

Under her thumb

Cambridge-based photographer and graphic designer Judith Aronson teaches at Simmons College. Several of her photographs are in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, in London, and during the 1970s she was a staff photographer at The (London) Sunday Telegraph Magazine.

One May evening in 1976, Aronson decided to take in a Rolling Stones concert at London's Earl's Court arena. The Meters were the opening act (the Stones have always had excellent taste in opening acts). Ron Wood had recently replaced Mick Taylor on guitar, and the band had just released its "Black and Blue" album. Billy Preston played with the Stones, looking a bit strange minus his trademark Afro. Out of solidarity, perhaps, Charlie Watts sported a particularly bad haircut.

We know about Preston's and Watts's coiffures because Aronson took along her camera. She didn't have any special vantage point, because she wasn't there on assignment. Instead, she was in the middle of the crowd and, caught up in the excitement, just held her camera over her head and starting clicking. All photographers should click so well. The

resulting images miraculously combine detachment and intensity, giving a rare audience's-eye view of the Stones.

Nine of Aronson's photos from the concert are in her show "Tactile/Mercantile: Scene One," which runs at Isole Gallery of Art + Industrial Design through Sept. 6. A follow-up, "Tactile/Mercantile: Scene Two," opens Sept. 26. Isole is at 4 Park Plaza.

There are more than 50 other pictures in the show — ranging from a portrait of theater director Jonathan Miller to still lifes of autumn leaves from Mount Auburn Cemetery. All of them demonstrate the same rich and exacting use of color as the Stones photos. How rich and exacting? Mick Jagger's azure ensemble makes him look like Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" (except for when the spotlights shift to green, in which case he resembles a string bean fantasizing it's a lime).

The Stones are to perform at Gillette Stadium Sept. 20. Until then, Aronson's photos are the next thing to being at a concert. Not to mention the band has a lot fewer wrinkles.

MARK FEENEY



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The Boston Globe

August 12, 2006

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