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COURTESY GIFFERMAN GALLERY

Roswell Angier's "Soony, Washington Street," on view at the Howard Yezerski Gallery.

IN THE ZONE

 By Mark Feeney
GLOBE STAFF

The Combat Zone, the adult entertainment district that greatly flourished between Chinatown and what is now Downtown Crossing during the '70s, wasn't exactly unique. Baltimore had the Block, New York, Times Square, San Francisco, North Beach. Human beings have their urges, legit and otherwise, and other human beings monetize those urges. But there was always something a little extra glam and squalid about the Zone. Although a Puritan-founded city cannot avoid Puritan condemned vices, perhaps it doesn't enjoy their indulgence quite so much.

The Zone, with its porn shops and peep shows and strip joints, was a kind of sexual freedom trail. It even included a nod, of sorts, to local history: Along with such noted establishments as the Naked Cabaret and Teddy Bare Lounge, there was the Pilgrim Theatre. The distance between Princess Cheneau and Priscilla Alden might not have been as great as one might think.

Now the Zone, too, belongs to local history, done in by rising real estate values and the less-public options for a good time afforded by home entertainment and the Internet. We'll never know the answer to the question raised by the Naked's infamous sign "Totally Nude College Girls Revue": Did

the booker demand to see transcripts?

Part of the fascination of "Boston Combat Zone: 1969-1978," a photography exhibit at the Howard Yezerski Gallery through March 16, is its ability to capture a very specific time and place in the city's history: The presence of the original neon sign from the Hungry 1. **ZONE, Page N7**

A VANISHED WORLD OF SEX, SQUALOR, CAPTURED IN BLACK AND WHITE

PLUS: 'ON THE STROLL' DOWN LAGRANGE STREET WITH SAM ALLIS PAGE N7

She's the boss of all her houses

 By Christopher Muther
GLOBE STAFF

NEWTON — It was during the construction of his house three years ago that Watertown-based television producer Ed Lemos noticed something curious about his contractor, and it wasn't simply that she was a shapely woman in True Religion jeans and Uggs boots ordering around a crew of braggart and hoary builders, plumbers, and electricians. "A woman contractor in a man's world is unusual as it is," says Lemos, president of Production Values. "But her personality was so forceful and so aggressive. She was not satisfied until things were done — and done the way she wanted them. That combina-

tion gave me the idea that this could be a TV show."

Next week, Lemos's idea — to create a show around the life of local luxury McMansion builder Cindy Stumpo — becomes reality or, more accurately, reality television, when "Tough As Nails" debuts on HGTV March 18. The 45-year-old Stumpo seems particularly well-suited to reality TV. For one, the woman can talk. At her office in Chestnut Hill, there are no awkward pauses during a conversation with Stumpo. In fact, there are no pauses at all. In a North Shore accent thicker than a Friendly's strawberry Fribble, Stumpo speaks her mind, unafraid of

STUMPO, Page N2


PHOTOCRAZY/SHUTTERSTOCK

HGTV's "Tough as Nails" will follow local luxury McMansion builder Cindy Stumpo.

THEATER
A happy reunion

Director Peter Dinkols and playwright Gina Gionfriddo, old friends, team up on the comedy "Becky Shaw" at the Huntington. **N2**

ART
Museum-hopping

Sebastian Smee discovers now is the perfect time to spend a few days exploring a vast array of shows in Western Mass. **N6**

Photography

A stroll down the Combat Zone's seedy side

This was where hookers, johns, and trouble met

By Sam Allis

Once upon a time, there was a slice of Boston called the Combat Zone, and in that zone was a long block named LaGrange Street. LaGrange was the core of the Zone. What it was was a rodeo.

On any given night from the '60s into the '80s, you'd find scores of prostitutes on parade on LaGrange. They leaned into open car windows, metering on elevator platforms, talking to men inside while trying to steal their wallets. They worked the sidewalks like they owned them, which they did.

"Scores of them? Try 60 some nights," recalls Bill Dwyer, a 32-year veteran Boston detective, now retired, who worked the Zone in various capacities from 1971 to 1994. "LaGrange was insane. It was the O.K. Corral. Wall to wall traffic. People would be coming down from Maine and New Hampshire to see the sights. It was like a circle, the cars would drive through and then come around again."

But then the whole Combat Zone was a rodeo. It ran roughly from Tremont to Washington and from Boylston down to Rowland, extending west onto Stuart Street. The area was infamous for its strip clubs, peep shows, dirty bookstores, booze, drugs, and violence.

The ladies were, in the street parlance of the time, "in the stroll." They would swarm like adrift near Good Time Charlie's, a bar on the block that poured men into the night. The women would be there in daylight too, their razors tucked, working hard for the money.

You had men trolling, undergraduates ogling. You had small seedy men leaning on parking meters, spraying and smoking, and people running each other's lights out. It was a game playground for anyone interested in adventure of a certain kind. The Zone was nothing but sleaze.

"I had something there for everyone," recalls John Goodman, a photographer who took some of the photographs mounted on the Howard Yezzerki Gallery's walk in "Boston Combat Zone: 1969-1978."

Goodman all but lived in the Zone during the '70s. He and five other photographers shared studio space in a huge deserted kitchen atop the Bealton Hotel, which had once offered rooftop diner dancing. "Some of the girls lived below me. We were on the elevator together all the time."

"I was with one one day," he adds, "and I asked if I could shoot some pictures of her," he says. "One second later, she was totally naked in the elevator."

The names are gone but not forgotten — placed like the Naked 1, the Two O'Clock Club, the Pilgrim Theatre, the Intermix Lounge, and the Panquet Lounge. Strip clubs festooned the streets with 6-by-10 pictures of their performers, their breasts barely covered by pasties.

Violence always lurked beneath the street theater. Many of the street women preyed on drunks coming out of the clubs. "That's where the tricks were," says Dwyer. "They were there to rob. Some of the clubs would put micksy in drinks and run up a guy's tab." A fair number of prostitutes were murdered over the years. He adds, and Andrew Paupolis, a Harvard University football player, was stabbed to death in the Zone in 1976.

The core of the Combat Zone were planted in Scollay Square, where Government Center is now, known for its burlesque theaters and good times. It was seedy but not particularly dangerous, and it had its charm. Scollay got torn down in the name of urban renewal, and some of the trade moved over to what became the Zone. This new turf lacked the style of Scollay and was more dangerous.

Places opened, hookers showed up, and off it went. The Zone was named for the brasels that unfolded between the biker gangs and sailors and soldiers, going way back, says Dwyer. "These were colonial fights. The M.F.s maintained a large force near there. Organized crime moved in."

One in plain clothes and in uniform, wandered around. Police cars would glide by sometimes. Every now and then, some of the working women would get hauled into Boston Municipal Court. That's how you know you're in there.

Retired BMC Judge Demno Meagher, who saw the detritus of the Zone at the end of its days blow into his court, recalls a trio of rogues who took his name, known by some patrons as "the blackfoot club" for their love on its floors. AIDS arrived in the '80s, followed by crack and heroin toward the end of that decade. The city increased its efforts to clean up the Zone. Prostitutes had to be bathed in — Brockton, New Bedford, Providence. Real estate developers later swooped in to build huge projects like Millennium Place, which includes, among other things, a hotel and a mall.

Goodman knows all this, but he gazes at his pictures on the gallery walls and still asks, "Where did everything go?"

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Jerry Berndt's photos of Washington Street (top and above right) are on view in the exhibit "Boston Combat Zone: 1969-1978" at the Howard Yezzerki Gallery. Above left: John Goodman's "Silence" — LaGrange St.

From the Teddy Bare Lounge to the Two O'Clock Club, a vanished world

► ZONE

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which looks out from the gallery for the duration of the show, is a curvy beach. But the sign is so much touchstone as collectible. The Zone was "a gold mine of evidence," says Dwyer. "It was a gold mine of evidence." One of his labia was remarked once to Rowell Angier. Along with Jerry Berndt and John Goodman, Angier is one of three photographers with work in "Boston Combat Zone: Evidence." The Zone was a state of mind, really, and the evidence for that was all over.

The excitement of the New Boston of the '60s had passed. The real estate boom of the '80s was as yet a gleam in the eyes of developers. With counter-ordered desegregation, the city was turning into a combat zone of a different sort. The collective portrait presented in the 30 black-and-white photographs at Yezzerki isn't pretty, but the grimness it speaks to was very much a part of that time — and not just in the immediate vicinity of Jerome's Lounge and the Two O'Clock Club.

It's an injustice to those photographers, who have been doing very good work for a very long time, to see their images simply as documentation. Many of the pictures belong as much to a particular genre, street photography, as to a particular moment. Street photography usually means energy, surprise, an implicit excitement. The street photographs here betray a crucial difference. They often subvert the genre in service to the people they show. Energy, surprise, and excitement (or at least excitement in a positive sense) tended not to be the experience of Zone regulars.

There's a recurring deadness here, a sense of

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

BOSTON COMBAT ZONE 1969-1978
At: Howard Yezzerki Gallery, 460 Harrison Ave., through March 16, 617-262-0556, www.howardyezzerkigallery.com

defeat or resignation. Nearly all the people either stare back at the camera or look off into space. Berndt's "The Combat Zone, Washington St., Boston, 1968" is emblematic. The slight reflection from the plate-glass window reminds us of the barrier between the woman sitting in the coffee shop and the rest of the world. Her out-to-there false openness further contributes to the effect. There's no real barrier in the Zone, little or no sense of human connection. That's as it should be. The Zone was a place of extremes. Almost all the pictures are big, and properly so. Demure and delicate are not operative words here for either form or content.

We see strippers, hookers, johns, various persons of indeterminate purpose (but they sure don't seem to be up to any good). Almost no one is identified by other than a first name. One of the exceptions is Angier's "Mr. and Mrs. Steve Mills, Pilgrim Theater." Very Diane Arbus, it shows a baggy pants comic in his 80s with his young wife, who would like Sarah Vowell in a pram dress. Maybe they look like they have been here off and on since identified.

"Boston Combat Zone" isn't sexy. It's about as sexy as mad, in fact. But that's the point. The pho-

tographable romance of E.J. Belloc's Storyville or Bessie's "Paris by Night" is nowhere to be seen. Romanticizing the Zone would be as much a disservice to the truth as ignoring the Zone. Angier, Berndt, and Goodman refuse to do either.

The basic premise of the Zone, degradation in the service of profit, is ugly. It's fitting then that the ugliness here is so often through and through: ugly clothes, ugly signage, ugly cars. A lot of that ugliness is a function of period. There's ugly, and then there's '70s ugly. Is it a coincidence that so many of the greatest works from that decade — "The Conformist," "The Godfather" movies, "Gravity's Rainbow," "Mute for 18 Musicians" — is set either in the past or outside of time?

So many of the pictures here are sad — or maybe it's just the sadness of the people. There's the occasional smile. But that seems as much a pose as the far more common cocked eyebrow or come-hither look. There is one genuine smile, if smile is the right word. It's in Goodman's "The Schlitz Boy" and it's terrifying. The photograph shows a crowd of young men carousing with a couple of six packs. They're ready for some action. The animal rictus on the face of the blond guy in the backseat is way beyond Arbus. It's like something shot by a war photographer, only there's no war going on. There is a transaction going on, though, or at least the anticipation of one. In the business of sex, as in any other kind, a supply side can't exist without a demand side.

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