



Women and the Material Culture of Death

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Examining the compelling and often poignant connection between women and the material culture of death, this collection focuses on the objects women make, the images they keep, the practices they use or are responsible for, and the places they inhabit and construct through ritual and custom. Women's material practices, ranging from wearing mourning jewelry to dressing the dead, stitching memorial samplers to constructing skull boxes, collecting funeral programs to collecting and studying diseased hearts, making and collecting taxidermies, and making sculptures honoring the death, are explored in this collection as well as women's affective responses and sentimental labor that mark their expected and unexpected participation in the social practices surrounding death and the dead. The largely invisible work involved in commemorating and constructing narratives and memorials about the dead—from family members and friends to national figures—calls attention to the role women as memory keepers for families, local communities, and the nation. Women have tended to work collaboratively, making, collecting, and sharing objects that conveyed sentiments about the deceased, whether human or animal, as well as the identity of mourners. Death is about loss, and many of the mourning practices that women have traditionally and are currently engaged in are about dealing with private grief and public loss as well as working to mitigate the more general anxiety that death engenders about the impermanence of life.

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