

### **Happy Birthday Punk: the British Library celebrates 40 years of anarchy and innovation.**

To mark the movement's anniversary, the library is unpacking its punk archive. The show's curator<sup>1</sup> talks us through some of the highlights.

"Punk is not an easy thing to define," says Andy Linehan, curator of popular music at the British Library. "As with any type of music, people will say, 'That's punk', 'No, that's punk'. Some say punk died in a specific year, others say punk lives."

For the exhibition, Linehan has decided to limit his focus to the explosive period between 1976 and 78. "We're looking at the initial burst," he says, "and the impact it had—punk's legacy."

It may seem incongruous<sup>2</sup> that the 20th century's most snarlingly<sup>3</sup> antiestablishment musical phenomenon is being honoured by such an august institution, but the British Library has amassed a huge archive of audio, video, print material and other artefacts<sup>4</sup> associated with punk. "We've always collected the counterculture as well as the culture," says Linehan. [...]

The exhibition will explore punk's impact on fashion and design. It's hard to visualise the early days of punk without thinking of sloganeering<sup>5</sup> shirts and DIY promotional art.

Fanzines are one way of tracing just how quickly punk spread around the UK, says Linehan. "It started as a London thing but suddenly there were bands and zines everywhere— Bristol, Manchester, Belfast, Edinburgh." He puts it down to "the DIY ethos<sup>6</sup> where people were going out and starting their own labels". [...] "People see it as negative and nihilistic," says Linehan, "but punk was also positive in many ways—it was, in effect, the birth of the independent label."

Does he think punk is still alive and kicking? "Most types of music have their moment of impact and then fade, but there are always people who carry them

on. Bands like The Stranglers and UK Subs are still playing, and every year there are festivals where all the old punks come out. We had to draw the line somewhere for the exhibition—but it's not a black-and-white line, it's kind of grey and fuzzy.”

*theguardian.com, 2016*

1. *conservateur*
2. *déplacé*
3. expressed angrily
4. human-made objects
5. *qui arborent des slogans*
6. philosophy

## File 10 p. 113 • Iconic punk rocker defaces punk rock exhibit

While taking part in a public talk on punk late last week, punk icon Viv Albertine became incensed<sup>1</sup> at the British Library exhibit's erasure of female musicians from London's early punk scene. So after the event ended, Albertine did what any good punk would do—she defaced<sup>2</sup> the exhibit's introductory sign.

Crossing out the names of bands The Clash, The Sex Pistols, and The Buzzcocks (all comprised entirely of men) Albertine scrawled<sup>3</sup> in women-led groups The Slits, X-Ray Spex, and Siouxsie and the Banshees. To ensure her message was clear, she added, "What about the women!!" and her signature.

Albertine has a real point; as the lead guitarist of the reggae-inflected punk group The Slits, Albertine has first-hand knowledge of her and other women's integral role in the early London punk scene. [...] In an interview with Channel 4 News regarding her book, Albertine describes punk's intersection with feminism, saying, "I think we shook up the English establishment. It was a very, very patriarchal society; you never questioned the doctor, the dentist, the judge, your uncle, your father—you never questioned a male, especially as a young woman."

It's no wonder, then, that she felt so compelled to make sure the contributions of the women she played alongside in the early days of punk do not go ignored, nor that she chose the most punk way imaginable to do so.

The British Library hasn't indicated whether they'll remove Albertine's additions to the exhibit, but they tweeted: "Viv Albertine is still more punk rock than you!"

Jessie Guy-Ryan, *atlasobscura.com*, 2016

1. furious

2. vandalise

3. *gribouiller*