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Photo-Op: Delta Hues



Magdalena Solé, 2011

MUSIC IS IN THE BLOOD of the Mississippi Delta. Nowhere more so than Clarksdale, the birthplace of the Blues. The crossroads where Robert Johnson is said to have met the devil is in Clarksdale. Son House's 'Clarksdale Moan' was another legend until a copy of the lost record was discovered in 2005. W.C. Handy lived there. Bessie Smith died there. Sam Cooke was born there. But it was poverty, not music, that photographer Magdalena Solé set out to document in 'New Delta Rising' (Mississippi, 160 pages, \$38), a study of the area today. Many of her pictures capture residents in front of their ramshackle dwellings and seem at first no more than color versions of familiar Depression-era shots. Yet the WPA images we know so well were soft

and static. Ms. Solé's lushly colorful and formally striking images are restless. The people of Clarksdale are lively and in motion, contrasting sharply with their crumbling surroundings. The neatly framed image (above) of a boy in front of an abandoned building on Fourth Street turns painted wood and brick into a composition one might expect in an abstract painting. The colors Ms. Solé finds everywhere in Clarksdale—the bright green walls of the Wangz and Thangz restaurant, the deep blue backgrounds of Messenger's Pool Hall, the red spotlight on the stage at Red's Lounge—are visual metaphors for the culture and history that remain vivid even beneath the cracking surface. Like Clarksdale's soundtrack, they electrify.

—The Editors