

RED WHITE AND BLUE:

POP
PUNK
POLITICS
PLACE



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PLACE

Jon Savage
Uninhabited London
1977



Peter Blake
Barney Bubbles
Pavel Büchler
Nicky Carvell
Neil Clements
Terence Cuneo
Richard Evans
Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard
Jaime Gili
Derek Jarman
Pil & Galia Kollektiv
Laibach
Antonio Manuel
Cildo Meireles
Humphrey Ocean
Simon Periton
Mick Jones Rock & Roll Public Library
Jon Savage
Syd Shelton
Jon Smith
Richard Smith
Daniel Sturgis
Steve Thomas
Paul Tickell
Mark Titchner
Trio/Fabrika
Kirsten Weiner

CHELSEA space
07.11.12 – 08.12.12

CURATOR'S FOREWORD

From the window of CHELSEA space you can see the statue of Britannia weighing heavily on top of Tate Britain, Looking at this solemn monument I am always quickly transported to a Do It Yourself Britannia – Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's punk shop assistant, Jordan, wearing a plastic union jack tabard and stockings, brandishing a broom handle trident as she defiantly pokes her backside at the camera in Derek Jarman's 1978 film Jubilee.

Timed to coincide with the last gasps of the 2012 Jubilee, Red White and Blue explores relationships, influences, and appropriations from political, pop, and punk imagery and looks at how the contemporary soundbites of Austerity, Legacy, and National Identity have resonated across the last half century.

Notions of Britannia and Britishness permeate this exhibition but there are also international perspectives from Sao Paulo, Sarajevo, New York, and Ljubljana. The show hints at subversion and ambiguity in popular culture and covers ground from patriotism to anarchy; xenophobia to Rock Against Racism; fashion tribalism to bloody civil war; from figuration to abstraction and Rock & Roll to Rave.

One of my many lodestones for Red White and Blue was the juxtaposition of constructivist-style graphics and the jingoistic title Frogs Sprouts Clogs and Krauts in a 1979 poster designed by Barney Bubbles for the band The Rumour. The painter Daniel Sturgis told me that Bubbles' album cover designs had been influential for him, and we began to share ideas towards this exhibition. I admire Daniel's work and I am grateful for his intelligent and thoughtful contributions to the planning of this show.

I am also indebted to him for introducing me to Michael Bracewell who has written brilliantly for this publication.

When Michael came to discuss the exhibition we walked him around CHELSEA space describing an imaginary show:

Enter into a darkish room with plasma screens and video projection; a control room or nerve centre; five intense films, each one would be enough on its own – in at the deep end, a video immersion tank.

Next, a kind of billboard alley of photographic images, pop art, graphics and posters; imagery piled high, international, and layered with histories.

Derek Jarman
Jordan's Dance
1977
courtesy Maja Hoffman
Luma Foundation



At the end of this graphic walkway a TV on the floor acts as an abject sentinel, a cathode tube at the end of the tunnel.

Into the light: the main space, a minimal installation of vivid, colourful artworks. Emptied out and cleaned up, abstracted details of political symbols and music related graphics find new materiality and new meaning.

Somehow Michael Bracewell saw through the tangled network of images, ideas, and lists of names and understood. His writing is perfect.

I would be lying if I said I was cool about the work in this exhibition, I retain the right to be a fan; the generous response of the artists, designers and musicians in the show has meant a lot and the names and ideas in Red White and Blue include many references to the 47 show history of CHELSEA space.

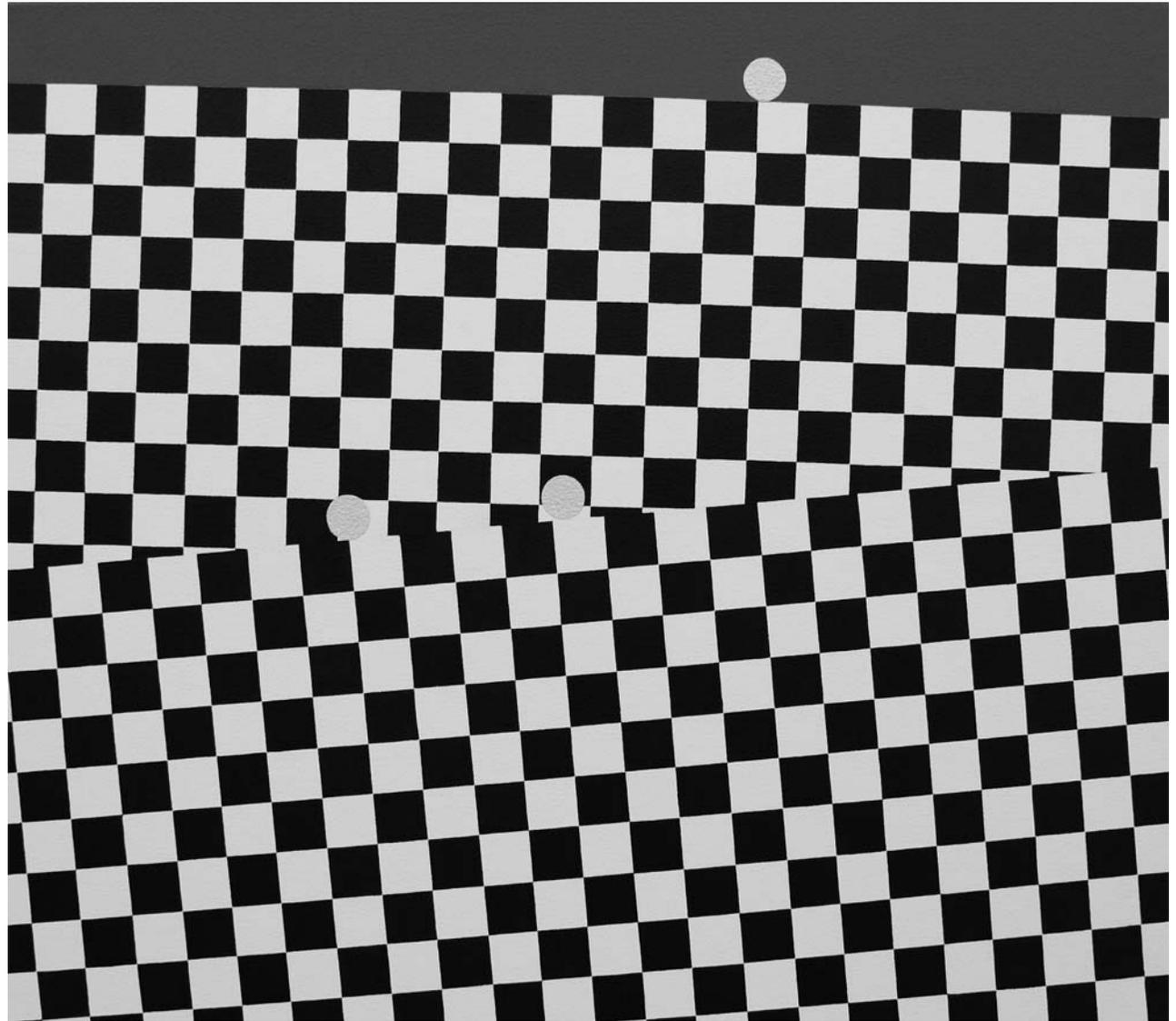
Although CHELSEA space has a reputation for showing archives, this particular event is not a memorabilia show or a nostalgia trip, we want you to stop dreaming, wake up, experience art NOW.

DONALD SMITH



Vertigo Record Label

Daniel Sturgis
Oscillate Mildly
2011



SOME NOTES FOR THE EXHIBITION

MICHAEL
BRACEWELL



Laibach
Anglia
2007

The simple things you see are all complicated.

“After he finished his studies at Ealing, Michael English worked for the new boutique ‘Gear’ in 1965, designing carrier bags and sunglasses. The sunglasses had Union Jacks printed across the lenses and became a ubiquitous prop and fashion accessory with a multitude of connotations: principally the tension between patriotic sign and its decontextualised, transgressive identity, as one more ‘hard edge’ colour abstract pattern. Here was the tinge of ambivalence and allusion which characterised so much of Pop design and its avant-garde counterparts. The appearance of the Union Jack, both in and out context within an avant-garde milieu, was dependent upon Geoff Reeve, a Royal College of Art textiles student in 1960. Reeve first painted fellow student Phillip Harrison’s sunglasses with the Union Jack design for the celebrations of Princess Margaret’s wedding to Tony Armstrong-Jones in London in May, 1960. From this context of royalist ritual, Reeve then made up silkscreened fabric designs of Union Jacks in November that year. The head of the Textiles Department at the RCA, Roger Nicholson, was horrified at their appearance in Reeve’s subsequent Diploma show. In this case the flag was given a serial meaninglessness, a repetition out of context, festive only in the announcement of the carnival-like circulation of a sign that had previously signified ‘correct’ behaviour, within the mental boundaries of the British state.”

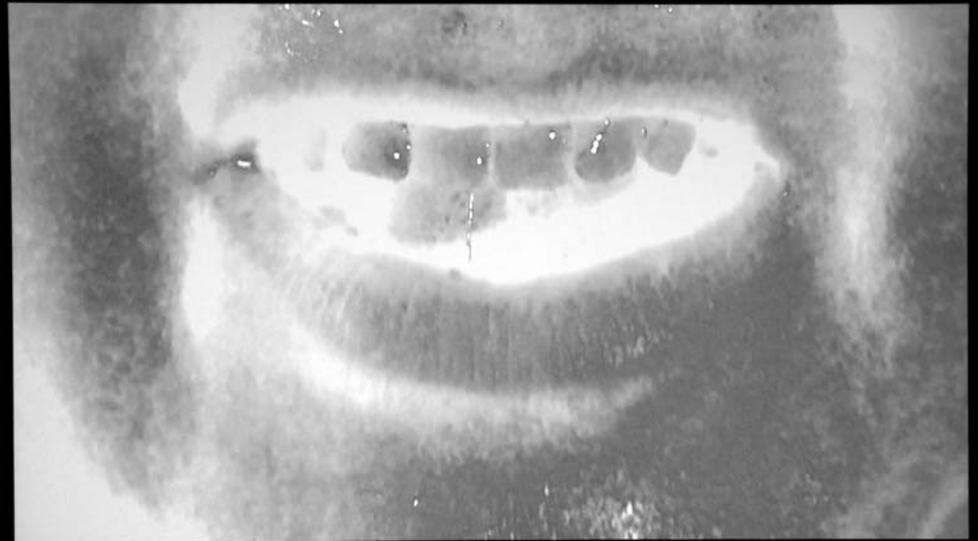
Dr David Mellor: ‘The Sixties Art Scene in London’.

In his uneasy film fantasy, 'Jubilee', a non-punk film featuring one or two punk people, (Jordan, Adam Ant) and released in 1978, director Derek Jarman has Queen Elizabeth I transported from the sixteenth century to the twentieth by her Court Magician, John Dee. She discovers a crypto-fascist dystopia and teenage anarchy – a literal interpretation of the Sex Pistols, 'God Save The Queen'. While there was something too shrilly adolescent about the dichotomous political vision of 'Jubilee', Jarman was in his element visualizing the Pistols pronouncement that "there's no future in England's dreaming..." As an artist, writer and sub-cultural personality, Jarman was most importantly a point of confluence: connecting the post-war sensibility of British Neo-Romanticism to the gay politics of the 1980s by way of the Hollywood redux glamour of 70s pop styling on the Kings Road and Kensington High Street: "Ossie's last collection, BIBA's closing sale..." as Neil Tennant recalls in 'Requiem in Denim and Leopard Skin' by Pet Shop Boys.

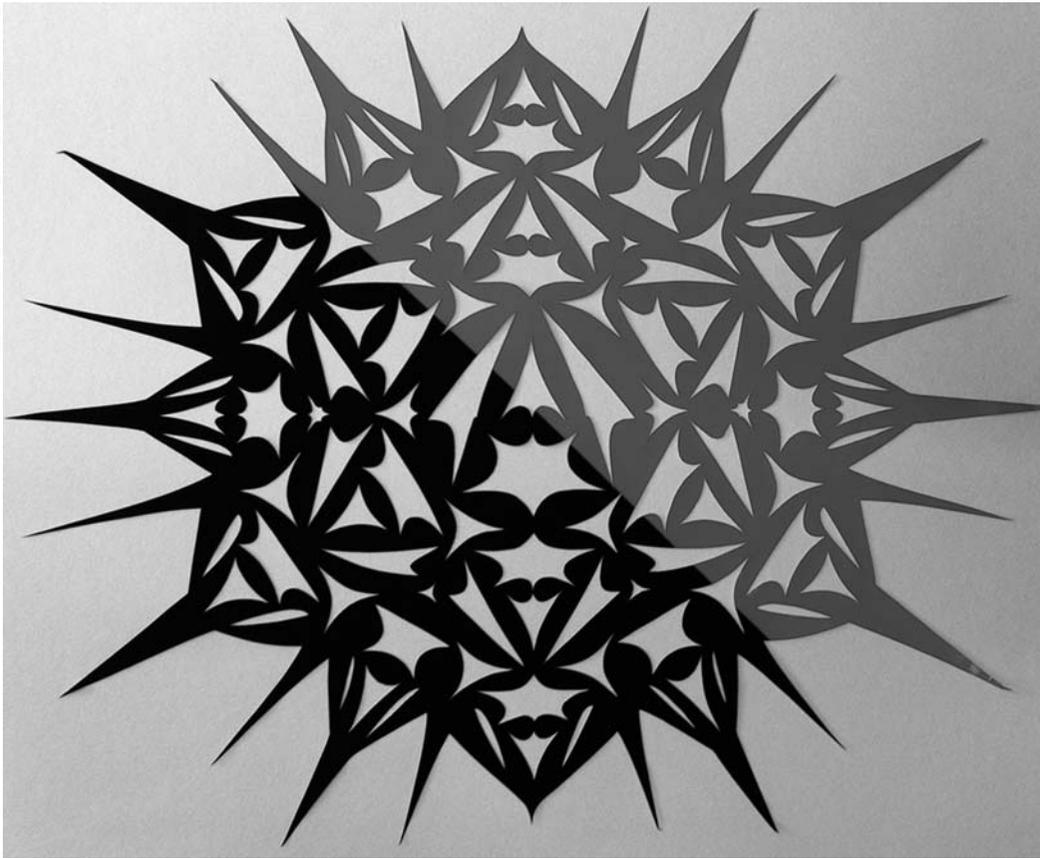
We fade to grey.

Between 1976 and 1977, punk in the UK seemed to express the sensation of modernity – the modern British state - reaching critical mass. The old modern, of post-war new build housing, tower blocks and multi-story car parks, ring roads, supermarkets and showrooms for new white goods, had stalled, worn out, prematurely derelict.

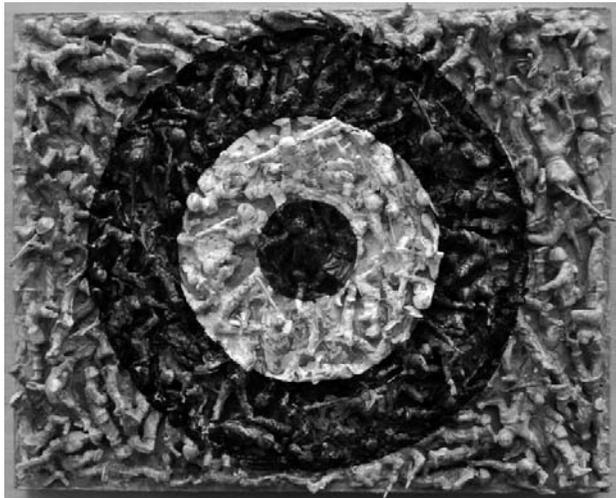
Time imploded in the punk version, releasing sci-fi Dickensian rockabilly uber-realism. Punk music accordingly played games with acceleration and deceleration – caricature surfer rock or heavy dirge; punk clothes were made of materials that were largely impossible to wash, at times impossible to wear, and which when they weren't hindering movement seemed pre-programmed to fall apart. Fetish-wear as street-wear. Modernity *in extremis* gave birth to a new wave of creative innovation and restlessness, energised by ideas of chaos and destruction – thus creating, despite itself, a short-lived dream landscape, of fluorescent colours smudged with the decayed blackness of imagery from the fag-end of mechanical reproduction and primitive photocopy.



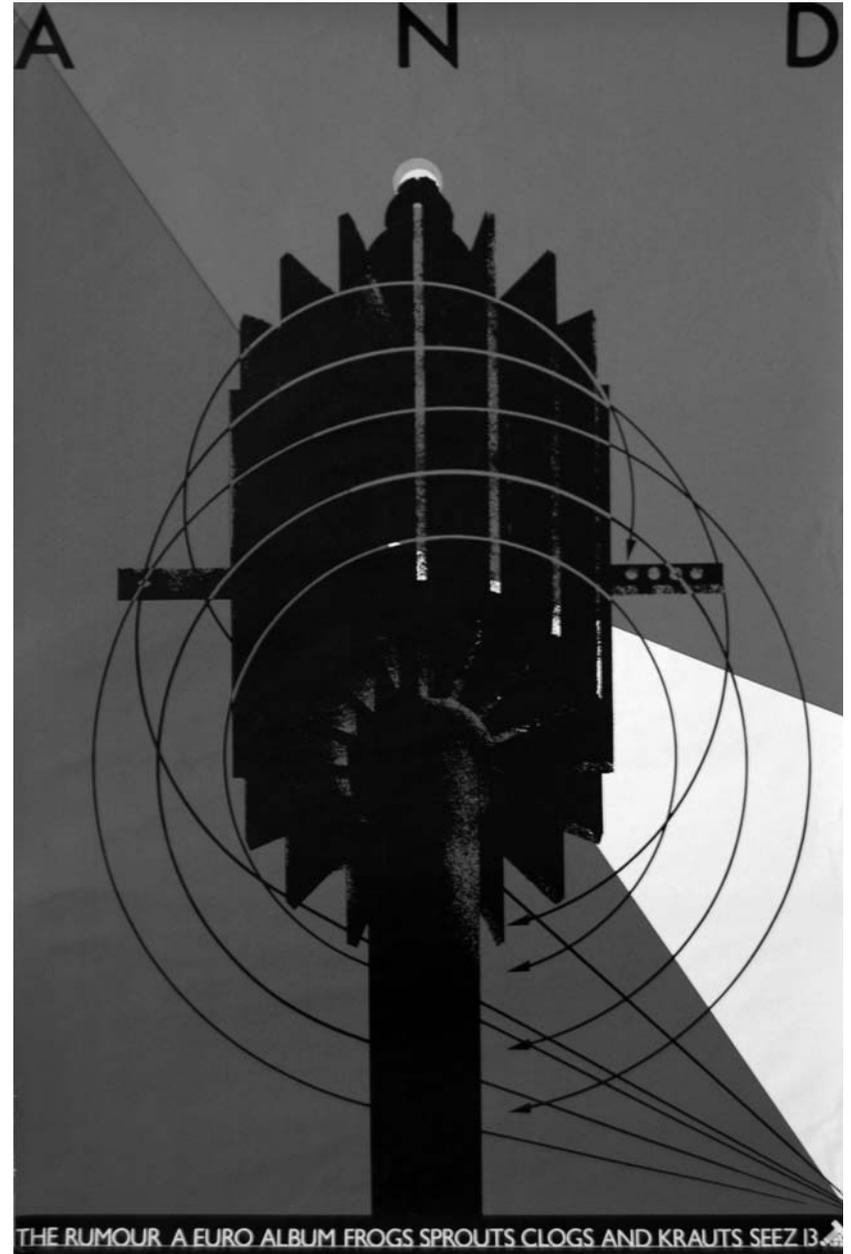
Mark Titchner
N(1)B
2011



Simon Periton
Argy-Bharji 2000.
copyright the artist
courtesy Sadie Coles HQ
London



Jon Smith
Target
2001



Barney Bubbles
Frogs Sprouts Clogs and
Krauts
1979

TONIGHT!

Pavel Büchler
Tonight
2003

The Clash
Flag
c.1978

But there was no future in England's dreaming, after all; and it seemed as though elegiac and tense, freezing stillness followed punk's brief year of pantomime anarchy. A frosty twilight over the rural-suburban estates of Coventry or Nottingham: clear skies, deserted roads and crescents. This was a monochrome world, a landscape of requiem and post-industrial greyness – Manchester, Berlin and Warsaw cross channelling an idea of their respective cultural identities to become reflections of one another, within the dream logic of urban decay and malign, repressive government.

But did any of this actually happen? Or, rather, was there an enduring belief in a cultural dream-episode, within which, Cavaliers and Roundheads, pop children of the punk generation chose either intense romanticism or devout Socialist realism – as their sub-cultural camouflage, as it were, and their choice of self-reinvention?

The dream landscape of brutalised Britain provided a theatre for both sensibilities – for the romantics to recreate the Weimar by way of Bowie, to fixate upon the mood of camp-surreal carnival within the cultural requiem; and for the socialist realists to believe a re-run of Spain, 1936: the demonization of the Union Jack, no longer Pop fun or Mod abstraction; but the Struggle come to Brick Lane, with the National Front to the football terrace.

A hybridization, then, of intense social realism and equally dedicated Romanticism: co-joined in seemingly ceremonial sacrifice – the suicide of Joy Division's singer, Ian Curtis, in 1980; and the release (for example) one year later, of 'Ghost Town' by The Specials. A year and dream of death in pop world: a time of rites and ritual and existential crisis – choppy minor chords, cavernous echo, portent, tension, anger and melancholy. Cold, cold, cold...





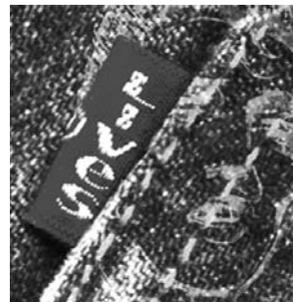
Antonio Manuel
 Repression Once Again -
 Here is the Outcome
 [fragment]
 1968



Peter Blake
 Found Art Britannia
 Published by CCA
 Galleries
 2011

Over time, the image-bank of punk and the 'New Wave' transmutes from documentary realism to pure abstraction, carrying within its visual DNA the delicate tracery of an epoch of anxiety. If between 1978 and 1983 there was a sub-cultural accumulation of nervous energy, catalysed by an in-growing political awareness, later fixated on the rise of Thatcherism and the advent of HIV/AIDS, then the style code of this anxiety knew a slide from monochrome to bright colour – and in the laying down of a sub-cultural imprint (call it a map with no names) from which successive generations might attempt to take or intuit their bearings.

The days of requiem and elegy – the softening out from aggression to plangency – in British post-punk, filtered first through silver melodrama (“this means nothing to me...”) and then becoming hyper-colored in its counter-reaction of upbeat party-time retro-Samba: the sounds of a bright new Britain, epicentre cappuccino-Soho jazz revival; like it's the jive-talking pre-Mod Fifties and we are absolute beginners: the dissolution of punk into 'style' culture – everyone a social anthropologist, fluent in the style code, media multi-lingual.



Steve Thomas
 Elvis Lives In Levis
 2010



David Bowie, Bryan Ferry and Andy Warhol had comprised a Trinity of imperial pop figures between 1972 and 1982 (Peter York had written in '76 how Ferry should hang in the Tate next to Bowie) – and Bowie's highly persuasive performance in Nic Roeg's sci-fi film, 'The Man Who Fell To Earth', playing the stranded alien, Thomas Newton, seemed subsequently filled with prophecy. A social anthropologist himself, Newton watches a bank of televisions simultaneously, all pumping out the mass media of America, from cowboy film to cookery show. After a while he becomes gorged, overwhelmed, terrified – by the sheer density of mass media, its tyranny of mediocrity. He screams at the images to get out of his mind. And as Jon Savage wrote subsequently, as regards our postmodern condition: "Now we're all Thomas Newton – and isn't it a bore?"

Throughout the 1980s, the pan-cultural progress of postmodernism moved away from insular, theoretical debate (within architecture or critical theory, for example) and towards the then burgeoning worlds of media, contemporary art, luxury goods and popular culture. These phenomena (and within the lexicon of postmodern thinking, all and any cultural manifestation seemed usefully to be labelled a 'phenomenon') appeared to mark a distinct gear-change within the broader cultural mainstream, and announce a self-consciously clever sense of playfulness: the commentary of cultural production upon its own ancestry, context, language and capacities, and a school of creativity that combined self-portraiture and historical reference (time travel, even) with a somewhat ironical and dandified form of self- diagnostic aphorism.

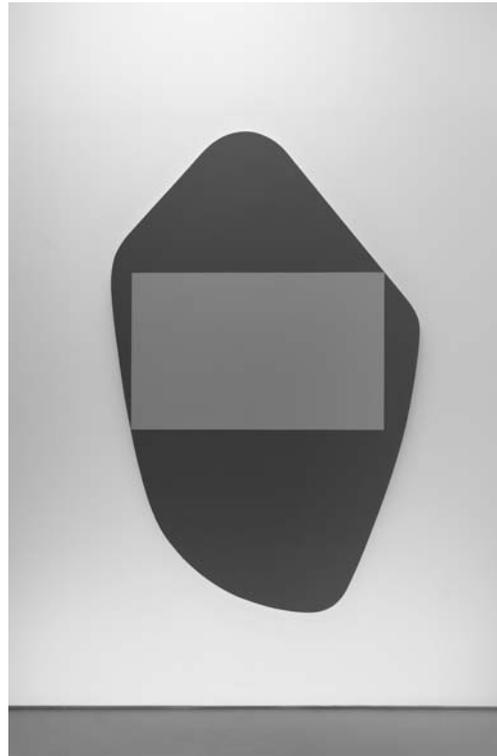
Kirsten Weiner
Gun
2007



Nicky Carvell
Hemel 17
2011



Neil Clements
Phantom I
2011



Neil Clements
Phantom II
2011

Punk rock had seized on popular music as a metaphor for cultural conformism, and proceeded to subject the form and all that it represented to a series of games: accelerating or decelerating music (as discussed) to points of heightened absurdity deconstruction and hyper-stylization, for example, while appropriating the 'low' form of popular culture for 'high' ideas of protest, cultural and aesthetic revolution. Very swiftly, punk became a cultural polyglot, mingling covert or overt intellectualism with contrariness and shock tactic in order to express a sensibility that lay beyond the old ideas of modernity, while announcing a post-modern condition.

In many ways, postmodernism as it came to exist throughout the 1980s might now be seen as a fortuitous (and only partially accidental) collision between the creative audacities and desire for newness catalysed by punk, and the already operational postmodern practices at work in critical theory, design, fine art and architecture. That postmodernism itself would turn out to be the house style of cultural materialism *in extremis*, and as such modernity's undertaker, dressed to kill, would be a final irony of both the much-debated term, and the epoch that bears its name.

Red, white and blue constellate into different meanings, tethered in the UK to the visual language of nationhood, in all its cultural capriciousness and emotional volatility. In relation to sub-cultures, the patterning of the colours shifts in mood, from threatening to effervescent; the years immediately on either side of 1980, in Pop terms, pit the last echoes of a punk sensibility alongside the standard fare of light entertainment. Mods and punks and skinheads and new industrialism and Style culture and disco and New Romantics and Power Pop and Rock Against Racism and suddenly –

It's thirty years later; and we didn't have the romance of the century; and the drama of the old pop age is refined as though from a mass-cultural database, computing the nuances of aesthetic choice. Pristine, poised, smooth, clever, gorgeous, cool... So much of everything!

"Dot dash, dot dash, dot dash..." -

END.



Richard Evans
The Who Live:
The Blues to the Bush
1999



**Iain Forsyth &
Jane Pollard**
File Under Sacred Music
2003
Photograph by Alison
Wonderland. Courtesy
Kate MacGarry, London

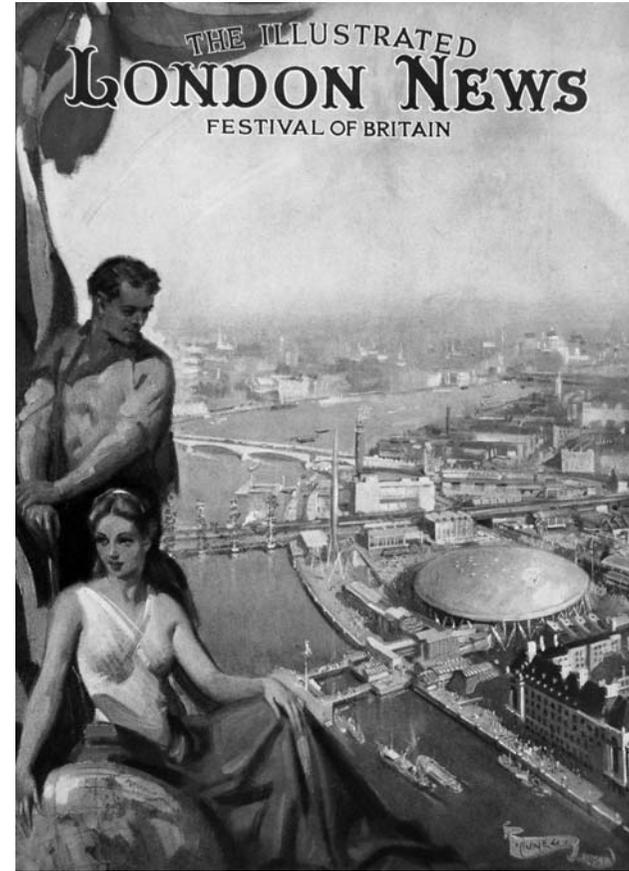


Paul Tickell
Punk and the Pistols
1995



Pil and Galia Kollektiv
WE
2011

Jaime Gili
Quilmes Avellaneda
2005

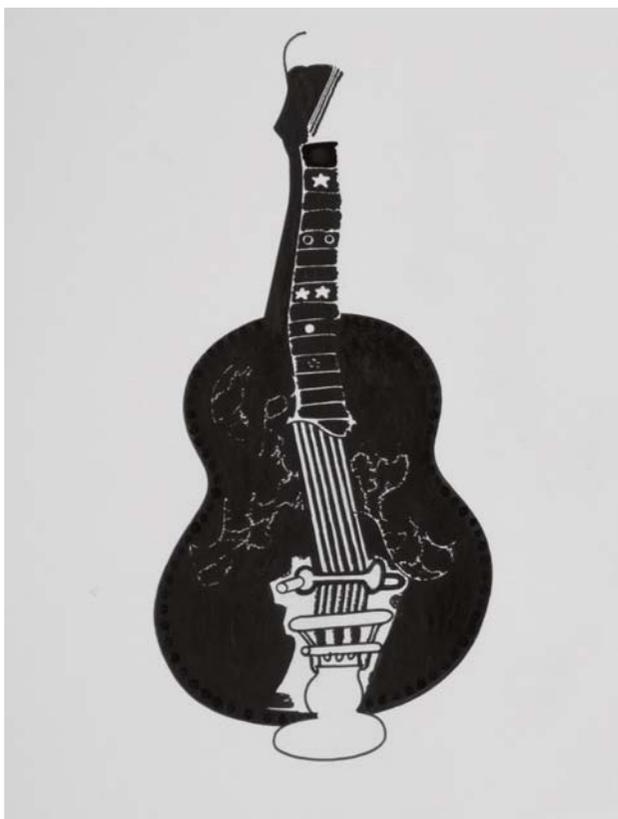


Terence Cuneo
Festival of Britain
1951



Trio/Fabrika
Let The Game Start Now
1994

Richard Smith
Lee
1961
copyright the artist
courtesy Flowers Gallery
London



Humphrey Ocean
Black
2012

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1977-2012