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**SPRING/SUMMER 2013**



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PHOTOGRAPHY

**GINA SODEN'S SPOOKY RUINS**

— PUBLISHED ON FRIDAY

**Stunning shots of broken buildings from a young snapper deep into decay**

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TEXT BY CHARLIE JONES

**Why do you think urban exploration photography has exploded in recent years?**

The internet has played a massive part in this, and social media has made it very easy for people to communicate and share images. It's something different from the norm and I can remember the fascination of finding such places when I first started out. People also love escapism and perhaps doing something slightly risky. Pictures of broken buildings offer a wonderful insight into the past. It allows us to realize that nothing lasts forever and in a way that's a refreshing thought. There is also a great platform for story telling- I love to imagine what was once there, what the building was used for, who walked the corridors and why it has been abandoned. Even the most ostentatious of structures end up in ruin, and there is something very attractive about peeling wallpaper and sunlight pouring through a sash window.

**Did you get into any scrapes shooting these structures?**

I've come across metal thieves and always been slightly wary, but I've never had any trouble. The only time I've felt pretty nervous was being in a semi-live industrial site, one of the workers spotted me and was banging a pole against the steel girders whilst I was hiding up in the top. Luckily I didn't caught! My friends and family know I suffer for my art- I have a veritable banquet of scars on my arms and legs from catching them on fences or broken glass!!! Was each shoot legal? It depends how you define legal. I'm not breaking any criminal law by being in these places. I never force entry and I always leave if I'm asked to. Trespass is only a civil offence and any dispute would only be between the landowner and myself. I'm very respectful of the locations and never give away any details to prevent someone else from taking advantage.



**How did you hear about each location?**

I spend hours online researching, using Google Translate, reading local papers, scouring Google Earth and chancing upon places. I sometimes get inside info from co-conspirators. The research is half the artwork and I am keen to think about how to incorporate aspects of it into my practice.

**Do you think the pictures are sad?**

There is certainly an element of poignancy to many of the pieces. When you are dealing with a building which was used as a hospital or someone's home you immediately have the sensation of familiarity and it can be unsettling to see the way time can ravage a grand building. I try and create different atmospheres for each work, so sometimes a power station can be very moving despite its industrial make up and vice versa a derelict old people's home can have charm and humour.

**Can you share some stories around the shooting of your favourite pictures?**

I was in an asylum for about 5 hours until I finally got caught. The security guard would not of heard me but a very scary Alsatian dog certainly sniffed me out. The dog started barking erratically and I made my way to the exit and was prepared to give myself up. I was then confronted by a barking dog and a very aggressive security guard who accused me of breaking and entering which of course I never do. I had found my way in through a board which had simply been propped up against a door frame. I was pretty annoyed as he wanted my memory cards and he had called the police. I knew it would be a complete waste of everyone's time and tried to explain this to him but he was not interested. I quickly stuffed my memory cards in my pants when he had his back turned to ensure my pictures couldn't be erased. He took me to the office where I was asked questions by his boss. After waiting 20 minutes or so for the police, I was stroking the dog Bella in the security guards office, had received a cup of tea, paracetamol for my headache and I was sharing stories with the guards about my adventures. They were my best friends by the end of it, I just told by the police not to come back.

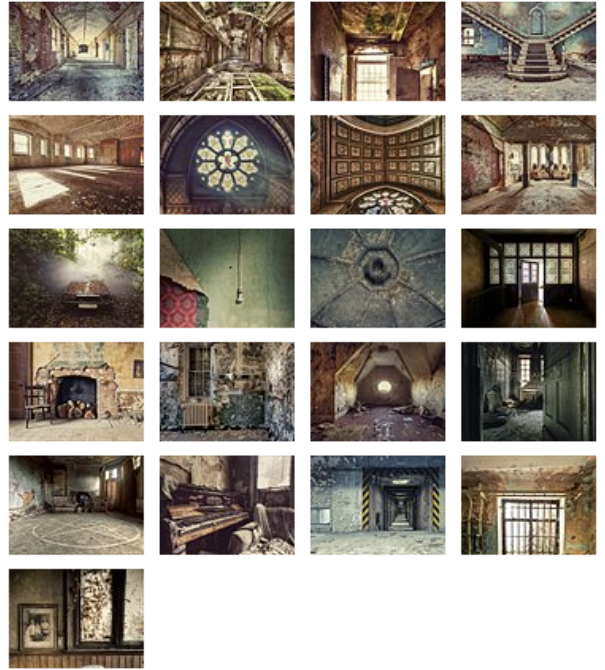
I once discovered that was an easier way in here via some tunnels. This made everything so much easier, as I never knew what route the security guard would take. The tunnels were claustrophobic, dark and wet, full of mould, fibreglass and (undisturbed) asbestos. One stretch was very hard work as it had been bricked off at various sections lowering the height of the tunnel, forcing me to crawl on my hands and knees in the slushy mud to get to the end. I felt like I was in Shawshank Redemption film. Once I was at the end I came up through the floorboards directly into the wards, and once I was done exploring, I would slip back in and go through the tunnels to get to the next ward.

**There's a hex in one of the pictures. Did you ever see any ghosts?**

Ah yes, the pentagram! It was quite a thrill to come across that - obviously some people use these abandoned places for their own ends. I don't usually like to include unnatural additions like graffiti in the compositions but this one was so unusual. It still related to the theme of retrogression as it was so pagan- as if the building was going back thousands of years to an earlier way of thinking.

I don't believe in ghosts- I don't think I would be able to spend as much time alone in derelict asylums if I did- but I will concede that sometimes a place has an undeniable 'feeling' about it. I am trying to convey that in the artworks. I once slept in a forgotten hotel overnight as I had travelled over 4 hours across 2 countries to get there. It was pitch black when I entered and it was a pretty scary experience trying to find a half decent room to sleep in. I woke up the next morning and saw that there was a 3 star hotel across the road. How ironic.

**IMAGE GALLERY**



<http://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/14951/1/gina-sodens-spooky-ruins>