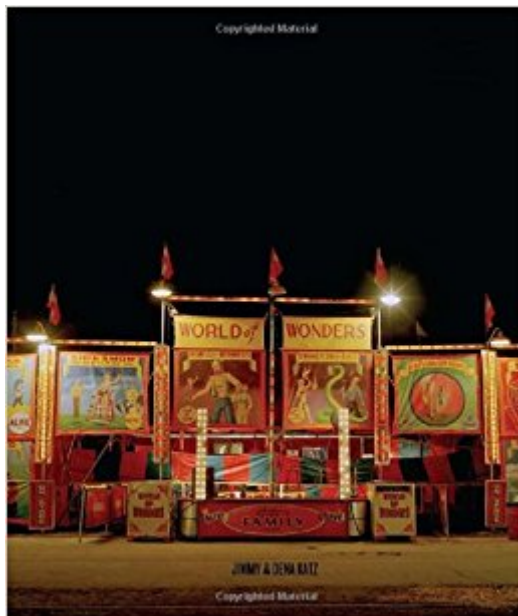


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# World Of Wonders



## Synopsis

Working in brilliant color and with a large format camera, photographers Jimmy and Dena Katz spent three seasons following the last authentic traveling side show in America to create this elegy to a uniquely American art form. Their powerful, poignant, and respectful portraits of aging performers and young recruits reveal disappointment, despair, and tenacity played out against the tawdry glitter of the fairground. These images, along with anecdotes and commentary by the performers, are brought together for the first time in *World of Wonders*. Sword swallowers, fire eaters, freaks, and illusionists have excited generations of Americans. Today, only this one troop persists, led by the legendary Ward Hall and his partner Chris Crist, who mounted multiple extravaganzas for Ringling Brothers more than fifty years ago. As the photographers listened to hard-luck stories and felt the power of hard-lived lives, they were moved by these men and women who continue to perform despite changing times and tastes. The Katzes' widely acclaimed book about the surreal effects of human action on the salt flats of Utah, *Salt Dreams* (powerHouse Books, 2006), featured images deemed "spectacular" by New York Times critic Grace Glueck. With this powerful and unsettling new work, Jimmy and Dena Katz continue to explore the postmodern aesthetics of American subcultures.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Born in New York City, photographer Jimmy Katz spent more than a decade based in Utah as a mountaineer and Nordic skier, photographing the desert and mountainous terrain. He often

contributed photographs and articles to climbing publications about his expeditions and first ski descents in remote areas of the world. Back in New York, he established himself as a well-known music photographer, shooting over 250 recording projects and more than 60 Jazz magazine covers. Although he lives in New York City, Katz is still closely connected to the American West, where he often finds inspiration for his personal projects. Dena Katz was born and educated in Moscow, in the former Soviet Union. She met Jimmy Katz during his expedition to the Soviet Pamir, and their relationship developed after she had climbed the highest peak in Europe. Shortly thereafter, she moved to the United States and pursued post-graduate East Asian studies at Columbia University. She has been a conceptualist and collaborator with Jimmy Katz on a number of photographic projects.

This book was purchased for inspiration in preparation for a stage production of BARNUM. The photography is amazing and the inspiration was perfect. I could feel the textures on the faces of these hard-livin' characters, who carry on the circus/sideshow tradition. The hard cover makes this a perfect coffee table book, a point of conversation. What a fantastic addition to my research library. It almost makes me want to take up the craft of the sideshow... or at least get a few tattoos! I can hear the Carnies barking out their pleas.

I have read and looked through the book a dozen times since receiving it. The pictures are the story and they are fun to look at. I have other books with the works of Glasier and Kelty on circuses and freak shows but they seem more historical. When you see the lives of these people you want to meet them and travel with them for a season or at least catch the show. You want to be part of it before the era ends. I wish it were longer but good books always seem short.

The last link to the sideshows of old

Beautiful pictures of people unlovely and fascinating - the people of the World of Wonders sideshow. There's something about their professional fearlessness that makes for an amazing candor in their gaze. Nobody here cares about a little flab, body hair, or a buttcrack. What I think is most interesting about these people is that the show comes first. They've developed their skills in support of their desire to travel with the show. If only I could have taught the kids in my Circus Arts club to swallow swords.

Buy it! The book provides a sympathetic yet unwavering insight into the disappearing culture of the travelling carnival. The book grabs at your heart and soul with portraits of side-show artists, hawkers and roadies. The Katz duo captures a visually arresting and slightly unnerving family of personalities spanning the newly-arrived to the wizened and fading. Their stories are told in their own words and the texture of their voices unfold in the brief narratives. While Diane Arbus would have treated this subject matter from a judgemental distance, the Katz's are able to enter this travelling carnival like the best of ethnographers, almost invisibly, and portray an iconic way of a life with the regret that the ancient entertainment form is slowly becoming a victim of our modern life.

"World of Wonders" is a fresh and wonderful creation. Jimmy and Dena Katz introduce us to a strange, beautiful view of the American landscape and those who populate its fringes. They take us into a world that's on the edge of extinction and bring it roaring to life. Through their eyes the sideshow becomes beautiful. The photos themselves are splendidly re-produced, vividly colorful, each revealing something new about this now exotic environment. The text, taken from quotes of those photographed, also seem extremely well-chosen to further draw us into this hidden place. Bravo to Jimmy and Dena Katz. I can't wait to see where their next American journey will take them, and us.

This is a beautiful, iconic pictorial of the last of the circus side shows. Each picture tells a story of its own, the hard life etched in the faces of the entertainers. Photos worthy of Life or Vogue magazines.

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