



THURS 12.8

RHONA BITNER: STAGE Howard Yezerski Gallery,
14 Newbury St., Boston. Through Dec. 23. 617-262-0550.

There's nothing like the anticipation as the lights go down in a theater before the show — it's a collective surrender to the magic to come. In her new show at Howard Yezerski Gallery, **GALLERY PICK** photographer Rhona Bitner, who in the past has shot portraits of circus performers, turns to the pregnant thrill of the darkened stage. And dark it is: Bitner uses Fuji film, which gives her deeper, richer blacks. She prints in high gloss on a large scale; if you stand right in front of a photograph, you'll see yourself reflected on the stage. These photos work on two levels. They capture the sense of supercharged fantasy that stage performance can stir, and with their play of spotlights in the dark, they take on a haunting abstraction. If you didn't know that "MARI" was a curtain, you might just see a swath of pleated purple in the darkness, strung between delicate copper loops and a slash of red. Either way, Bitner puts us on the edge of imagination's precipice, ready to dive in.

CATE MCQUAID