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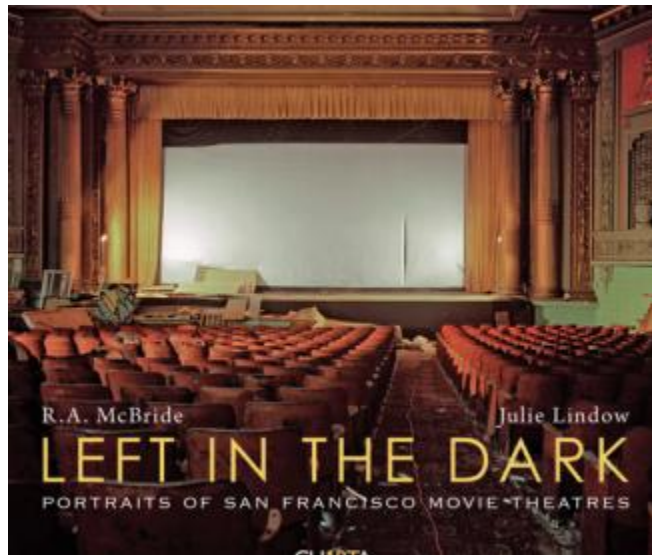
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Moving portraits

By *caitlin*

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WRITERS ISSUE: *Left in the Dark* illuminates San Francisco's movie-going past



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WRITERS ISSUE The Metreon is handy if you require 10 different *Inception* showtimes. But watching a movie there is not same as seeing one — even the *same* one — at a circa-1922 palace like the Castro Theatre, a space lovingly dedicated to the specific pleasure of Going To The Movies. Edited by Julie Lindow (a former Castro employee), the brand-new *Left in the Dark: Portraits of San Francisco Movie Theatres* (Charta Art Books, \$39.95) compiles essays from Bay Area film advocates, paying homage to San Francisco's dwindling population of theaters. The book is illustrated by photographer R.A. McBride's colorful, often haunting images of spaces robust (the Roxie) and ravaged (the New Mission).

Cinephiles will recognize most of the contributors, including San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival director Chi-hui Yang (topic: Chinatown cinemas); Landmark Theatre cofounder and current Balboa Theatre proprietor Gary Meyer (a personal timeline of his life as an exhibitor); and Guardian writer D. Scot Miller (a look at theaters in the onetime "Harlem of the West," the Fillmore), among others. There's also an interview with

author Rebecca Solnit, who points out that the shared-experience aspect of movie-going is lost in a multiplex environment. Buying a ticket in a theater inside a mall, she writes, "you don't have that funny sudden spiritual bond that this person next to you in line, who looks so different, also wants to see cowboys."

Even before they met, Lindow and McBride had a mutual interest in local theaters. "I had been thinking about doing a book to help the movie theaters. At a party that Melinda Stone [another of *Left in the Dark's* essayists] had, I met Rebecca [McBride] and she had started her series of [theater] photographs. So we thought, that might make a great book if we combine these two things together. And then she handled the photos, and I handled the text." The collaborative spirit continued to the selection of contributors. Lindow says making a connection with one author would lead to her to another; she describes the writing process as a true community effort.

By contrast, McBride found that accessing every venue she wanted to document wasn't easy (she was flatly denied access to Cow Hollow's Metro shortly before it closed). She also made some surprising discoveries (a toilet in the projection booth at the Clay, for example).

"There were over 100 theaters at one point in the San Francisco Bay Area — and I've only photographed 19 of them," McBride says, with a certain amount of wistfulness. "One my favorites was the Coronet, which is now gone."

LEFT IN THE DARK: PORTRAITS OF SAN FRANCISCO MOVIE THEATRES

Wed/13, 5:30 p.m. reception;

7 p.m., slideshow with R.A. McBride

SF Camerawork

657 Mission, second floor, SF

www.sfcamerawork.org ^[2]

More events at www.leftinthedark.info ^[3]

Literature Volume 45, Issue 02 Cheryl Eddy

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[1] <mailto:cheryl@sfbg.com>

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