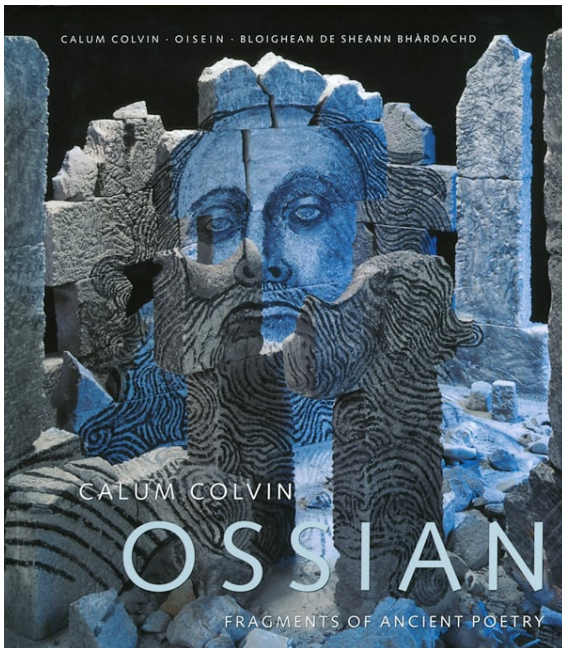




Calum Colvin: Ossian- fragments of Ancient Poetry

Tom Normand

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Calum Colvin is one of Scotland's most innovative and exciting contemporary photographers. In his work he creates a kaleidoscope of figures, symbols and ideas, which are blended into the most vibrant and stimulating images. With this project, Colvin has explored the mysterious world of Ossian. Ossian, a third century Celtic bard, was first discovered by James MacPherson, himself a poet but also a cultural entrepreneur and an adventurer. MacPherson published the ballads of Ossian in the years after 1760. These mournful elegies to the lost world of the Gael became a cause celebre in Enlightenment society. On the one hand, MacPherson was hailed as the discoverer and translator of a "Celtic Homer", while on the other, he was accused by Samuel Johnson, of having perpetrated a cruel fraud on the public. While this dispute rumbled on, the poems of Ossian became feted throughout Europe and America and touched the art of poets, writers and composers such as Burns, Goethe, Longfellow and Mendelssohn. Colvin has taken these events as the basis for his surreal meditation on contemporary culture. Through the ideas and associations inspired by MacPherson's Ossian, he has produced a discourse on national identity, "authenticity" and the human psyche. It is characteristic of Colvin that he has successfully explored these difficult themes while simultaneously creating accessible, provocative photographs.