



Soul in the Stone: Cemetery Art from America's Heartland

John Gary Brown

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John Gary Brown's richly evocative photographs remind us that cemeteries—shadowy markers of death and grief—also shine forth with life and art. By turns starkly sobering, nostalgic, provocative, and quirkily humorous, his photos capture the human spirit preserved in all of its amazing diversity. Celebrating master stone sculptors as well as grassroots and ethnic folk artists, Brown's striking images document the rich traditions of cemetery art as found throughout Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Colorado, and New Mexico. The art itself manifests a great many idiosyncratic forms and subjects including an Egyptian sphinx, a gigantic baseball, a salesman's suitcase, a rolltop desk, a car-engine shrine, plexiglass-enclosed dolls, life-size limestone statuary, hovering marble angels, elaborate wrought-iron crosses, along with more modest traditional motifs in etched-granite and concrete. Brown's own artistry and insights illuminate the ways in which these works embody or reflect personal grief, family relationships, religious and ethnic values, social status, occupations, avocations, aesthetics, as well as unrealized hopes and dreams. Both informative and entertaining, his book provides a haunting tribute to this neglected art form.

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