



Grande Ballroom, Detroit, MI, October 29, 2008, from the series "Listen"

Date

October 29, 2008 (printed 2013)

Primary Maker

Rhona Bitner

Medium

Chromogenic print mounted on aluminum

Description

In her photography, Rhona Bitner interrogates the nature of performance, spectacle, and theatricality; past series of her work have dealt with stages, circuses, and clowns. Grande Ballroom, Detroit, MI, October 29, 2008 is part of an ongoing series begun in 2006 called "Listen," through which Bitner has attempted to create a visual catalogue of American rock 'n' roll history. The series consists of color photographs made with a medium-format film

camera of the sites of important musical events, such as concert halls, arenas, churches, clubs, and recording studios as well as less predictable places, such as the living room where Nirvana played its first house party and Folsom State Prison, where Johnny Cash performed his famous concert for inmates. Through these images, Bitner underscores the important role music can play in society and in our individual lives, along with its utility as a chronological yardstick. She is interested in the wide reach of American popular music, its ability to connect people, and its profound impact on human experience and the zeitgeist of certain eras. Yet, in their lack of human presence, these images convey the deep silence of an irretrievable past. This photograph depicts Detroit's Grande Ballroom, which opened in the late 1920s as a dance hall for jazz and big band music; revived in 1966 after a period of decline, it went on to be a birthplace of punk, where bands such as the Stooges and the MC5 got their start, until it closed in 1972. Juxtaposed with the dilapidated space of the ballroom, its ceiling collapsing onto dusty floors, are the lush color, crisp detail, and glossy finish of the photograph itself. At the center of the image, a shaft of light directs itself through a hole in the roof and onto the now-empty stage. "I became intrigued," the artist explained in 2011, "by the notion of physical emptiness (co)existing with the memory of what had occurred there." Grande Ballroom, Detroit, MI, October 29, 2008 is one of two photographs from the "Listen" series that were included in the Fall 2013 exhibition A Sense of Place and were purchased by the Wellin after the close of the show. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) From the "Listen" series, a project attempting to photograph every significant rock-and-roll venue in the United States, starting with venues the predated Elvis and ending with those in operation at the time of the breakup of the Ramones in 1985. Working with a medium-format film camera, Bitner isolates herself in each space and subsequently chooses one image per venue: over the past six years she has documented over 200 venues in various stages of usage or decrepitude. Her lush, colorful photographs reflect the energy and layered history of spaces in their prime.

Dimensions

Overall: 40 × 40 in. (101.6 × 101.6 cm) Frame: 41 × 41 1/16 × 1 1/2 in. (104.1 × 104.3 × 3.8 cm)