

Youth Activity

Youth Activity is an exhibition about youth culture. It explores how children, teenagers and young adults spend their free time, and how they interact with the world around them.

Social media has taken the world by storm. More and more children and young adults are becoming addicted to technology and becoming less and less adventurous in their social lives. It is important to remind ourselves of times when mobile phones didn't exist, young people were finding their spark by themselves, growing confidence and making friends. It is important we continue to encourage this amongst the youth in society. This exhibition displays beautiful moments captured in time by various photographers, over the last seven decades. Photography is an amazing form of story telling. This is because it shows the raw reality of a scene. However, the objectives of photographs are often unclear as to allow room for interpretation by the viewer. (Davidson, Goldin and Minkinen, 1997, p. 348)

As we look back in recent history, subcultures were the way for young adults to find their voice and confidence. The punk culture of the 70's and 80's was one of the more notable moments in youth culture history – this subculture is featured in this exhibition.

Youth culture is the way in which young people in society behave, dress, speak etc. The qualities generally recognised to be the foundations of a culture are common interests, music, hobbies, relaxation rituals, sports, the list goes on. There are many subcultures within society. For example, goths, hippies, ravers, metal-heads etc. These all have different 'rules' and structures. However, they all fall under the umbrella term 'youth culture.'

From 1920-1936 the number of teenagers in schools almost doubled due to high school education becoming compulsory in America. Britain followed through shortly after, in 1947, making education compulsory up to the age of 15. This created the group of young adults that we now know as 'teenagers'. This is because school was a place that allowed young adults to create a separate culture outside of the constant watch of parents (Thompson, 2018.) The very first youth sub-culture was called 'Teddy Boys'. Teddy Boys were groups of young men, mainly in post-war Britain, who were inspired by early American rock and music. They would dress in Edwardian suits, style their hair into quiffs and demonstrate rebellious behaviour. Teddy Boys had a long-lasting impact on youth culture.

I want this exhibition to highlight the importance of different cultures and socialising, and for it to teach people about cultures they may know very little about. I hope to give an insight into what my own social life is like as a young member of society.

Some of the artists included in this exhibition work primarily with the youth of society, or have collections of work specifically dedicated to young people and their activities- whether it be in school, in university, in their free time or at their jobs. These collections give the viewer a sense of who the photographer is as well as the subjects of each photograph. One of the photographers featured in this exhibition is Sheila Rock. Rock played a huge part in documenting the London punk scene of the 1970's. With subjects such as Vivienne Westwood, the punk rock band 'The Jam' and even American punk stars such as Debbie Harry of the band 'Blondie', it becomes clear that the punk scene and music is a major interest of Rock's.

Other photographers included in this exhibition are English photographer Dafydd Jones, French photographer Bruno Barbey, South African photographer David Goldblatt and American Photographer Mark Cohen.



Fig 1. Dafydd Jones, *Boris Johnson & Allegra Mostyn-Owen*. (1986)

This first photograph is featured in a collection of works by Dafydd Jones, curated into a book titled 'Oxford: The Last hurrah' published in 2020. This collection of photographs explores the social scene at Oxford University in the 1980's. A few famous faces appear in the book, prominently politicians. However, Boris Johnson's face stands out the most. Throughout the book we can see scenes of parties, balls, gatherings and even bonfires. This photo displays two key aspects of youth culture: partying and relationships. As suggested in this photograph, alcohol is staple of the Oxford University social scene. Here, a zoned-out, scruffy, young Boris Johnson is looking into the camera, witnessing it

capture this drunken moment with his then-girlfriend. Despite the drunken state of the subjects, the patterned wine glasses are a symbolic reminder of the location and class of the scene. This photo was taken on the 10th of March 1986. Which makes Boris Johnson 21 here. This is the average age of a university student. Although at 21 years old you may be nearing the end of your youth, it is the age in which people start experimenting with their social lives in the 'real world' (university). As artists, we haven't strayed too far from this concept. We thrive on experimentation and partying. A drink is a common 'wind-down' or 'pick-up' tool. As Jeremy Bowen states, 'photographers lubricated their days with industrial amounts of alcohol' (Bowen, 2022, p.7) This photograph hangs on the wall to the right as you enter the gallery.



Fig 2. Mark Cohen, *Boy in Yellow Shirt Smoking, Scranton, PA.* (1977)

Sticking with the theme of partying, smoking and drinking, this photograph, taken by Mark Cohen, shows a much younger person engaging in behaviour typically displayed by older teens and adults - smoking. This photo shows a group of young people socialising, which is one of the main factors of youth culture. These children are out playing in the streets, joking around and having fun. The focal point here is obviously the boy joking around while smoking a cigarette. However, the contrast between that and the boy to the right licking a lollipop is fascinating as it demonstrates the spectrum of youth culture. There are some youths who rebel and behave anti-socially, and others who embrace the stereotypical way of behaving for a person of their age. As this photo was taken in the 1970's, it reminds viewers of a time before social media and mobile phones,

times when playing on the street was a prominent form of entertainment for youths. This photograph hangs on the wall to the left as you enter the gallery, opposite fig 1. Print is 12.5 in x 18.5 in.



Fig 3. Sheila Rock, "Let It Rock", *Jordan Inside SEX Landscape, London*. (1971)

Punk photographer Sheila Rock photographs a young Jordan Mooney standing inside Vivienne Westwood's shop 'SEX' in west London. This photograph is part of a collection Rock titled 'The Punk Series'. This collection of work captures many moments from the early years of the punk movement that took youth culture in London by storm. A very notable aspect of the 70's punk culture was the fashion. A young Vivienne Westwood was responsible for a lot of it. Here we can see a woman dressed in rebellious clothing and make up standing inside a nonconventional clothing and accessories shop. This was very early on in the punk scene when young adults were rebelling against the stereotypical fashion and behaviour of people in England as it wasn't reflecting the multi-cultural society London was developing (Letts, 2020, p.14). You could argue that it all stemmed from this small group of people revolving around Westwood and Malcom McLaren's shop, as many of them were 'punks' before the movement even started (Letts, 2020, p.14). Punks did not care about their appearance, they weren't afraid to be judged by others, they did not care for other people's opinions about them. This photograph hangs on the wall in between the two doors of the gallery. Print is 12 x 16 inch.



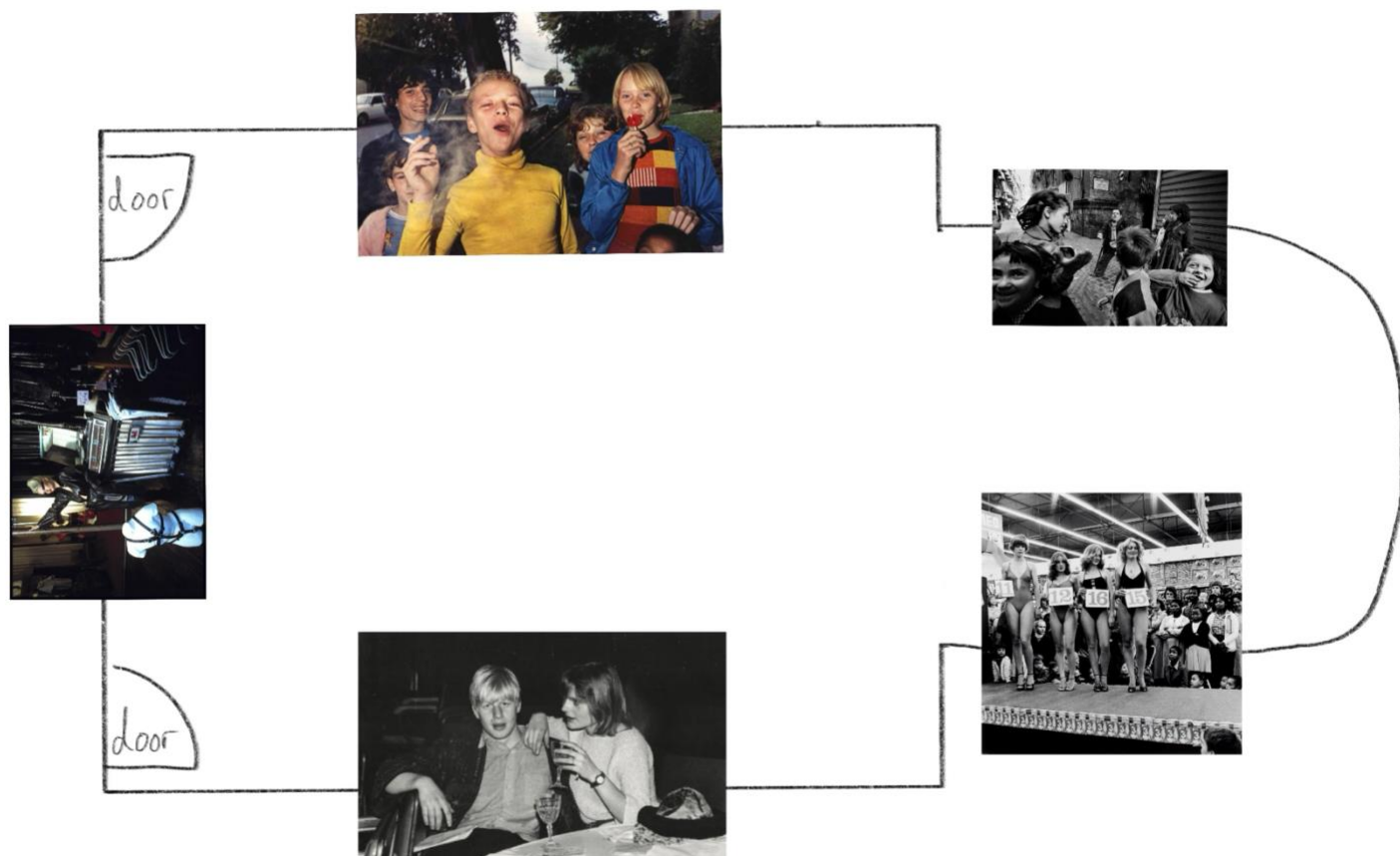
Fig 4. Bruno Barbey, *A Street Scene in Naples*, (1963)

This black and white print captures the innocence of children playing in the street. They appear to be laughing, possibly laughing at the beggar stood behind them all. The laughter and happy expressions show the playful demeanour of each child. This innocence is a reminder of the lack of malice intentions behind a child's entertainment. The children are not aware of the financial situation of the beggar, or any negative things in the real world. Youth culture is finding something you enjoy, or find amusing, and exploring said thing. These kids play on the street to socialise, make friends. It is also a learning experience and a window into other people's lives. Not all kids are rebellious; some kids wear pig tails and mickey mouse tops – as seen here (bottom right). This photograph hangs on the left of the semi-circle section of the gallery. Print is 8.6 in x 5.8 inch.



Fig 5. David Goldblatt, *Miss Lovely Legs Competition*, (1979)

This photograph shows the contrast in society at a similar time period as punks. These girls appear more stereotypical. They are concerned about the way they appear, to the point they have entered a beauty competition in their free time. This is something that reflects modern youth culture. Due to social media, young people are consumed by how they are perceived by others. People tend to put all of the blame on modern technology, but here is evidence that insecurities have always been an issue. There is a certain group of youths that display their looks either online or in beauty pageants, seeking approval of strangers. This photograph hangs on the right of the semi-circle section of the gallery, opposite fig 4. Print is 15in x 15in.



Mission Gallery floor plan.

Low lighting and cold, white spotlight on each photograph.

Word count: 1,591.

List of refernces

Bowen, J. (2022) *Aperture*. Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press.

Davidson, Goldin and Minkkinen. (1997) *The Photography Book*. London: Phaidon Press.

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Thompson, D. (2018) *A Breif History Of Teenagers*.

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List of Figures

Fig 1. Jones, D. (1986) *Boris Johnson and Allegra Mostyn-Owen*. Available at: <https://www.dafjones.com/image/I0000Q7qXE1xFg0k> (Accessed: 22nd April, 2025.)

Fig 2. Cohen, M. (1977) *Boy in Yellow Shirt Smoking, Scranton, PA*. Dye coupler print. Available at: <https://www.cartermuseum.org/collection/boy-yellow-shirt-smoking-scranton-pa-1977-p201770> (Accessed: 22nd April, 2025.)

Fig 3. Rock, S. (1971) “*Let It Rock*”, *Jordan Inside SEX Landscape, London*. Archival pigment print. Available at: <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/sheila-rock-jordan-inside-sex-landscape> (Accessed: 22nd April, 2025.)

Fig 4. Barbey, B. (1963) *A Street Scene in Naples*. Available at: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/bruno-barbey-the-italians/> (Accessed: 22nd April, 2025)

Fig 5. Goldblatt, D. (1979) *Miss Lovely Legs Competition*. Gelatin Silver Print. Available at: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O152718/miss-lovely-legs-competition-at-photograph-goldblatt-david/> (Accessed: 22nd April, 2025.)