



Talking With: Marcia Resnick on Photographing Punks, Poets and Other Bad Boys

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

With her ruffled skirts and combat boots, Marcia Resnick is a true contradiction: a bold, girly girl photographer who braved the trenches of New York City's rough and tumble downtown underground in the 1970s and '80s and emerged with hundreds of remarkable photos of the best and baddest of the bad boys.

I met Resnick in the early 1980s when I was fresh out of college and working as a curator at The Night Gallery, a short-lived downtown club/art gallery. She wanted to show something really unusual: an entire roll of film from the photo shoot she did with John Belushi six months before he died of an overdose. I hung out with her for a few days at her cavernous Canal Street loft and spent a wild night clubbing with her friends, one of whom was Italian model and actress Anita Pallenberg, ex-girlfriend of the Rolling Stones' Keith Richards.



Photo of John Belushi by Marcia Resnick.

Resnick printed every black and white image on the roll, and we nailed them to the wall behind pieces of plexiglass. True to the punk ethos, the opening turned chaotic when clubgoers—riled up Brits who had just been to a [Siouxsie and the Banshees](#) show—pried the photos off the walls and beat up [Rockets Redglare](#), the night's entertainer at the gallery. The next day we saw kids selling the photos over at St. Mark's Place. Art galleries could be dangerous places back then.

Flashing forward a few decades, Resnick has collaborated with old friend and writer Victor Bockris to publish a book of her photos and essays, "[Punks, Poets & Provocateurs: New York City Bad Boys, 1977-1982](#)" (Insight Editions, 2015) featuring a wide selection of her portraits.



Photo of William Burroughs by Marcia Resnick.

Marcia Resnick photographed the who's who in the worlds of jazz, rock and roll, literature, art and film. There are such rockers as Johnny Thunders, [Joey Ramone](#), James Brown, Iggy Pop, David Byrne, Brian Eno, and Mick Jagger; beat poets William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Gregory Corso; and artists, filmmakers, authors and entertainers making the scene like John Waters, Studio 54's Steve Rubell, Gary Indiana, Abbie Hoffman, Norman Mailer, [Andy Warhol](#), Jean-Michel Basquiat and the aforementioned John Belushi.

As [Resnick](#) noted in a release from the publishers: "The people from the extraordinary New York milieu amongst whom I was living and working had no way of knowing that the years between 1977 and 1982 were enchanted, endangered, and unrepeatable."



Photo of Mick Jagger, William Burroughs & Andy Warhol by Marcia Resnick.

I reached out to Resnick via email recently to get some more insight into her life and the book.

Sandra Hale Schulman: How did you get started and what made you want to start photographing downtown bad boys?

Marcia Resnick: "In 1976, I totaled my car and woke up in the hospital, my mind streaming with vivid images of my life. I used these images to stage photographs of my adolescence and paired them with short, often humorous written observations. My book "Re-visions" (The Coach House Press, Toronto, 1978) was the end product, an attempt to de-mystify my own past. I then traveled to Egypt where the men dominated everything and the women were veiled, hidden and overtly suppressed. I was surrounded by ungovernable maleness.

Upon my return to NYC, in an attempt to de-mystify men in general, I began a series of photographic portraits of the ungovernable men, the "*enfants terribles*" of our culture. These "bad boys" were initially the punk rockers of the downtown scene. My focus soon broadened to include artists, writers, filmmakers, actors, poets, etc. all united in their roots in the counterculture."



Photo of Mick Jagger by Marcia Resnick.



Photo of Johnny Thunders by Marcia Resnick.

SS: What made NYC so creative and vibrant in that time from 1977-1982?

MR: "NYC was a melting pot for both creative types and misfits, since the rents were low and affordable. In a time before computers and cell phones and electronic social networking, people frequented music clubs and other venues in order to fraternize with like-minded people and collaborate on artistic projects, share ideas and just have fun. It was a time when 'do it yourself' was a popular dictum. People created new identities for themselves; indeed changing one's name was quite common. Personal transformation, aesthetic collaboration and sexual liberation for both women and gays, all contributed to the creation of a new multimedia bohemia, which was to be cursed by the advent of AIDS in 1982."



Photo of Divine by Marcia Resnick.

SS: Why did you choose to work with Victor Bockris and incorporate essays rather than publish just a straight photo book?

MR: "I wanted 'Punks, Poets & Provocateurs: New York City Bad Boys, 1977-1982' (Insight Editions, 2015) to reflect the times, which were colored by an intense collaboration between the arts. I believe that photographs do not exist in a vacuum. I wanted to create a pastiche of my photographic portraits intermixed with the ideas, conversations and stories about the very subjects in them."



Photo of Jean Michel Basquiat by Marcia Resnick.

SS: Looking through the book, so many of the subjects have passed on, including most recently, Muhammad Ali. What was your memory of photographing him?

MR: "My photograph of Ali came out of a very atypical experience. It was the first and only time I was a paparazzo, surrounded by a sea of photographers. I was being crushed and Robin Platzer, a veteran paparazzo felt sorry for me. She hoisted me up to the front of the crowd so that I would be able to see Ali and take a few pictures. Almost all of my other photographs were taken in my studio, where I was able to experience the give and take implicit in the collaboration between the

photographer and the subject during a photo session.”

Marcia Resnick is based in New York. Her new photo book, “Punks, Poets and Provocateurs, NYC Bad Boys 1977-1982,” features commentary by Victor Bockris and additional texts by John Waters, Richard Hell, Gary Indiana, Max Blagg, Liz Derringer, Roy Trakin, Kristian Hoffman and Marcia Resnick. For a video walk through of the book, visit www.marciaresnick.com. The book was celebrated earlier this year with an exhibition and event at [How! Happening](#) in New York City.

In The Hamptons, a book signing takes place at [Art Hamptons](#) on Saturday, June 25, 2016 at 2 p.m. at Booth 118, hosted by [Karyn Mannix Contemporary](#). Click [here](#) for details.

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