

## Capturing the sacred and the mysterious

By Cate McQuaid

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Performance art must be documented. And the photos that document it are no substitute for the performance itself. Having

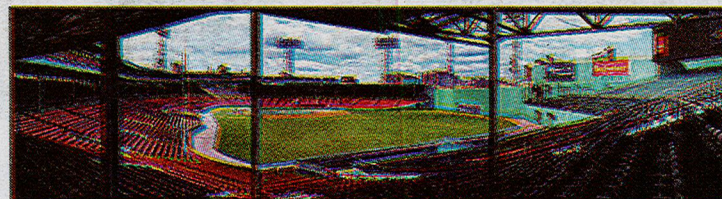
### GALLERIES

seen many such images, I went into a retrospective of the late Bob Raymond with some hesitation. Raymond photographed performances at, and sponsored by, the artist-run organization Mobius for close to three decades. Mobius is the granddaddy of performance art venues in Boston, and Raymond, who died in February at 59 after a brief illness, had been around since nearly the beginning.

It's a magical exhibit. Performance art is more like ritual than like theater. Every action is freighted with meaning, but narrative is often hard to peg down. The photos here — of people painted blue or red, of a bright red chair perched high in a leafless tree — have an abiding power. Like ritual, they touch on the sacred and the mysterious. They can't help but make you stop and be present.

Cumulatively, they hint at deep meaning that we only catch whiffs of as we go through everyday life. The works in this show expand upon an exhibit Raymond staged in 2009, which he called "this moment: missives from another world." The title couldn't be more apt. These images are dreamlike, but they're straight photos. They depict a particularly surreal reality.

Raymond had a remarkable eye. According to curator Jed Speare, he worked without a flash, choosing still moments for long exposures. That's likely the case with a shot of William Pope L. in his 2003 performance "angel-vision." He stands in a funnel of light, surrounded by dark, with work boots on either side of him, as white powder streams over him. Perhaps he's being smothered. Maybe he's being anointed.



BOB RAYMOND (TOP LEFT); JIM DOW (ABOVE)

**Top:** Bob Raymond's photograph of William Pope L. in a 2003 performance. **Above:** Jim Dow's Fenway Park triptych. **Top right:** Detail of Kenneth Stubbs's "Grace Powell."

Some of the more recent photos capture small details that become still lifes: Raymond's shot of Joanne Rice in "Holy Land," a 2005 performance with Mari Novotny-Jones, is a close-up image of the performer's fiery red hair as she lies on the floor, her face turned away from us, grasping a fish bowl. Others take us outdoors. There's a mystical shot of Tom Pisek in a performance he did with Rice called "Corvus Corax 5" at the Quincy Quarries in 2005. Pisek stands on the quarry's edge bathed in the light of an orange sunrise, his arm outstretched, as a trombone flies above him. He's like a wizard

musician.

There are approximately 25,000 images of thousands of artists in Raymond's archive. According to Speare, they will soon find a home at Tufts University. Let's hope they're not just archived, but seen. Mobius should publish a book.

### A view of America

Jim Dow's lush color photos, shot with an 8-by-10-inch view camera, capture a bygone America. The photos, up at Robert Klein Gallery, are from Dow's 2011 book "American Studies." Many of them were taken 30 or more years ago, but even then, he was after nostal-



### BOB RAYMOND: this moment — missives from another world and other works

At: Studio Soto, 10 Channel Center, through May 5.  
617-945-9481,  
[www.mobius.org/events](http://www.mobius.org/events)

### JIM DOW: American Studies

At: Robert Klein Gallery, 38 Newbury St., through May 5. 617-267-7997,  
[www.robertklein-gallery.com](http://www.robertklein-gallery.com)

### KENNETH STUBBS: A Retrospective Exhibition

At: ACME Fine Art, 38 Newbury St., through May 5. 617-585-9551,  
[www.acmefineart.com](http://www.acmefineart.com)

gia. Not simply nostalgia's romance, its persistence.

Viewers will recognize two local landmarks that aren't going anywhere soon: Fenway Park, stretched out luxuriantly in a panoramic triptych shot in 1982, and "Town Diner, Route 16, Watertown, MA, 1979." Both have changed. Fenway Park has added levels of seating and more. The Town Diner is now the Deluxe Town Diner. Looking at these images, you get the strange sensation that time is both moving and standing still.

A lot of what Dow conveys is archetypically American — ballparks, diners, gas stations. Many feature design elements that have been recycled through the decades. But the neon signs that hover over the establish-

ments in "Orleans Burger Joint at Night, New Orleans, LA, 1980" and "Dairy Queen at Night, US 6, Iowa City, Iowa, 1988" speak to a particular era that was already fading in the 1980s. Dow's photos, while nostalgic, really ask larger questions about how Americans see America, and what we cling to, and what we let go.

### Putting colors to work

Kenneth Stubbs (1907-1967), a mid-century American modernist, has a jazzy little retrospective up at ACME Fine Art. Stubbs was clearly a skilled realist painter — one early work here, the 1935 portrait "Grace Powell," deftly depicts a noble young woman in an exotically patterned dress. But he threw himself in with the Cubists, and began painting flattened, fractured seascapes and still lifes crackling with color.

Stubbs built his compositions on geometric ratios. He discerned the way shadows, light, and reflection could cut a single plane into many shifting shapes, and as his work grew more sophisticated, he flattened all volume out of it until he seemed to be dealing only in shards of color. He painted a number of small pieces, each titled "Shorescape," in which he set these shards deflecting against one another, evoking a jumble of cottages along the beach.

The most dazzling work in the show, "Sunbathers" (1962) has him at the height of his powers. It depicts a clutch of beach denizens, some chatting, some wrangling small children. They're all in bright, sunny hues, and colors pinwheel over the scene. Shadows slither like vipers around the crowd, mixing it up with sickles of bright light, like sunlight cast off the water. The whole thing undulates and glimmers like the sea.

Cate McQuaid can be reached at [catemcquaid@gmail.com](mailto:catemcquaid@gmail.com).