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Silent Screens: The Decline and Transformation of the American Movie Theater (Creating the North American Landscape)

Michael Putnam

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Michael Putnam : Silent Screens: The Decline and Transformation of the American Movie Theater (Creating the North American Landscape) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Silent Screens: The Decline and Transformation of the American Movie Theater (Creating the North American Landscape):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. sad dream about a bygone way of life By Robert Reid I rarely buy a book immediately after I've read a borrowed copy, but I had to make an exception here. This beautiful and poetic collection of photographs and short essays moves like a dream, though it's a sad dream about a bygone way of life that may have been too good to be true. The book opens with Robert Sklar's essay, which importantly recognizes the fight that trade associations of independent theatre operators put up in order to try to retain local control over cultural cinema offerings; even into the late 30s, most theatres were in small towns and offered a much broader range of movies than we might see today. Unfortunately, major companies, motivated by the lower maintenance and greater revenue from the bigger theatres, eventually dominated cinema and (along with the advent of television) drove most of these screens to near extinction. Molly Haskell's poem, A Wake, mourns a greater loss than this, suggesting that the closing of screens "signaled the passing of a way of being together... families no longer gathered for the big meal in the middle of the day. The photographs are wide-ranging and honest, capturing the small movie houses in various states of abandonment, disrepair, adaptive re-use (particularly as churches), and even demolition. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. A wonderfully nostalgic book By A Customer A couple of months ago I decided to take photos of all the old and forgotten movie theaters in San Juan (the Cinerama, the Riviera, the Radio City, the

Paramount, the Rex). All these places were such a part of my youth that I wanted to capture them before they were torn down. So it was wonderful to see a book of photographs taken by a person with a similar frame of mind. You will love the pictures of neighborhood theaters in Texas, New York. It will make you long for the days of single screen theaters and will bring back some amazing memories. The text written by various movie critics is excellent. I really recommend this book. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Beautiful "Screens" By Dale W. Boyer This is a wonderful, haunting book, which I think at least one of the previous reviewers here has missed the point of. The point is not to show these theaters in their prime, but rather, in pictures of their present state of decay, to hint at the glories that were. If you're looking for a picture book of grand movie palaces, this isn't it. But if you're looking for something that operates on a different plane, the romance of decay, and the melancholy of a world lost, this is definitely it. For all those who want to let their imaginations loose upon the ruins, this book should provide a field day.

The single-screen movie theaters that punctuated small-town America's main streets and city neighborhoods since the 1920s are all but gone. The well-dressed throng of moviegoers has vanished; the facades are boarded. In *Silent Screens*, photographer Michael Putnam captures these once prominent cinemas in decline and transformation. His photographs of abandoned movie houses and forlorn marquees are an elegy to this disappearing cultural icon. In the early 1980s, Putnam began photographing closed theaters, theaters that had been converted to other uses (a church, a swimming pool), theaters on the verge of collapse, theaters being demolished, and even vacant lots where theaters once stood. The result is an archive of images, large in quantity and geographically diffuse. Here is what has become of the Odeons, Strands, and Arcadias that existed as velvet and marble outposts of Hollywood drama next to barbershops, hardware stores, and five-and-dimes. Introduced by Robert Sklar, the starkly beautiful photographs are accompanied by original reminiscences on moviegoing by Peter Bogdanovich, Molly Haskell, Andrew Sarris, and Chester H. Liebs as well as excerpts from the works of poet John Hollander and writers Larry McMurtry and John Updike. Sklar begins by mapping the rise and fall of the local movie house, tracing the demise of small-town theaters to their role as bit players in the grand spectacle of Hollywood film distribution. "Under standard distribution practice," he writes, "a new film took from six months to a year to wend its way from picture palace to Podunk (the prints getting more and more frayed and scratched along the route). Even though the small-town theaters and their urban neighborhood counterparts made up the majority of the nation's movie houses, their significance, in terms of revenue returned to the major motion-picture companies that produced and distributed films, was paltry." In his essay, "Old Dreams," Last Picture Show director Peter Bogdanovich recalls the closing of New York City's great movie palace the mammoth Roxy, the old Paramount near Times Square, the Capitol, and the Mayfair and the more innocent time in which they existed "when a quarter often bought you two features, a newsreel, a comedy short, a travelogue, a cartoon, a serial, and coming attractions." While the images in Putnam's book can be read as a metaphor for the death of many downtowns in America, *Silent Screens* goes beyond mere nostalgia to tell the important story of the disappearance of the single-screen theater, illuminating the layers of cultural and economic significance that still surround it. "These photographs and the loss of which they speak signal the passing of a way of being together." Molly Haskell

List of Theaters by State

Alabama The Lyric, Anniston The Martin, Huntsville

Arizona The Duncan, Duncan

Arkansas The Avon, West Memphis

California The Town, Los Angeles El Capitan, San Francisco The State, Santa Barbara

Connecticut The Dixwell Playhouse, New Haven

The Princess, New Haven

Florida The Gateway, Lake City

Georgia The Judy, Hartwell

Idaho The Ace, Wendell

Illinois The Pekin, Pekin

Indiana The Rem, Remington

The Ritz, Rensselaer

Kansas The Cameo, Kansas City

Kentucky The Crescent, Louisville

The Ohio, Louisville

Louisiana The Madison, Madisonville

The Sabine, Many

The Jefferson, New Orleans

Massachusetts The Strand, Westfield

Michigan The Liberty, Benton Harbor

Mississippi The Magee, Magee

The Star, Mendenhall

The Mono, Monticello

The Park, Pelahatchie

Missouri The Star, Warrensburg

Nebraska The Grand, Grand Isle

New Jersey RKO Proctor's Palace, Newark

New Mexico The Lux, Grants

The State, San Jon

New York The Hollywood, Au Sable

Forks The Broadway, Buffalo

The Lovejoy, Buffalo

The Senate, Buffalo

The Jefferson, New York City

The Little Carnegie, New York City

The 72nd Street East, New York City

North Carolina The Colonial, Chesnee

The Alva, Morganton

Oregon The United Artists, Pendleton

Pennsylvania The Lawndale, Philadelphia

The Rex, Philadelphia

The Spruce, Philadelphia

The York, Philadelphia

The Capitol, Williamsport

Tennessee The Park, Memphis

Texas The Royal, Archer City

The Strand, Chillicothe

The Gem, Claude

The Mulkey, Clarendon

The Texas, Del Rio

The Bowie, Fort Worth

The Chatmas, Hearne

The Queen, Hearne

The Palace, Henderson

The Alabama, Houston

The Almeda, Houston

The Crim, Kilgore

The Gulf, Robstown

The Clinch, Tazwell

The Winnie, Winnie

Virginia The Earle, Big Stone Gap

The Home, Strasburg

Washington The Pasco, Pasco

West Virginia The Ritz, Ansted

The Alpine, Rainelle

"The boarded-up movie theaters in Michael Putnam's *Silent Screens* wear their faded glamour like battered hats. Putnam's photographs, taken with an 8 by 10 view camera, are starkly formalistic: the boxy, Art Deco theaters are largely shot head-on and centrally placed in the frame, making the viewer conscious of minute variations in detail and texture. The stylized neon marquees that read 'Ritz,' 'Lux,' or 'Judy' contrast with the blank peeling facades, as if we can see the dream palace that once was and the shell it has become." (Eric P. Nash *New York Times Book*) "Several

years after *The Last Picture Show*, Larry McMurtry hoped for 'some present-day Walker Evans' to document the abandoned theaters of his youth, and [Michael] Putnam has answered his wish." (*New Yorker*) "Disused small-town and neighborhood movie theaters are to photographer Putnam what the decrepit churches and storefronts of the rural South were to Walker Evans: objects that, austere and photographed in their decline, can cause us to reflect... As you study Putnam's well-composed and well-lit photographs of abandoned theaters, a pang for the lost past inevitably afflicts you. Even more saddening is his record of conversion theaters turned into evangelical churches, bookshops, banks, restaurants, a swimming pool." (*Richard Schickel Wilson Quarterly*) "Haunting, edgy, black-and-white photos... accompanied by commentary on love, loss and change by Larry McMurtry, Peter Bogdanovich, Andrew Sarris, Molly Haskell, Chester H. Liebs and John Hollander." (*Publishers Weekly*) "A haunting portrait of the gradual decline of cinemas in small-town America. Putnam's book is a superb example of a documentary project's ability to arrest particular, concrete situations and their attending emotional counterparts and thereby illuminate the social and economic movements that engender them." (*DoubleTake*) "Takes us back to the wonderful world of the small hometown theater not as they were but what they have become. A wonderful chronicle of a time when twenty-five cents was the price of an afternoon of entertainment and a soda." (*Route 66 Magazine*) "Evocative enough to make a viewer nostalgic for places he has never been." (*Kevin Riordan Cherry Hill Courier-Post*) "These poignant and often distressing pictures of boarded-up neighborhood bijous speak volumes about main-street moviegoing in decades past, as opposed to the multiplex experience of today." (*Playboy*) "Michael Putnam's strikingly beautiful photographs document American movie theaters and the passing of that era in American culture. They penetrate the barrier that traditionally separates significant aesthetic achievement and historical events. Such is the contribution, historically, of great documentary photography." (*James L. Enyeart St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) "The remnants of a bygone era are documented in Michael Putnam's *Silent Screens*. These poignant and often distressing pictures of boarded-up neighborhood bijous speak volumes about main-street moviegoing in decades past, as opposed to the multiplex experience of today." (*Leonard Maltin*)

About the Author Michael Putnam is a freelance photographer. His photographs have appeared in such publications as *U.S. Camera*, *Du*, and *America Illustrated*. He also served as one of four photographers for *A Guide to the National Road*, also available from Johns Hopkins.