



Real to Me Jacob Haupt

About the Artist

Jacob Haupt is an artist working with photography, video, and sculpture. His work employs pop culture as both metaphor and mirror for addressing the tragedy of becoming an adult. After completing the book *Infinity Gate* with Noah Jackson in 2015, he recently released a photobook of his own, *Gloom*. Airlock Gallery (CA) hosted his first solo show *Beyond the Super Rainbow* in 2015, and he has had two further solo exhibitions of his work, at Gallery 303 in 2016 and at the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art in 2019. He has continued to exhibit nationally, internationally, online, and in print. His work has been featured by Self Publish Be Happy, Vice, Musee Magazine, Der Greif, Don/Dean, and Ordinary Magazine, among others.



Left: *Embrace*, 2018;
Cover: *Necromancer
and Demons*, 2020

Real to Me

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The overwhelming first impression one gets from Jacob Haupt's images of monsters and superheroes is that of sincere playfulness. The colors are vibrant, the costumes are charmingly homemade, and the performers seem to be having a blast, which we can sense even though their faces are often hidden behind masks. Haupt has an affection for pop culture that is light-hearted yet deeply invested. The pictures included in *Real to Me* reference comics, movies and video games to which the artist holds deep, almost spiritual connections. Though the images may first appear amateur, they are meticulously conceived and crafted. Haupt creates detailed sketches for each picture and goes to great lengths to find materials for props, costumes and sets that strike the right balance between affable goofball and polished cosplayer. The result is a game of dress up that is supremely irresistible. Yet for all the infectious joy, there is an undercurrent of angst that is hard to pin down. It is the twinge of loss that makes nostalgia so pungent, or what Haupt has referred to as "the tragedy of becoming an adult." It's as if Haupt is processing his own life and experiences through a filter of pop culture, nostalgia and fantasy to create a revealing kind of self-portrait or family album.

Born in California, Haupt moved to Salt Lake City, Utah when he was still an infant. He was raised in the Church of Latter-day Saints, which held strict rules about the kinds of entertainment that were permitted. Haupt's parents, however, were not so strict about what he read and watched, so he grew up in the 1990s watching horror, sci-fi, and action movies, reading comics books, and playing Dungeons and Dragons and video games. As an undergraduate Haupt began to craft these childhood fantasies into images, reveling in the transformation of ordinary materials into otherworldly capes and masks. He loved to escape into these worlds of fantasy and adventure, but noted, "A love of fantasy does not necessarily equate to a disinterest in reality, but it does cultivate a unique loneliness."

This collision of playful exuberance and unique loneliness is on full display in his 2016 series *Gloom*, where Haupt performs a series of images as Batman. In a monumentally large image titled *Batman Wept*, Haupt wears the famous cowl which he painstakingly made by layering plastic bags in duct tape and poster board, then covering this with masking tape and several layers of house paint, and finally inserting white printer paper behind the eye openings. He is hunched over a cardboard Gotham City skyline, dejected, and alone. Silver rain drops made from craft paper and glitter streak across the picture. Batman is famous for his heroics, his uncompromising morality, and his keen detective

skills, but his other deep-rooted character traits—anger, brutality and isolation—are less idealistic. Another photo in the series shows Batman’s bedside table with a picture of his rival/love interest Catwoman (portrayed in the photograph by Haupt’s wife Evelyn) in a heart-shaped frame. In another picture Batman is being smothered by sentient plants, a nod to the villain Poison Ivy.

The pictures and the sentiments are goofy and sweet and more than a little sad. The creation of Gloom roughly coincides with a flurry of major life changes for Haupt. Within a few years he graduated from college, got married, became a father and left his community’s church. Of course most of these events are joyful, but the “tragedy of becoming an adult” is about leaving the carefree world of childhood. Haupt’s Batman is comically lonely, terrorized by villains and desperately in search of connection. In one image we see Batman’s gloved hand reaching up to grasp Catwoman’s before a blood red sky. The hero in need of being saved.

Batman is only one of many popular cultural references in Haupt’s work; another touch point is Star Wars. Because many of the themes within Star Wars resonated with the teachings and theology of the Mormon Church, Haupt and his community were especially interested in it. The notions of clear light and dark sides as well as a strict code of moral ethics that is only followed by members of a special community strongly echoed his religious upbringing. Haupt stated: “The idea of being guided by the wisdom of departed ancestors was especially familiar, the “force ghosts” who appeared to Luke like they did to Joseph Smith. Even the fact that the Jedi have temples and special clothing that sets them apart seemed to link Star Wars directly to our community.”

An early Star Wars-inspired image from Haupt is also his first collaboration with his own daughter, Talia. Here Haupt performs as a minor character from the movies, the heroic rebel pilot Nien Nunb, and Talia plays the pilot’s child. Haupt pushes his daughter in a stroller, which is covered in a sheet to resemble a hovercraft, and both wear hand-made masks in front of the background of an alien planet made from modeling clay and fish tank gravel. Talia holds an oversized lollipop while wearing a golden sequined dress. There is nothing dire here, no city to save—just a father and daughter out for a walk, a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

In another series, Ultraforce, Haupt and his family and friends are dressed as Power Ranger-like heroes. The costumes are made from brightly colored spandex suits, motorcycle helmets and dishwasher’s gloves. In one image a man in a gray suit ascends with a jetpack, looking back at us over his shoulder to give us a thumbs-up. In another, two heroes—Blue and Pink, performed by Haupt and his wife—embrace before an artificial gradient sunset. Pink holds

Blue’s waist, and Blue cradles Pink’s helmet. There is only a small distance between their bodies, and their helmets touch as Blue’s visor rests on the crown of Pink’s head. It is a saccharine moment in a bad children’s television show. It is a tender and true moment in one marriage and two lives.

Many images from Real to Me are from the horror-movie-inspired series Did I Scare You. Here Haupt and his family perform as demons, gargoyles, necromancers and skeletons. These pictures are bright, exuberant and irresistible. They evoke the giddy delight of watching scary movies at childhood sleepovers, basking in the build of tensions and the euphoric release of fright. They are also family portraits, an ongoing document of a family growing together. Talia is no longer a toddler in Nien Nunb’s stroller, but a mighty winged fiend, standing on the kitchen counter and mugging gleefully for her father’s camera. Haupt is a purple bat in full-body spandex, leaping for the camera. Evelyn is a serene angel in white, holding an enormous mythical sword.

Only one picture, Necromancer, includes Jacob, Evelyn and Talia together. Talia is the sorceress, raising the demons. Her face and hands are painted white, and she is clad in black robes, a hood covering her eyes. Jacob and Talia are the risen devils in head-to-toe spandex, vamping with fangs, horns, and pointy tails. Talia is committed to the bit, gritting her teeth, but it’s hard not to imagine mom and dad smiling from ear to ear beneath their masks. It’s a true family portrait overflowing with love and delight.

Real to Me poses the question: What is real in a fantasy? The relationships are real, the feelings are real, and the love for stories, play and adventure is real. Perhaps the demons, heroes and monsters are made up, but that’s not quite true either. Everything here represents a deep, very real truth. Some are obvious, and some are not quite so easy to put into words, but they are all incredibly, painfully, joyfully real. At least to Haupt.



Images from left to right: *Batman Wept*, 2016; *Nien Nunb and Child*, 2018

	<i>Batman Wept</i>	2016 Archival Pigment Print 40×50 inches Edition 2 of 3	\$2,800
	<i>Catwoman Frame</i>	2016 Archival Pigment Print 16×20 inches Edition 1 of 10	\$600
	<i>Batman Covered in Vines</i>	2016 Archival Pigment Print 16x20 inches Edition 1 of 10	\$600
	<i>Green Plant Monster</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20x25 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,000
	<i>Batman and Catwoman Hands Reaching Over Gotham</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20x20 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,000
	<i>Buff Demon</i>	2021 Archival Pigment Print 24x30 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,200
	<i>Demon</i>	2017 Archival Pigment Print 20x25 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,000
	<i>Angel Blood Quest</i>	2017 Archival Pigment Print 37.5x60 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$2,800
	<i>Flying Bat</i>	2020 Archival Pigment Print 20x25 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,000
	<i>Jet Pack Man</i>	2018 Archival Pigment Print 32x40 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$2,000

	<i>Embrace</i>	2018 Archival Pigment Print 40x50 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$2,800
	<i>Spiderman and Mary Jane Holding Hands in Central Park</i>	2021 Archival Pigment Print 16×20 inches Edition 1 of 10	\$600
	<i>Sad Spiderman</i>	2021 Archival Pigment Print 20x25 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,000
	<i>Talia Ghost</i>	2015 Archival Pigment Print 16x20 inches Edition 1 of 10	\$600
	<i>Skeleton Man</i>	2021 Archival Pigment Print 24x30 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,200
	<i>Gargoyle</i>	2021 Archival Pigment Print 24x30 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,200
	<i>Nien Nunb and Child</i>	2018 Archival Pigment Print 40x50 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$2,800
	<i>Necromancer and Demons</i>	2020 Archival Pigment Print 20x25 inches Edition 1 of 3	\$1,000
	<i>Looking at Clouds</i>	Lightbox Transparency Print 30x40 inches	NFS
	<i>Friends Watching a Sunset</i>	Lightbox Transparency Print 40x30 inches	NFS

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