

"The concept for a post-nuclear concrete shelter (with the remains of the BOY in the concrete) was finally rejected by the superior landlords. We had a week till opening. Peter Christopherson and John Harewood said, 'don't worry John, we will think of something else.' A week later they arrived with the three immaculate display cabinets with the remains of the BOY - this time burnt to death in a fire he started. A finger with a ring on it, an ear with hair attached, the waistband of a pair of jeans with skin attached and one Doc Martin with half a blackened shin sticking out. They had to reassure us that it wasn't real, they used a material called 'Revoltex.' All we had to do was to set fire to the interior of the shop and hang the display in the window, it took an evening. We opened on a Saturday when there is the most traffic on the Kings Road. The display attracted crowds that forced pedestrians onto the road, which prevented traffic from flowing freely. Members of Parliament lived in the vicinity, and one of them had called the police to terminate the disturbance. I was not there, I had collapsed at 7am and gone home. The display was seized, and Don Letts was arrested. I was awakened by a call from Janette Lee, she was very calm, I told her to close the shop and I called Chelsea Police Station and was put through to the arresting officer, Inspector Rice. It was a strange conversation. I asked him to let Don go, and I would give myself up on Monday morning. For his part he apologized, said that he was not comfortable with the arrest as they hadn't yet come up with a suitable charge, they were consulting with their solicitors. When I arrived on Monday, Inspector Rice was in excellent spirits, he told me that I was being charged under the Act of Vagrancy 1824. This Act was introduced in part, he told me, to discourage disabled veterans of the Napoleonic Wars from displaying their stumps in public, and it was felt that our window display fell well within the act. I could not have the display back because it was being held as evidence but, the inspector mused, 'would the makers of the display be interested in cooperating with the Met in a booklet on forensic medicine that was in the works?' The display is probably still in the basement of Chelsea Police Station, if Andy is interested."

—JOHN KRIVINE on the genesis of BOY

"I thought the fashion was much more important than the music. Punk was the sound of that fashion."

—MALCOLM McLAREN

Binghamton University Art Museum

SW3 TO SW10:



Sheila Rock, *Subey*, digital print, 1977. Courtesy of the artist.

FROM BOY TO SEX

SW3 to SW10: From BOY to SEX

Punk fashion in London + the photographs of Sheila Rock

Siouxsie Sioux would reminisce about the style of punk before "punk," "Before it got a label, it was a club for misfits. Waifs, male gays, female gays, bisexuals, non-sexuals, everything." This androgynous, transgressive sensibility catalyzed a few shops along King's Road in London (SW3 to SW10) to begin to specialize in the sartorial choices of the counterculture. The shops themselves became club-houses for the emerging punk scene, including SEX, run by Vivienne Westwood & Malcolm McLaren and BOY (first Acme Attractions), opened by John Krivine.

Punk fashion reproduced the entire sartorial history of post-war working-class youth cultures in cut-up, appropriated and reassembled form. As McLaren notes, the cacophony of the music found its mirror in an equally eclectic clothing style. In doing so, it demonstrated a way that binary sex and gender stereotyping were, at very

least, being blurred, if not outright collapsing. Westwood's infamous "Tits T-Shirt" (seen in a number of Rock's photographs on view), is a hilarious example of gender play at work. Steve Jones, the Sex Pistols' guitarist wore a version during the band's legendary appearance on Bill Grundy's Today show in December 1976, when Jones called Grundy a "fucking rotter" on live television, catapulting the band to the radar of popular culture. Jones' burly frame and macho demeanor was in stark contrast to the chest-height "window" of a *trompe l'oeil* pair of a woman's breasts. The double-takes encouraged by such garments on femmes took on a different mode of provocation, as Viv Albertine would later write, "men look at me and they are confused, they don't know whether they want to fuck me or kill me. This sartorial ensemble really messes with their heads. Good."

X-Ray Spex's first single, "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!" was something of a critique of the framework of Westwood and McClaren's evolving punk boutique. X-Ray Spex's frontwoman, Poly Styrene also had a tiny clothing stall on King's Road in Beaufort Market, the original location of Krivine's Acme Attractions. Don Letts, head clerk at Acme Attraction, as well as a DJ, musician and filmmaker, noted that the Beaufort Market shops were friendlier and less elitist than SEX. Noting that they were "about multiculturalism, whereas Vivienne and Malcolm were always more Eurocentric... The kids who came to [Beaufort Market] were intelligent enough to know that there is something aesthetically wrong with a punk thing being ready-made and sold for £60."

Sheila Rock is one of the primary documentarians of the UK punk scene and has had a long career as a commercial photographer, doing publicity for the Royal Opera, Royal Ballet, and Barbican London. She has also photographed many leading entertainment and music industry artists and contributed photographs to *Face*, *German Vogue*, *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Architectural Digest*, *Sunday Times*, *Telegraph Magazine*, *Brides*, *Time* and *Rolling Stone*. Her current work is much more personal, including recent volumes on the monastic life of Tibetan monks and the people and places of the English seaside. The photographs featured in this exhibition are selections from her publications *Punk+* (2013) and *Young Punks* (2020), which document the early London punk scene at SEX, Acme Attractions and BOY, as well as a few select photographs of some of the extraordinary women of punk.

"The legacy of punk is not determined by gender. Any legacy that punk has left behind is as much due to women's contributions as it is to men's. The DIY ethic, the challenge to the status quo, the confidence to pick up an instrument, a paintbrush, a camera or any other tool that you have not been trained to use and to discover your power for yourself without feeling intimidated are all part of having a punk attitude. I see punk attitude in the women of Saudi Arabia who recently got in the driver's seat of their cars to challenge that country's restriction on women driving. I see the legacy of punk in hacker groups like Anonymous who target corrupt governments and corporations. The legacy of punk is not in its musical style, it's having the audacity to actively participate in shaping our world."

—ALICE BAG, one of the main figures in Los Angeles' first wave of Punk, member of ground-breaking bands such as The Bags and Castration Squad

RIOT GRRRLS 1.0:



Kris Needs, Zigzag (cover), August 1977 (issue 75). Courtesy of Andrew Krivine.

WOMEN OF PUNK ROCK

Riot Grrrls 1.0: Women of Punk Rock

In her memoir, Viv Albertine of The Slits suggests that punk was a feminist incubator for many of her generation, but that the concept of “feminism” was often a contradiction: they identified with feminism’s aims, but itched under the construct of the “ism.” When the punk-era music journalist Caroline Coon asked The Slits to speak to what she saw as the band’s feminism, Albertine disdainfully responded, “we’re just not interested in questions about Women’s Liberation... All that chauvinism stuff doesn’t matter a fuck to us... You either think chauvinism is shit or you don’t. We think it’s shit.”

Years later, as she strode on stage at the British Library on July 14, 2016, Albertine asked the audience if they had seen the exhibition’s introductory “yellow panel,” which name-checked a series of bands listed as pioneers of the movement: “The Sex Pistols, The Buzzcocks, la-la-la... they didn’t mention the female bands!” She then added, mischievously, “There is now, if you want to go around and have a look.” The exhibition in question was the Library’s *Punk 1976-78* exhibition, part of a year-long, city-wide celebration of the so-called 40th anniversary of the movement in London. While Albertine’s talk and other programming organized by the Library emphasized women’s significant contributions to punk, the exhibition’s checklist and labels perpetuated the clichéd stereotypes that it was mostly the purview of men.

Albertine’s corrections to the introductory panel, to include the women contemporaries and collaborators of the listed bands is not a stretch, as according to Coon, “it would be possible to write the whole history of punk music without mentioning any male bands at all.” And yet, Albertine lamented, the battle for women’s visibility in punk history continues: “It’s a fight that, honestly, never, ever ends.”

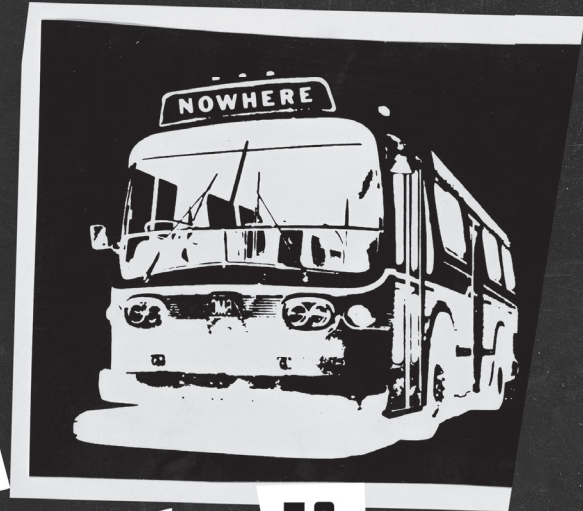
This section of the exhibition continues to correct that record by focusing on photographs, flyers, posters, zines, and other ephemera about seventeen women-centered, American and British punk artists and bands:

The Adverts
Blondie
Cherry Vanilla
The Cramps
Crass
Destroy All Monsters
Nina Hagen
Lydia Lunch/Teenage Jesus
and the Jerks
Penetration
Plasmatics
Siouxsie and the Banshees
The Slits
Patti Smith
The Pretenders
Wayne County
X
X-Ray Spex

—Claire L. Kovacs, Curator
of Collections & Exhibitions

JAMIE

REID



FROM

SUBURBAN

PRESS

TO

SEX PISTOLS

Jamie Reid, "Pretty Vacant" Buses, 1977. Courtesy of Andrew Krivine.

Jamie Reid from Suburban Press to Sex Pistols

No designer had a greater influence over the appearance of punk graphics than Jamie Reid. His work of the mid- and later 1970s for the Sex Pistols — from concert posters and publicity to record sleeve art — virtually defined the movement's aesthetics: ransom-note lettering, neon Day-Glo color, appropriated imagery, high-contrast printing, all were features of his iconic designs that quickly spread far and wide. Reid made the psychedelic inwardness and pop Victorian references of 60s rock obsolete overnight with his scabrous, gritty urban sensibility.

That sensibility was not formed within punk itself, but developed out of his work with Suburban Press, a small, leftwing community press he founded in the London suburb of Croydon in the early 1970s, after having dropped out of art school. Suburban Press designed leaflets, pamphlets, and books for a range of social movements,

from anarchists and feminists to Black power activists and squatters. Reid describes the work as “quick and fast,” its look determined “out of sheer necessity, from having no money” — qualities that were later extended in his designs for the Sex Pistols. Much of it was based on “hijacking” or diverting preexisting imagery and adding elements or captions that subverted its original meaning, a British variant of the *détournement* that had been pioneered by the French radicals of the Situationist International in the 1960s. Reid and Suburban Press, in fact, designed the first English-language anthology of Situationist texts, *Leaving the 20th Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*, edited by former Situationist Chris Gray and published in 1974.

Reid was living in a remote area of Scotland with a group of countercultural activists when a former

art-school colleague, Malcolm McLaren, summoned him back to London in the fall of 1975. He wanted Reid to build a graphic identity for a new project, a band called the Sex Pistols. It was a means for McLaren to promote his clothing shop SEX, but more broadly both he and Reid thought of it as a way to bring the sometimes-esoteric revolutionary politics of the Situationists into popular culture. Reid's famous design for the group's logo — its name spelled out in letters cut randomly from the newspaper, as in a ransom note — set the subversive tone. The materials he produced for the first four singles released between fall 1976 and fall 1977 defaced national symbols — the Union Jack or a portrait of the Queen — and highlighted the boredom and emptiness of modern urban life and leisure. His sleeve design for the Sex Pistols' only studio release, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* (1977), combined

Day-Glo colors with a crude, screen-printed look in a pointed refusal of the polished appearance typical of contemporary album covers. Together, they captured the violence and anomie released in the group's music.

— Tom McDonough, Associate Professor of Art History & Adjunct Curator