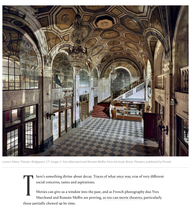
Beauty and decay: inside America's derelict movie theatres

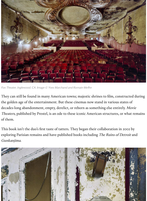
In a new photobook, photographers Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre capture a bygone era of entertainment through decaying American movie theatres



Ritz Theatre, Jackson, Mississippi, 2011. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, from the book 'Movie Palaces', courtesy of the artists

Texas's unsettling divine about decay. Traces of what once was, now of very different social concerns, tastes and aspirations.

Marchand gives us a window into the past, and in French photography duo Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre are proving, as we can movie theatres, particularly those partially charred up in the ashes.



Ritz Theatre, Jackson, Mississippi, 2011. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

They can still be found in many American towns, majestic shrines to film, constructed during the golden age of the entertainment. But these cinemas now stand in various states of decadence, being abandoned, empty, derelict, or reborn as something else entirely. Movie Theatres, published by Prestel, is an ode to these iconic American structures, or what remains of them.

They look isn't the dust-free taste of nature. They begin their collaboration in 2005 by exploring Parisian remains and have published books including *The Ruins of Detroit* and *Giantkamme*.

Gem Theatre, Detroit, Michigan, 2009. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

In contemporary times, where streaming services reign and convenience outshines occasion, Marchand and Meffre's book is not just an approving visual record of the majestic movie palaces, it's a timely eulogy for a entertainment's golden years. Decay, in its diversity, is evidence that things have moved on, for better or worse.

Fox Theatre, Detroit, Michigan, 2009. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

The early 20th century brought with it an entertainment boom. Hundreds of theatres popped up across the US, from Hollywood to Manhattan, Chicago to Cleveland, Detroit to Dallas, extravagant, palatial auditoriums to satisfy the swelling appetite of spectators.

Since 2011, photographer duo Marchand and Meffre have travelled across America to visit these theatrical relics. In hundreds of lushly coloured images, they have captured the rich architectural diversity of the theatre: cavernous and intimate, from neo-Renaissance to neo-Gothic, Art Nouveau to Deco, from Byzantine to Legendrill.

Columbia Theatre, Florence, AZ, 2009. Constructed in 1927, and designed in 1928 and by Lawrence Dwight and Robert M Neff, the Columbia Theatre was the first movie house in Florence, Arizona. Its last movie was shown in 1978. Today, it is a Masonic Temple. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, from the book 'Movie Palaces', courtesy of the artists

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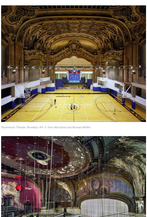
Alabama Theatre, Birmingham, 2009. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

Armed with a large-format camera, they contrasted vintage operating backstage interiors to the ruins of the auditorium. The duo's work, in the words of Marchand, "is a meditation on crushed velvet seats, stories contained in the delicate equipment and abandoned concession stands. Laughs, tears, screams and gasps live on in the crumbling corniceu.

Some sites have not been left entirely for dead. But as the sales mentioned, no too old domestic TV sets and multiplexes. During the following decades, the heyday of the movie theatre was curtailed by modernization. These massive buildings, in turn, began taking on less majestic roles: bingo halls, basketball courts, bus depots, warehouses, fitness centres, flea markets, car parks and retail stores.



Alabama Theatre, Birmingham, 2009. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

Grand Theatre, Wheeling, Illinois, 2009. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

Alabama Theatre, Birmingham, AL, 2009. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

Loew's Village Theatre, Milwaukee, WI, 2009. Opened in 1929, designed in 1928 and by architects Rapp and Rapp and Albert S. Ritchie, the Loew's Village Theatre, which was the last movie house in Milwaukee, closed in 1978. Today, it is a Walgreens. Image © Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, from the book 'Movie Palaces', courtesy of the artists

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Movie Palaces, Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, Prestel, £35

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