

Press Release

Zappa and Hendrix: Unseen Portraits 1967-2017 shot by Robert Davidson and Mike Berkofsky

32 st. George Street, Mayfair, London
Friday 14 July - Saturday 15 July 2017
Preview evening: Thursday 13 July

Whitebank Fine Art is delighted to present its first photographic exhibition, featuring unseen original portraits of two giants of music, Frank Zappa and Jimi Hendrix.

Photographers Robert Davidson and Mike Berkofsky have spent the better part of half a century searching for their lost negatives. It is therefore a privilege to be exhibiting these original photographs exactly fifty years from when they were first captured.



In the summer of 1967, nineteen year old Robert Davidson was commissioned to shoot Frank Zappa in his London hotel room to promote an upcoming concert at the Royal Albert Hall. Zappa let him in upon arrival and proceeded to use the toilet, Robert seized the opportunity and immediately asked through the ajar door if he could take his picture on the throne - Zappa obliged.

This set of images, commonly known as the 'Zappa Krappa' pictures almost immediately gained cult status, a sentiment echoed by Zappa himself in 1983, when stating, "I'm probably more famous for sitting on the toilet than for anything else."

Earlier this year the image appeared in the V & A's definitive exhibition on the 1960's 'You Say You Want a Revolution.' The proliferation of this unconventional image, with poster reproductions reaching into the millions, has propelled this intimate portrait of Zappa into the fabric of pop culture

Three months after the shoot, Zappa's management, incorrectly thinking Davidson to be benefiting exclusively from the increasingly popular images, sent representatives to his studio where he was forced to part with his original negatives. However, these measures proved futile due to the vast amount of pirate reproductions that had already taken place, and ultimately neither Davidson nor Zappa received any royalties from the image.

Moving forward to 2010, Davidson learnt that his negatives were about to be sold online by a Los Angeles memorabilia company, Rockaway Records, who had purchased them from the estate of Herb Cohen, Zappa's manager. Davidson contacted Rockaway Records to relate his story, and in turn they kindly agreed to repatriate the 10 surviving negatives for a token sum. Rockaway's Mark Steckler stated, "We are just glad that Robert Davidson could get them back"

The story behind Mike Berkofsky's Hendrix image is less spontaneous but equally fortuitous. Twenty two year old Berkofsky was commissioned by the influential 60's magazine 'Rave' to shoot Hendrix. One of only a handful of photographers to capture him for a sitting portrait, and using a high quality Hasselblad medium format camera.

Upon completion, the processed rolls of film from the shoot were handed over to the magazine and never returned, seemingly lost. Fortunately before processing, Berkofsky visited the laboratory and requested a clip test to check the film exposures and kept possession of the test clipping. This clipping is the only surviving record from the shoot, but was misplaced and thought lost until recovered by Berkofsky in 2014 from a Los Angeles storage facility. Unfortunately the storage had been severely affected by the cataclysmic 1994 Northridge earthquake, causing moisture damage, which in turn led to fungus infestation. Determined to restore the negative, over a period of time was carefully washed, each wash revealing layers of bright colour, imbuing the image with a new psychedelic vibrance.

These photographs are some of Davidson and Berkofsky's most important work from the 1960's, at a time when they were working in the same studio.

This exhibition is the culmination of decades of separation from their lost works, and a final chapter in these unusual narratives

Whitebank Fine Art,
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