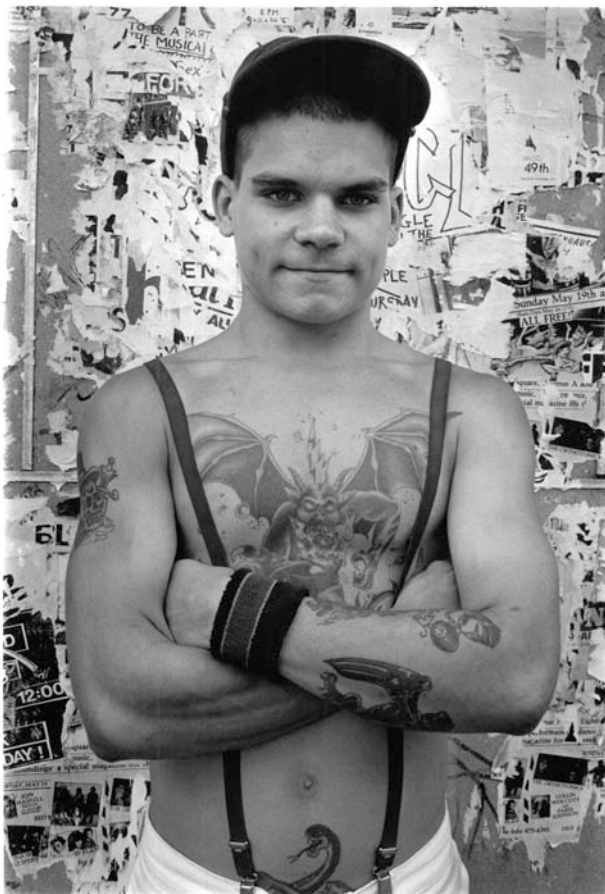


PUNKS AND SKINHEADS OF THE EAST VILLAGE, 1984-1987



**Photographs by
Lilian Caruana**

Punks and Skinheads of the East Village, 1984-1987

Photographs by Lilian Caruana

**Catalogue for an exhibition at the
John D. Calandra Italian American Institute**

October 27, 2010–January 7, 2011

In conjunction with the symposium

**Hybrid Moments
Independent Music in Italian America**

November 5, 2010

The central theme of my photography focuses on individuals who are outside the mainstream of larger society. Some of the subjects I have photographed include immigrants, punks, skinheads, and gang members. My work explores how individuals who, either by choice or because they are seen as “The Other,” live outside the dominant culture. My goal is to capture how individuals shape their identity, fend off alienation, and give voice to their own existence. This theme comes out of my own experience as an immigrant, trying to negotiate my identity as an Italian American.

My roots are in documentary photography. My work was inspired by W. Eugene Smith. Looking at my own photographs, I see Smith’s influence—like him, I am drawn to the marginal and the outsider, and, like him, I see their strength and vitality.

These photographs of the hardcore and punk subculture of New York’s East Village were taken over three years, from 1984 to 1987. They depict young people who lived in tenements and “squats,” with peeling paint and graffiti proclaiming slogans—“Pure Impact,” “Peace,” and “Death.” In my photographs, they pose in garbage-littered streets and embrace in lots filled with rubble. For decorations, they wear skulls, swastikas, studs, and chains and sport Mohawks and spiked hairdos. Their tough posturing, music, and slam-dancing seem violent and ugly. To the casual observer, they are scary and forbidding, almost demonic. But exploring this community in depth allowed me to see the humanity and vulnerability underneath the harsh, anti-social exterior. I chose to document their way of life by showing them as individuals through their portraits.

Lilian Caruana, 2010

Editor's Note

In this catalogue, Lilian Caruana's photographs have been paired with quotations from her recorded interviews. Except for "Anna," the speakers are not the subjects of the photographs.

—Rosangela Briscese

I take from the system. I play the system because that's the way you gotta do it now. For a poor person in this country there really isn't any more Horatio Alger stories. I'm about a little swindling on the side. If I can get by by doing something slightly shady then I do it. I'm not into going out and mugging people, but if I can live rent-free somehow—fine. If I can get over on my boss, I'll do it because I feel that they're taking my blood. I've had shit jobs all my life, slave jobs, you know.

Jon

I was around London in '75-'76, around when the punk scene was coming out. At the time it was a way to shock people. It was a movement—people got tired of waiting around being like the hippies—all peace and love—punks decided to be more active by doing something outrageous and make them realize that you were out there.

It was exciting, there was a reason behind it, there was feeling behind it. Here it's very different, it's a very small group here. There's still the attitude of "Fuck you we'll do what we want," but there isn't the power behind it like in England. I've known skinheads whose parents were skinheads and were brought up to be skinheads.

Mark



My parents were really freaked out when I moved into the squat 'cause they were from Germany during the war, and they lived in one room with four families and they couldn't understand why I'd move out of the house with electricity and a bathroom to an abandoned building. They just couldn't grasp that. They used to drive by now and then. I'd ask them if they wanted to come upstairs and they'd say "No." I guess they were afraid.

Anna



Five years from now there'll still be a scene. I think skinheads is the future. We're sub-working class people who can't even get jobs. With me it doesn't matter. I'm fucked whether I crop my hair or not, wear boots and braces or not, so I might as well wear boots and braces—to me that's a symbol of working class anger.

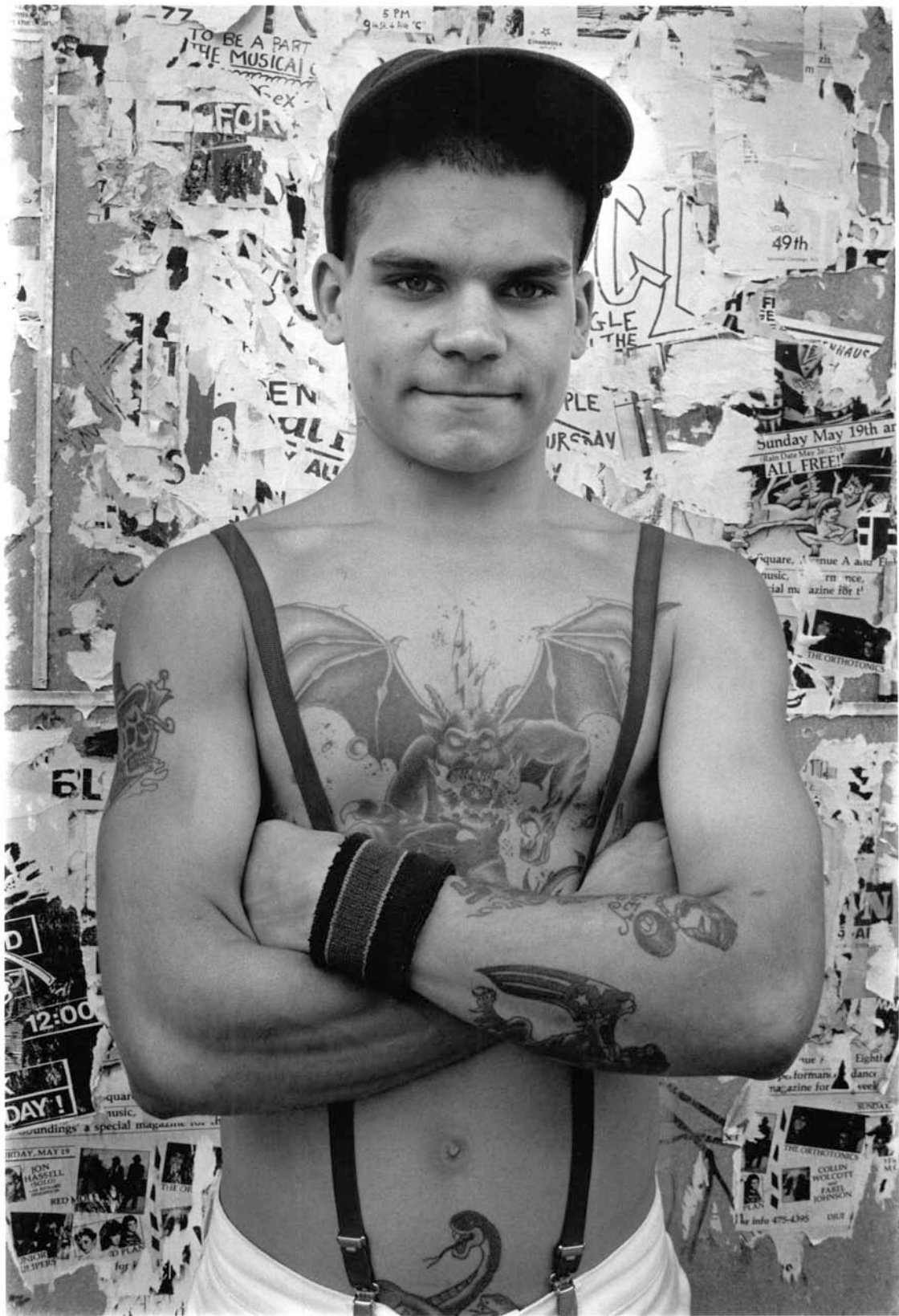
I consider that our birthright has been taken from us. What we were taught as Americans, they're trying to take that from us—the corporate capitalists. The capitalists and the communists, in my opinion, are like cohorts, you know. All these conflicts, it's all economic, they've got the globe split up and it's whose going to take more. This country is turning into corporate capitalism rather than the free enterprise ownership—ownership by the people. Everything is franchised, everything is owned by very few people. Skins on the average think a lot about things, we're aware of what's going down—that's one reason we're skins.

Bobby



My parents are suburban. It would be really easy for me to get a job, go to college. I choose not to do that because I wouldn't be able to look at myself in the mirror and not throw up all over the place. It's really twisted the way people put money in front of people, when you think about people who work their whole lives to retire when they're 65 and like everything is broken down when they're 65—then you have so much time to sit around and feed the pigeons in the park. You go to college and you get the career and you work at the career, the family, the house, the mortgage, and you feel strapped down. Making money makes you want to make more money.

Matt



People see me as a street punk. That's what people would consider me, but I consider myself Lee Marie. That's who I am. That's my name. I still panhandle, bumming around. My band *Scab* is the main thing in my life right now—it's the only source of a career that I have going for me and I hope that it works out 'cause I really enjoy doing it.

I usually make enough to eat and then I eat. Sometimes, if I want to make more I can make as much as \$10. We're not making any money yet as a band. We play a lot of benefits. We played at Riker's Island and we didn't get paid for that. One show we played at Tin Pan Alley and we got \$300. But eventually as time goes on we'll get paid for our gigs.

I'm close with the band. We tell each other our problems. I guess I fit in. I have more of a home. I was always an outsider everywhere I went and I always will be. I finally fit in with a bunch of people who don't fit in and we all fit in together.

Lee Marie



The world's going to end. It's gonna happen. Me as an individual, I'm not going to stop it. There's nothing I can do. Instead of wasting my energy on nonsense, why not put your energies on something you do have control over? Since I can't better my surroundings I gotta better myself. I try to be happy. I haven't had a full-time steady job though and I miss having money in my pocket. I want to get married, have kids, a good job. I want the American dream—but I don't want the mortgage.

Dave



**John D. Calandra Italian American Institute
Queens College, CUNY
25 West 43rd Street, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10036
212.642.2094
www.qc.edu/calandra**