



Opening Act (chromogenic print, 2002)

Detail

The Projectionist

Kendall Messick unearths a subterranean movie house

“I grew up across the street from Gordon Brinckle in the small town of Middletown, Delaware. Gordon was born in 1915, and as a boy he fell in love with the grand old movie palaces, most of which have now been demolished. During World War II he worked as a projectionist for the US Army, showing the latest Hollywood movies to boost the troops’ morale. After the war he was hired at the Everett Theatre in Middletown, where he worked for thirty-three years.

“Gordon always dreamed of buying his own movie house, but on a projectionist’s salary that was impossible. Instead, he built his own theatre in the basement of his modest house. A few years ago, I was visiting my folks in Middletown when we heard that Gordon’s daughter had passed away. My mother encouraged me to come with her and visit him. Gordon was of course very distraught. During a lull in the conversation I asked if he still had the theatre in the basement. Gordon said, ‘I do and it’s decorated for Christmas. Would you like to see it?’

“Walking down the steps, the place looks like any old

basement with a washer and dryer. But turn the corner and there’s a theatre facade, complete with marquee and box office. There are dollar bills under the window and ticket prices are posted. Inside, there’s an auditorium with nine movie seats bolted to the floor facing a stage with four curtains. The auditorium is decorated in the atmospheric style of the early twentieth century—foliage, skies, and stars on the ceiling. Its original name was the Alvin Shalimar Theatre, after Gordon’s grandfather.

“My film and photography projects tend to be long-term. This allows for a heightened level of intimacy with my subjects. An image should evoke an emotional response in the viewer, even if it’s discomfort from being so close. My twenty-minute documentary about Gordon is narrated by him. His opening line is ‘I’ve been a loner my whole life.’” 🎬

Kendall Messick will be exhibiting his Projectionist series at G+GALLERIES in Toronto from September 6 to 24. Visit walrusmagazine.com to see more of Messick’s work.