



Rocker Art, Artful Rockers on the East End

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

From Bill Haley and Chuck Berry to Elvis and the Beatles, from Jimi Hendrix and Blondie to Vampire Weekend, rock music has always included a strong visual component. Performers understand that presentation, whether playing live or trying to sell albums, is almost as important as the music, spawning careers in the art world for rock photographers and album cover and poster designers and spinoff careers for rock musicians as visual artists.

On the East End of Long Island, works by classic rockers and classic rock art can be found in places as predictable as galleries and as unlikely as boutiques, bookstores and whaling museums.

Menswear designer John Varvatos credits rock and roll icons such as Iggy Pop for his early obsession with music growing up in Detroit. His discovery that he was more interested in the rock look than in actually playing music provided the catalyst for his interest in fashion. Also, as he said in an interview in The New York Times, his conservative parents wouldn't let him grow his hair long, so he rebelled.

After award-winning stints designing for Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein, Varvatos struck out on his own, designing a cutting edge men's line and opening boutiques. In a major nod to his rock roots, in 2008 he took over the old CBGB space on the Bowery in NYC, keeping some of the original graffiti and building a stage for free rock shows.

His 1,800 sq. ft East Hampton store, opened in 2007, serves as a place not only to buy pricey laceless Converse shoes but also classic limited edition rock photos by Gary Gershoff, Mick Rock, and Deborah Feingold. He also sells vinyl albums and rock photo books.

The collection is sold under the Rock Paper Photo name on www.johnvarvatos.com and RockPaperPhoto.com. Varvatos is a major collector of rock 'n' roll memorabilia and uses rock musicians in his ad campaigns. Photos for sale include images of Debbie Harry, Joe Perry, Chris Cornell, Iggy Pop, Velvet Revolver, Alice Cooper, Cheap Trick, and many more.



John Varvatos Store, East Hampton, NY.



“Debbie Harry” by Mick Rock.

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Melet Mercantile Montauk, the East End outpost of vintage fashion guru Bob Melet’s legendary appointment-only SoHo space, sells an unusual high-end jumble of vintage records, photos, art and clothing out of a former garage. Currently on view is a rare exhibit of Ken Regan’s photos of the Rolling Stones during their time in Montauk, planning and rehearsing for their 1975 summer tour.

With five homes on the compound they took over, there was plenty of room for the band – and their family, friends, entourage, and groupies who could be found stalking them in the bushes.

Regan was hired as tour photographer and spent weeks documenting the rock party. In the black and white photos, the band members are shown walking the foggy cliffs above the ocean, hanging out in the kitchen, and posing on rocks on the patio outside the rehearsal studio.

Regan was a native New Yorker who made his name as a photographer for Time, Sports Illustrated, and LIFE magazines, shooting presidents, movie stars, football players and politicians, among others.

[Melet Mercantile Montauk](#) exhibits prints, vintage contact sheets and original prints for sale.

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“Rolling Stones in Montauk” by Ken Reagan.

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“Born to Run” cover shot by Eric Meola.

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The Boss, aka Bruce Springsteen, hangs in Sag Harbor at Tulla Booth’s gallery. Eric Meola is a highly regarded American photographer who is probably best known to rock fans as the guy who shot the image for Springsteen’s “Born To Run” album cover. He had been a young fan following the band around the East Coast in the ’70s and got a call to do the album shoot. He wanted something innocent and street smart, he told students attending a lecture he gave at Syracuse University.

“I felt that color, in this case, was distracting,” Meola said. “I really had to convince Bruce to shoot in black and white, and to keep everything simple.” The two-hour session yielded over 700 images.

The image and the album, which sold more than 6 million copies, rocketed both Meola and

Springsteen to fame. Then Columbia Records Creative Director John Berg— whose album cover artwork was the subject of a show at Guild Hall in East Hampton last year—designed the lettering for the cover and recalls the album with pride.

As he said in a talk at Guild Hall. “I saw some of the charm and humor of Bruce, particularly with Clarence, in Eric’s photos. The image that we decided on was a storytelling picture: there’s this white guy and a black guy, and they’re making music,” he said.

[Tulla Booth](#) represents Meola’s rock photos as well as his fine art photos and his books on Springsteen.



Album covers designed by John Berg.

The [Sag Harbor Whaling Museum](#) is not where you might expect to find Oscar winners, but through August 24 visitors can see a rare exhibition of signed movie posters and screenings of music documentaries made by Lifetime Achievement Academy Award-winning director D. A. Pennebaker.

The director of such classics as “Monterey Pop”, “Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars” about David Bowie, and the highly regarded Bob Dylan documentary “Don’t Look Back,” he and his wife and partner Chris Hegedus are longtime Sag Harbor residents. Last fall they screened films at Guild Hall in East Hampton, demonstrating that at 88 years young Pennebaker still rocks.



Film poster signed by DA Pennebaker at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum.



Posters signed by DA Pennebaker at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum.



Oscar winning filmmaker DA Pennebaker at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum Opening.

Original Beatle Stuart Sutcliffe joined the legendary band in May 1960, but left just over a year later in July 1961. The musician had decided to quit music to focus on painting and making art, but Sutcliffe's career as an artist sadly ended as quickly as his career as a musician: he died of a brain aneurysm at age 21 in April 1962.

Despite his death at such a young age, he left behind a large body of work that the late artist's sister and Hamptons resident Pauline Sutcliffe has presided over as representative of his estate. She recently invited artist, longtime fan, and Hamptonite Richard Prince to curate a selection of her brother's works for exhibition at Harper's Books in East Hampton. Prince writes in the exhibition catalog of seeing the paintings years ago on TV and his dream of working with the estate to curate such a show.

The show, "Stuart Sutcliffe: Yea YeaYea," features 21 abstract paintings and works on paper using paint, drawing materials and collage. Opening August 10 at [Harper's Books](#) in East Hampton, this is the first U.S. retrospective of Sutcliffe's artwork to be exhibited since a 2001 exhibit at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.



"Untitled" by Stuart Sutcliffe, 1960. Mixed media on paper, 23 x 33 inches.

In more Beatles art/music news, Guild Hall will host a screening on August 10 of part-time East Hampton resident Sir Paul McCartney's "Rockshow," a 1980 American concert film featuring Paul McCartney and Wings, the band that included his late wife Linda. The film features 30 songs from the 1970s North American tour and some groovy '70s bell bottom fashions and shag haircuts. On August 25, the Classic Albums Live Band will re-create the 1969 Beatles album "Abbey Road" note for note on the stage of the [John Drew Theater of Guild Hall](#).



"Rockshow" movie poster.

Wrapping up the rockin' summer at Guild Hall will be Patti Smith. The artist / singer / poet / photographer/author takes the stage on September 1. Smith has been on quite the artistic roll in the last few years: releasing a memoir about Robert Mapplethorpe; exhibiting her spooky travelogue photos with Robert Miller Gallery at Art Basel Miami Beach; presenting on stages around

the world and winning the National Book Award for “Just Kids”.

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Patti Smith at her photo exhibit, Robert Miller Gallery booth,
Art Basel, 2009. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

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