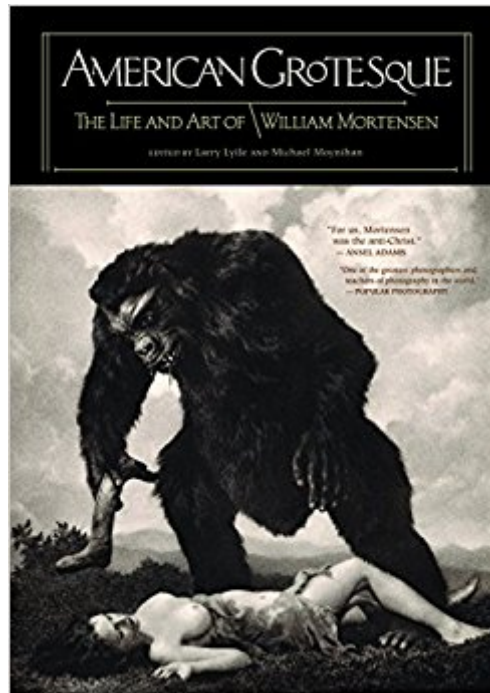




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# American Grotesque: The Life And Art Of William Mortensen



## Synopsis

American Grotesque 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

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.

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.

Absolutely stunning: the life of Mortensen, his work, this book... This is a must. The long forgotten Mortensen deserves to be known by a wider number of people.

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.

Brilliant book about a to me unknown photographer that deserves to be recognized amongst the best. A studio and darkroom master creating effects just recently available to most via Photoshop and it's like, just that he did it in the darkroom. A photographic must have book

A validation of the masterful artistic talent of William Mortensen. A talent that went somewhat unrecognized due to the disapproval and heavy criticism from the equally talented Ansel Adams. Although Adams was a pictorialist early on, he abandoned that style in favor of "straight" photography.

Mortensen was a true pioneer before his time, for me a must have for the collection. Arrived promptly. While looking at this now in present day the subject may not be that big a deal, naturally, anymore. Good way-way-back look at an early visual craftsman.

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

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