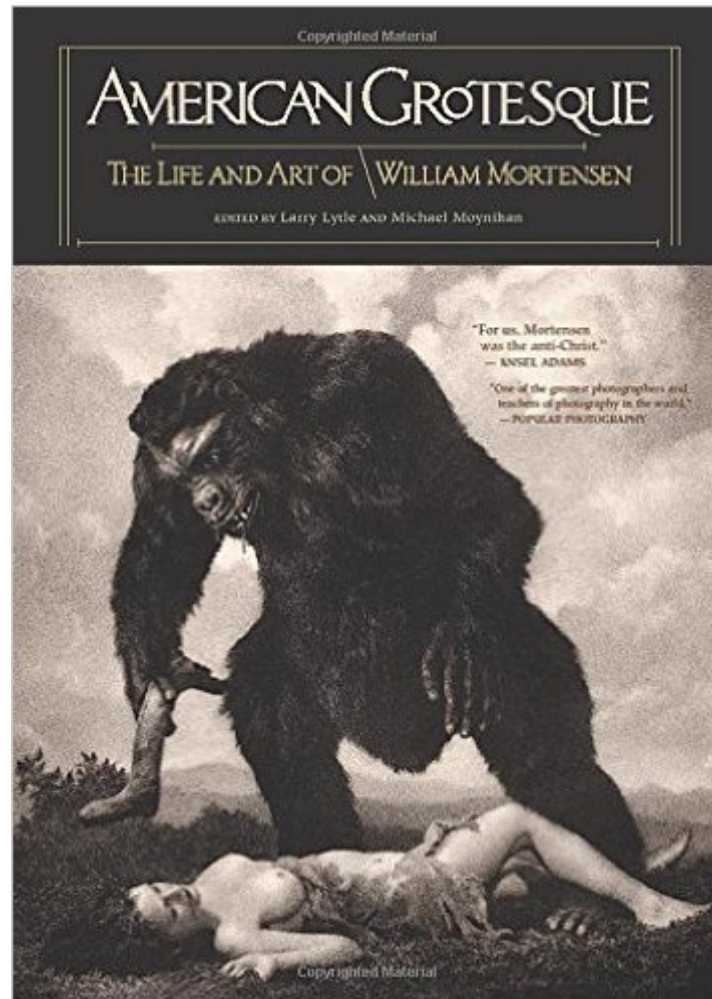


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# American Grotesque: The Life And Art Of William Mortensen



## Synopsis

American Grottesque is a lavish retrospective of grotesque, occult, and erotic images by the forgotten Hollywood photographer William Mortensen (1897–1965), an innovative pictorialist visionary whom Ansel Adams called the "Antichrist" and to whom Anton LaVey dedicated The Satanic Bible. Mortensen's countless technical innovations and inspired use of special effects prefigures the development of digital manipulation and Photoshop. Includes a gallery of more than one hundred striking photographs in duotone and color, many of them previously unseen, and accompanying essays by Mortensen and others on his life, work, techniques, and influence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Beautiful book by an under appreciated photographer. Ansel Adams called him the antichrist, at least in regards to other photographers. I'm still puzzling over exactly what he meant, since the remark was clearly intended to include photographers only. Maybe he meant that Mortensen went where no one else did, and photographed in a way that brought light to dangerous subjects. If so, he succeeded brilliantly. I was marginally aware of the man, and had seen maybe one or two of his images. But, this book has simply left me awestruck. As I thumbed through the pages the first time through, I kept thinking "How could I not know of this guy?". Very beautiful, disturbing, funny, perplexing book. Thanks to Feral Press for publishing it. And, to the authors for having the ambition to put it all together.

The editors and publisher who republished Mortensen's "The Command to Look" have also produced this absolutely gorgeous collection of Mortensen's photographs. Beautifully bound, and with additional essays that perfectly accompany the photos, this is a book very worth having in one's library.

A long overdue retrospective of a photographic pioneer. Mortensen developed intricate processes of image texturing, but was overshadowed by his creation of extravagant and fantastic tableaux and portraits that range from abject horror to sublime beauty. Extremely well illustrated and designed, authors Lytle, Coleman, and Moynihan give us insight into this unique artist. In particular, Larry Lytle's biographical entry brings this eccentric genius to vivid life. Highly recommended.

Phenomenal book on one of American cultural history's most overlooked treasures, William Mortensen. Elegantly designed and very well researched and written, this is the definitive book on this artist. The book is clearly organized and filled with many never before seen images that will for years to come validate William Mortensen as one of the few occupants of the parthenon of truly great American Visionary artists.

In this era when the history of photography is moving faster than ever, my faith in our collective culture was redeemed upon seeing this book was forthcoming. Mortensen was a trail blazing great who was buried and silenced by the louder and stronger voices of our time. This book does his brilliant work justice, finally, and is supported by great essays as well. My only wish for the future would be for this book to become required reading for any art student today.

Never heard of William Mortensen? Neither did I until recently, and I thought I knew a lot about photography. Mortensen fell into obscurity after his death in the 1960s and is experiencing a modestly-sized revival, due to the resonance his fantastic analog imagery has on today's more receptive audience. The cover of this book is truth-in-advertising - Mortensen's heavily retouched photos could pass for stills from an alternate universe in which the Hays Production Code never took effect and 1930s Hollywood was as lurid, macabre, and explicit as possible. In other words, this is a creative world in which jazz age nudes, Goya-inspired torture scenes, witchcraft, freaks, monsters, and violence are readily available. It is also a world with some exceptional portraits in period costume, as one might expect from a photographer who worked in publicity for movie studios during the silent era. These portraits would be a centerpiece in any photographer's portfolio, or any

actor's collection of head shots. You will not be surprised that Mortensen knew, and admired, Lon Chaney Sr. This book contains crisp, clear reproductions of many of Mortensen's surviving photos (most of which are full-page), thoughtful essays from a biographical, technical, and artistic perspective, and a reprinting of one of Mortensen's own essays (with full coauthor credit finally given to Mortensen's ghostwriter George Dunham). Given that Mortensen's subject matter leans towards the outré and outrageous, there are some images that lean heavily towards kitsch or camp (and he degenerated into straightforward cheesecake near the end of his career), but most of what is shown here is among the most amazing (if not disturbing) fantasy art of the 20th Century. This book is highly recommended.

William Mortensen was one of the most imaginative photographers to hit the Hollywood scene. This is your chance to see some of the best of his erotic work showing the beauty Hollywood actresses in the 20's and 30's. Julian Wasser

You can simply Google his work and decide if you want a hard copy. Mortensen's work is dark, classy, and a little erotic but not in a vulgar way. It's like the perfect imagery for Bataille's "Death and Sensuality".

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