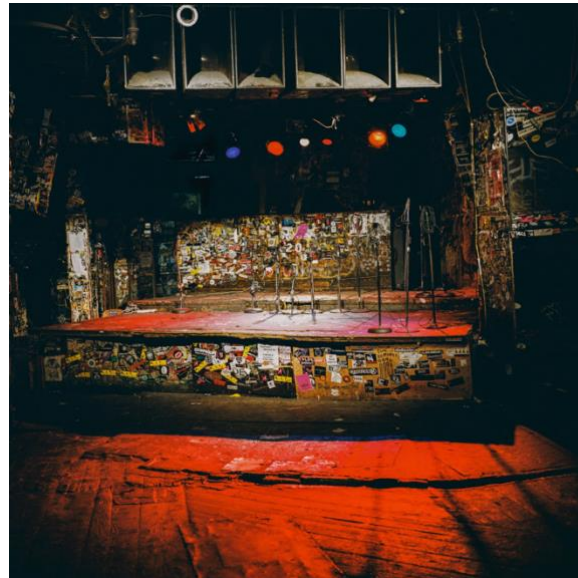


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**THE WELLIN MUSEUM OF ART AT HAMILTON COLLEGE PRESENTS THE
FIRST SOLO MUSEUM SURVEY OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY RHONA BITNER**

**On view September 9 – December 9, 2023, the Exhibition Features Seven Photographic
Series by Bitner dating from the 1990s to Today**



Rhona Bitner, photographs from the “Listen” series, 2006-2018. Fujiflex print mounted on aluminum. 40 x 40 in. (101.6 x 101.6 cm). ©Rhona Bitner / ADAGP, Artist’s Rights Society, New York
LEFT: *KLRU-TV, Austin City Limits, Austin, TX, June 3, 2009*
RIGHT: *CBGB, New York, NY, October 4, 2006*

Clinton, NY—Rhona Bitner’s sumptuous photographs depict the physical and material domains of music, dance, and the theater, among other subjects. The exhibition *Rhona Bitner: Resound* marks the artist’s first museum survey. This retrospective features work from seven series of photographs spanning the last three decades including original Cibachrome prints from the 1990s and newly produced chromogenic and digital prints ranging in scale from the intimate (4 ½ x 6 inches) to the heroic (40 x 55 inches). The exhibition is curated by Tracy Adler, Johnson-Pote Director of the Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, and is on view from September 9 through December 9, 2023.

Much of Bitner’s photographic practice focuses on the spaces, people, and objects related to performance—from popular music and the circus to ballet and classical theater, among other subjects—to create images that evoke personal and collective memory.

Explains Adler, “Bitner has the distinction of being the only artist to be included in three group exhibitions at the Wellin. With this one-person survey, our audiences will gain a deeper understanding of the breadth of her photographic practice through the display of several series from the last 30 years. What I admire about Rhona is that she has continued to grow and explore as an artist throughout her creative career, and now she is finally receiving the recognition her work deserves.”

“Her photographs transcend the archive to attain a deeper and personal connection to the spaces, people, and objects she photographs,” continues Adler. “As an artist, she follows her own passions, and it has led her to many places to tell many stories. She has often remarked that her images are about ‘what is there and what’s implied.’ Those implications are for each of us to discern, drawing from our personal experiences and individual journeys. She is sharing—often in exquisite detail—what she has found along the way in the hope that we connect with her subjects on our own terms.”

Adds Bitner, “I am grateful to Tracy Adler and the Wellin Museum for their unfailing support and faith in my work over the past years, and I am honored by the recognition they extend with this exhibition. With the opportunity to see a broad selection of my projects, I hope viewers will be able to imagine themselves within the spaces and situations the work depicts, and that the photographs will spark their own memories and experiences. This synergy is the pulse of the work.”

The following projects are featured in the exhibition:

Circus

“Circus” (1991–2001) is the earliest series featured in *Resound*. The 39 photographs on view are displayed in two configurations created by the artist and organized according to shapes made by the performers’ expressions, movements, and accessories. Inspired by images Bitner first made while attending a matinee of the expansive three-ring Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus at Madison Square Garden in New York City, the hundreds of photographs that followed were the result of photographing 76 live performances by 46 traveling circus companies over the course of a decade. Over the next several years—and with the initial help of New York’s Big Apple Circus—Bitner went on to photograph circuses in New York and throughout Europe, building on the long-established informal network between troupes to gain access. This series of photographs, made at the end of the twentieth century, unwittingly anticipated the decline of the circus as a popular form of entertainment in the U.S.

Stage

Seven images from this series are included in the exhibition. As “Circus” wound down in the early aughts, Bitner began to look at the context and environment within which performers operated. Mounted on the title wall, the first work from “Stage” (2003–8) reveals the curtain parting at the Big Apple Circus. Over the next five years, through relationships developed with traditional theater and opera companies throughout the U.S. and France, Bitner worked with in-house lighting technicians to photograph the rise and fall of the curtain, attracted to the symbolic nature of those consequential and ephemeral moments. For the audience and Bitner herself, these instances are full of anticipation and heightened emotion.

Listen

Fourteen images from the “Listen,” series are on view in the exhibition, the first of which depicts CBGB, photographed shortly before that famed New York City club shuttered after 33 years. This image propelled Bitner to embark on the encyclopedic “Listen” series comprising 427 photographs of 395 music venues in 89 cities throughout the U.S. In this project, Bitner mapped the history of American popular

music by photographing “recording studios, clubs, concert halls, arenas, ballrooms, churches, living rooms, prisons, and fields where our most vital music was created, played, witnessed, and engraved,” she explains. From 2006–18, Bitner crisscrossed the nation to make photographs of spaces where the roots of rock and roll were planted. A book of these photographs titled “Listen: Rhona Bitner” was published in 2022 by Rizzoli in English and French editions. “Bitner’s photographs give us a phantom history of American sound from Duke Ellington to the White Stripes, but what you hear depends on the room tone within your own mind.” – Jeff Gordinier, *New York Times*, December 2022

Pointe

Five pictures from the “Pointe” series (2020–present) are included in the exhibition. The toe shoes were given to Bitner by an artist who found them on the street a decade earlier. Bitner recognized the names scribbled on some of the soles as dancers from the New York City Ballet, stamped with dates as far back as 1994. Bitner’s research-based process led her to learn more about the history of ballet, the dancers she identified, and the shoes’ maker, Freed of London. Bitner resolved to focus on the platform, that two-inch surface upon which the dancer balances the entirety of her weight. Bitner commented, “I realized how much strength and effort goes into that point. Each shoe possessed the essence of the ballerina who wore it.”

Headshot

A highly personal work, this group of six images created in 2019 portrays Bitner’s oldest childhood toy, a plush clown head that was originally a windup, rotating musical toy; its age and repairs evident in the photographs.

Ghost Light

In the early days of the pandemic in 2020, Bitner walked the streets of New York City with a small digital camera, revisiting places that have personal memories associated with them. Here, 77 works are displayed as postcards, evocative of messages sent from a faraway place. Shot in black and white, the images recall the architectural photography of Berenice Abbott who began documenting the modernization of New York City in the 1930s and Eugène Atget who photographed disappearing neighborhoods in fin-de-siecle Paris. The title of the series refers to the naked bulb left burning on center stage as a safety measure when a theater is completely dark. Bitner notes, “Its other function is superstitious, to light the way for ghosts said to inhabit virtually every theater.”

Tour

This four-part work grew out of Bitner’s long-held desire to examine the audience and fandom as components of performance. Alongside images offering bird’s-eye views of concert crowds are two text-based images. One is a photograph of a wall label from a 2019 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that featured the instruments of celebrated rock and roll musicians. The label informs visitors that an object belonging to one of the members of the Rolling Stones has been removed and is on tour with the band. The other is of a handmade sign carried by a concert-going friend of the artist who, for decades, has stood outside venues offering to pay a modest amount for any spare ticket.

About Rhona Bitner

Rhona Bitner (b. 1960, New York City; lives and works in New York City and Paris) has participated in exhibitions at Galerie Italienne, Paris (2022); the Daegu Photo Biennial, South Korea (2018); Fondation Bru, Venice (2017); Musée du Louvre, Paris (2015); and Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2012), among other institutions in the U.S. and abroad. Her book *Listen* was published by Rizzoli in 2022. Bitner’s work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida; Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, Clinton, NY; the Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum, California State University, Long Beach; Maison Européenne de la

Photographie, Paris; Fonds national d'Art contemporain, Paris; Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris; and Bibliothèque nationale de France. Bitner is the recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant (2020), New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Photography (2010), and has been an artist-in-residence at Ucross Foundation, Clearmont, Wyoming (2019) and the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, New York (2010). She is currently a fellow at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in New York. Bitner received a BS degree in studio art from New York University.

The publication “Listen: The Stages and Studios That Shaped American Music”

Listen: The Stages and Studios That Shaped American Music is a book of photographs by Rhona Bitner, published by Rizzoli New York, 2022, with a forward by Iggy Pop, afterword by Jason Moran, and texts by Natalie Bell, Greil Marcus, Jon Hammer, edited by Éric Reinhardt. Hardcover / 272 pages / 9.5” x 10.25” / 300 color and b&w photographs and illustrations.

Prompted by the closing of New York’s famed CBGB, Rhona Bitner embarked on a thirteen-year journey to photograph 395 venues across twenty-six states and eighty-nine cities—the studios, concert halls, arenas, high schools, bars, ballrooms, prisons, and fields where the most memorable songs were inspired, recorded, performed, and listened to. Featuring Jimi Hendrix’s recording studio, Elvis’s Graceland music room, Aretha Franklin’s family church, the Georgia auditorium where fourteen-year-old Little Richard was discovered and Ray Charles, Otis Redding, James Brown, and Sam Cooke took the stage, and the high school where a young Bob Dylan first performed, While Bitner recorded these sites empty and silent, the reverberations of sound still echo from within their walls.

About the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art

A teaching museum on the campus of Hamilton College in Clinton, NY, the Wellin invites visitors to discover the arts and form unexpected connections through groundbreaking exhibitions, a globally representative collection, and engaging programming. The Wellin Museum opened in 2012 with Tracy L. Adler as its founding director. Its 30,537-square-foot building was designed by Machado Silvetti and features a 27-foot-high visible archive, over 5,000 square feet of exhibition space, and other amenities that foster common exchange and learning. The Museum collection includes over 7,000 objects representing a broad range of cultures, historical periods, artistic practices, and movements. Through its exhibitions, public programs, and educational outreach, the Museum promotes interdisciplinary approaches that are vital to a liberal arts education. <https://www.hamilton.edu/wellin>

The Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art’s programs are made possible, in part, with funds from the Daniel W. Dietrich ’64 Arts Museum Programming Fund; the Johnson-Pote Museum Director Fund; the John B. Root ’44 Exhibition Fund; the Edward W. and Grace C. Root Endowment Fund; and the William G. Roehrick ’34 Lecture Fund. Additional support for this exhibition has been provided by the Daniel W. Dietrich ’64 Fund for Innovation in the Arts.

Social Media

Join the conversation on social media by tagging @wellinmuseum and using the hashtags #WellinMuseum, #BitnerWellin, and #ResoundWellin

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