

ROUGH TRADE

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Featuring...
Janette Beckman &
Vivien Goldman, Kevin Morby,
The Bakersfield Sound,
Brix Smith-Start

MOVING FORWARD, GLANCING BACK:

Words by *Janette Beckman* and *Vivien Goldman*. Images by *Gudrun Georges* and archive photos by *Janette Beckman*



Janette and Vivien in John Lydon's house, photographer unknown

A conversation between long-reigning champions of punk, reggae and hip hop and long-time best friends Janette Beckman and Vivien Goldman.



Music photographer **Janette Beckman** and writer and musician **Vivien Goldman** have been close friends since the '80s, and have since been carving their names out as some of the most respected creatives in music. Janette's career began when Vivien commissioned her to shoot **Siouxsie and the Banshees** at the Roundhouse, and went on to photograph legends of punk, hip hop and youth culture on the streets of London and New York. Vivien's career has seen her write for **Melody Maker**, **NME** and **Sounds** alongside making records, documentaries and books all about music. Not to mention she also lectures at NYU under the affectionate title of "Professor of Punk and Reggae." These days Janette is now exploring artistic collaboration with graffiti artists who she invites to reinterpret her famous photographs and is the New York Editor of **Jocks&Nerds** magazine. Vivien is working on a punk novel called **The Non-Stop Throb** and working with **August Darnell** of **Kid Creole & The Coconuts** on a musical called **Cherchez La Femme**. **Revolutionary: Songs 1979-82**, a compilation of Goldman's adorable post-punk music is being reissued on May 20, on the European indie label, **Staubgold Records**.

Here they are discussing friendship, music, being women in the music industry, memories of New York, and the effect the changing times have had on the work they have produced over the years.



Vivien: So I guess everybody seems to want us to start talking about how we met. You always like to tell that story..

Janette: *Okay, so, one day I decided to take my portfolio to Sounds, a well-known weekly music paper and I didn't really have any pictures of musicians in my portfolio. In fact I didn't have many portraits, I mainly had pictures of classic American things like neon and palm trees and stuff. I walked into Sounds with my little portfolio and asked to see the photo editor and they said there was no photo editor but this woman suddenly pops up and goes "Oh, I'll take a look at your work!" And she told me she was a Features Editor. This woman turned out to be Vivien and she looked at my work and was, like, "What are you doing tonight, do you want to go photograph Siouxsie and The Banshees?" And I was like, "Yeah!" without thinking. But the crazy thing was, I'd never ever photographed a pop group before, let alone a live band, and I really didn't know what I was doing, I certainly hadn't learned anything about that in college, but we went to the gig and I got pictures of Siouxsie and the Banshees and that was the start of my music career.*

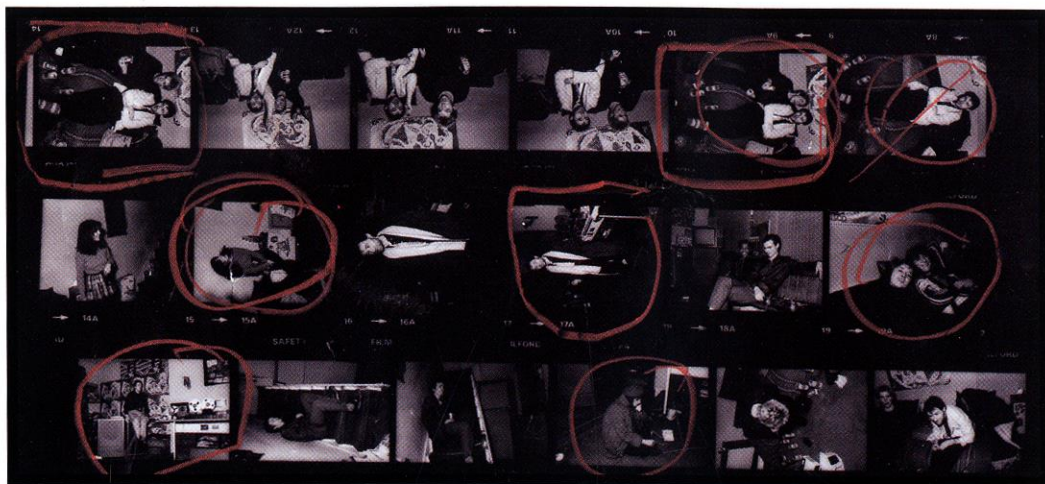
V: The funny thing is I remember it very clearly because I liked your work, but it did

flit across my mind that you were a possible accomplice, because I was always the only girl.

J: Right.

V: I had this front-line mentality back then, because it was like the last gasp of the rockiest, laddish old guard. They always used to say things like: "Well, I don't see why we should have to cover girls because girls don't buy music, girls don't like music, girls don't make music," And here I was, y'know, supposedly Features Editor, always saying, "Well, what am I? Chopped vinyl?"

J: *That is really true and when I eventually left and went to Melody Maker it was very much "Rock! Go down the pub, jeans tucked into cowboy boots, smoking cigarettes culture," and I was more of an art school, pot-smoking type and I didn't really fit in. It wasn't so much that I was a woman, they just took the piss out of me because of what I wore. I'd go in wearing pyjama bottoms with my Madness t-shirt on and they'd be like, "Ohh, did you forget to get dressed then today?.." But it didn't really deter me because I just wanted to take photos.*



V: Ha! There was a thing in *The Guardian* talking about bands which said that women who wrote for the *NME* at the time had to have the skin of a rhinoceros, but the thing is, if that's what you do, then you just sort of carry on ahead and you do it, you know? An interesting thing is, we never really trained for any of the stuff we did, and that was suitable for punk.

J: I pretty much approach a photoshoot to this very day exactly the same way I did back then. Talk to the person, take the picture. It's more instinct and collaboration with my artist that I'm photographing, rather than having any structure.

V: Well going to the digital, that was expanding the art, and y'know we've been doing these various things for quite a while and you know me, I'm always trying to expand with the writing. But I think it's writing all these other things that keeps music writing fresh as well.

I don't really go on tour with bands like I used to so a lot of my interviewing I do on Skype.

It's even more of a challenge to have that genuine contact where you cut through. Especially now the whole industry has changed so much, it's almost farcical when you think about how the *Sounds* office and *NME* office was comparatively open house and everybody used to drop in – from Malcom McLaren to Tom Robinson, anybody who you could think of. People from Stiff Records were always coming in with their badges, y'know; "If it ain't Stiff it ain't worth a fuck" and so on..

J: Don't you miss that thing of actually sitting down with somebody having a cup of tea or going round the corner to have a beer or something?

V: I was always very much a face-to-face person and really the human connection was defi-

nitely what fed me and kept me engaged. Like at Rough Trade people would be dropping in and out all the time and there would be an exchange of views and artists and people would make interesting collaborations. I remember knocking around with Scritti Politti there, the Delta 5, or Mark Perry who made the *Sniffin' Glue* fanzine. It also reminds me of what Jeannette Lee and me were talking about recently, when she was looking back on her period of time at Acme Attraction. That was a retail environment, theoretically, but it wasn't that for Jeannette and her partner there, Don Letts – it was more about selling ideas, communicating ideas, building community, than strictly creating sales. What do you think about Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's son Joe wanting to burn all his memorabilia?

J: Yes, seven million dollars worth of it! I think it's pathetic. For a start he owned *Agent Provocateur*, he's a wealthy guy, he's not really punk!

V: He can afford to do it!

J: He could be giving that money to the refugees in Calais if he wants to be so fucking punk. He could go there and help those people and it would be a much better thing to do.

V: I thought the same thing although I really see that somebody has to make these grand gestures sometimes. But it was a bit galling to think of all that money that people really need desperately to survive and achieve things.

J: It's interesting that he announced it like eight months before he was going to do it, saying he was going to do it in November or something, it's not like he's doing it tomorrow.

V: Yes well he wants to film it and make a whole art piece out of it.

People often talk about the differences between punk in New York and in London, both of them at that time were much more anarchic and free spirited, you could squat, make events and so on, but the big difference was it was so much more druggy in New York.





J: *It's bullshit, though. People are craving that freshness. Same thing with all the hip hop I photographed. People are always coming round here going, "Oh what was it like in the '80s? What was it like when you took a picture of Eazy-E? The thing is, I was just so in it at the moment, I was just there being me, taking photos of things that I loved, it wasn't like I was photographing celebrities or icons, a lot of them weren't even famous then.*

V: There's such a thing as a ghetto star, they used to say in Jamaica. They weren't famous at that moment but they were famous in their communities. And so that's a whole idea that I am always very fond of.

J: *It's interesting, the hip hop thing. People so idolise the whole era, and there was so much poverty and drugs and people dying of drugs. And as they died young just as they were rising up and becoming stars, and then becoming even more huge stars. Even Joe Strummer, no one's got a bad word to say about him and he died young.*

V: Yeah, I mean Bob Marley died young, then quite differently, there was Kurt Cobain, and Eazy-E, who is in another category again. People often talk about the differences between punk in New York and in London, both of them at that time were much more anarchic and free spirited, you could squat, make events and so on, but the big difference was it was so much more druggy in New York.

J: *They were doing heroin in New York, people were doing speed and smoking pot in London, that was the difference.*

V: Remember when I was living on Avenue C? I remember going downstairs to the candy store to indulge in a dime bag of street level ganja and they said, "Oh sorry we haven't got that any more but we can sell you some crack," and I said, "Well I don't want crack!" And they said, "No one wants weed any more, they want crack," and I didn't want crack so I stomped out. The next stage of that story is that long after, that very joint became a sort of *belle époque* style tea room specialising in Viennese pastries. So I always think that's the story

of the lower east side moving on from the early hip hop era to becoming gentrified.

J: *It was pretty dangerous, I was living on Avenue B and 8th street and it was supposed to be very dangerous but nothing ever happened to me in all the years I lived there. I was just lucky.*

V: Well often things would happen late at night. Even if you came home from clubs late you would be alright, most violence used to start at around 3:30am. I used to love coming home because there used to be all these gardens there and you'd hear the cock crowing as you came home from clubs and it gave that surreal feeling. A wild east feeling. I remember hearing Public Enemy for the first time on a big roof top party there on Houston Street. A new sonic experience. It was so hot and the sound was so new and everything was just so incredibly exhilarating.

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J: *That hot summer when that Public Enemy came out, every car radio blasting down Avenue B. Public Enemy was so influential.*

V: What's nice is that you and I keep wanting to work together. I think I was right that time when I thought you were a potential accomplice when I met you that day at *Sounds*.

J: *Yes, and one thing is, Vivien, last year after being photographer for all these years and photographing celebrities, politicians, sports people, artists, and having all these different types of photography, and last year I curated that Photoville thing, being asked to curate a show of the best music photography from disco until now, was so exciting because it meant I could reach out to all these iconic music photographers.*

V: Many of whom are our friends! Keeping the tribe alive. It's a different sort of challenge now for young photographers and writers to make their way than it was for us, with the way artists get paid now.

J: *The cream always rises to the top. There will always be great writers and great photographers. And that's that.*