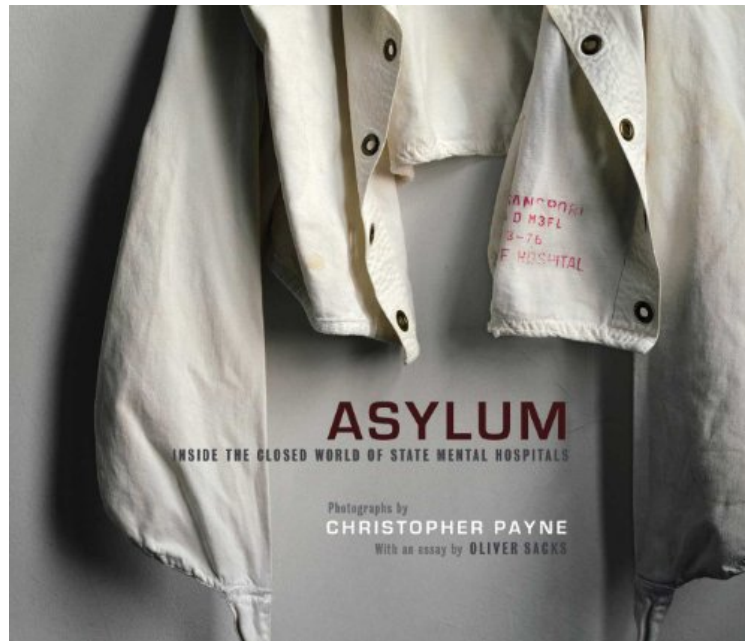



Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals (MIT Press)

Christopher Payne, Oliver Sacks
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Christopher Payne, Oliver Sacks : Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals (MIT Press)
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals (MIT Press):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Hauntingly PoeticBy Stephen J. JaneczkoAt first glance this seems like a picture book of creepy old "nut houses", "looney bins", or whatever vernacular you choose. Sure you can take that and walk away and be correct in a sense. But if you choose to dig deeper you find much more. In the later half of the 19th century when mental asylums were coming into use, these grand structures were seen as a symbol of civic pride and stature much the same way a university or a state of the art hospital is considered. These were looked at as humanely treating thoes who were before chained to walls or thrown into jails with no treatment whatsoever for the cause of thier disorder. While the best of intentions were behind thier construction, they fell far short of thier expectations. This book photographs these haunting and delapitated places that have almost become likenesses of the very minds they were built to treat. Here the book is sectioned off very well between photographs of the outer facades, the regular wards, the work areas where the hospitals employed for a time the very patients as part of thier therapy, operating and treatment rooms, and the morgues. Not something for every coffee take. But for the curious of the strange and unique, this book is some real heavy material. Highly recommend! 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A solid photographic essay ...By BradAn excellent photographic essay on a history and aspect of medical science that far too many people would rather avoid looking into. So much so, that my mom won't even look at this book. I value history. I value human rights. I also feel strongly that photography and visual media are the best ways to communicate history, as well as document social and political issues. We owe a lot to the urban explorer who is willing to tackle these issues and bring such work to the table for discussion. It is, therefore, not surprising that Mr.

Payne found almost every hospital he spoke with in regards to this project was happy to open its doors to him. Many people in the profession are frustrated by the politics and lack of understanding when it comes to mental illness. This book matters because it investigates this problem by making it accessible to everyone. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A must-have for urban explorers/photographers. By jgAs a photographer who has an unquenchable appetite for history and urban exploring in old ruins, *Asylum*, is a photography-nerd's dream come true. The pictures are hauntingly beautiful in a tragic way. While there is not a narrative that will give you stories of any individual patient, the beauty of this book is the photography. It enables one to create an image in their head and only imagine what life must have been like for those left to live/die; and often die; in state-run mental hospitals. I cannot recommend it highly enough for those who are interested in the subject matter. These are easily some of the most stunning photos I've ever seen in the urban exploring/abandoned world realm. It's been a fantastic conversation starter and coffee table piece for me.

For more than half the nation's history, vast mental hospitals were a prominent feature of the American landscape. From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth, over 250 institutions for the insane were built throughout the United States; by 1948, they housed more than a half million patients. The blueprint for these hospitals was set by Pennsylvania hospital superintendant Thomas Story Kirkbride: a central administration building flanked symmetrically by pavilions and surrounded by lavish grounds with pastoral vistas. Kirkbride and others believed that well-designed buildings and grounds, a peaceful environment, a regimen of fresh air, and places for work, exercise, and cultural activities would heal mental illness. But in the second half of the twentieth century, after the introduction of psychotropic drugs and policy shifts toward community-based care, patient populations declined dramatically, leaving many of these beautiful, massive buildings -- and the patients who lived in them -- neglected and abandoned. Architect and photographer Christopher Payne spent six years documenting the decay of state mental hospitals like these, visiting seventy institutions in thirty states. Through his lens we see splendid, palatial exteriors (some designed by such prominent architects as H. H. Richardson and Samuel Sloan) and crumbling interiors -- chairs stacked against walls with peeling paint in a grand hallway; brightly colored toothbrushes still hanging on a rack; stacks of suitcases, never packed for the trip home. Accompanying Payne's striking and powerful photographs is an essay by Oliver Sacks (who described his own experience working at a state mental hospital in his book *Awakenings*). Sacks pays tribute to Payne's photographs and to the lives once lived in these places, "where one could be both mad and safe."

Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals contains sadly beautiful photographs by Christopher Payne and a masterful essay by Oliver Sacks that reminds us that state hospitals were not always places of neglect and abuse but also of true asylum -- of refuge from the stresses of life. The book presents us with a world of abandoned buildings, forgotten ashes, and derailed futures. It packs a powerful punch. (Elyn R. Saks, author of *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness*, and Professor, USC Law School) *Asylum* is a haunting, beautiful book of lost dreams and lost minds. It is a reminder that society's ideals deteriorate more rapidly than the structures built to facilitate them. Asylums for the insane, which started with high intentions, usually ended in horror and neglect. Oliver Sacks has written a deeply moving elegy for the lives of those who lived, and often died at these asylums and Christopher Payne has captured the soul of the asylums themselves through his extraordinary photographs. I cannot imagine forgetting this book: it has evoked sadness, awe, and shame. (Kay Redfield Jamison, Professor of Psychiatry, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and author of *An Unquiet Mind*) The book will appeal to historians or scholars of material culture as well as to the medical personnel, photography lovers, and citizens familiar with the lore and lure of asylums. (Jane Simonsen *The Annals of Iowa*) Astoundingly beautiful work on a subject that rarely gets the attention. (Aaron Britt Dwell) Beautifully researched, exquisitely photographed and expertly composed and edited... Extraordinary. (Frieze) Christopher Payne's photographs perfectly match his subjects: they are strong, yet understated and dignified -- a fitting tribute to the talented architects who built these asylums and the troubled people they sheltered. It's impossible to look at this wonderful book without imagining the people who lived in these formidable structures, and wondering about their lives and what happened to them. (Henry Horenstein, photographer)... *Asylum* is of enormous value, as a record of how such places looked in their final years. More than that, and despite its dismal subject matter, it makes for a remarkable and endlessly fascinating book, one that can be recommended with enthusiasm to both the architectural historian and the general reader. (Times Literary Supplement) About the Author Christopher Payne is a photographer and practicing architect in New York City and the author of *New York's Forgotten Substations: The Power Behind the Subway*. The late Oliver Sacks was a neurologist and the author of *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, *Awakenings*, *Musicophilia*, and other books.