

BOOK REVIEW

BY AMANDA QUINTENZ-FIEDLER

PHANTOM POWER

By Barbara Diener, Essays by Allison Grant and Gregory Harris. Daylight Books. 112 pp. \$45 hardcover.

Looking down an ordinary staircase, you see an outline of a figure — perhaps a shadow, or a person moving in front of the shutter, or maybe something else — and it seems to hesitate, to linger long enough to observe the brilliant light projected onto the wall at the base of the stairs. This form, too, is not discernable, but it seems like a figure balancing tentatively on delicate legs, perhaps leaning toward the stairs, toward the figure, toward the camera and toward us.

Barbara Diener suffered an enormous loss when her father died a decade ago, and though she doesn't consider herself spiritual and is not religious, she believes there is much in this world that cannot be simply explained. Like many others before her, she takes on our enigmatic relationship with death and the afterlife and tries to see it from a new perspective. She engages with trees, shadows, reflections and lights. She uses double exposures and captures flare, not to create fictions but to explore possibilities.

This collection, *Phantom Power*, is a poem, a diary exploring grief and belief and the unknown. The images are sometimes mysterious, sometimes frightening, sometimes whimsical, but there is always a feeling that the images contain more. If you look deeper into the moss-covered woods, perhaps there will be an answer. Or if you dissect the grid of green lights pro-

jected in a variety of situations, perhaps you can decipher a message.

These images seem to present the same types of questions we all face when our mortality is illuminated. There are times when the individual elements aren't even discernable and there is no sense of place or meaning. There are moments of calm in a field where you can almost feel the light breeze through the tall grasses. There are anxious flashes in the dark and terrorizing lights shining out from the trees, and moments of comforting sunsets and dandelions and little reminders that life is a cycle.

well-produced, though small in size, the book, appropriately, is not to be displayed on a table. It is not a shouting match but a quiet conversation — a trinket you take out on occasion to feel connected to something that otherwise feels absent.

This is a book that some will adore and some will criticize. The images can be seen as spiritual or simply alternative. In the most technical sense of the craft, some of the photographs might be panned for being too dark or lacking a tangible subject. But these are the things that can also be the most universal and open to interpretation. It is the enigmatic elements

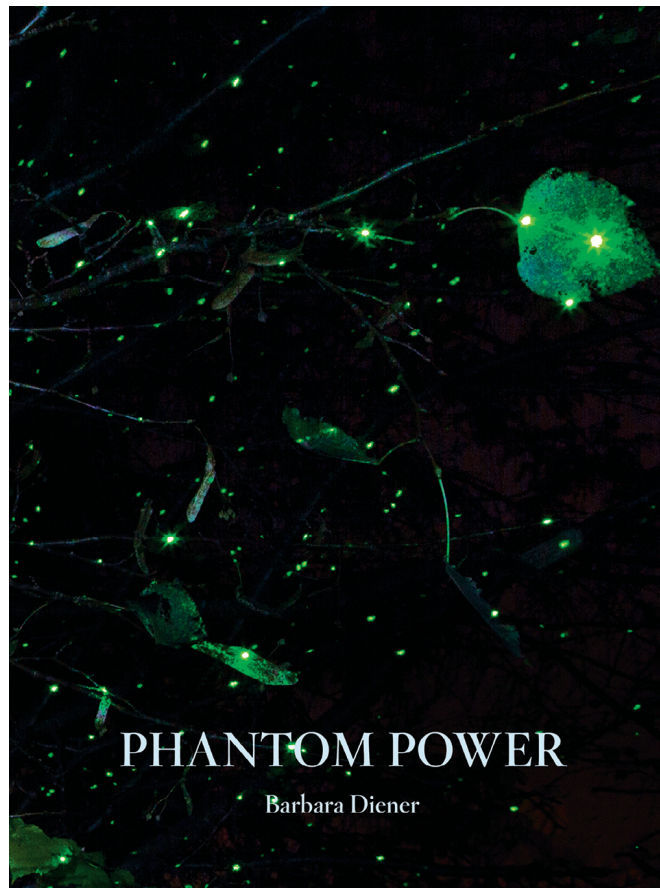
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This book is about far more than the images, and each person who peruses it will get something different out of it. In this way, it is a reflection of each individual's experiences, just as these were created as an expression of Diener's. Incredibly

that are the strongest aspect of this series, whether there is a mystery in lights or a question as to which element of the field should be of most interest.

The brief essays and interview are insightful but not necessary. These photographs will reflect the viewer as much as they do Diener and, perhaps, her father. But for anyone who is unsure about the universe around us, even if skeptical of spirits, ghosts or mediums, this book might offer an odd comfort. And for anyone who has lost someone and yearns to connect with the intangible, this book might have a special place on the nightstand. ▲

Amanda Quintenz-Fiedler is an avid photographer, educator and writer. She regularly contributes to Photographer's Forum and the Macphun blog and has worked for Digital Photo Pro, Rangefinder, PDN.edu, and other photographic publications. A former commercial and corporate photographer, she is currently focusing her efforts on fine art.



NOTED

BY AMANDA QUINTENZ-FIEDLER

RADIANT: FARM ANIMALS UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

By Traer Scott. Princeton Architectural Press. 128 pp. \$24.95 hardcover.

Traer Scott has given us another exquisite, endearing work of animal portraits — this time from the farm. As in Scott's previous books, the animals pictured in these pages are expertly photographed, in such a way as to reveal varying personalities, unique characteristics and an abundance of soulful eyes. Her simple and clean images allow the viewer to focus on the animals and develop a sense of these creatures that we culturally overlook in favor of seeing them as producers. The book is not judgmental about the animal product industry, but instead, is pragmatic and compassionate toward its subjects. It is a lovely book.

AS FAR AS YOU CAN SEE: PICTURING TEXAS

By Kenny Braun. University of Texas Press. 200 pp. \$45 hardcover.

Texas is often represented with a limited vocabulary, especially by those who have never been there. But the immensity of the place goes beyond its vast physical footprint, spanning all the natural wonders one could ever wish for — from beaches to mountains to fields of wheat. Photographer Kenny Braun has compiled a series of outstanding images that capture all the natural magnificence the Lone Star State has to offer. From crashing waves to the gloriously clear Texas night skies, Braun imbues the treasures that can be found with their own vivid language. The images are reproduced nicely, but the layout cuts some scenic vistas in unfortunate places, leaving a desire for a redesign.

MEXICO: BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

By Harvey Stein. Kehrer Verlag. 176 pp. \$45 hardcover.

American photographer Harvey Stein is fascinated by Mexico's multifaceted society. Using an outsider's perspective, he immerses himself in those elements that are different from his own upbringing and has created a body of work that embraces the country's complex relationship between life and death, mourning and celebration. Through a series of visits to Mexico over 17 years, mostly during religious and traditional celebrations such as Day of the Dead, Stein built a collection that feels intuitively honest to Mexico and accessible to the rest of us. The images are often haunting, with minimal explanation of the scenes in the plate titles. But the point isn't to understand every scenario, but rather, to see the similarities that unite us all amidst the differences.

#THESTORMPILOT

By Santiago Borja. teNeues.

160 pp. \$40 hardcover.

Storm photography — contained vignettes of nature's immense power captured for us to view in safety — can be amazing, with its dual sense of danger and elegance. But the photographs of pilot and photographer Santiago Borja feel cataclysmic. These aren't images taken from a precarious place near a storm; they are entrenched in the crown of the storm, a view so foreign to most of us as to inspire wonder. This book has perhaps an overuse of hashtags and too much text, which is compounded by the three language translations of English, German and French. Also the photographs feel as if they lose something on matte paper, especially in the shadows. But the views are astounding. ▲

