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## Bandshells and record bins

Cindy Bernard's silenced shells evoke musical memories

BY KELLE SCHILLACI

Last spring, after a day of battling traffic, heat stroke and the growing stench of camper-hippies and techno-geeks, I looked up from the lawn to the tangle of metal, lights, steel frame and wires that combined into a soundstage erected in the middle of nowhere: Coachella. It was nearing sunset, and up to that point all that kept me navigating my way through sweaty crowds was the promise of the headliner for whom I'd made the sweaty pilgrimage, a band called Radiohead.

After several hours of anticipation (and festival openers), there was a moment, as the sun dipped toward the horizon and the mercury levels dropped, that we found a shady spot in the grass and I became entranced by the structure of the giant performance platform itself. Where yesterday there had been a polo field, today was a stage. And it was profoundly beautiful for its absence of motion, its negation of sound. Pure potential. Cindy Bernard's collection of bandshell photographs at UNLV's Donna Beam Gallery captures that sense of pre-show anticipation, but not through huge arena-show crowds or tangles of expensive sound equipment. Most of Bernard's chromogenic prints depict public bandshells captured in their silent, crowdless off-seasons. Some are encrusted in snow, others backlit by spring or summer blue skies.



Cindy Bernard's "James C. Petrillo Music Shell (Chicago Park District, 1978)"

The exhibit's main postcard print, "James C. Petrillo Music Shell (Chicago Park District, 1978)" is a study in pristine composition. It looks like the perfect album or Bauhaus (design style, not the band) coffee-table book cover. A perfect rectangle framed by deconstructionist-styled steel fencing, the bandshell's main stage area is boarded up with planks for the winter. The foreground is shrouded in thick snow-cover matching an equally blank sky. A bright splash of red skyscraper ignites the Chicago cityscape in the background, offering the otherwise chilly view a touch of post-industrial warmth. Lacking crowds and performers, the bandshell series (other structures hailing from the Midwest or central California) strips these silent structures down to their own aesthetic essences as lines, shapes and patterns of design.

In a two-piece series titled "August 25th, 2001," Bernard leaves behind the public, arena-style structures to capture a before-and-after shot of a live performance space. She seems to be channeling Magritte, with interesting light effects blurring the lines between night and day. The shot appears snapped from the back row of an indoor auditorium, and yet, from over the glow of a string of hanging flashbulbs, you can make out tree branches and a dusk-lit outdoor sky. In the first shot, a crowd packs into the cramped space to watch the show. In the second, more intimate shot, post-show die-hards and friends linger in smaller groups, finishing their drinks and chatting up the musicians.

Maybe it's all the hours I spent scouring the racks of Amoeba Record's album bins in L.A. and San Francisco, but a standout piece for me was one titled "July 25th, 2002," a colorful and incredibly detailed interior shot of the world-famous record store during an in-store band performance. The panoramic shot captures it all: the expressions on the faces of the performers and the crowd, the CD and album cover art lining the new and used bins, the band posters plastering every inch of wall space in the background. I went all goose-fleshy homesick and couldn't seem to pull myself away until I called a friend and set up a trip westbound for a music fix.

Bernard's photos exude an almost-rhythmic musical vibe both in the presence and the absence of actual musicians, a pretty tricky tactic to pull off. While appreciating the silence of the off-season bandshells, I imagined potential "after" shots that filled the rows of empty benches with fans like myself, taking pause in that most sacred of pre-show moments when you stare at the empty stage, waiting, knowing that soon the lights will dim, the crowd will erupt and the music will begin. And yet, the moment the show begins brings us closer to the moment when it will end. So we stand content in our anticipation, staring at the empty shell, waiting.

*Cindy Bernard: Recent Work*

UNLV's Donna Beam Fine Art Gallery

4505 Maryland Parkway

702-895-2787

Through Dec. 15

Free

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