

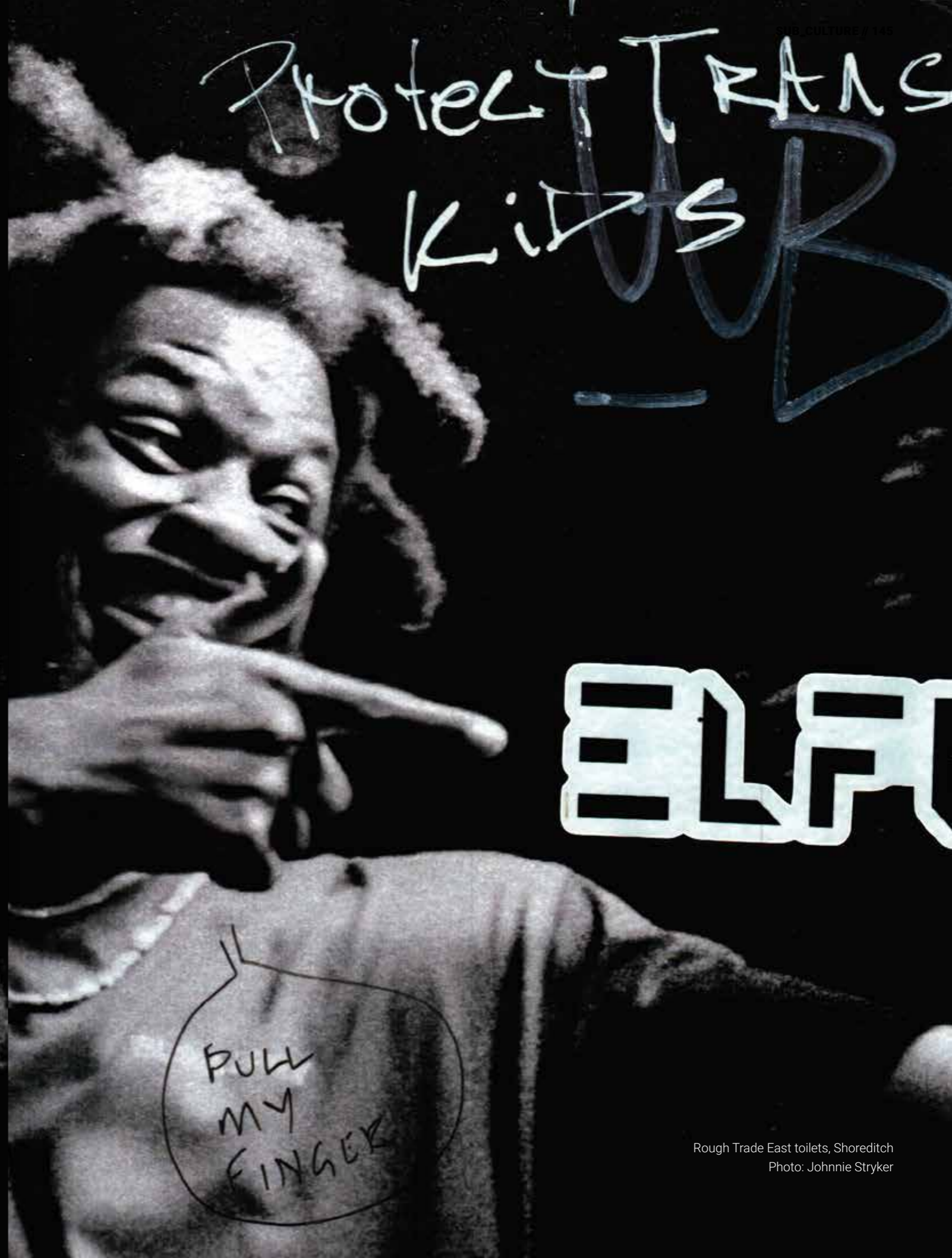
SUB CULTURE

VOLUME 01 - ISSUE 01

issue
one

The debut issue of **Sub_Culture** dives into alternative dress and the people keeping it alive. Featured inside: Photos by some of London's leading **subculture photographers** • How to dress for the **Northern Soul** revival • Inside London's underground **goth scene** • The titillating designers of the **fetish world** • **Derek Ridgers** on the evolution of subculture – and surviving the scenes.





EDITOR'S NOTES

by James Stryker

When we think of subculture, scenes from the second half of the 20th century spring to mind: a golden age for fashion, music and defiant life philosophies. It was the time of goths, punks, skinheads, mods, and even today, the chances are high you have an unassuming family member hiding their leather trousers in some hard-to-reach attic corner. From the outside, it might seem that subcultures have gone into hiding, or is it a matter of knowing where to look?

The nature of subculture has shifted dramatically. Many exist today in extremely specialised, yet fully accessible forms: on our screens, in our feeds, endlessly reposted, repinned and reshared. From niche online communities to micro-trends that live for just a day, the rate at which subcultures grow and subside is nearing lightspeed.

The more recognisable silhouette of subcultures built around a particular music genre, place, or style still exists today. And as punk celebrates its 50th birthday this year, it's a good time to reflect on the people carrying forth movements older than themselves, even when progress means disapproval from an older

generation. These people claim that punks/goths/rockers/mods today cannot be real parts of that subculture because they were not alive for X album/band/club. While John Lydon calls much of today's punk music 'woke', he doesn't seem to realise the irony that bands like Kneecap hold just the same liberal values and make the same provocative statements as The Pistols once did, simply from a modern context.

This magazine is not about them, the generation keeping a scene from entering a new zeitgeist. Too much focus on nostalgia is harmful to the existence of subcultures. True subculture requires agency. It evolves, adapts, and bends to a modern climate, keeping its roots intact, perhaps, but always growing. This magazine is for those helping subcultures leap from the past and ground themselves in the present. For the photographers, the fashion designers, the DJs, and the dancers, injecting life into a scene.

The individuals who fill these pages propose a dynamic view of identity. Most of those I have had the pleasure of meeting for this issue consider themselves attached to more than one label. They may consider



Slimelight, Electrowerkz
Photo: James Stryker

themselves 'a bit goth, a bit punk, with a bit of the rave scene thrown in.' So much of what constitutes a subculture will come down to personal interpretation. So to help decide what we include and what not to include in this quarterly publication, we've devised three rules for defining a subculture in the 21st century.

Modernity Over Nostalgia

This rule helps separate revival movements from solely nostalgic communities. This is particularly important for older subcultures, such as goth, for instance. True goth revival should welcome new music, bands and styles if they fit within the scope of their tastes. It rules out clubs or groups that limit cultural consumption to a bygone era.

Community Over Division

A true subculture puts community first above bigotry. While some subcultures may be made up of one particular race or class due to a shared history or origins (black American hip-hop, for example), this shouldn't be the rule. This is to rule out groups with extremist or nationalist ideologies, white power skinhead culture and neo-nazi punk offshoots, these groups often hijack subcultural symbols to breed hate.

Culture, Not Just Community

Subcultures produce culture. This could be music, fashion, art, fanzines, or even a unique lingo. While this may apply to sports communities, we felt existing publications cover these thoroughly enough, and we won't be including them.

Despite just now trying to pinpoint what a subculture is, I've found the only satisfactory way to answer this question is to be a part of one. No book or academic text will be able to quantify the feeling of looking around and realising, this is where I belong.

After four years of personal discovery at university, this magazine is as much a personal final reflection on the concept of identity as it is for those featured within its pages.

To truly understand each subculture, I immersed myself fully and gained the trust of its followers in the process. I'm grateful to everyone I met along the way, who welcomed my curiosity with such warmth, and those who patiently guided me in learning their language. This magazine wouldn't exist without them, but I particularly owe thanks to photographer Jeanie Jean. Having become a trusted name across London's many scenes, she was often my guide and gateway into many of these communities. Thank you, one and all.



Slimelight, Electrowerkz
Photo: James Stryker



Slimelight, Electrowerkz
Photo: James Stryker

Editor: James Stryker

Editorial Assistant: Lena Müller

Contributors:

Chloe Ackers	Rae Tait
Jeanie Jean	Ava Silsbury
David Hadland	Matt CC
Miguel Martim	Jonny Slut
Damien Frost	Ricardo Castro
El Nine	Sherry's Soul Society
Darren Black	Lith Li
Aimee Rose	Joel Richardson

A Special Thank You to:

Tamsin Blanchard	Cath Caldwell
James Anderson	Daisy Garnett
Philip Clarke	Raegan Rubin
Clare Coulson	Dave Edmond
Chris Sullivan	Graham Potter
Alex Whiteley	Emer O'Hanlon

Cover Photo: James Stryker

Advertising and Commercial Enquiries:

jamespottermail@gmail.com

sub-culture.cargo.site

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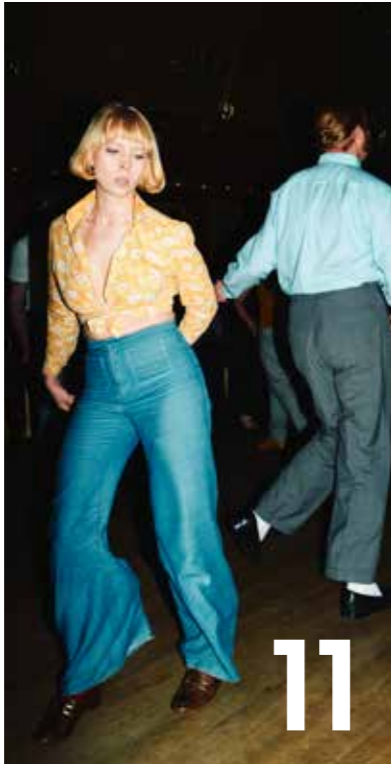
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Slimelight, Electrowerkz
Photo: James Stryker

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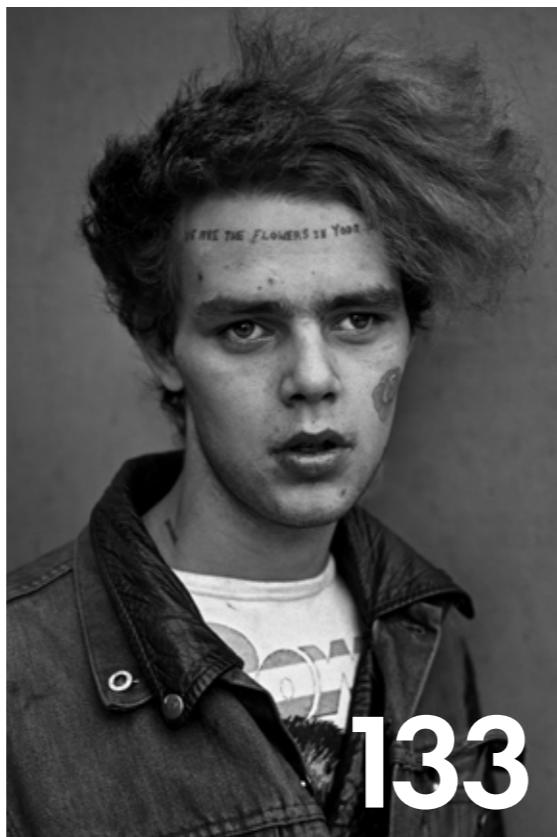
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BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS
DEREK RIDGERS

NOWHERE TO RUN TO, BABY

THE COST-OF-LIVING COMEBACK OF NORTHERN SOUL

by James Stryker

Young people are skint, and it's no coincidence that Northern Soul is making a comeback. Why are the two connected, and why are people trading their Saturday night for the immortal tunes of the '70s once again?

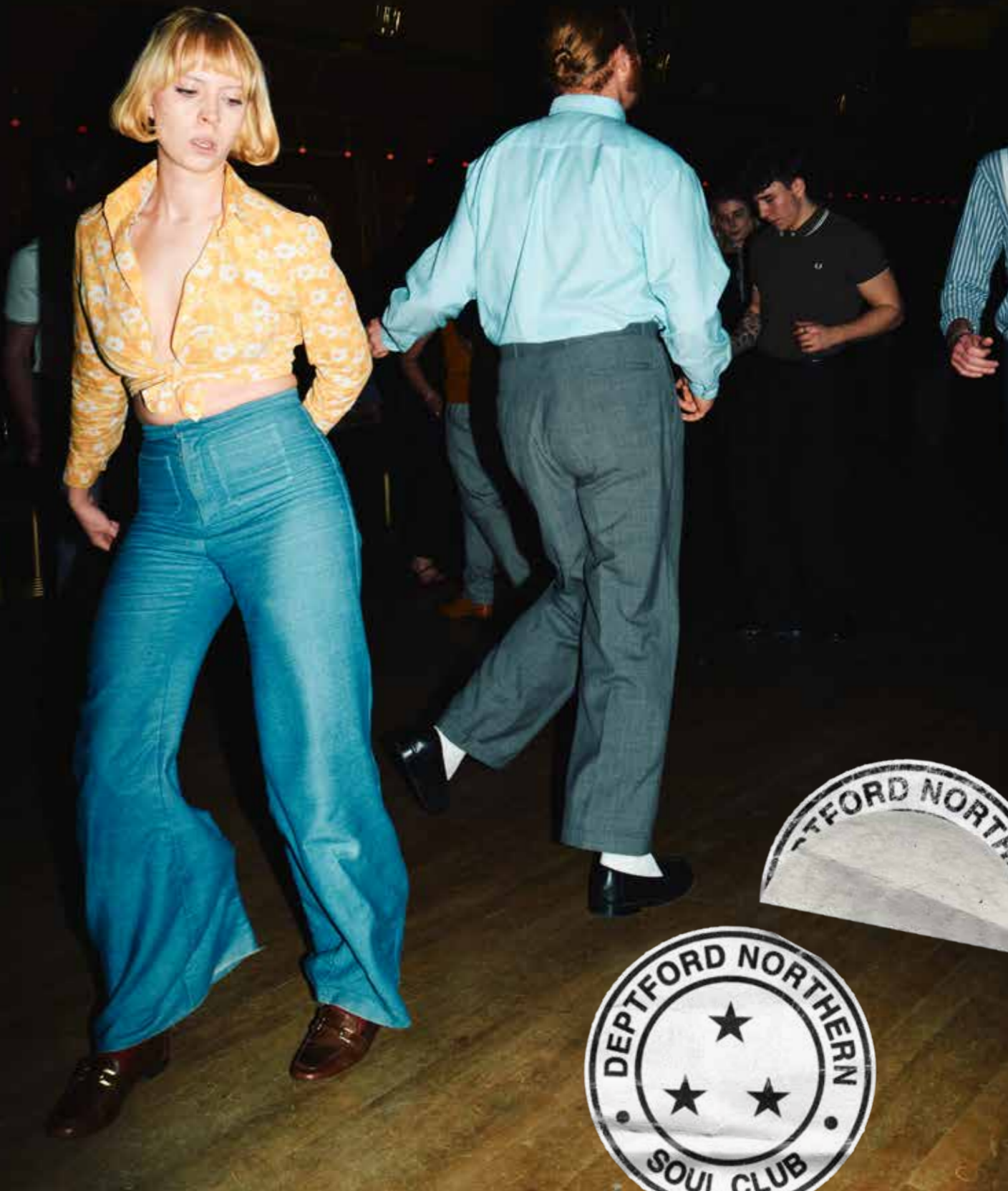
As the cost of living continues to soar, Saturday nights out have already become a luxury few under-thirties can justify. Small tax breaks on draft alcohol haven't been enough to revive an already struggling nightlife scene as venue closures continue to sweep through cities. Affordable spots for a social gathering are now few and far between. In London, Bristol, and Manchester, a different kind of night out has seen a growing following - one that requires more intricate footwork.

Marked by fast American soul records, Northern Soul was originally the music of 1970s working-class youth from port cities such as Blackpool. The scene evolved around DJs, who became obsessed with rare records from overseas, and an audience of sharply dressed dancers seeking entertainment and a cheap night away from the grind of working life amid an industrial

decline, rising unemployment, and soaring inflation.

Yet decades later, history seems to be repeating itself. Soul music has gained newfound popularity among a growing Gen Z audience, who are feeling the pinch of rising costs, limited job opportunities, and an uncertain future. *Deptford Northern Soul Club*, founded in 2016 by childhood friends Will Foot and Lewis Henderson, is one of the key names leading this underground revival. Their monthly residency at Hackney's *Moth Club* has become a cult fixture, selling out regularly. The two friends started DJing after Lewis discovered his dad's old soul records. Since then, they've played at *Glastonbury*, *Green Man Festival*, and beyond. With the founding of their record label, *Deptford Northern Soul Club Records*, which reissues rare and forgotten soul tracks for a new generation to discover, they have been influential to the scene's revival.

Rivoli Ballroom, Crofton Park
Photo: James Stryker



Midnight at The Moth Club

Outside The Moth Club, sweaty groups of twenty-somethings spill out onto the pavement. Leather shoes, white vests and straight-cut trousers pique the interest of passersby. Inside, dancers spin, slide and twist. Booths with sofas line the dance floor, abandoned as everyone crowds onto the checkerboard centre floor. The club is packed, and the only place to stand is over by the bar, which, much like the booths, remains empty. Will and Lewis cue up records inside a caged desk, and old soul tunes cry out from the stage.

“We got here at opening time, on the dot, so we could dance for at least half an hour with fewer people here,” one couple tells me, but explains this was in vain as dozens were ready for the doors to open. “It just seems like a great place to come and not have to care about anything else. It’s a place where you can see people express themselves with their entire body and not care how others perceive them.”



*A dancer moves at the back of the club
Photo: Jeanie Jean*

Outside the venue, I catch up with two sweat-soaked dancers in vests - the same ones I saw moving for at least the past hour straight. “Soul music brings back so many memories, it’s stuff your parents play in the car when you’re young. Our parents had a lot of fun on a limited budget when they were young, so it feels good to come here and enjoy doing something other than drinking. Everyone’s dressed nicely and everyone’s

cheerful. It makes a big change from the rest of London - even on the tube here, people looked miserable.” I ask if they have any advice for someone new to the scene, and they chuckle as if it seems trivial.

“Just pick up a shirt from your dad, some silly shoes, and that’s all you need. Spin about and have a bloody good time.”



*Talcum powder on the floor of the Moth Club, a Northern Soul tradition used to help dancers slide
Photo: Jeanie Jean*

Despite the popularity of the night, even Moth Club hasn’t been safe from the wave of gentrification and the ravaging loss of music venues. In November last year, developers submitted two separate planning proposals to Hackney Council to build a block of flats next to the club. If approved, the venue could face severe closure threats due to noise complaints. A petition was launched against the application, which has since amassed over 17,000 signatures.

I meet another stranger outside, telling me, “when you move to London, you think you’ll be going out every weekend, but reality hits, and you end up working the entire time just to make a living.”

“If you remove places like this, what’s left? A soulless city.”



*Moth Club, Hackney
Photo: Jeanie Jean*



Photos: James Stryker

Young Blood at the Rivoli Ballroom

In Crofton Park, South London, sits another historical venue. At the *Rivoli Ballroom*, I meet with Conor, Olly and Aaron of *Sherry's Soul Society* whilst they set up at the far end of the space's grand dancefloor. They've been invited to DJ at one of the venue's monthly soul events. The boys, aged between 19 and 26, formed a close friendship whilst working at *Sherry's* mod clothing store near Carnaby Street. In 2024, with enough enthusiasm to make up for little DJ experience, they formed their collective. "We didn't expect to do anything with it," Conor reflects, "we just thought it'd be a laugh." "Olly and Aaron knew a bit about soul, but I knew fuck all", he admits. "We had three months until our first gig, so I went into a record store and spent £150 on twelve records. From doing that, you get to learn names, producers... You just soak it all up. Soul isn't just good to dance to; the lyrics have got a lot of pain and suffering behind them. I think that's why people these days probably relate to them again."



Olly queues up tracks with the telephone he wired up
Photo: James Stryker



Aaron wears a Fred Perry polo
Photo: James Stryker

Unlike Moth Club, soul nights at the Rivoli Ballroom draw a variety of ages. "It's quite a stark mix," Conor adds. "You'll get people here who are 17, 18 mixing with people in their 60s or 70s. Young and old don't

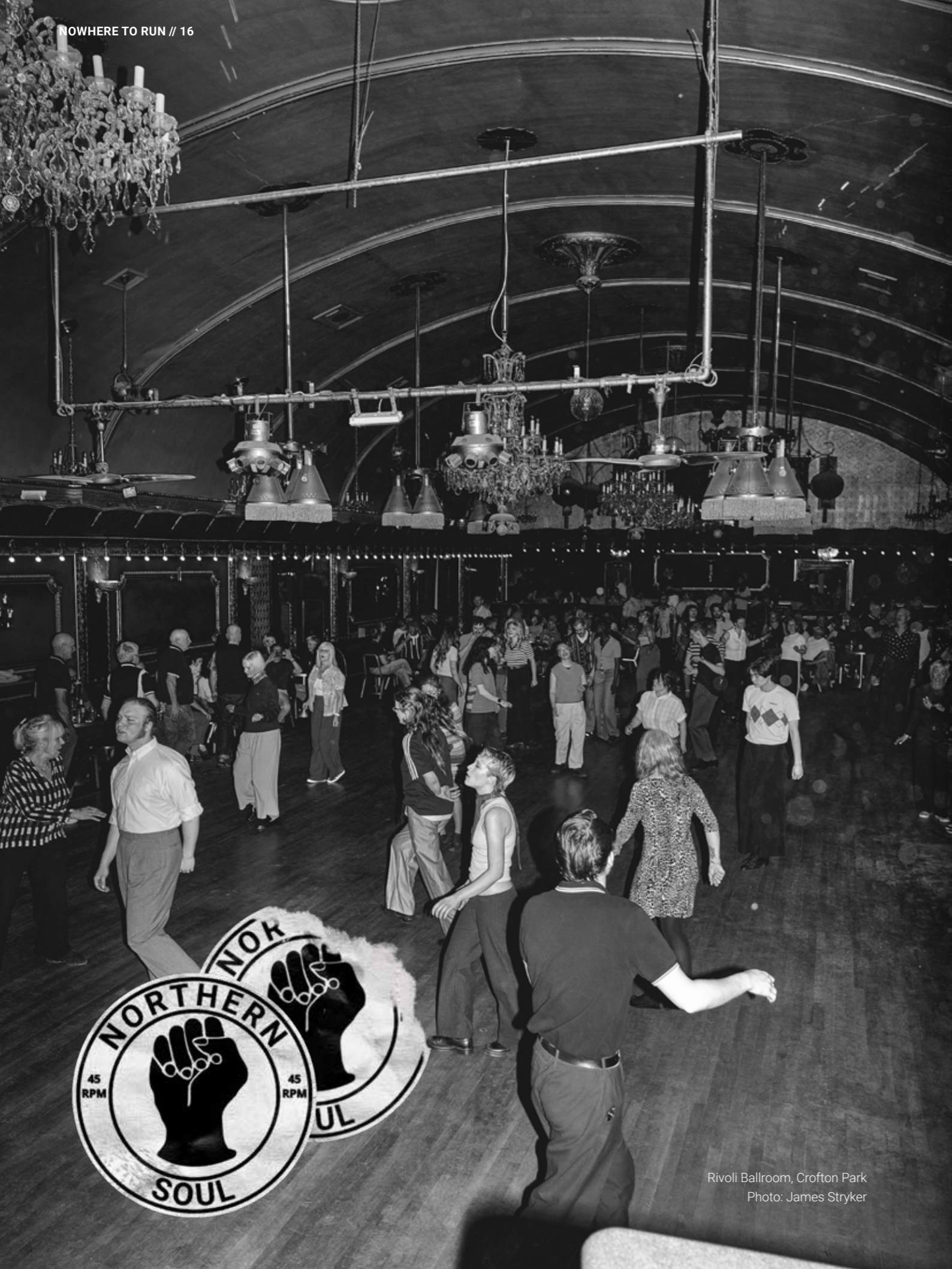
mix much these days, so it's nice to have a space where people enjoy the music for what it is."

Aaron, a former punk turned soul DJ, says the scene has a more welcoming energy. "Punk gigs were rough. You never felt truly safe. But here, everyone invites you in. It's not a structured subculture—there's no dos and don'ts. Everyone just loves the music and the dancing."

A DIY spirit runs through everything from the night's clothing to its finer details. The boys use a modified telephone handset to queue up records - a tradition that started in the early days of Northern Soul.

Jeanie Jean, a regular photographer at the Rivoli Ballroom and Moth Club, arrives in flared trousers and sunglasses, looking eager to join the dance floor. "The Northern Soul scene has such a strong sense of community," she says, "I think during the pandemic, when people were on the Internet more, the subculture had a chance to evolve." "Platforms like TikTok get a lot of hate," she says, "but I know people who have found their tribe that way."

"There has to be some kind of crisis for that burst of creativity to happen." Jeanie says, "You had it in the 70s, in Thatcher's Britain, even in the 90s." And perhaps that's why Northern Soul is back - because young people today, skint and uncertain, are once again dancing their way through the madness of it all."



Rivoli Ballroom, Crofton Park
Photo: James Stryker



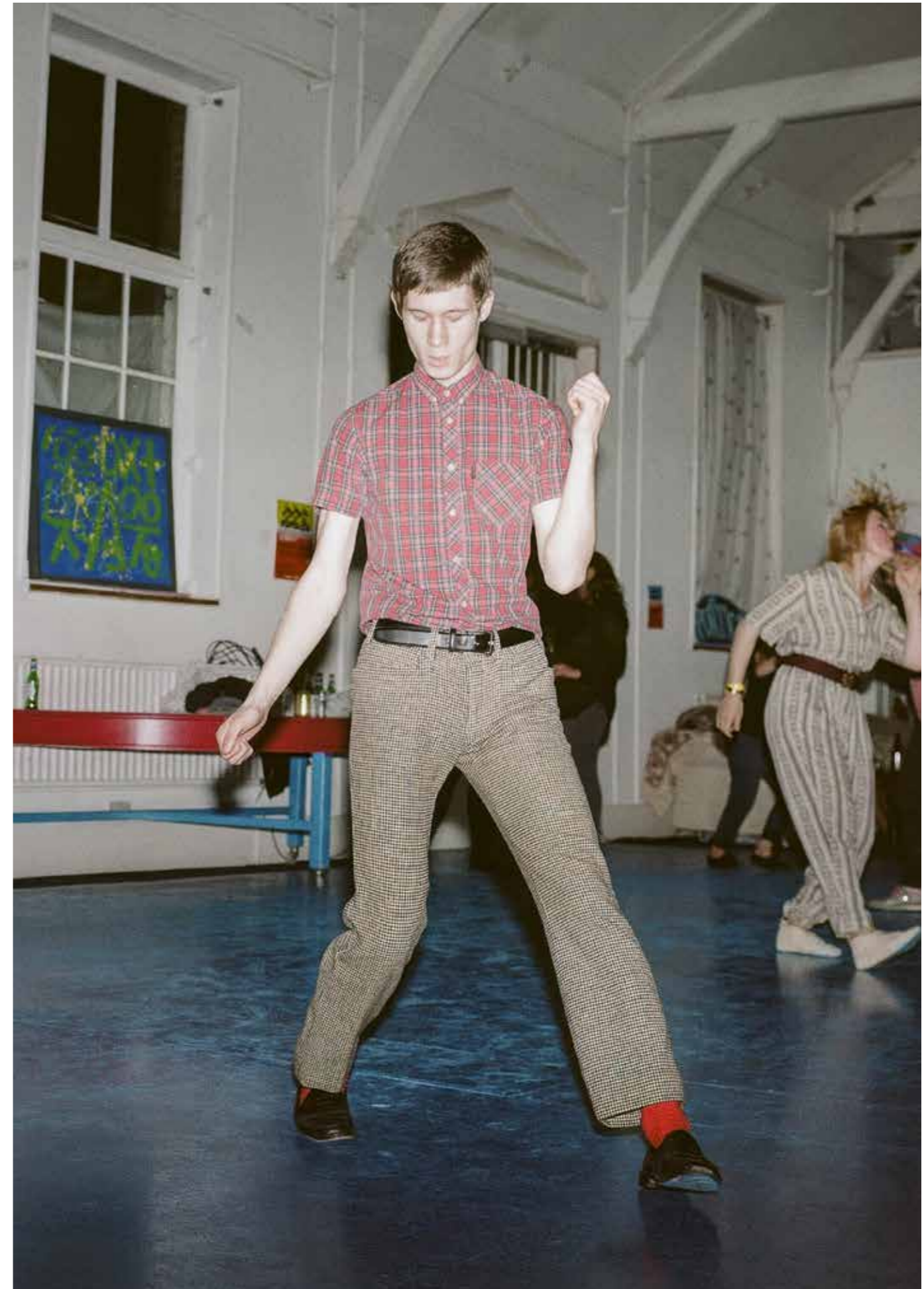
Sherry's Soul Society custom slipmats
Photo: James Stryker

Photographer Profile: Chloe Ackers

With her unique perspective, Chloe Ackers captures the soul scene with quiet grace, documenting the community with a soft, nostalgic sense through her 35mm camera. Her images emanate a certain romance, whether capturing fleeting moments across the dance floor or portraits of the most notable outfits around. Chloe's deep understanding of soul music is evident in her work, and she spins the records in the very clubs she photographs. Her intimate connection to her subjects shaped her photobook, *Northern Now*, which was released as her graduate project from UCA Farnham.

Instagram: @cackers_

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“The Northern Soul scene is such an amazing community and feels like family right away.”

Chloe Ackers



Photographer Profile: Jeanie Jean

Jeanie Jean, one of the most influential photographers in the UK's subculture scene, presents her *Not Dead* series as a love letter to the people who keep alternative cultures alive. From bristling nightclubs to more intimate locations, Jeanie's work conveys a patchwork of pride and personal history. She approaches each subculture she encounters with inquisitiveness and respect. Her work documents both spirit and style, and is a testament to the fact that subculture is alive and well.

Instagram: @jeaniejeanphotos

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“Subculture is timeless. It’s not something to be shelved. These communities are still very much alive and full of soul.”

Jeanie Jean

AFTER DARK

THE SUBVERSIVE CHIC OF LONDON'S GOTH SCENE

by James Stryker

A new generation of goths wants to keep the subculture alive. With a little help from London's longest-running dark scene club night, the odds are in their favour.

Stepping out from Angel station, I drift into a quiet procession of black-clad figures moving toward the husk of a factory building, which rises into view. On the corner, a man pulls a latex mask over his face, zipping up the mouth—one final addition before crossing into the alternative world of *Slimelight*. Started in 1987 as an unlicensed event in a scrap metalworks, the club night's new curator, Ricardo Castro's inclusive, fashion-forward vision has drawn a diverse crowd from all over the world, helping Slimelight to remain the beating heart of the UK's alternative scene.

Goth is surging back through the UK's underground, draped in black lace, eyeliner, and the throb of post-punk basslines. Once the preserve of dingy clubs and moonlit misfits, the Dark Scene—a loose web of goth, post-punk, and their many offshoots—is now being driven by Gen Z and Millennials who've claimed it as their own. The 2025 BAFTAs made it official: Timothée Chalamet, Gwendoline Christie, David Tennant and

Margot Robbie all embraced the mood with dark, dramatic, goth-inflected looks. But the red carpet didn't start the trend—it's just catching up.

After rigorous security checks, I'm greeted with a hall filled with all manner of dark creations. Behind them, through tall glass windows, dark shapes move in a red haze to muffled techno. Around the room, outfits are rich in accessories - feathers, studded leather belts, and tall boots. Some outfits are closer to performance art than a Saturday night get-up. The night's popularity leaves no question unanswered about the subculture's health.

Slimelight has been the keystone of London's goth community for over three decades. The night is the longest-running dark scene event in the world. The same building in which it started, now renovated, hosts three floors of goth, industrial, dark techno, and dark wave music.

Slimelight, Electrowerkz
Photo: James Stryker



Eleanor Rose Wayman, a Slimelight regular since 2018, has attracted over 45 thousand followers on Instagram with her goth-inspired outfits. She describes discovering Slimelight and the goth world as a creative awakening: "There's no such thing as too much. That's the whole point. It's a space where you can wear whatever you want without judgment." Like many, Eleanor's newfound dark identity bled into her daily life. "I work in an office, we had a Monday morning meeting and I rocked up one day with big 80s teased back hair and a floor-length leather trench coat. Luckily, my co-workers loved it. If I weren't in London, I wouldn't be able to get away with it."

"I remember seeing someone on TikTok who I thought was really cool," says Venus, another young

goth who fell sharply into its dark allure. "I bought every single item they were wearing - that's how it started. I wore that look to my first Slimelight. Back then, I'd only ever been to student clubs in my area, and I was shocked to see such a variety of ages here."

After founder Mayuan Mak's passing in 2020, the night was taken over by Ricardo Castro - an unapologetically flamboyant DJ and promoter of queer and dark scene events, and a former fixture of Berlin's alternative nightlife. Just as with other events, Ricardo is poised to steer Slimelight towards maximum inclusivity. "My vision is to integrate and make the Dark Scene inclusive for all ages, sexualities and body types. It's for the old school, the new generation and everything in between."



Slimelight, Electrowerkz
Photo: James Stryker



Ricardo Castro at Slimelight, Electrowerkz
Photo: James Stryker

“We cannot live in the past; I want Slimelight to live in the future.”

Ricardo has been aware of the closure of many LGBTQ venues in London and has fostered a closer connection between goth and the LGBTQ community. “At Elektrowerkz, we have very good staff, ID scans, and Slimelight is a dress code event, so it’s very difficult to attract the wrong crowd. I want people to know that even if they don’t dress particularly dark, they’re still welcome here, and we depend on those people to pay the bills.”

One guest in drag echoes the importance of places like Slimelight today. “Ricardo’s really done wonders for this place. I come here more these days, just because many gay clubs are closing. It’s got a younger crowd

now. It’s more gay, more mixed, just cooler.”

Ricardo’s open invitation to the broader alternative scene, including those not strictly Goth, has increased the club’s popularity and diversified its identity. When Slimelight began, the club night operated on a membership basis. New attendees were required to be referred by two existing members to gain entrance. While the membership was initially intended to dodge alcohol licensing laws, it also protected the community from outsiders. Today, Slimelight’s memberships offer discounted tickets for regulars.

In a time of digital saturation, the survival of goth and the wider dark scene in physical spaces shows it’s not just about nostalgia. It’s about preserving the values that make subculture meaningful: community, inclusivity, and belonging.

“I like to focus on extreme makeup. That’s where I put most of my effort. My outfits are usually inspired by artists I like, like Motionless in White or Marilyn Manson, or movies like Sleepy Hollow.”

Louise

Louise wears a *Superdry* jacket with other traditional elements of goth, including ripped tights and facial jewellery. Ethan wears a black suit paired with a woman’s overcoat, red contact lenses and eye makeup.



Photo: James Stryker



Photo: James Stryker

“On the street, people yell things like, ‘It’s not Halloween anymore!’ But, the reactions here are really positive. I’m really bad at starting conversations, so dressing like this gives someone a reason to come up and ask about my look. It’s my way of making friends—and it works!”

Venus

Venus combines this leather corset belt with a black *Lip Service* dress, an online retailer inspired by traditional goth looks. She also wears a leather necklace and cuffs from *Liberty Bazaar* and black *Dr Martens* boots.

“Goth is straight-up powerful. The leather, the thickness—it’s like armour.”

Miss F. Fatale

Miss F. Fatale wears a *Manière De Voir* leather catsuit, Jonny wears a full-body *Libidex* latex suit.



Photo: James Stryker

Slimelight, Electrowerkz
Photo: James Stryker



Photographer Profile: David Hadland

David Hadland's black and white film shots hit like a '70s time capsule with attitude and grit. Rooted in the raw energy of subcultures, his portraits of skinheads, punks, and goths blur the lines between past and present, capturing the continuation of rebellious fashion with the integrity of historic photographers. David's work tells stories of identity, defiance, and community with no filter or fakery, but with a deep commitment to capturing the essence of a defiant youth.

Instagram: [@davidxhadland](https://www.instagram.com/davidxhadland)

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Photographer Profile: Miguel Martim

Miguel's work intersects protest, pride, and provocation. With a focus on the transgender experience and LGBTQ+ communities, the London-based photographer captures scenes which others shy away from. Their photographs challenge the comfortable nature of a heteronormative gaze through intimate moments with same-sex couples, arresting nudity, and ferocious drag. Every image is unapologetically queer. There's an intensity to their work that channels a punk approach to visibility. Miguel doesn't just document resistance to the status quo – their work shows us what it means to live free from prejudice.

Instagram: [@no.one.studio.london](#)

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Monster Queen, Camden Assembly
Photo: Jeanie Jean



MONSTER MASHUP

A MASHUP OF CULTURE AND A QUEER GOTH EVOLUTION

by James Stryker

In a city where queer nightlife is under threat, one goth-inspired club night dares to be something bigger, bolder and louder.

Many forms of subculture have an unstoppable presence. One London club night, however, is pushing that legacy further. There, a scene which evolved from goth embraces a theatricality rarely found anywhere else. In other words, Camden Town's monthly clubnight *Monster Queen* is alive with the howls of a bold DIY movement.

While London is arguably one of the safer places in the world to grow up, that safety has been hard-won for LGBTQ+ people. Last month, the Supreme Court ruled that under the Equality Act 2010, the legal definition of "woman" does not include trans women - effectively excluding them from single-sex spaces like shelters, hospital wards, and bathrooms. This damaging ruling is likely to increase harassment and discrimination

against trans people. On 10 December 2023, the Soho club G-A-Y Late closed permanently due to a rise in attacks on staff and growing safety concerns for its guests, highlighting the vulnerability of queer spaces. What began as a playful club night at the Camden Assembly nearly seven years ago has flourished into a monthly celebration of unbridled self-expression, co-founded by friends Aarron, Lais, and Jxn - all experienced goths, artists and DJs - determined to fill a gap in queer nightlife.

"I started Monster Queen purely to create another safe space for the queer goth community... Some of the existing safe spaces weren't all-inclusive and didn't offer the kind of well-being support we felt was necessary," says co-founder Aarron. "People can't walk around

every day expressing themselves the way they want to, so we provide a space where they can do that safely," adds Lais. The recipe? An expertly selected blend of DJs and live performances, and a surreal ensemble of looks.



Doorman, Cezar Andrade, greets attendees with a dandy-inspired outfit
Photo: Jeanie Jean

Stepping into Monster Queen feels much like falling down the rabbit hole. Inside, the crowd is a riot of colour - every outfit meticulously handcrafted or assembled. Some are gorgeous, some bizarre, but each is unforgettable in its own way. The music is a mix of European techno and dark wave. At the bar, all sorts of mythical creations pass by.

The night's two hosts are familiar faces from *Slimelight*, the world's longest-running goth night in Angel. "What interests me is the creativity, the outfits, the personalities," says professional dominatrix and fetish model, Miss F. Fatale, this time out of her leather catsuit and looking glamorous with a fur coat and sequined handbag. "It's not at all about being beautiful... You don't have to look perfect or have the perfect body. Monster Queen is more of an open door."

Co-host Sibyl Cooper, tonight as their alt-persona, Scarlet Early, is another active familiar face at *Slimelight* and in the broader goth world, as a host of various events and as a maker of darkwave music.

Scarlet mentions that while *Slimelight* is more about traditional goth looks, *Monster Queen* is more diverse in character. "It's dark glam, but it's not necessarily pigeonholed by one subculture." Tonight, Sibyl has swapped their gothic Victorian ruffles for Scarlet's 1920s post-flapper-inspired look, complete with vintage hat and bright red lipstick.

Julius Ben is a regular at *Monster Queen*. A visual artist, he recently put on an exhibition creating gorgeous drag-inspired looks. While Julius doesn't describe himself as a goth, he sees the night as an important space for personal dialogue, and especially important for London's queer community to be seen. "Today's generation has largely forgotten what it's like to be treated as the scariest thing around," says Julius.

"For lots of queer people, it's all they've known. This night is about reclaiming that power."

For many of the vibrant artists who attend *Monster Queen*, the club night is more than just a good time. With so much uncertainty surrounding the future of queer nightlife, the expressive nature of goth - and the inherent queerness at its core - has given birth to a new form of stylistic expression. It's fascinating to realise that the birth of a subculture often stems from a fundamental need for it to exist.

The Batcave

The *Batcave* was a weekly club night launched in July 1982 by members of the band *Specimen*. It was an especially important place to the goth scene's queer following. In June, *Monster Queen's* seventh birthday, DJ Jonny Slut, a fixture of the original *Batcave*, will spin classics from Bauhaus, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and early Sisters of Mercy - building a bridge from queer goth then to its community today. The night is sure to be a homecoming for many.



Photos: Jeanie Jean



“I first came to Monster Queen when I got tired of the same old stuff at Goth events, and then I realised - this is my favourite place of all. It feels most transgressive here.”

Miss F. Fatale

Miss F. Fatale wears a faux fur coat, jewels and leather bag.

Photo: Jeanie Jean





Photo: Jeanie Jean

“I’m way too colourful for Goth events. My style is an amalgamation of multiple skirts— sprinkle in a bit of clown and jester. Very eccentric makeup, and layers, layers, layers, layers. I try to put as much as I can onto one body.”

Monika

Monika wears a jester hat, cat ears, teeth grills, a mesh tank top and a *Hello Kitty* bikini. On top, candy necklaces, a custom tie, purple shirt, belt, puffer skirt, tartan dress, plus an additional tartan layer, with multiple scarves.

“Do we go to a lot of queer events? Honey, we are a queer event.”

Pige & Ike

Pige & Ike wear charity shop coats with studded dog collars and “ball scratcher” accessory.

Photo: Jeanie Jean



Photo: Jeanie Jean



“People here are a bit more open, you get to know each other more. It’s a small scene, and there are people from lots of different scenes who overlap when they come here.”

Sapphire

Sapphire wears a red faux fur jacket to the floor, thigh-high chains, PVC underwear, and a nylon bodysuit.

“You could say my outfit, inspired by the Great Depression, aligns with our current situation. We’re just trying to make the most of it and get by as best we can. I always try to put a little extra glam into the look for Monster Queen.”

Scarlet

Scarlet wears a post-flapper-inspired look.





Photo: James Stryker

“I think it’s my love for art, and just the love of dressing up — and the characters you can play. Some empower me, some connect with me in different ways, and some come from frustration.”

Julius Ben

Julius wears a one-piece dress made from a recycled metallic material.

“For me, especially when it comes to the art of dressing up, it’s a conversation I usually don’t get the chance to have. Either I don’t have the platform, or it’s just not possible. So I use dressing up as a way to communicate with the world.”

Julius Ben

Julius wears an upcycled gown and repurposed plastic earring.



Photo: James Stryker



“I’m more or less a silent activist, in a way. I let my clothes and my pieces speak for themselves. I’m all about freedom — especially the freedom of dressing up, the freedom of understanding yourself, the freedom to try anything, as long as it’s within reason.”

Julius Ben

Julius wears an upcycled fur scarf and hat.

Photographer Profile: Damien Frost

Damien Frost's *Night Flowers* captures the eccentric pulse of London's alternative queer nightlife through over 300 portraits of drag kings and queens, club kids, goths, and performance artists. Damien's portable studio has toured many underground events across Soho and East London. His images capture an era in the capital's history where self-expression is celebrated through ephemeral art forms. Many of the looks are handcrafted and last only a night. Damien's editorial direction adds a personal flair to these fleeting encounters. His portraits, composed with classical framing, lend dignity and timelessness to his subjects, preserving a vibrant subculture at its most liberated and luminous.

Instagram: [@nightflowersbook](#)

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Photographer Profile: El Nine

El Nine uses his point-and-shoot camera to capture the chaos and heart of the queer club scene. He dives into a world of raves and backstreet parties, surfacing with images that conserve and convey its character. There's a raw urgency to his work, which is less about creating an archive of queer culture, and more about honouring the moment as it happens. His photos don't just record queer spaces - they help realise them as something sacred.

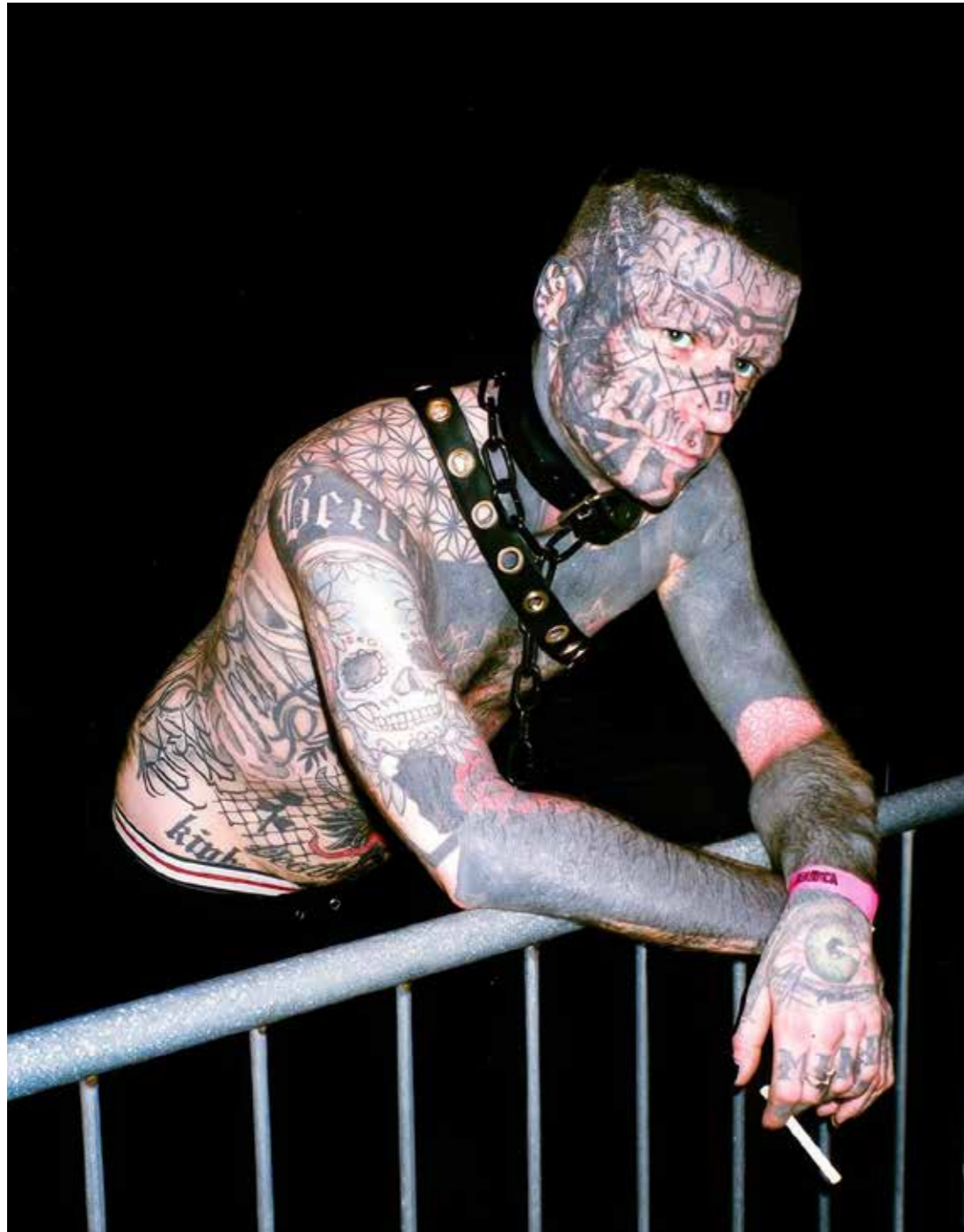
Instagram: [@9999999999boyscrysendpics](https://www.instagram.com/9999999999boyscrysendpics)

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Flesh!

WHEN STYLE MEETS SUBMISSION

by James Stryker

Once underground, fetish clubs and fashion are no longer hidden. Leather, lace, and latex are now Friday night go-to materials with a growing following.

London's nightclubs in the '80s and '90s delivered more than just music to their crowd - specialist clubs were places for taboos to be broken. In 2025, fetish fashion's influence is felt on a larger scale than you might think; a style adopted by everyone from Lady Gaga to Sam Smith. As society becomes more open to conversations around sex and sexual freedom, more people are openly exploring the full scope of their sexual identities through clothing.

Rosanna Laura (@rosannalaura) is a fetishwear maker at Soho's *Regulation* store - a shop which has supplied the fetish scene since the '90s. Rosanna is also a frequent attendee at club nights like *Torture Garden*, an influential fetish event in Angel. As a designer, Rosanna creates her own looks, blending her love of textile craft with her lived experience of alternative subcultures. Raised around the subcultural influence of her parents, she sees fetish clothing as representing more than just sex and spectacle.

JAMES STRYKER How did you originally get into wearing and making fetishwear?

ROSANNA LAURA I've always had an eye for it. It started with things like glam rock and punk, but fashion and fetish have always been one and the same to me. My friend and I were exploring her mum's magazines one day and found some old *Torture Garden* magazines. We were like, "Oh, one day when we're older, we'll get to dress up and go to these parties." Nothing happened for years, and then when I was about to turn 30, I moved back to London after living away for a while. I was new to the dating scene, started talking to people, and going out to parties a lot. I started meeting people who were part of the fetish subculture in London, and it went from there. I ended up getting a job in a sex shop and being around rubber all the time, and just became desperate to learn how to make things myself. I've always had a close relationship with textures and the

Rosanna wears a full-body nylon suit with leather belt.



Photo: James Stryker



Male full body fetish suit being created by Rosanna
Photos: Rosanna Morgan-McNeil

feel of materials, so I enjoy the sensual properties of rubber, nylon, and leather.

JS Do you remember the first time you went into a fetish club? What was that like?

RL Yes. It was weird. I went with someone I work with now. She knew everyone and is quite well known on the fetish scene as a muse. I just went straight in at the deep end and met lots of people. It was an interesting experience. I'm not easily shocked by anything, so I didn't feel like, "Whoa, this is crazy," but I enjoyed seeing people enjoying what they love.

That's what I love most about it: Seeing people be passionate about what they're into together.

JS What kind of music do they play at fetish nights?

RL It depends on where you go. Generally, the bigger clubs lean more towards heavy, dark techno, which isn't my cup of tea, so I avoid the larger clubs. But sometimes you can find smaller niche events or private parties where the music is more fun. It could be a relaxing, sensual vibe with ambient music, or there might be a party atmosphere in another room.

The club I went to last night even had a karaoke room, which was interesting. There was also a disco afterwards with rock and alternative music. There's a club for everyone, and you find out what suits your style by going to different ones. I feel a lot more comfortable and confident at clubs that play music I enjoy.

JS Do you think there are any assumptions people have about the fetish scene that are wrong?

RL For some people, like myself, when I go to clubs, I actually just enjoy dressing up for the fun of it. Dressing for pleasure, I guess. Whether I engage in any activities at the club or not, what I mostly enjoy is wearing the clothes I love, with other people appreciating it and enjoying it. I think there's an assumption that you have to be a certain type of person to go. I'm actually a very awkward, shy person a lot of the time and find it challenging to engage with people in general. But I find it much easier in fetish clubs because people are so much more accepting. It's easier to communicate when people let their guard down. When you're showing a part of yourself to a group of people, sometimes quite a big group, that you usually keep private, it's a lot easier to speak to those people.

Rosanna wears the latex "milk suit" she designed.



Milk!

Photo: James Stryker

Rosanna wears a latex bra, pants, gloves, boots and scuba hood.



Photo: James Stryker

SKIN TWO



Photo: James Stryker



JS What would you say to someone nervous about going to a fetish club for the first time, especially when it comes to what to wear?

RL There are a lot of rules and regulations in clubs, and that's to protect people and ensure the right kind of people are attending. You can't just walk off the street and come into these venues, but when it comes to choosing what to wear, don't overthink it. You don't have to spend loads of money. Be really creative

- creating an outfit out of pairs of *Primark* tights is fine. It looks cool, and it's much easier than getting into rubber. Don't feel like you can't go because you don't have loads of money for fetish wear. Make outfits out of nothing. As you go, you'll learn more from the people you meet. You might meet someone who makes latex clothes, and if you're friendly, they might make something for you, or even teach you to do it yourself. Be original.

Photographer Profile: Darren Black

Darren Black's Berlin and London homes become stages for queer and trans bodies to claim space. His black-and-white portraits exude strength, are stripped back and raw, yet always crafted with precision and intimacy, inspired by the brutality of the cities' backdrops. There's honesty in how he frames desire, transgression, and power. Beyond the studio, Darren's intrepid nature spills into his DJ sets, with shows at Berlin's *KitKat* and *AVA Clubs* and London's *Torture Garden*. Influenced by techno, hard groove and house, his work is a marriage of London and Berlin's historic ties to the Goth scene.

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Instagram: @darren_black

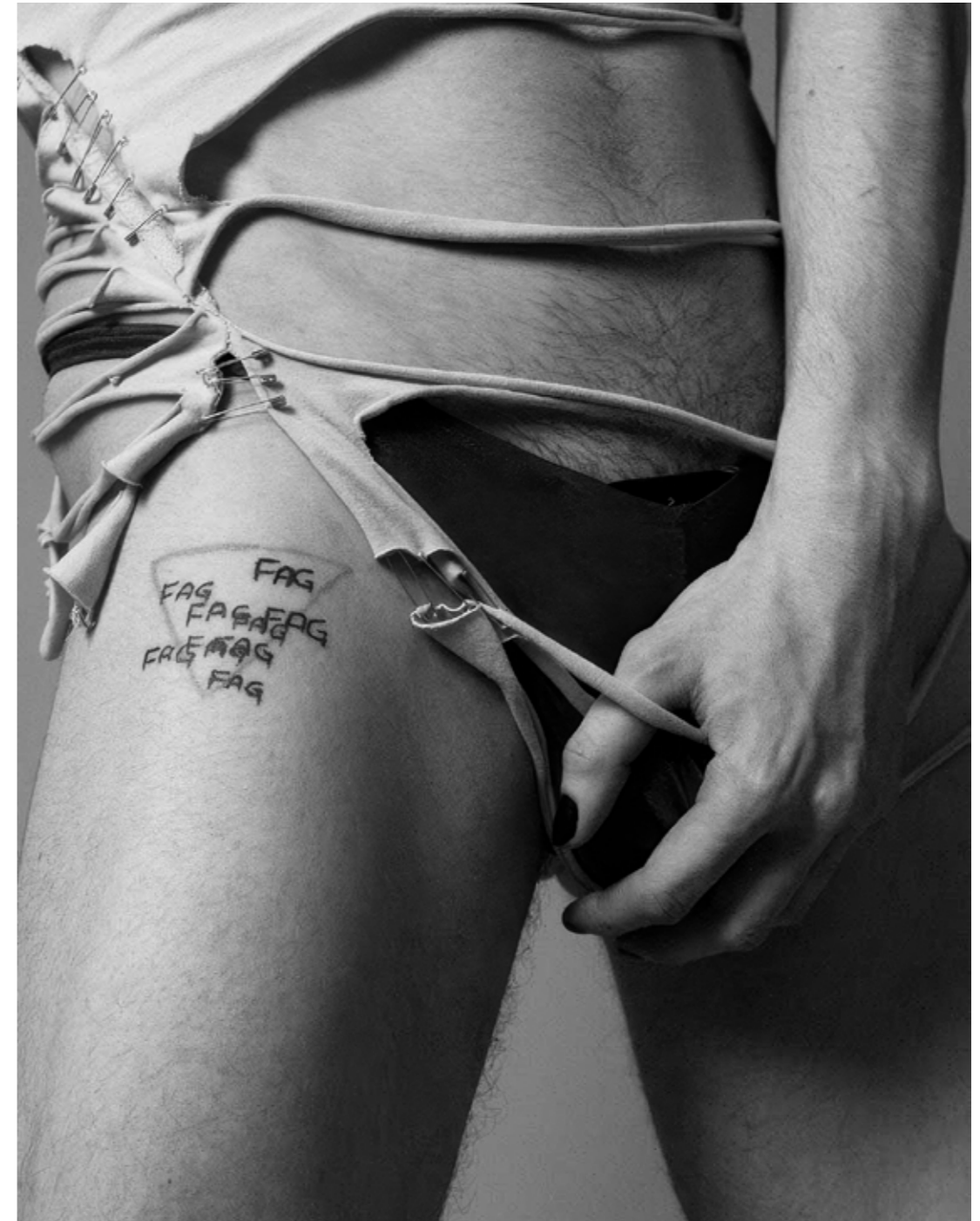




“Every subculture has a language; it has a sound, it has a uniform, and it has a lingo.”

Darren Black







Photographer Profile: Aimee Rose

Joy steers the work of Aimee Rose, a wedding photographer turned subcultural artist. Her photography bursts with color, sequins, sweat, and life, capturing the vibrant side of queer identity. Drag queens and attitude are her go-tos, showcasing a camp, gorgeous, and deeply proud aesthetic. If her work could walk, it would strut. Aimee's photography has taken her to Paris Fashion Week and landed London Pride in *Vogue* last year.

Instagram: @shotsbyaimee_

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Photographer Profile: Rae Tait

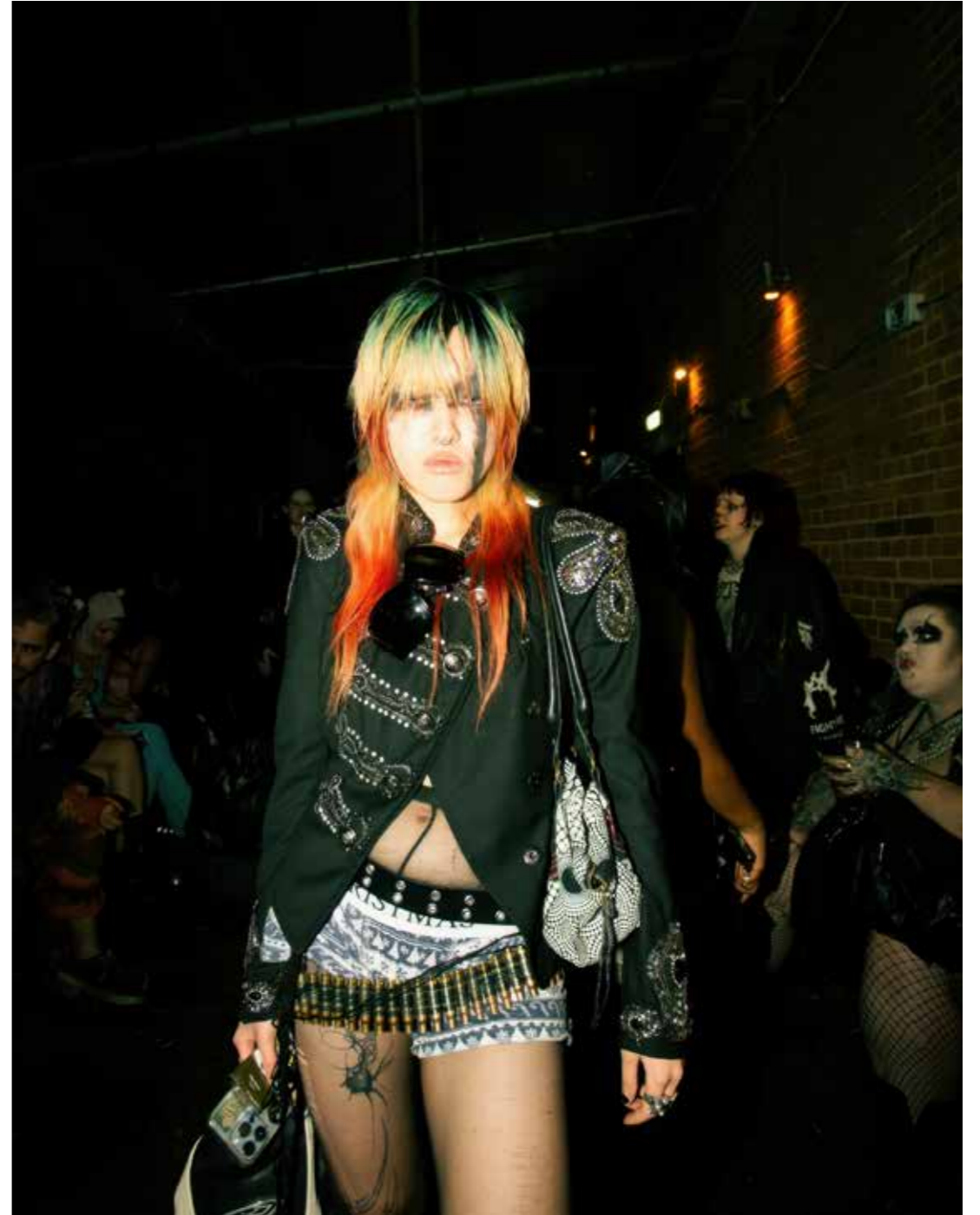
Rae Tait captures youth in all its messiness and glory. A London-based photographer, she combines documentary and fashion photography to celebrate a raw and unapologetic journey of self-discovery. Her photos are playful, full of motion, and feature wild makeup and a misfit conviction, while reflecting the exuberance of newfound adulthood. Rae's work is a celebration of figuring yourself out without pretence or performative approach, instead revealing the real, unfiltered spirit of youth. Drawing from her longstanding fascination with the obscure, Rae began documenting the people around her with a small camera, capturing the singular energy of every moment.

Instagram: @dead.deeds

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THE UNDERGROUND IN FOCUS

DEREK RIDGERS' TOP TAKES FOR SURVIVING SUBCULTURE

Interview by James Stryker

Few photographers captured British subcultures in the late 20th century with the same persistence as Derek Ridgers. Starting with punks, then onto skinheads, new romantics and club kids, Derek documented the chaos and character of youth culture from the late 1970s onward. Drawn by curiosity and equipped with an outsider's perspective, he moved between subcultures when they were at their most vibrant, creating a lifetime of work that preserved not only the fashion of the time but also its people.

I spoke with Derek about how he approached these groups, navigated the risks associated with some, and how his work both reflected and challenged the public's perception of subculture over the decades.

JAMES STRYKER What attracted you to punk, and what kept you coming back to it over the years?

DEREK RIDGERS I started photographing punks at *The Roxy* and *The Vortex* in London in 1977. I shot them in other places, too. After 1977, I didn't photograph punks in clubs as much, but I certainly did on the street. What interested me about the original punks in the '70s and '80s was that, because the ethos was very much based on doing-it-yourself, there were a lot of very different looks. Punk eventually became a bit of a uniform, like all 20th-century subcultures, but it certainly didn't start out that way.



Kings Road, London, 1983
Photo: Derek Ridgers

JS From your perspective, how did the world feel about punk at the time, and how did your experience of the scene differ?

DR At the start, I think the world saw punks as being dangerous and aggressive. All the reports of bad behaviour and the spitting at gigs didn't help. I found the punks to be mostly friendly and polite. They were certainly amenable to being photographed because, I suppose, at heart, they were just showing off. There was some truth in the aggression, though. There was usually a fight at some point in the evening at The Vortex, although I never saw a fight at The Roxy - it was usually too crowded, and it was a very small club.

JS You grew up in London around the same time as many of the people you photographed. Did you fit in with or empathise with the mood of young people then?

DR No, not at all. I started to photograph the punks when I was 26, and although I was only two years older than Joe Strummer, I did feel a lot older. In my teens, I never felt like I was part of anything. I tried at times, but I never really became a part of any subcultural group. If anything, I was more of a hippie than anything else - a hippie who worked in an office. I always felt a bit apart from things, but when I eventually became a photographer, I think having that outsider viewpoint helped.

JS In what way?

DR Well, my stance as a photographer has always been from the point of view of the observer. I'm always on the outside looking in - as though through a window, almost. I don't necessarily think this point of view suits every photographer. I've always been a bit of an outsider, but I'm not sure I had any choice in that. Gavin Watson's photography of skinheads, which I love, was taken whilst he was still a skinhead himself. His work has a completely different tone to mine. Dafydd Jones' fantastic photography of the world of the young toffs and the upper classes is fantastic. Dafydd isn't a toff himself, but he was something of an insider, as he worked for the toffs' bible, *The Tatler*.

JS How did your focus expand beyond punk? What led you to photograph skinheads and other groups?

DR In 1978, I was offered a show at the ICA of my punk photographs. This was really the start of what

became a career in photography. My technique was so haphazard back then that probably only one in five of my photos were even decent enough to show anyone. But I did show my photographs to a few people. One, who was a journalist, suggested I show my portfolio to Sarah Kent, who was then a curator at the ICA, and she agreed to exhibit my photographs. After that, I thought to myself, "Is this just beginner's luck, or could I do it again?" So I sought out the new romantics, and some mods and teds. The skinheads sought me out.

JS Some scenes can be wary of outsiders. Did you ever find yourself in risky or uncomfortable situations?

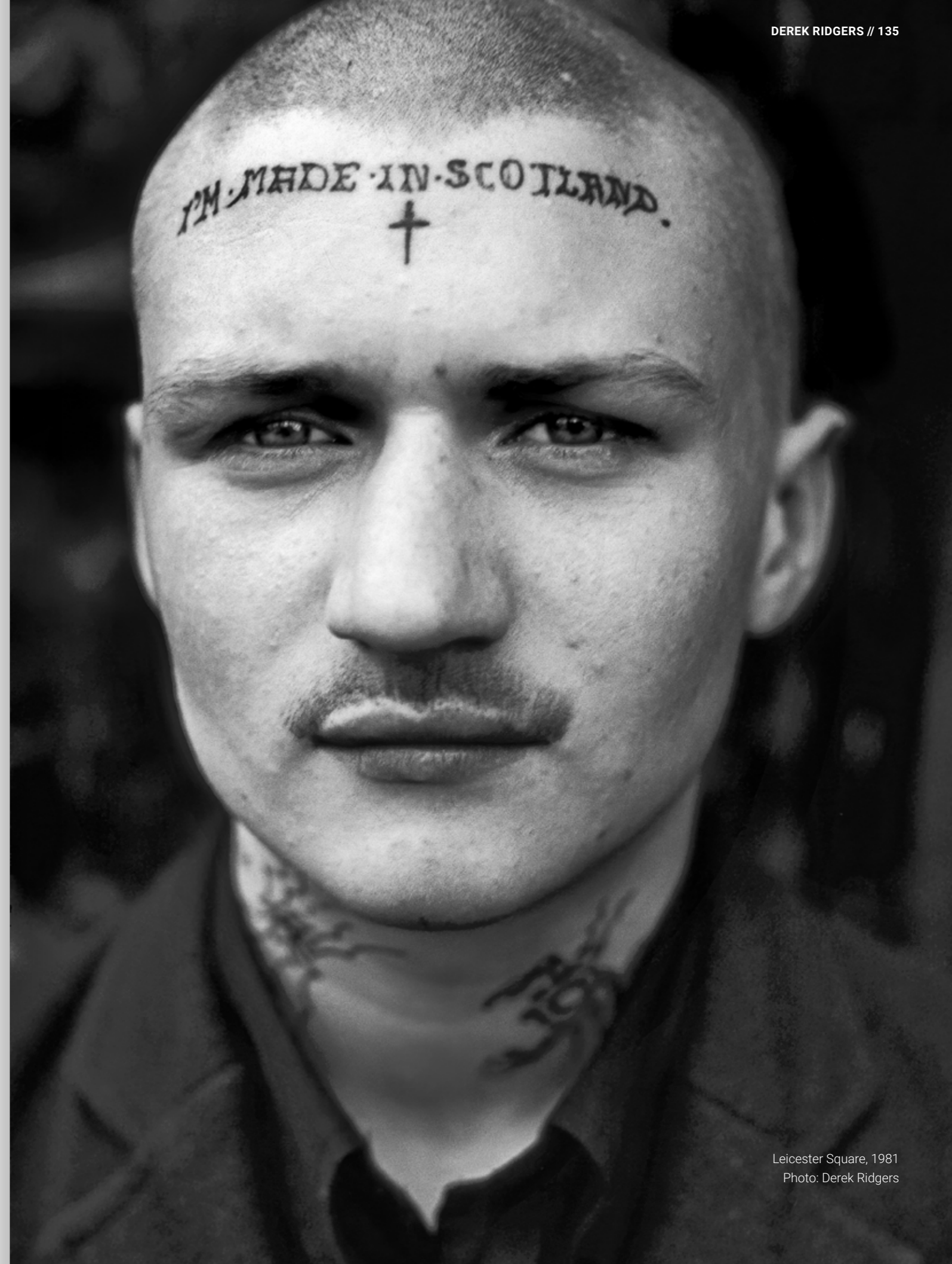
DR I certainly did. I came uncomfortably close to being beaten up a few times whilst photographing the skinheads. It might have been worse than being beaten up. But I was very lucky and also extremely naive.

JS How do you deal with a situation like that?

DR The big problem is that often one doesn't realise it's "a situation like that" until afterwards. And sometimes afterwards, it's too late. It sounds melodramatic, I know, but some time after the fact, I learnt that a couple of skinheads had been planning to stab me, and the reason they didn't was that the pub we were all in at the time was being watched by some plain-clothed police in an unmarked car. One of those skinheads did stab someone to death a couple of years later and has now served a sentence for murder, so I was very lucky. Most of the skinheads were fine. 90 or 95 per cent of them were decent enough kids, but one never really knows initially, in any big group of young men, which are the dangerous ones. So you have to be very careful.

JS How did you transition from club photography to taking street portraits? Was it a case of recruiting the most interesting people you had met at clubs?

DR No, there was no recruitment going on, but often the people I saw on the street were the same ones I saw in the clubs. For a short while, in the early '80s, it was almost de rigueur for all the fashionable young things from the clubs to parade up and down the King's Road in Chelsea on Saturday afternoons, as well as Soho and Camden Town. Like everything, the mood of the times changes, and you don't seem to get that happening these days.





Above: Punk girl in Soho, 1977
Right: Skinheads at The Clarendon,
Hammersmith 1984

Photos: Derek Ridgers





'Yasmine', taken on Kings Road, 1984
Photo: Derek Ridgers

JS Over time, did you notice a shift in how the public or media reacted to subcultures? Did interest fade, grow, or change in tone?

DR Back in the 1960s, the fighting between mods and rockers in seaside towns on Bank Holiday weekends was big news. At the time, I thought it sounded a little crazy, but I didn't understand anything about it. In the early 1970s, Stanley Cohen wrote a book called *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, which, as far as I know, was the first time an academic had tried to study the behaviour of British youth subcultures. There was undoubtedly public interest, though. I suppose you could say that, throughout the '60s and '70s, the interest was more of the tabloid outrage variety. However, punk's influence on mainstream culture happened very quickly. In the spring of 1977, Selfridges on Oxford Street was selling punk-inspired t-shirts. Since that point, fashion, especially, has been tremendously influenced by punk and other British street and club styles. The legendary British fashion stylist Judy Blame was a former punk. His work was all about do-it-yourself—using found items from mudlarking, scrap metal, and other objets trouvés in his work. In 2017, *Balmain's* Olivier Rousteing collaborated with *Victoria's Secret* to design lingerie that was pure punk, with lots of safety pins and graffiti-style writing. And of course, Vivienne Westwood was eventually made a Dame.

JS In your view, what are the most significant differences between subcultures in the late '70s/'80s and those around today, especially in terms of visibility or attitude? What's been lost, and what do you notice is new?

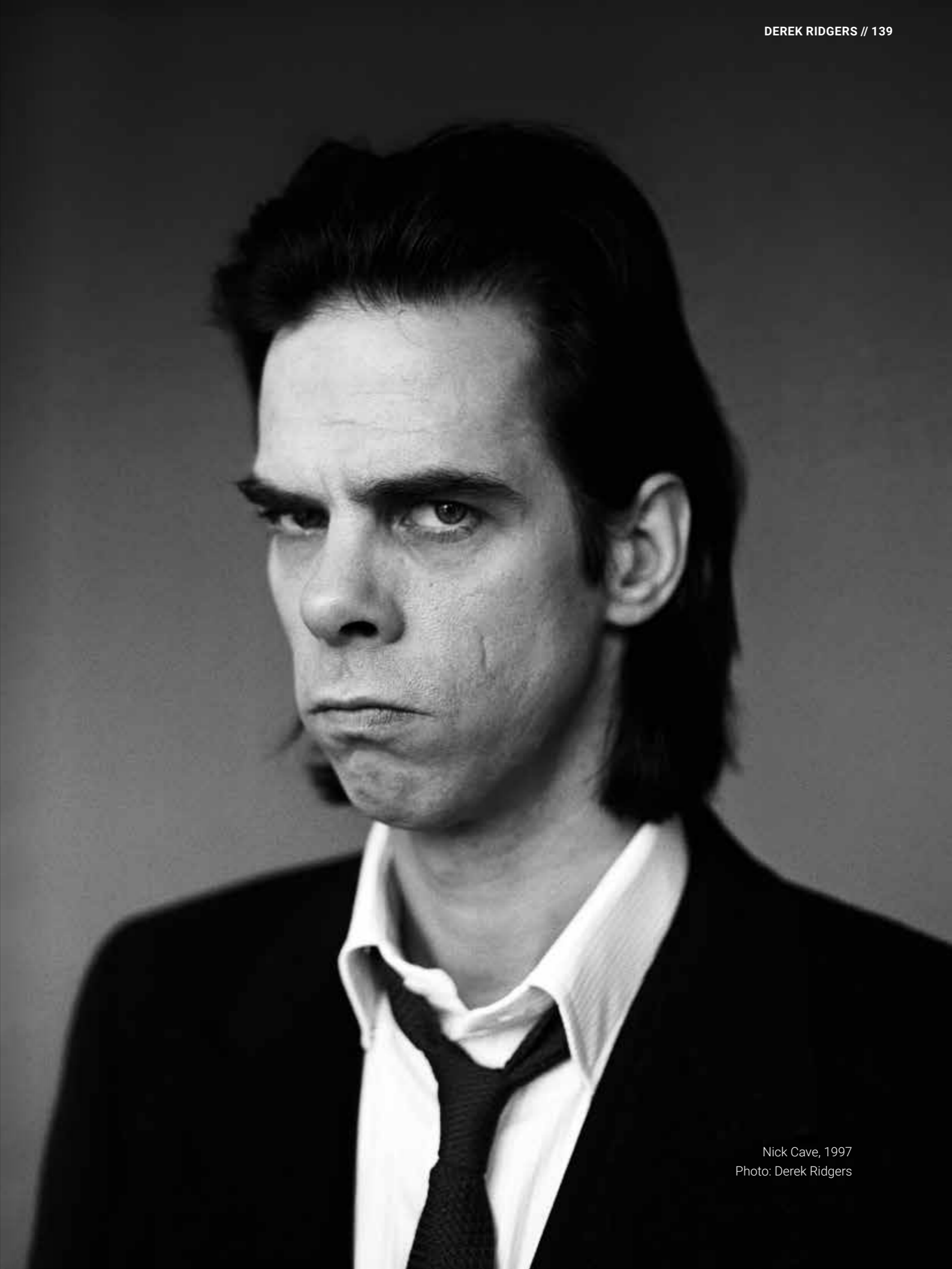
DR The subcultures of the '50s and '60s were very clearly defined and almost always based on a love of certain clothes and a type of music. By the late '70s and '80s, everything became much more commoditised. And various subculturally inspired clubs and shops proliferated. These days, you have the Internet, and Marshall McLuhan's idea from the 1960s that technology would create a global village has certainly come to pass. These days, people are instantaneously connected and can share their experiences on Instagram and TikTok. This afternoon, if someone somewhere has a great outfit they want to show off—in Outer Mongolia, for instance—then the whole world could have seen it by this evening. And they don't even have to leave their bedroom. This means that everything happens everywhere all at once. Nothing is allowed to gestate and grow away from the public gaze, which can be very harsh and quick to judge and, in some cases, ridicule.

JS There's a narrative that today's youth aren't creating anything 'original.' Why do you think people feel this way despite all that's happening still?

DR Probably because the people behind that narrative don't know what they're talking about. But one doesn't always see it whilst it's happening. Anyway, the opposite is true. Because so much is available these days through advanced technology, like AI or 3D printing, there are far fewer boundaries on creativity. If you can think of it, you can find a way to do it these days. That wasn't always the case in the past.

JS You've photographed a lot of big names over the years—from The Clash to early Adam and the Ants, and icons like Boy George. Are there any moments that stuck with you?

DR All my decent photographs represent moments that have stuck with me. And that's really why I make prints of them. The photographs should tell their own story, and if they don't, they're not good enough.



Nick Cave, 1997
Photo: Derek Ridgers

FINAL NOTES



Monster Queen, Camden Assembly

Photo: James Stryker

As this project draws to a close, I wanted to take a moment to thank everyone who has helped me reach this point, not just with the magazine but across the four years I've been at UAL.

To my friends, collaborators, tutors, and mentors, thank you for believing in me, reading countless drafts, and letting me ramble on about strange ideas. You've helped me overcome many fears and create something I'll forever be proud of.

This final project in particular has been close to my heart because it's the first time I've felt like I was writing from a place of honesty. I owe a huge amount to the scenes, nights, and communities who welcomed me in without reservation - Deptford Northern Soul Club, Sherry's Soul Society, Slimelight, Monster Queen, the DJs, the artists, the people - you made me feel part of something meaningful.

In the past four years, I've come to understand myself in ways I hadn't even considered. It's led me to rethink why I never quite clicked with the world around me. Subcultures, in all their forms, have always made space for people like me - the fanatics, the overly introverted, the poor conversationalists or anyone a bit different. People find freedom in music, connectivity, and shared interests. I'm inspired every day by the people who are considered to be outliers but who are shamelessly themselves regardless.

So, thank you for being part of this, for letting me be part of your world, and for reminding me that sometimes the best thing you can be in life is slightly out of step with what's considered normal.

With love and gratitude,
James



