

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

1. *Randy's Rodeo, San Antonio, TX*, 2009
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
2. *Sam Phillips Recording Service, Memphis, TN*, 2008
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
3. *Grande Ballroom, Detroit, MI*, 2008
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
4. *United Sound Systems, Detroit, MI*, 2008
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
5. *The Masque, Los Angeles, CA*, 2009
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
6. *Harp'o's, Detroit, MI*, 2008
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
7. *Electric Lady Studios, New York, NY*, 2007
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
8. *Tuxedo Junction (Nixon Building), Birmingham, AL*, 2010
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
9. *CBGB, New York, NY*, 2006
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
10. *Ocean Way Recording, Los Angeles, CA*, 2009
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
11. *Blind Pig, Ann Arbor, MI*, 2008
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
12. *Whisky A Go-Go, Los Angeles, CA*, 2009
color coupler print, 40" x 40"
13. *Chess Records, Chicago, IL*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
14. *Broken Spoke, Austin, TX*, 2009
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
15. *Cobo Arena, Detroit, MI*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
16. *Graceland, Memphis, TN*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
17. *Howard Theater, Washington, DC*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
18. *Overton Park Shell, Memphis, TN*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
19. *The Sutler, Nashville, TN*, 2010
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
20. *Sound Factory, Los Angeles, CA*, 2009
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
21. *American Bandstand (Enterprise Center), Philadelphia, PA*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
22. *KLRU-TV: Austin City Limits, Austin, TX*, 2009
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
23. *New Roxy Theater, Clarksdale, MS*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
24. *Red's Lounge, Clarksdale, MS*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
25. *Norman Petty Recording Studios, Clovis, NM*, 2009
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
26. *First Church of Deliverance, Chicago, IL*, 2008
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
27. *Pasadena Civic Auditorium, Pasadena, CA*, 2009
color coupler print, 20" x 20"
28. *Max Yasgur's Farm, Bethel, NY*, 2007
color coupler print, 20" x 20"

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Rhona Bitner's photographs have been internationally exhibited and are represented in permanent collections including those of The Art Institute of Chicago; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Maison Européenne de la Photographie; and the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris. Bitner holds a B.S. from New York University, and studied at the Parsons School of Design. Presently, she is a faculty member at the School of the International Center of Photography in New York. Recent awards include a Fellowship in Photography from the New York Foundation for the Arts, 2010 and a Fellowship from the Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation, Brooklyn, 2009-10. Recent exhibitions include BFAS Blondeau Fine Art Services, Geneva, 2011; and the Rencontres d'Arles in France, 2010. A selection of her *CIRCUS* work will be shown at the Vienna Kunsthalle, Austria in 2012. Rhona Bitner is a native New Yorker. She works in New York and Paris.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The University Art Museum wishes to thank The Instructionally Related Activities Fund, the Constance W. Glenn Fund for Exhibition and Education Programs, CSULB College of the Arts, the Bess J. Hodges Foundation, the Arts Council for Long Beach, The Pasadena Arts Alliance, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services for their continued programming support. We are also grateful to BFAS Blondeau Fine Art Services, Geneva; Fine Art Solutions, and The Icon for their generous assistance in the production of this exhibition. The artist wishes to thank all the individuals and venues involved in the project for their assistance, gracious generosity, support and warm welcome.

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Cover Image: Sam Phillips Recording Service, Memphis, TN, 2008. ©Rhona Bitner. Courtesy of the artist and BFAS Blondeau Fine Art Services, Geneva.

University Art Museum

College of the Arts
California State University Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd. Long Beach, CA 90840
562.985.5761 • www.csulb.edu/uam

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STATIC NOISE

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF RHONA BITNER

STATIC NOISE: The Photographs of Rhona Bitner



Norman Petty Recording Studios, Clovis, NM, 2009

RHONA BITNER: Listen

by Lenny Kaye

It's like going back to the old neighborhood. You don't live there anymore; but there it is, where it was. You're revisiting.

The who-knows-when of time as it meets the geography of space. One moves forward and the other stays put, the crumbling remains of an old stone wall, an intersection now clover-leafed into a superhighway, a car park; sometimes a commemorative plaque to mark the spot, or preserved in the amber of a historical district.

There's the old movie theater, now an apostolic church, once a vaudeville house. Been through the bump and grind, on its way to being covered in vinyl siding, soon to be an appliance store, a condo, a fast food outlet chain. Big cities don't remember until after the wrecking ball is over. Country shacks become overgrown with weeds, reclaimed by forest. The transience. Here today, gone tomorrow.

Me, I like to know where I am. I've waited outside Joe Meek's second-floor walkup on Holloway Road in north London, where a pay phone near the door rings, and I answer, and no one's on the line. I've knelt in the manger of Sun Records in Memphis. Been to the empty lot where Buddy Holly's boyhood home in Lubbock once stood, picking up and pocketing a stone to take away as talisman. Buried a guitar pick at the crossroads of Highways 61 and 49, where Robert Johnson made his devilish pact and signed his name in blood. I've lived down the street from the once-splendor of the Brooklyn Paramount, bank in the lobby of the once-Fillmore East. The inhabitation of ghost.

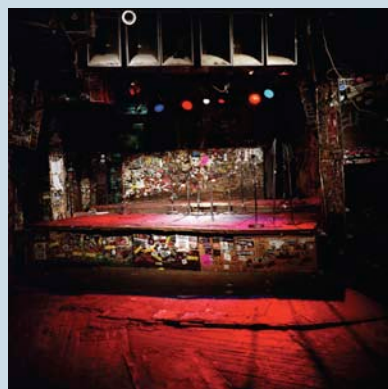
Sometimes the view needs to be caught quickly, like the sides of buildings exposed when their neighbors are torn down, revealing the shape of rooms, stray plumbing, the silhouette of former occupants, only to disappear beneath a new sheet of brickwork and upward thrust. Cities build on their own remains, the cannibalism of urban life, layer after archeological layer of debris and discard. You can't waste any time if you want to go sightseeing.

Still here.

For music, it might well be the still hear. The past echoes, a time delay measured in years, not milliseconds. Sometimes, standing on hallowed ground, you can hear the distant repeat, the moment's breath as it reaches through the now and then to the spot on this random earth where something took place, and we still remember.

Still. The word hardly resonates within music's ubiquitous racket. You just have to listen for the sound that remains. The sound tracks.

Rhona Bitner began photographing these interiors of sonic reflection late in 2006, when CBGB's, that venerable Bowery dive of thirty three years aging, was about to sing its swan song. She stood before the stage, scarred by layers of feedback and flyers promoting bands whose hopes and dreams still resonated from the monitors, and aimed and fired and caught the light as it approached the E of MC squared. Energy. Maximum Combustion. And then repeat. The theorem of rock and roll.



CBGB, New York, NY, 2006

It was a natural progression within the focal lens of her camera eye, moving from the encircling rings of the circus and its principal comedic tragedians, the clowns to stages of theaters in their heartbeat before the curtains open, the holding breath that is anticipation for audience and performer alike; to combining all three in the greatest show on earth, at least where it found its place in the twentieth century as it unravels into its next millennium.

She visualizes a history of American music "by attempting to photograph every iconic, mythic and historic venue still standing, using rock and roll as a parenthesis and punk as a nucleus." To look at the raised platform of performance and hear the sound in her head. She went to Electric Lady Studios and made her second picture, of instruments awaiting and microphones in placement, framed by the interstellar mural commissioned by Jimi Hendrix that implies the speed of light as it overtakes sound. She stared at these paired images of two different venues of musical expression for months, wondering and in wonderment, and then she started traveling, mapping a landscape where the walls have ears.



Electric Lady Studios, New York, NY, 2007

Bitner only wants to be inside. Outside you can't hear the music (unless the show took place out of doors), and thus "How would you be able to hear the photographs?" She has rules. "If it's completely demolished, I can't photograph it. If it's turned into a bank, or a chain store, there's no point. The echoes are gone. But if it's still there...."

She doesn't inject herself into the portrait. There's no setup, or staging ("No need," she says),

no additional lighting unless, as she found at the Howard Theater in Washington D.C., there was only the pitch of black, and lets the space tell her where to position her camera. Much of the time is spent awaiting. "I stand and listen. The space breathes. It tells you how it can be heard." She might shoot four or five venues a day after researching their histories for many months.

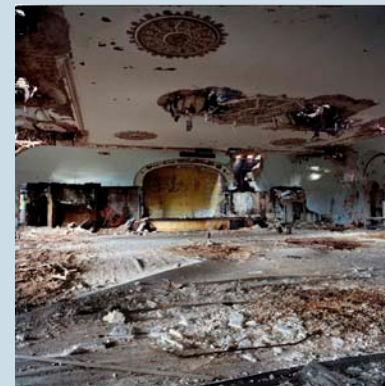
"It is not about nostalgia. I am here, in this place, on this day, this is what is left." And when she visits, people tell her stories about what happened, who played there, how loud or hushed it was and how they were moved, howls of remembrances that provide the frame, and where to hang the photo on a wall where it revolves in consciousness like a record, ready to be played again and again.

"I've been on that stage."

This is the other side of the mirror, the performer's perspective. Seeing yourself as the audience might, feeling the sound bounce back to you from the second balcony; or listening over the speakers after the once-in-a-lifetime take has been emerged from your oversoul. Even for the places I've never played, perhaps only imagined, you can feel what kind of music might suddenly arise unbidden from voice and fingers, as the venue guides you toward what it wants to hear, shaping your sound, and how the audience might respond, among the many variables of performance come out to play.

Daylight streams in from the holes in the ceiling of the Grande Ballroom in Detroit. It's like a follow spot, and I can imagine the MC5 in full throttle. The American Bandstand from which Dick Clark taught a generation to clap along, the dancers showing off their latest shimmy shimmy ko-ko bop. Elvis' living room in Graceland, where the piano still bears the fingerprints of gospel songs that he would sing late at night, hoping to save his immortal soul, as he most assuredly would, a short journey from Memphis' Overton Park, where he first elicited prayers and hosannas. The field of dreams that is Woodstock's pastoral meadow. The stairs at Chess Records where Muddy and Chuck and the Moonglows strolled up for their session, and down after, all shades of blues.

Rhona Bitner has amassed more than two hundred images at this point in her odyssey,



Grande Ballroom, Detroit, MI, 2008

with perhaps another hundred to go. The prints she makes are lush, imbued with color, inviting, as if you're on the guest list. Their naturalism combined with a temporal and heightened realism places you within the borders of composition, positioned between the speakers to fill the full stereoscopic dimension of each depiction. There is the casualness of snapshot as it moves toward the iconic. You can order a beer at Red's Lounge, look at the framed records overlooking the console at Norman Petty's studio, and see that these are settings that are as much working environments as formal enclosures. Made to be used, often abused; surely amused at the transformation that will occur when the first note of the twelve-tone scale is struck, signaling beginning. Sometimes the music is over, and hush descends. Sometimes it never ends, only moving from one location to another, on the road, which has its own rhythm and momentum and reality. Music is a moving target, after all, the right note at the right time, and then reverberation.

These photographs bring together the unlikely of musical pairings. Tuxedo Junction, that ancient stopover on the chitlin' circuit outside of Birmingham, Alabama, stands near to the Masque, deep within Hollywood, a punk stopover on another kind of short-circuit. Randy's Rodeo hosted the Sex Pistols' first and only American tour; Sam Phillips might have enjoyed recording "Anarchy In The UK" ("That's a pop song now," I can hear him saying). The cross-contagion of these musics is what keeps the formulaics of sound constantly

January 27 – April 15, 2012

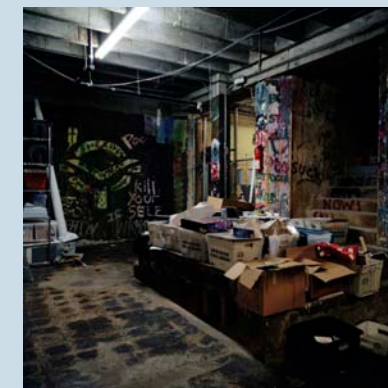


Tuxedo Junction (Nixon Building), Birmingham, AL, 2010

evolving, creating new ways of expressing the universality of human emotion: sorrow, anger, frustration, pleasuring and romancing, and love above all.

When Rhona Bitner began photographing in theaters, she felt it was like entering a black box, very much like the inside of a camera. "I wondered what happens when you remove the performer from the spotlight, to experience another chord of performance on a two dimensional surface." This trick of prestidigitation—now you hear it, now you don't—imbues the click of her shutter with the sensation of downbeat, on the one, as the music begins its magic, even if it—like Elvis—has left the building. The crowd still stomps for more.

Encore.



The Masque, Los Angeles, CA, 2009