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has nothing to do with images of violence, crime, or war. Death, and personally dealing with death, was prevalent throughout the entire world as epidemics would come quickly and kill quickly. Advances in medicine removed unexpected death from everyday life and professionals took over. Commissioned by grieving families, postmortem photographs not only helped in the grieving process, but often represented the only visual remembrance of the deceased and were among a family's most precious possessions. Mourning periods were based on family relationships and could last from months to years. Small photographs of the deceased were often carried in lockets or kept close to the body for greater intimacy. As many of the diseases that killed our ancestors were conquered and photography advanced during the century, society grew more and more distant from death, and practices, styles, and traditions of mourning and memorialization changed.

The earliest postmortem photographs were often close-ups of the face or full body, at times depicted to appear lifelike or napping. Children were often positioned in a crib, posed with a favorite toy, or with a family member, most often the mother. Later photographs depict the subject in a coffin. Flowers, like forget-me-nots and calla lilies, were common in postmortem photography of all

types. Later photographic memorials involve a shrine usually including a living portrait and flowers dedicated to the deceased.

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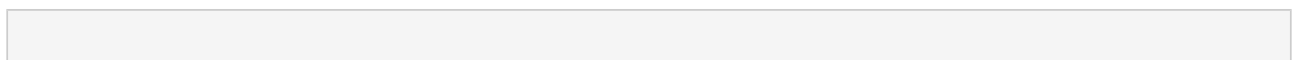
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### **Editorial Review**

#### Review

"If you can peer in past the somberness, you'll summon up the warmth and intimacy of a lost emotional landscape, one that links up momentarily with those who have gone before." - John Updike in American Heritage Magazine

"Unlike anything I've seen before...succeeds in a way the few documentary books manage to do. Dr. Burns uses what might seem an obscure subject...to persuade the reader to reconsider matters of life and death in our own time." -New York Times Book Review

"[Dr. Burns] has researched the hell out of these photos, and his notes in Sleeping Beauty amount to nothing less than a furiously compressed history of death and dying in America...Stanley Burns' project is a thing of strange beauty, always thought provoking and eye opening, often startling, usually a revelation of some kind." - New York Press

"Almost every one of its stunning reproductions inspires shivers and achingly vivid pathos..." - The Voice Literary Supplement

### **Users Review**

#### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Russell Bussey:**

Now a day people that Living in the era exactly where everything reachable by interact with the internet and the resources inside can be true or not demand people to be aware of each facts they get. How many people to be smart in receiving any information nowadays? Of course the solution is reading a book. Reading a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information particularly this Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America book as this book offers you rich information and knowledge. Of course the info in this book hundred per-cent guarantees there is no doubt in it you know.

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