

McElheny, Josiah
“Jason Moran: Luhring Augustine”
Artforum.
Vol.55, no.1. September 2016, 359-60.

LUHRING
AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street
New York NY 10011
tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055
www.luhringaugustine.com

ARTFORUM

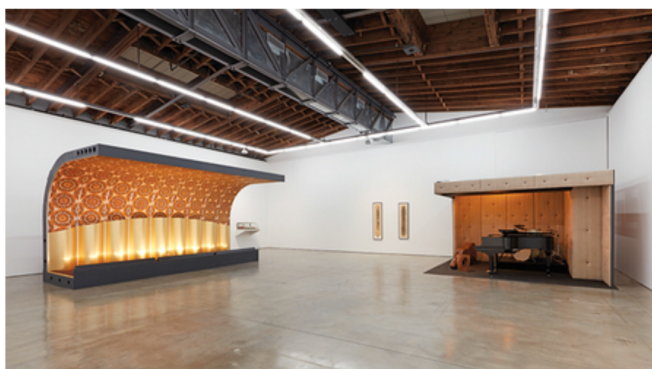
IN PRINT



September 2016

Jason Moran

LUHRING AUGUSTINE | BUSHWICK



View of “Jason Moran,”
2016. From left: *STAGED:
Savoy Ballroom 1*, 2015;
*The Temple (for Terry
Adkins)*, 2016; *Basin Street
Run 1*, 2016; *Basin Street
Run 2*, 2016; *STAGED:
Three Deuces*, 2015. Photo:
Farzad Owrang.

As many a musician or barback can tell you, a live-music nightclub—sadly, today they call them *venues*—is a strange place during off-hours, whether that is 3 PM or 3 AM. Unlike a theater or cinema, which might play to an audience of one, a nightclub requires people; early in the day and very late at night, the nightclub uniquely evokes simultaneous feelings of loss and potential. In “STAGED,” Jason Moran—the visionary musician, composer, impresario, and visual artist—set two architecturally scaled sculptures kitty-corner to each other, each a reimagined version of the main stage from one of two historic New York nightclubs central to the history and development of jazz. But instead of the existential emptiness suggested by many previous similarly scaled sculptures-as-space—for example, Bruce Nauman’s sport-stadium-bleacher sculptures that miss both the fans and the game—these spaces, these *places*, started to play to each other, listen to each other, in a kind of call-and-response, remembering and projecting forward.

Moran’s homage to sites that no longer exist—which of course feel charged with what is missing; namely, the musicians, their audience, and the buildings—played out the inherently ambivalent story of jazz: a miraculous invention and discipline that has never been given a simple space to inhabit. The question of who jazz is *for* is still essential for musicians, and for us. The full history of its creation is frequently (and willfully) forgotten or suppressed. Here, though, in the context of visual art, a strange and temporary peace was arrived at. Featuring elegant architectural objects, two very different types of sound reproduction, periodic live performance, and silence as a material, too, Moran’s installation allowed one to at least *hear* a history of form and expression as a lineage that can survive across gaps and erasures. Still, a central point of these works is that we require places, and that what makes all the arts possible are various physical architectures for creator and listener, where reflections, acoustic and otherwise, are absorbed and rebounded idiosyncratically and specifically.

The largest sculpture, *STAGED: Savoy Ballroom 1*, 2015, is based on the main stage of Harlem’s iconic Savoy dance ballroom, with a narrow raised floor for live performance under a sound-amplifying ceiling. Most of the time it “plays” forced-labor work songs through speakers invisibly embedded in its brassy, hard band shell, giving the songs a deep, hollow, and crystalline three-dimensional grandeur. The more compact *STAGED: Three Deuces*, 2015, echoes the cramped stage of the Three Deuces, the midtown seated nightclub that fostered the exploration of bebop, and includes an almost magical player piano—the newly invented Steinway Spirio—which faithfully executes Moran’s own performances by itself; the tone is softened by close, upholstered surfaces. This high-tech piano can also be played normally, and behind it is a drum kit and bass for the Bandwagon, the trio Moran leads, which periodically took up position and played.

McElheny, Josiah
“Jason Moran: Luhring Augustine”
Artforum.

Vol.55, no.1. September 2016, 359-60.
p.2

LUHRING
AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street
New York NY 10011
tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055
www.luhringaugustine.com

The soundscapes of these works are not sound tracks. In *STAGED: Savoy Ballroom 1*, it was difficult to place where the sound was coming from; moving around, one discovered that the architecture itself functioned as an instrument. The piano in *STAGED: Three Deuces* articulated almost every nuance of Moran's interpretation of his compositions while you watched the keys moving; its emanations were a re-performance of some kind, and not really a reproduction. In both works, silence and music were equally important in the way that movement and stillness are on the same plane in kinetic sculpture and painting. Songs from one time re-arrived in the present in the other space, such as when a song recorded at Louisiana's Angola State Prison—an example of a painfully complex site that can also, despite everything, be a place where creation occurs—floated out from one stage and met Moran's tough but sublime compositions. One could clearly hear Moran listening to the melancholic, disembodied voices, then him speaking back. When the Bandwagon played, or when a guest musician appeared under the curved low ceiling of the “new” Savoy, it felt something like the future. Strangely, the main sculptures in “STAGED,” though they are essentially full-scale reconstructions, appeared almost like models. Instead of proposing nostalgia for an idealized past, they could be prompts for building new shared spaces within a heritage that is still not known.

—Josiah McElheny