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9
10 | 18

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September/October 2018

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ROCKING AND ROLLING

GONSON GOES BEYOND THE IMAGE

"Visages de Punk," CambridgeSeven's current exhibition, is Boston photographer JJ Gonson's ode to Boston's vibrant punk scene of the mid-to-late 1980s through the first half of the 1990s. This show features fairly unseen photographs of Kurt Cobain, Elliott Smith and the many fans and independent artists who made up the music scene of that time period. The work shows a new side to these artists that was only seen by close friends and core members of the music community. In collaboration with curator Kwesi Budu-Arthur, Gonson does an exceptional job of showing the faces of that period's punk era to music lovers of all ages. This exhibition will be on view through October 19.

The first thing one notices when looking at the work is Gonson's choice of image titles; each piece is titled with just the subject's first name. She made this decision because this show is the faces of punk. "I gave them that background, that these are the faces of punk, but I wanted them to look at the faces of the people and not necessarily who they were," Gonson stated. After looking at these photographs, one can truly tell that she wasn't just a photographer, but a member of the community. The subjects in the images express a certain knowledge of her presence and an obvious comfort with her being around with her camera.

The subjects were not afraid to show their full selves for Gonson's lens. The piece "Fans At the Channel" features four men, one shirtless, making wacky faces for her camera. One could argue that good documentary photography requires the photographer to implant

his or her self into their community of choice and to become a member of that community. Without becoming just another part of the scene, Gonson's ability to capture these intimate scenes would have been greatly hindered.

The photograph that stands out from the rest of the images is a picture of Kurt Cobain. He is sitting in a living room drinking a carton of Nesquik. It is obvious that this is a young Cobain, and one could assume that the photograph was taken after a show. The power in this image comes from seeing a side of him that wasn't seen by most individuals once Nirvana became one of the world's most popular bands. It shows a very innocent and vulnerable side to Cobain.

Most people who knew of Cobain and Nirvana saw him as a tortured soul who was gone too soon. Budu-Arthur was especially drawn to this image because, he said, "He had the most endearing and innocent look on his face ... it is such a wonderfully intimate view of somebody that we all know of, but don't know." This image alone makes the show a must-see. Anyone who is a fan of Nirvana or appreciates Cobain's contributions to music will not be able to look at this image without being moved by the youthful sparkle in his eye.

In addition to this exhibition, Gonson is part of a group that is in the midst of putting

on a "Boston Rocks" photography show, featuring the work of a group of local music photographers. "LOCAL FOCUS: A Celebration and Sale of Boston Rock Photography" will be held on September 16 from 2 to 10 p.m. at ONCE Somerville and will be the first installment in a series of exhibitions.

Gonson has also been making portraits on film for the past few years and is considering publishing another book. Gonson is a true lover of the communities that surround music, and "Visages de Punk" is a true ode to the people who made up Boston's unique punk and hardcore scene of the 1980s. There is a heart-warming element to these images that makes even those who didn't live through that time long for it. On the opposite end, a person who was a member of that community might be able to see him or herself on the wall.

| Jacob Cutler

REVIEW

JJ GONSON: VISAGES DE PUNK

PAUL DIETRICH
GALLERY
CAMBRIDGESEVEN
1050 MASS AVE.
5TH FLOOR
CAMBRIDGE,
MASSACHUSETTS
THROUGH OCTOBER 19

LOCAL FOCUS: A CELEBRATION AND SALE OF BOSTON ROCK PHOTOGRAPHY

ONCE SOMERVILLE
156 HIGHLAND AVENUE
SOMERVILLE,
MASSACHUSETTS
SEPTEMBER 16

Kurt.

