

# PUNK. Its Traces in Contemporary Art

Exhibition from 13 May to 25 September 2016



Gavin Turk, *Pop Up*, 2000

Heir to other radical and nonconformist movements such as Dada and Situationism, punk became one of the most long-lasting cultural references of the twentieth century. This exhibition examines its influence on contemporary art, marked by a critical and questioning spirit, seemingly the most propitious territory to follow punk's traces.

**JOHNNY ROTTEN**, microphone in hand, is on his knees on a stage, surrounded by broken beer bottles that have been hurled from the crowd; next to him, Sid Vicious, who has, throughout the entire show and as usual, played his bass unplugged, is bleeding after having cut his chest with one of the bottles. This is the remaining image of the iconic punk band the Sex Pistols' last concert in San Francisco in 1978. Only four years have passed since, in August 1974, the Ramones played furious one-minute songs in the CBGB club in New York, where, a year later, Television, Suicide, Talking Heads, the Dictators and over thirty bands would also play. That same summer in London, Malcolm McLaren renames his fashion store Sex and creates the Sex Pistols. In 1976 they appear on TV and swear provocatively. The following day they are on the front pages of all the newspapers and are banned everywhere in England. And punk explodes. Two years later, in the same summer of 1978 when the Sex Pistols play their last gig, a no wave concert takes place at New York's Artists Space, reclaiming the intensity of the beginnings of punk with bands such as Teenage Jesus and the Jerks and, later, Sonic Youth. What follows are the effects of the explosion.

This is the brief and strict history of the punk explosion as an essentially musical movement that took place during the second half of the seventies. But during that last Sex Pistols' concert, Johnny Rotten would launch a question whose echo crosses all those years: 'Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?' Critic Greil Marcus was there. And much later – while writing *Lipstick Traces*, the first genealogy of punk – he remembers how, underneath the grinding of teeth of Johnny Rotten singing to punk anarchy, one could hear the echo of a fury that, like a ghost, has traversed the whole twentieth century: fundamentally in the revolutionary fervour of the Situationists and their anti-everything slogans, in the howls of the Dadaists and their will for negation or the revolutionary fury of the communards tearing down the Vendôme Column in Paris. Punk, therefore, was not only a musical movement, but the manifestation of unease in the face of an economic, political, social and cultural system: a reaction to a society marked by the end of the hippie dream, the return of conservatism, the emergence of terrorism, the oil crisis and the lack of future for young people condemned to the dole. 'No future' was one of the slogans appropriated from previous movements like Situationism and Dada. But unlike them, punk emerged in the midst of mass culture, prompting its expansion beyond the Anglo-Saxon world and escaping the boundaries of music. This expansion superseded the concrete historical phenomenon, turning punk into an adjective that qualifies a way of understanding the world: critical, radical, anti, free...

Punk is an attitude. An attitude made of rage, speed, noise, incorrectness, nonconformity, denial, opposition and provocation that runs through the twentieth century and extends beyond the seventies, beyond the Anglo-Saxon context and beyond the music scene. An explosion whose effects make punk one of the most influential cultural references of the twentieth century. The punk attitude is also very present in contemporary art, marked by a critical and questioning spirit, seemingly the most propitious territory to follow punk's traces.

The purpose of *PUNK. Its Traces in Contemporary Art* is to examine its influence on contemporary art, establishing a genealogy that reaches to our own time, and, in the words of Greil Marcus, to follow its traces to the present. This is to corroborate an intuition: that beyond the divisions that exist between artists, trends or media, there is a rabid noise that unites many creators. That is, the punk attitude whose history can be traced from Dadaism to, among others, Situationism, is still very much alive in contemporary artistic production. This exhibition shows how the echoes of this punk attitude – the reasons that lead to dissatisfaction, nonconformity, the loss of faith in progress or the fierce critique of icons of the socio-economic system – are intrinsic to the practice of many artists. Taking up the famous phrase 'punk is (not) dead' is to assert that effectively punk is one of the living dead, a zombie that has continued to gain adherents.

Some of the more than sixty artists in the exhibition witnessed and took part in the explosion of punk in the seventies, marking their artistic activity as true instigators and activists. Others are older: they anticipated and demonstrate the historical ties of punk with other radical movements. For many, the punk explosion appears as an explicit reference: the use of elements such as noise, cut-out typography, anti-design and ugliness; or the inclusion of direct musical references to punk groups and icons. The exhibition also presents traces of punk as an attitude: denial, opposition and destruction; the DIY; the reference to fear and terror in a society that alienates individuals; the same alienation that causes psychotic states; valorisation of what is out of the norm; nihilism; a critique of the economic system and anarchy; and the claim of sexual liberation itself, the body as a place of battle. Finally, there is a selection of fanzines, videos, films, feature articles, posters, books and records documenting the history of punk, its explosion and its impact on different contexts.

Through the traces it has left on contemporary artistic production and its strong influence, the exhibition reveals the main elements that define punk as a way of understanding culture and, by extension, of being in the world. Equally, it reveals the main world events that prompted punk's appearance: the use of terror and terrorism as an excuse to justify a return to conservatism and a more conventional way of life; the economic crisis and the shortage of resources signalling an end to the dream of progress; and a generation that had lost all hope and was condemned to a life on the dole. The 'no future' slogan was a reflection on the loss of a utopic horizon. In these set of circumstances, punk, heir to the most radical movements of the twentieth century, was the living proof of the failure of contemporary society, a failure that continues to exist and has marked the nature of our contemporaneity.

Conversely, by way of reflection, the exhibition shows how the main aspects of the social and political crises of the seventies have remained and how, in order to express disagreement and anger, artists have picked up the traces of punk.

Carlos Aires, Marcel·lí Antúnez, Martin Arnold, Fabienne Audéoud, Eduardo Balanza, Bill Balaskas, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jordi Benito, Laurent P. Berger, Chris Burden, Tony Cokes, Jordi Colomer, Brice Dellsperger, DETEXT, Die Tödliche Doris, Christoph Draeger, Jimmie Durham, Tracey Emin, Mario Espliego, VALIE EXPORT, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Claire Fontaine, Chiara Fumai, Iñaki Garmendia, Kendell Geers, Gelitin, Nan Goldin, Douglas Gordon, Dan Graham, Eulàlia Grau, Johan Grimonprez, Guerrilla Girls, Antoni Hervàs, Jota Izquierdo, Mike Kelley, Martin Kippenberger, João Louro, Christian Marclay, Israel Martínez, Raisa Maudit, Paul McCarthy, Jonathan Meese, Jordi Mitjà, Joan Morey, Janis E. Müller, Matt Mullican, Itziar Okariz, João Onofre, Antonio Ortega, Luis Felipe Ortega and Daniel Guzmán, Tony Oursler, Mabel Palacín, Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa, Raymond Pettibon, Maria Pratts, Tere Recarens, Jamie Reid, Tim Reinecke, Aïda Ruilova, Pepo Salazar, Santiago Sierra, Federico Solmi, Natascha Stellmach, Tres, Gavin Turk, T.R. Uthco & Ant Farm (Doug Hall, Chip Lord, Doug Michels and Jody Procter), plus some of the documents, records, books and graphic references relevant to punk.

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Punk session: special visit to  
the exhibition and Skype with  
Tomás Spicolli  
Fridays 13 May and 3 June,  
4.30 pm. Espai Taller.  
15 €. Free with Amic card.  
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**Guided visit to the  
exhibition by the curator****David G. Torres**

Thursday 19 May, 7 pm  
Exclusively for MACBA  
Amics. Advanced booking at  
[amics@amics.cat](mailto:amics@amics.cat). Limited  
places

## SEMINAR

**With Greil Marcus and  
other guest speakers to be  
announced**

Thursday 15 and Friday 16  
September  
Meier Auditorium

EXPERIENCE MACBA  
5 €. Free with museum  
ticket and MACBA Amics  
cards. No advance booking  
required. Limited places

**Félix Pérez-Hita**

Thursday 7 July, 7 pm  
Museum Atrium

**Antoni Hervàs and  
Corte Moderno present  
*Negociudad***

Thursday 14 July, 7 pm  
Museum Atrium

**Screening of the  
documentary *Tito, the  
Phantom Monk (2015)***

Presented by the director,  
Dani Montlleó  
Thursday 21 July, 7 pm  
Meier Auditorium

**Maria Pratts and Ulldeter**

Thursday 28 July, 7 pm  
Museum Atrium

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**Curator**

David G. Torres

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Catalogue, music lists, timelines, thematic itineraries, downloadable texts... Everything at [www.macba.cat/expo-punk](http://www.macba.cat/expo-punk)

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**Opening times**

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, from 11 am to 7.30 pm (from 25 June to 24 September, from 11 am to 8 pm)  
Tuesday closed  
Saturday, from 10 am to 9 pm  
Sundays and public holidays, from 10 am to 3 pm

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Plaça dels Àngels, 1  
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