

Review: Vermont

Backstage Pass: Rock & Roll Photography

Shelburne Museum

Shelburne, VT

Through May 7, 2017

shelburnemuseum.org

published in Art New England 2017

“Backstage” implies access, and indeed this exhibition of 266 photographs, taken by over 50 photographers, spanning 6 decades, allows the viewer to share the often intimate, and occasionally profound, relationship forged between artists in front of and behind the camera.

The images in *Backstage Pass* reflect the interests of one anonymous collector, whose motivation appears driven to capture a cataclysmic moment in the musical, cultural and social history of our time, rather than an engagement with any one particular aesthetic approach to image making.

The collection is barely contained in the two main galleries of the Shelburne Museum’s starkly modern Pizzagalli Center. It includes nearly every significant performer who contributed to the legacy of rock and roll from the 1950s to today, from Elvis to James Brown, the Beatles to Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin to Patti Smith. The images are uniformly framed in black with white mats providing a sense of continuity and displayed by subject, sometimes 3 rows deep. The 22 photographs of Bob Dylan were taken by 11 different photographers and occupy an entire wall in the downstairs gallery. For Dylan lovers this is a treasure trove of nostalgic moments from his early years. Some shots are familiar like the 1963 image of a young Dylan giddy with his first love, Suze Rotolo. This black and white gelatin silver print by Don Hunstein appeared on Dylan’s first album cover.

It is encouraging to see female photographers Kate Simon, Laura Levine and Roberta Bayley so well represented alongside their male

counterparts, Art Kane, Jim Marshall and Bob Gruen, whose son is a Vermont based musician. Kate Simon contributed some of the most emotionally compelling, as well as aesthetically varied, images that are scattered throughout the exhibition. From her 1976 black and white shot of Bob Marley caught off guard in Jamaica to a chromogenic print of a ferocious, catlike Grace Jones, Simon's work stands out. Her 2007 color print *Iggy Pop, at home, Miami FL.*, is so nakedly revealing, it epitomizes that moment of trust, a mixture of luck and talent when a photo becomes art.

Cynthia Close