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1996

Review of *Soul in the Stone: Cemetery Art from America's Heartland* By John Gary Brown

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Duncan, Robert, "Review of *Soul in the Stone: Cemetery Art from America's Heartland* By John Gary Brown" (1996). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1115.

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Soul in the Stone: Cemetery Art from America's Heartland. By John Gary Brown. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994. Photographs, bibliography. viii + 246 pp. \$39.95.

John Gary Brown, a professional photographer from Lawrence, Kansas, has collected over a period of time a variety of unique photographs documenting examples of cemetery art found in the central states of Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Colorado, and New Mexico. The author, through his photographs and to some degree his text, illustrates the rich mixture of personal efforts that stone sculptors and vernacular artists have developed in this special art form. While cemetery art is public, the photographs Brown presents, through his use of a multiplicity of artistic images, often suggest particularly private stories. Brown begins with a discussion of the "garden" cemetery, the prototype of which was Père-Lachaise in Paris (1804), which moved away from a preoccupation with the grim and condemnatory to more artistic expressions of grief and hope. Art, architecture, city planning, and gardening were all part of the design and construction of the new cemeteries.

Brown has not attempted to systematize his findings. He looks for the unusual, the memorable, the eccentric. ("In Lincoln, Nebraska, when a pioneer flier crashed and lost his life, his shattered propeller was put up to mark his final resting place.") He chooses the "outstanding" cemeteries: Graceland in Chicago, Bellefontaine in St. Louis (home of the Wainwright mausoleum by architect Louis Sullivan), but also notes the smaller ones like Mount Olivet in Hannibal or the Wyuka cemeteries in Lincoln and Nebraska City. The book includes chapters on religious iconography, secular images and motifs, civil/military/fraternal themes, and a chapter on ethnic influences. "Ashes to Ashes," the final chapter, looks to the future of Heartland cemetery conditions and art, much of which is threatened by the new "memorial parks" with their uniform markers and relentless maintenance.

Brown believes that "our society needs to redefine how it feels and thinks about mortality and insists on having options for the expression of those feelings and thoughts, be they the erecting of edifices or the scattering of ashes. The signs of returning individualism are encouraging, but this nascent impulse needs to be nurtured and expanded if the Heartland cemetery is once more to be a mirror for our rich and varied culture."

Soul in the Stone, like many other photographic essays, has attempted to present graphically through the author's lens the stories of

those graven images that exist in the cemeteries of the Midwest. Although the selection of states and cemeteries is highly subjective, the overall impact of the excellent photographs is impressive. Notable is the chapter on grave markers for children, which Brown refers to as "uniquely poignant." He is correct; the cumulative effect of these photographs is haunting and powerful.

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