

“MAMAS DON’T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE COWBOYS”—Willie Nelson

“MAMAS DON’T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE COWBOYS” created during Artpace Residency 11.1 curated by Heather Pesanti addresses issues of history, curation, artists, and context and how these varying in-between practices play themselves out, in the plastic arts and the world of Jazz. One wall, completely wood paneled floor to ceiling side to side recalls/alludes to Judd’s “Untitled” from 1974, the Portland Museum of Art, in which he wood paneled the entire exhibition space, from floor to a certain height. In my interpretation the wood paneled wall displays a cloud arrangement of 56 photographs of nameplates, reserving hotel rooms for a plethora Jazz greats. Each image is mounted on a ¾” thick wood frame, as if the nameplate has been cut/removed/sawed out of the door leading to the reserved room, but in between the viewer and would be occupant. All of these photographs are from a found source—the hotel’s curator/owner—complete with misspellings and are real representations of actual nameplates. One nameplate and only one nameplate has been re-curated into the mix—the missing impresario is Sonny Simmons, an Alto Sax genius and English Horn specialist that—because of my personal relationship with him—was included among the masters exhibited. And included he is, as his nameplate has been enlarged wall mural size and sandwiched between two more wood panel arms, further opening the commentary on audience, influence, and artist—much less venue and curator. This confluence is added on to by the presence of a packing box of cd’s produced specifically for the exhibition, “The Sonny Simmons Quintet Performs the Music of Charlie Parker +”, and these are left for viewers as a freebie. Among the tracks on the cd is the spoken word piece, “Sonny Simmons Comments on 56 Jazz Greats”. And this spoken word piece literally reverberates throughout the installation on a loop through Kenwood KL777 speakers. Two drawings by Artpace Studio Technician, Chad Dawkins, textually query two Sonny Simmons song searches on the internet, “Round Midnight” and “Talk of the Town”. In both drawings the text is duplicated, font and all, by hand, the language that comes up when searches for these songs are initiated . . . Sadly, Simmons is lost even on the internet: the drawings reflect that missing presence with the “Not Found” message. Inclusion of Dawkins, much less the original hotelier’s nameplate curation is an extension of my curatorial activities within my art practice and just as artwork is multi peopled experience, more than ever this installation tries to examine that . . . even down to the title which comes from the Willie Nelson song, warning in a way and/or admonishing potential cowboys and Jazz artists alike of the hardships that plague or heroicize these two American bred lifestyles/art forms. (Sonny Simmons 1933-2021).