

Image and Identity

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For some, the spirit of rock 'n' roll is authentic to the core, scruffy, anything but glamorous. For Lynn Goldsmith, who has spent the bulk of her life at the center of the music, rock has meant something else: lights, makeup, hair, a fashion and visual statement as much as a sound and rebellious stance.

"For me, rock 'n' roll was Little Richard," said Goldsmith, an Old Snowmass photographer and owner of Basalt's Lynn Goldsmith Gallery, a repository of the visual history of classic rock. "And I grew up in Motown, where people dressed up for the shows. It was a show. A lot of people think rock 'n' roll and think of the Grateful Dead. That wasn't my mindset."



Old Snowmass photographer Lynn Goldsmith at her gallery in Basalt. Her latest book, "The Police: 1978-1983," will be published this week. (Jordan Curet/Aspen Times Weekly)

Goldsmith's contribution has been to amplify rock's glamour factor. Over a career that began in 1964 with the early Beatles - a devout Rolling Stones fan, she deigned only to shoot the Fab Four's feet - and has included shots of virtually every classic rock act, Goldsmith has put a signature visual stamp on the music. Not satisfied with the grubby pose that rock struck in the late '60s, she taught herself hairstyling and makeup design to add glam to rock.



"Pygmalion" is part of Lynn Goldsmith's photographic self-portrait series, "Looking Glass." (Courtesy Lynn Goldsmith Gallery)

"I thought that my job, in terms of creating images, was to shoot aspects of these people which were the best of them," she said. "And sometimes my talent was about changing, often their hair, their clothes, their makeup, in order for them to, in my opinion, fulfill their greatest potential. My job was to be one step ahead - not to make them look like everyone else.

"Nowadays, almost all artists do that. They hire hairstylists, personal shoppers, choreographers. When I started, artists were of the opinion that that was a manipulation. They felt it hurt the integrity of their music. Now I can't think of an artist who doesn't do that. Except for jam bands."

By 1978, with the MTV era just over the horizon, the '60s ethos of keeping it real had begun to fade. That year, a new trio from England was brought to Goldsmith's attention. The threesome had flopped with their first single, and Miles Copeland, the band's manager and brother of their drummer, and a friend of Goldsmith's, was calling on his contacts to help relaunch the band. Thus began Goldsmith's relationship with the Police.

Immediately upon the re-release of a reggae-ish tune about a hooker, "Roxanne," the Police took off. Over the next five years, the trio would release five albums, all of them artistic and commercial gold. Goldsmith was there most every step of the way with her camera, shooting the band on tour, at homes in London, New York and Los Angeles, and as they recorded several albums in their studio on the Caribbean island of Montserrat.

The result of that collaboration is Goldsmith's "The Police: 1978-1983," a visual history of scores of photos, and accompanying text of the band members' own thoughts on those times. (In truth, it can be said to contain thousands of images; the book closes with Goldsmith's photo-montage of singer-bassist Sting, made up of some 2,000 shots.) The book, timed to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Police, opens with an introduction by Phil Sutcliffe, a British music journalist who was instrumental in the formation of the band.

Goldsmith will appear at a talk and book-signing on Thursday, Aug. 2, at 7 p.m., at Town Center Booksellers in Basalt.

"The Police" is also designed as a fundraising project. Twenty-five percent of Goldsmith's royalties go to Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation, an organization that funds music programs for children, and donates instruments to schools.

"Arts education is an important cause, in terms of creating better generations for the future," said Goldsmith. "Arts can be a powerful force for good. If there hadn't been arts programs in schools, would there have been a Police?"

From buses to limousines Goldsmith was impressed with the Police on first meeting the threesome: drummer Stewart Copeland, guitarist Andy Summers and a singer named Gordon Sumner, who earned his nickname from a black-and-yellow-striped shirt that made him look like a bumblebee. Collectively, the three were well-read, articulate and sophisticated. Sting had been a secondary-school teacher; Summers had studied classical music at UCLA and played jazz; the American-born Copeland, whose father was a CIA officer, had studied at Berkeley. Perhaps most important to Goldsmith, all three looked favorably on what she had in mind for them.



"The Police: 1978-1983" collects Old Snowmass photographer Lynn Goldsmith's photographs of the English trio in their early years.

"They embraced it. It was fun. Because I always made it like it was a party," she said. "The photo studio is a difficult place - empty walls, lights, you. But they liked looking good. Sting's mother had been a hairdresser, so he was adept at hair."

But the trio was far from perfect, so in stepped Goldsmith. For the first shoot, Sting appeared with Harry Potter-style glasses, which Goldsmith promptly removed. She didn't think much at all of Summers' style. "So I changed it a bit," said Goldsmith.

Goldsmith has made a habit of befriending certain musicians - "the ones who are the type of people I would have hung out with in high school, the ones who liked the same music as me," she said. They are the ones who have become her repeat subjects: the Stones, Patti Smith, Talking Heads, Blondie, and her former boyfriend, Bruce Springsteen. (An exception was Frank Zappa, a close friend and frequent subject who wouldn't have been a high school pal: "His musical taste was nothing like mine," said Goldsmith. "But he was funny. Humor counts for a lot.")

The Police connected with Goldsmith in this fashion, especially Copeland, who shared her interest in filmmaking. Over several years, Goldsmith and Sting kept room's in each other's apartments, for convenience's sake. What emerges in "The Police," then, is a thoroughly intimate look at the band. There are photos of Sting jumping rope ("He was one of the few rock stars to work out," says Goldsmith) and going to the movies, of Copeland roller-skating, of all of them recording and goofing around on Montserrat. And, in Goldsmith's style, there are shots of the band in makeup - looking good, looking funny, looking

odd.

"The Police" also reveals a sense of history. There is a bit of rock history in a photo of Summers taking his own photograph of the newspaper headline: "Fans mourn Beatle John Lennon." And there is a sense of the band's own rise, from leather-clad quasi-punks in London and New York to stars with time on their hands in the Caribbean. In that rise is the quintessential rock-star story.

"The clothes change over time. They're traveling by limo instead of bus," noted Goldsmith, whose previous books include "Springsteen: Access All Areas," and "New Kids," a remarkably ambitious work about the boy band New Kids on the Block, of which Goldsmith is especially proud. "And there's little communication going on in the limo, as opposed to the fun they were having in the bus. And then they have their own airplanes, when they're flying to shows. You see the change in their styles as the money changes."

Beyond rock 'n' roll

Goldsmith's next project is a broader take on rock. "Rock and Roll," featuring images of Bob Marley, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones and numerous others, is set for publication in late September. The release coincides with an exhibition of her photography at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland. That book, with an introduction by Iggy Pop, another close friend, features photos as well as quotes from various people that illustrate the prominence of rock music. Former President Clinton talks about early soul singer Junior Walker; Muhammad Ali talks about James Brown, whose music he trained to; playwright Sam Shepard contributes an original poem about Patti Smith.

"If I was ever going to leave a legacy of my work, my photography work in rock 'n' roll, this book is it," said Goldsmith, who also does art photography, photojournalism and portraiture in areas outside of music. "I not only present images, but also quotes - what was going on with the artists at the time the pictures were taken, how people were influenced by rock 'n' roll."

Perhaps closest to Goldsmith's heart is a project that has nothing to do with rock 'n' roll. For several years, she has been working on a series titled Looking Glass. The works are self-portraits, elaborate, complex pieces that feature the photographer in the guise of Little Red Riding Hood, characters from the film "Dangerous Liaisons," princesses, ballerinas and sexpots. The series, which Goldsmith is planning to publish in book form, examines fantasy, fashion, humor, self-image and the idea that a person can make herself into anything she wants to be.

In 1982, Goldsmith created a more specific alternative image for herself. As Will Powers, she released an album, "Dancing for Mental Health," on Island Records. In parks and theaters, she performed as a voice of empowerment.

Will Powers, says Goldsmith, "was your own inner voice. I'm all the answers to all the questions one could ever have in life. I am the source and path to enlightenment - as well as many other sources and paths."

The thread through the fictional Will Powers, through the Looking Glass fantasies and through a photographer intent on transforming her subjects is a bright one. In Goldsmith's world, nothing is static.

"In all my work has been the underlying theme: There is no such thing as a fixed identity," she said. "If you do that to yourself, you're limiting your possibilities."

"It's always about questioning what's real and what's imagined. Rock 'n' roll does that. Or John Lennon, anyway. I think one of the goals of rock 'n' roll was to create a world without borders."