

ZOE BROWN



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So zealous was her dedication to photography that Zoe Brown (born 1927) raised money for her first good camera by selling a pint of blood. When she showed her photographs to Minor White his enthusiastic praise persuaded her to study photography with him at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). After attending the school from 1951 to 1953, she worked as an assistant to Dorothea Lange and to Wayne Miller. In 1954 her photographs were included in *Perceptions* at the San Francisco Museum of Museum of Art (renamed the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1975). The exhibition celebrated a decade of fine art photography in San Francisco and the Bay Area.

Brown's work encompasses a range of styles including documentary photo essays, portraits of artists and writers, visual expressions of form and light, and symbolic imagery. "My eye was caught by the puzzling, the ambiguous, by odd juxtapositions" leading to photographs "encountered, not arranged," she explains.

In her photographs of the traditional Asian New Year festivities in San Francisco's Chinatown, Brown captured the alternately boisterous, playful and reverent sides of the annual event. Her photographs of this most important celebrator of Chinese culture in San Francisco, honored with fire works, food, dragons, music, and flowers, were published in a 1953 issue of *Aperture* dedicated to the yearly festival.

On Halloween, in 1952, Brown photographed children painting ghosts, witches and goblins on store windows or parading in costumes and masks through a street in Berkeley, California. Adults present at these events also caught her notice. Affection, humor and a keen sensitivity to human nature characterize these photographs. On the one hand the unsuspecting adults watching the events are objects of fun and visual puns. On the other hand, despite their light-hearted subject, many of the photographs of the children earnestly celebrating their Halloween fantasies are uncanny and unsettling. They suggest, as do Ralph Eugene Meatyard's photographs of masked children, that there is more than meets the eye to seemingly innocent childhood playacting. Writing about Zoe Brown in a 1953 issue of *Modern Photography*, Minor White aptly described her as "a perceptive eye unearthing and recording a psychological truth, or a truth of a state of mind."

Front Cover

1. *School Girl, Rescue, California*, 10½ x 13½ inches.
Illustrated: *Modern Photography*, April, 1955, p. 18 [4858]

All photographs are signed vintage silver prints made by Zoe Brown between 1951 and 1953.

All photographs are copyrighted and cannot be reproduced without the written consent of the photographer.



2. *Girl Painting Witch*, 9 x 13½ inches [4744]



3. *Halloween Mask with Big Ears*, 5½ x 9¼ inches [4732]

Selected Exhibitions

Perceptions, San Francisco Museum of Art (now San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), August–September 1954, and traveling.

The First Decade: 1946–1956—Alumni Photography from the San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco Art Institute, September 2006.

Selected Publications

Aperture Vol. 2, No.1, 1953.

Dody Warren, "Perceptions," *Aperture* Vol. 2, No. 4, 1954.

U. S. Camera, August, 1954.

Modern Photography, April, 1955.

Ten Photographers, 1946–1954, San Francisco, Paul M. Hertzmann, Inc. 2004.

Selected Collections

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



4. Masked Children, 6¼ x 9¾ inches [4733]

5. Witch Picture, 9 x 13¼ inches [4728]





6. Boy with Dark Glasses, 13 3/4 x 9 inches [4741]



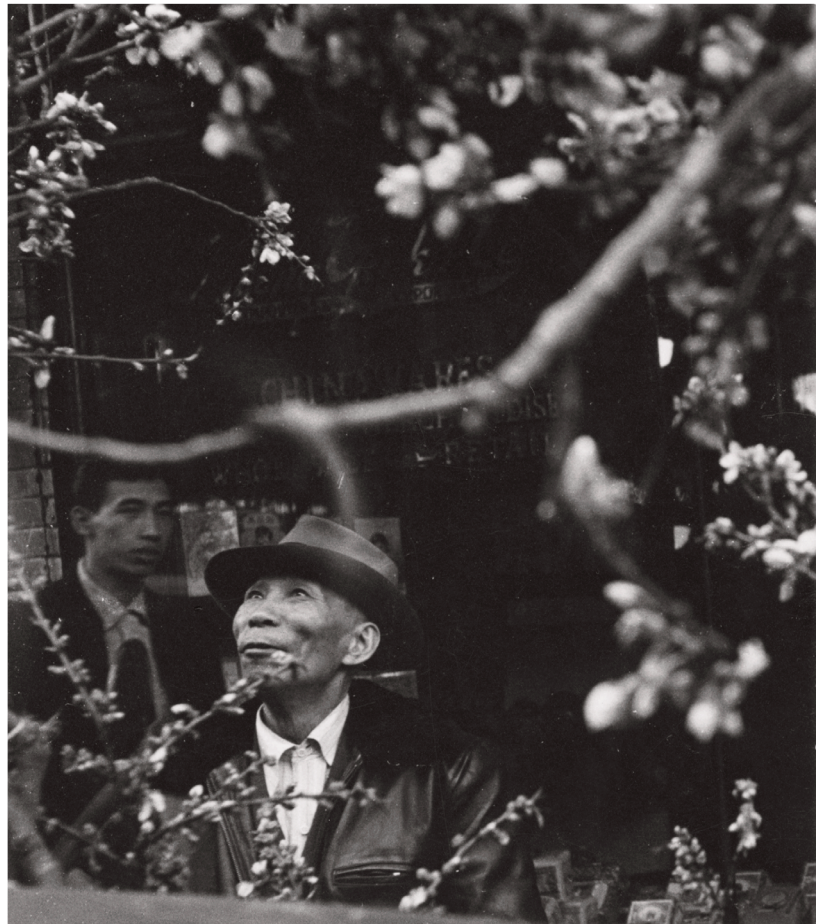
7. Halloween Witnesses, 9 x 13 3/4 inches [4857]



8. Halloween Beards, 9 x 13 3/4 inches [4742]



9. Young Men in Convertible, Chinese New Year Celebration, 9½ x 13¾ inches. Illustrated: *Aperture*, 2:1, 1953, p. 15 [2393]



10. Chinese New Year, 6½ x 5¼ inches [4855]



11. Grant Avenue in a Mirror,
8 3/4 x 11 1/4 inches [4856]



12. Lion Dancers, Chinese New Year, 5 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches [4853]