The Archives of Tony Oursler Imponderable

Program
Monographs & Artists' Books

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An archive of phantasmagoria

Artist Tony Oursler has amassed a vast personal archive of objects and ephemera relating to magic, the paranormal, film, television, phantasmagoria, pseudoscience, and technology. For Oursler, the archive functions as an open visual resource, historical inquiry, and—most intriguingly—a family history. One of the collection's many digressions is the friendship between the artist's grandfather Charles Fulton Oursler—a famous early 20th-century author and publisher—and magician and escapologist Harry Houdini, their joint campaign against fraudulent mediums, and a historic interaction with Arthur Conan Doyle, who, beyond his Sherlock Holmes series, was an important advocate for spiritualism and the paranormal.

This publication features more than 1,200 objects from Oursler's collection, including photographs, prints, historic manuscripts, rare books, letters, and objects, selected and sequenced by the artist. Additional topics include stage magic, thought photography, demonology, cryptozoology, optics, mesmerism, automatic writing, hypnotism, fairies, cults, the occult, color theory, and UFOs. Linking these wide-ranging materials is Oursler's underlying interest in belief systems and human nature—the suspension of disbelief, or perhaps just our propensity to believe. The material in Oursler's collection broadens recent explorations of technology and mystical cultural production, investigating the relationships between science, pseudo-science, religion, and the occult with visual and archival documents that demonstrate the power of images to carry and challenge our most cherished beliefs.

Tony Oursler, born in New York in 1957, works in video, sculpture, installation, performance and painting. His work has been exhibited worldwide at Documenta VIII and IX, Kassel, Germany; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Skulptur Projekte Münster; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC; and Tate Liverpool. The artist lives and works in New York City.

Published in conjunction with a major exhibition of Oursler's archive at LUMA Foundation in Arles, France.