



Mütter Museum: Historic Medical Photographs

Laura Lindgren (Editor) , Gretchen Worden (Introduction)

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The first book on the Mütter Museum contain artful images of the museum's fascinating exhibits shot by contemporary fine art photographers.

Here, the focus is on the museum's archive of rare historic photographs, most of which have never been seen by the public. Featured are poignant, aesthetically accomplished works ranging from Civil War photographs showing injury and recovery, to the ravages of diseases not yet conquered in the 19th century, to pathological anomalies, to psychological disorders.

Many were taken by talented photographers between the 1860s and the 1940s as records for physicians to share among colleagues and to track patients' conditions, and demonstrate various techniques used in medical photography including the daguerreotype, micrography, X ray, and traditional portrait-style photography.

As visual documents of what humans endured in the face of limited medical knowledge, these extraordinary and haunting photographs demonstrate how far medicine has advanced.

Mütter Museum: Historic Medical Photographs Details

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From Reader Review Mütter Museum: Historic Medical Photographs for online ebook

Dana Fontaine says

This is a must read for anyone fascinated by the medical profession, has a morbid fascination with deformities, or just has a natural curiosity for anything weird or out of the ordinary. I like all three, and I am fascinated by the Mutter Museum.

The photographs in this book showcase medical anomalies ranging from conjoined twins (as shown on the cover) to abnormal tumors and diseases. The photographs are from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. It even shows fetal anomalies and amputations.

Very informational!

Mark Desrosiers says

Few books can make you feel happier to be alive than to gaze upon this loving collection of nineteenth century deformities and monstrosities. First off, you're far removed from their direct experience (thereby erasing guilt). Secondly, you're much more normal and self-possessed than these freakazoids, especially as they're getting shamed by the lengthy shutter speeds of male-gazing doctor-photographers.

I'm half-kidding about that last bit, of course: this is all very sad, sublime, strange, no matter how many Jim Foetus or AxCx promotional materials have co-opted it. You'll never forget the before-and-after images of that 200-pound ovarian tumor, for example. Or the various teratofoms which obviously look like demons (cf. the sirenomelus and the cyclocephalus). Or the gruesome Civil War injuries which remind us that plastic surgery began as a noble effort to, y'know, put people's faces back upon their skulls.

Those of us who are cynical about the psychological sciences will be amused by the five (5) pages devoted to "psychological disorder": a single photo of Charles Guiteau's brain, and three pics of two vaguely alarmed-looking women. (Remember: psychology began with that ridiculous "hysteria" business.)

Last, but not least, behold the "precocious sexual development in a four-year-old boy" (wherein a doctor holds the squirming boy on his lap in order to display them remarkable genitals) and "congenital hypertrophy of the clitoris" (my earliest memory of *this* alluring photo consists of lolling about on the apartment floor, flipping through one of my mom's nursing textbooks... at age four).

A wonderful collection. My only suggestion is that perhaps some of the all-too brief captions could have been expanded by modern medical insights, however daffy they might be.

Kaila says

Creepy and wonderful. So grateful to live in a time with vaccines and vitamins.

Meaghan says

Meh. This was a little disappointing. Some of the photographs were stunning, both in an artistic sense and in a oh-god-I-am-so-going-to-have-nightmares-tonight sense. But there was some repetition -- several photographs were of the same thing, taken from different angles. And some of them didn't make a lot of sense. For example, they had one picture captioned something like "skeleton of infant with club feet" but the skeleton was from the knees upward; you couldn't see the feet.

I would recommend this only to people who already have an interest in medical photography.

Kristen says

Wow! And also wow.

Angela says

A lovely photo book from one of my favorite museums. This book concentrates on the photographs which could be considered groundbreaking, rather than purely a physical record.

The only thing I found lacking was an explanation of the medical conditions displayed. As this book is for a general audience rather than medical professionals, I would have preferred a few sentences of explanatory text about the condition shown rather than just, say, "severe congenital equinus deformity".

Robert Palermo says

I thought the photographs were great. I would have like more, but I guess I'll have to go to the museum.

Kent District Library says

So if you're thinking to yourself, "Self, I really wish I had a gigantic coffee-table book of sepia photos of people with cannon-ball-related war wounds and hideous eyeball cysts," then DO I HAVE THE BOOK FOR YOU! Mütter Museum: Historic Medical Photographs is a fantastically interesting book of medical pictures taken just as photography was becoming a Thing. Plastic surgery was just becoming a Thing at the same time, along with a lot of other surgical techniques that the book documents. And as an added bonus, it shows how early photographers tried to model their images—no matter how horrible—on famous painting poses. Which I thought was fascinating. It's a holiday treat for almost everyone!!!

The Badger says

I cannot wait until I'm able to visit the Mutter in person!

Jessi says

What a fascinating collection of photographs! I'm normally not squeamish with these things but there were a few that even made me gasp outloud. Makes me wonder what the rest of the museum holds. If I ever get to Philadelphia, I'll have to check it out.

Stacy says

I wasn't sure what to expect from a book showing medical oddities of the past. I was afraid it would be a combination of sideshow acts and old-fashioned treatment disasters. Instead, it was filled with people living relatively normal lives until they were impacted by a random disease, or children born with disorders I didn't know existed. I was also surprised to learn that I had vastly underestimated the ability of doctors to diagnose and treat ailments 100 years ago, particularly the examples of war wounds and treatment.

Toby says

This was an interesting read. Definitely made me feel better that we have the ability to do more with medicine now and how we understand more about different medical issues.

Wendie says

Very interesting.

Lindz says

Wow. This book is incredible. It's a collection of medical photographs, many taken from the beginning days of photography, illustrating a variety of unusual medical diseases. It's absolutely heartbreaking. Only a couple photographs have information on what happened to the patient, but you can infer by many of them the outcome.

This book has very slight commentary, which was disappointing but not entirely unexpected. Some of the photographs have information on where case studies were published if one wants to look it up. It's not a book I would want to own, I'd want something with a little more information in it (this is why I'm only rating it 3 stars, btw). However it's a fascinating historical collection and worth trying to get through your library if you're interested in medical history. The introduction, which quickly chronicles the history of photography in medicine, was interesting but very brief. Keep in mind that most of the images are quite graphic. And oh lordy am I glad I live in this age of medicine.

Judy says

I found this book fascinating, not only of how the human body can go horribly wrong, but in how the use of photography dated so far back as a study aid. I was also impressed with medical treatments and surgeries going way, way back. There was more knowledge and ability than I would have thought.
