Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Punk Culture at Skirball

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, June 3rd, 2026



Sex Pistols poster at Skirball

I wanted to see the Punk Culture exhibit at the Skirball Cultural Center, because in May 1977, I had traveled from Los Angeles to London to photograph the exciting Punk Rock scene.



Vivienne Westwood © Elisa Leonelli 1977

I met Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood,



Sex Pistols-Johnny Rotten, Sid Vicious © Elisa Leonelli 1977

Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols,



Chelsea © Elisa Leonelli 1977

Chelsea and the Damned,



The Damned © Elisa Leonelli 1977

Punk rock fans at clubs



Punk rock fan at the Roxy © Elisa Leonelli 1977

Punk boutiques and punk kids on Kings Road.



Punk kid on Kings Road © Elisa Leonelli

Read here about my experience.



Punk fashion at Skirball © Elisa Leonelli 2026

“Outsiders, Outcasts, Rebels + Weirdos: Punk Culture 1976-86” (May 20–September 6) examines Proto-Punk in New York 1975-77, including Patti Smith and the Ramones, because of their Jewish ancestry, UK Punk 1976-78, LA Punk Venues 1977-1984, such as the Masque in Hollywood and Madame Wong in Chinatown, New Wave 1979-1982, the term was used interchangeably with punk, etc.



Punk outfit at Skirball © Elisa Leonelli 2026

The black caption explains that Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, who was raised by his Sephardic Jewish grandmother, invented the look of UK punk. The Skirball Museum collects art and objects that reflect Jewish life.



Punk Fashion show © Elisa Leonelli 1977

In Los Angeles I photographed a punk fashion show at the Hollywood Palladium in 1977.



Punk make-up, Hollywood © Elisa Leonelli 1977

I would go to the Masque, an underground club where people danced uncontrollably bumping into each other, and ask some of the girls to pose for me.



Punk girl © Elisa Leonelli 1977

I befriended Jerry Casale of Devo and the band posed for a photo session in 1980.



Devo © Elisa Leonelli 1980

By 1981, another fashion and music trend had emerged, the New Romantics. I did a photo essay at Club Lingerie, also founded by Brendan Muller, like the Masque. Click here to see complete essay.



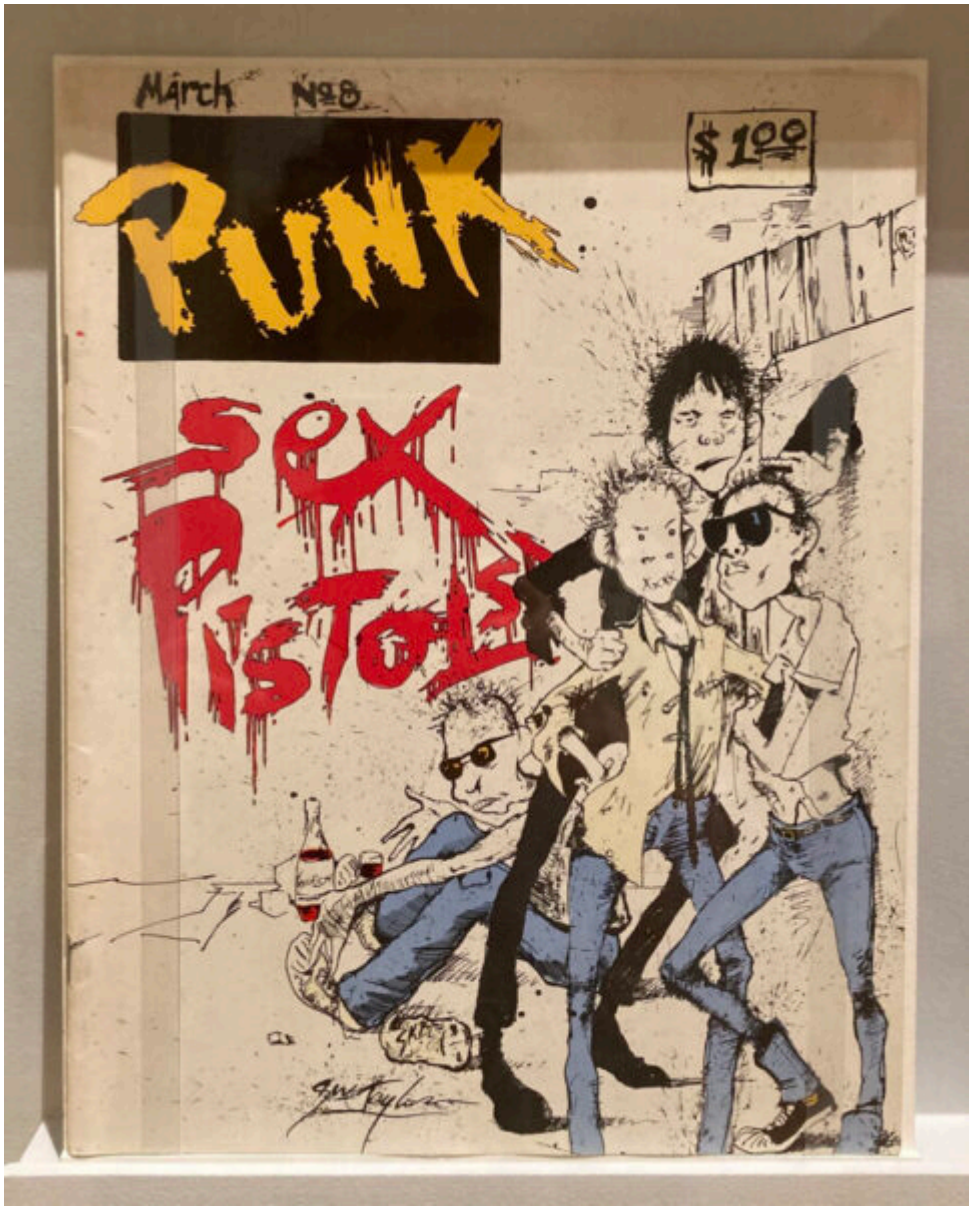
New Romantics-Club Lingerie © Elisa Leonelli 1981

The final note from Skirball concludes: Punk is not a sound, it’s an attitude, outside the mainstream.



Devo poster at Skirball

It’s a useful reminder today, 50 years after the birth of punk, that to rebel against the government is more necessary than ever.



Punk fanzine at Skirball

P.S.: Please click on underlined words for more info.

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