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The Art of the Impossible

PHOTOGRAPHY, ART AND THE
REPRESENTATION OF
THE PARANORMAL

ParanormalReview

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The Society for Psychical Research

The SPR was the first organisation established to examine allegedly paranormal phenomena using scientific principles. Our aim is to learn more about events and abilities commonly described as 'psychic' or 'paranormal' by supporting research, sharing information and encouraging debate. The SPR was established in 1882 and is a Registered Charity.

Membership

The SPR welcomes members of the public, as well as students and researchers in all disciplines, to join. Membership does not imply acceptance of any particular opinion concerning the nature or reality of the phenomena examined, and the Society holds no corporate views. The minimum age for joining is 16, with reduced subscriptions for students, couples and senior citizens. To renew or apply for membership please visit the website at www.spr.ac.uk, telephone the Secretary, Peter Johnson, on 020 7937 8984, or email secretary@spr.ac.uk.

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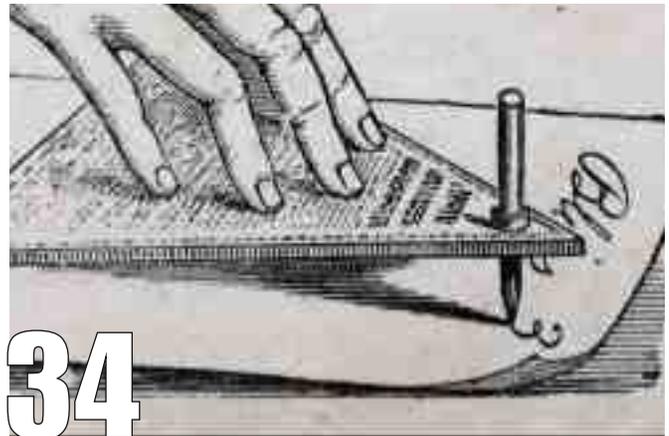
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The lights dimmed, the audience were on the edges of their seats (or, at least, *in* their seats), except for the absence of a drum roll, everything was set for the announcement of the winner and runners-up of the *Paranormal Review's* Photography Competition. The announcement was made at this year's conference at the De Vere Estate in Horsley before being made public – another good reason to attend the conference, or two good reasons if one includes the fantastic setting of the De Vere Estate. It was the first time that the *Paranormal Review* had run a photography competition – as far as I am aware, it is the first time that the Society for Psychological Research has run a photography competition – so it was with an understandable degree of trepidation that I embarked on the process.

The question of the paranormal and photography had brought the SPR and long-term member Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to loggerheads in 1922 when Harry Price's exposure of William Hope's fraudulent spirit photography was published in the *Journal*. Conan Doyle later indignantly resigned over the SPR's continued publishing of sceptical articles. I therefore stressed that the competition was about photography as an art form and not about photography as a means of capturing supposed evidence of the paranormal, even so, many photographs were submitted purporting to show something paranormal in nature – one such photograph won second place – but I still must stress that such photographs were judged on artist grounds.

Of invaluable help was Dr Michael Pritchard, a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and Chief Executive of the Royal Photographic Society – if anyone should know how to run a photography competition successfully, this was the man. What is

more, he is familiar with the photography collection in the SPR's archive. It was also Dr Pritchard who pointed me towards Olympus as a possible sponsor for the event and, after some negotiation, Olympus's Brand Manager, Mark Thackara, generously offered to provide a prize for our winner.

I was also delighted that Dr Pritchard agreed to be a judge and I was just as delighted to secure the participation of the rest of the judging panel, all of them experts in the field of photography and the paranormal. The SPR's Communications Officer Dr Tom Ruffles (also an Associate of the Royal Photographic Society) and the SPR's Archivist Dr Melvyn Willin are already well-known to readers of the *Paranormal Review* for good reasons; and Andreas Fischer, Curator of Photographs at the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene in Freiburg, and the photographer Shannon Taggart, Artist and Scholar in Residence at the Morbid Anatomy Museum in New York, have well-deserved international reputations.

The Competition inspired me to reach out to others working in the field of images and the paranormal. The result can be seen in the interesting articles from Dr Susan Barnes, Susan MacWilliam and Dr Grace Williams. Fortunately, this approach also coincided with the publication of Dr David Clarke's latest book *UFO Drawings from the National Archives* and he kindly consented to telling us more about this exciting new publication.

Dr Graham Kidd reports on the 100th anniversary conference of the Norwegian Parapsychological Society in Oslo, where he presented a memento on behalf of the SPR to mark the event. As always, Brandon Hodge completes this issue with another foray into the history of spirit communication devices. ♡

editorial

Dr Leo Ruickbie
Editor