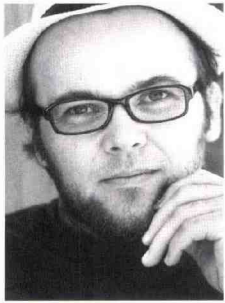




Spotlight | **Morgan Post** *Portfolio Contest Winner*



"I see [sideshow performers] as mysterious, completely wonderful."

Fact File
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15 x 19-inch waxed albumen prints (unframed) are available at \$1,100 in editions of 25.

4 x 5.5-inch carte de visite waxed albumen prints mounted on cotton rag board with letterpressed text are available at \$150.00 in editions of 25.

Morgan Post is literally—if not thematically—all over the place. Rather impressively so. The 37-year old Ogden, Utah native has just returned from Granada, Spain when I reach him. "I was invited to be an artist-in-residence at El Laboratorio [a photographic darkroom in a cave in Sacromonte], hosted by Pablo Castilla and Hedvig Sofie," Post relates from his Newburgh, New York home.

The high point of his Spanish stint was an extended interaction with the graduating class of an international circus school. Learning traditional circus acts as much as theatre arts, Post photographed nearly the entire 2016 class and the characters that participants created over a three-year span.

But it was a series crafted prior to his residency that's given Post critical traction. Notably, a 2015 exhibition at New York City's Penumbra Foundation, in which Post would add to a rare subtheme begun by no less than P.T. Barnum, 19th century photographer Charles Eisenmann and, most recently, Diane Arbus: carnival portraiture.

Leveraging the online talent agency **GigSalad**, Post connected with noted sideshow performer Jack Sullivan and arranged for a portrait session. Post had anticipated a brief first encounter, an icebreaker with the man who bills himself as "Gentleman Idiot." It lasted six hours.

Post specializes in wet-plate portraits, and in the course of the prep learned that Sullivan shares his affinity for the collodion process, which Eisenmann employed in the 1870s to glamorize the Bearded Lady, Jo-Jo the Dog-faced Boy and, not least, four-legged Myrtle Corbin (who also claimed two v-jay-jays).

Post utilized strobes to photograph Sullivan. While this achieves optimum sharpness and arrested motion, Morgan had to warn his subject of blowback: an intense and summary blinding. "The lights were close to his face. When the flash pops, that's 8,000 or more watt/seconds hitting you at once. You feel the air move and the light actually hits you when the exposure is taken. It's blinding; not just for me, my cats, the model, but also the neighbors if they happen to look inside."

Sullivan began with his Iron Tongue act, a staple in classic sideshow subculture. The next series focused on Sullivan's Human Blockhead act. "He tapped a 4-inch nail into his sinuses. He also demonstrated with the 6-inch nail, but it does not go in all the way." Several attempts later, Post fixed on "an interesting angle...good light on the nail." Ultimately, Post hit the head on the nail. "I wanted the viewer to almost feel it going in."

Post has traveled extensively for the past three years to photograph other members of the sideshow/burlesque/circus communities. Besides the creative fulfillment, the endeavor brings his childhood to the forefront of his psyche. "I see them as mysterious, completely wonderful," Post says. "In my mind—and in reality—I consider them super-people. The feats themselves are absolutely incredible. They are always pushing themselves to the limits of what they can handle; then they push some more."

That notion of tolerances represents the animating message in another of Post's projects: "The plausibility of containing radioactive material to generate power." He follows up with his own rhetorical question: "Is nuclear power truly a carbon-free renewable? At what cost?" To further this dialogue, Post has begun a collaborative, multifaceted installation at Artspace New Haven (Connecticut), partnered by Yale University's Art Gallery, that includes lights and images of spent uranium from Connecticut's nuclear reactors, panels of inlaid uranium, plus water and soil from the same nuclear stations. Post sums up his agenda: "The 'dilution is the solution' for toxic chemicals idea just does not work."

Talk about range. Morgan Post: thematically and creatively embracing a uniquely American, 19th century cultural oddity; while socially and environmentally engaged in the here and now, helping shape a very Data Age omen to a potential American Chernobyl.

— **Michael DiGregorio**

