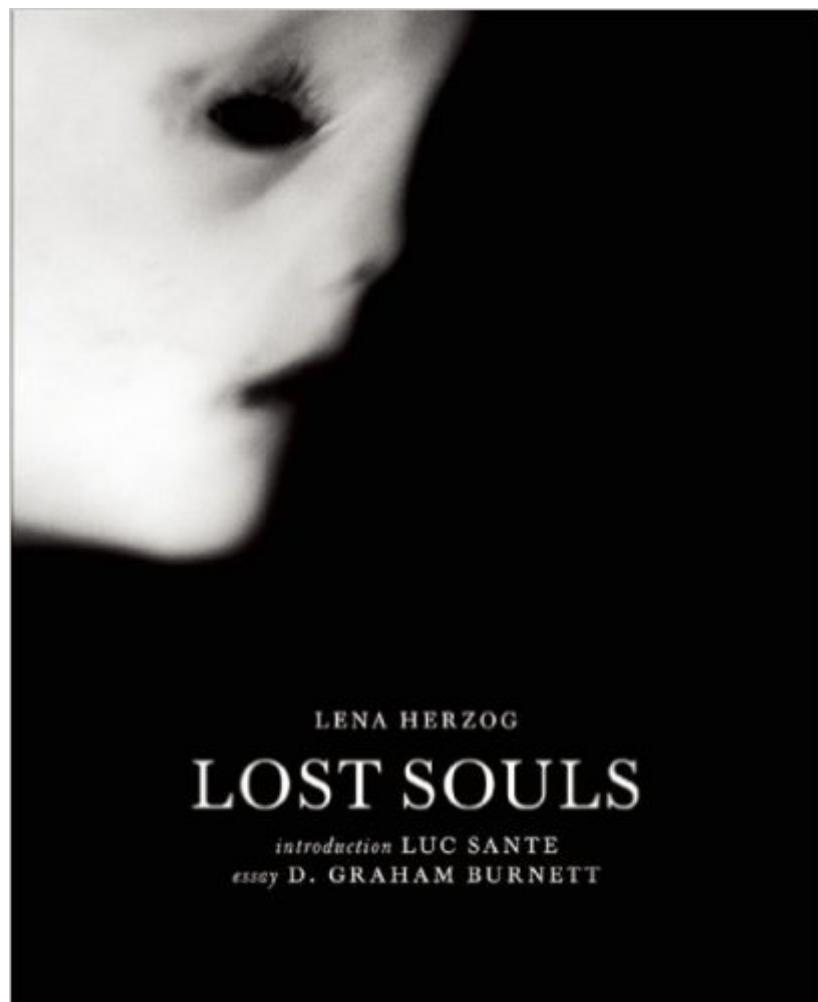


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Lost Souls



Synopsis

Lost Souls records Lena Herzog's journey into a world rarely seen by outsiders: cabinets of wonder and curiosities (Kunstkammern and Wunderkammern) that include the world's earliest medical museums, where oddities have been closely guarded for centuries. Established in the early eighteenth century, Russia's first Kunstkammer triggered a profound debate over religious and existential questions. The Orthodox Church, faced with a collection of Cyclopes, Siamese twins, and creatures that looked like lions or leprechauns, could not justify nature's unsuccessful attempts at human life and deemed their souls lost: they could not go to heaven, hell, or limbo; they were dead on arrival and had nowhere to go. Herzog was granted access to the Wunderkammern around the world and has photographed the mysteries with a sense of beauty, wonder, and tenderness. Her subjects are mostly infants born with genetic defects that prevented their survival, and although they have been preserved as scientific specimens; some for hundreds of years; they are profoundly transformed through Herzog's lens into beings that mirror our own fears and existential dilemmas. Herzog follows this portrait gallery of sorrows with images of the skeletons and bones of various creatures; both warm- and cold-blooded; and continues the journey with views of some of the unusual subjects on display in the curiosity cabinets. The final section, "The Mice Orchestra, or The Rhapsody of Death," shows a diabolically witty scene, an actual nineteenth-century installation from the Anatomical Museum of Leiden University Medical Center, which has been hidden in the museum's storage for years. Herzog uses a combination of unique processes for developing her negatives and printing her photographs, resulting in images with tonal subtleties, palpable textures, and superb clarity and resonance. This book reproduces the prints that Herzog exhibited at the International Center of Photography in New York in 2010.

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