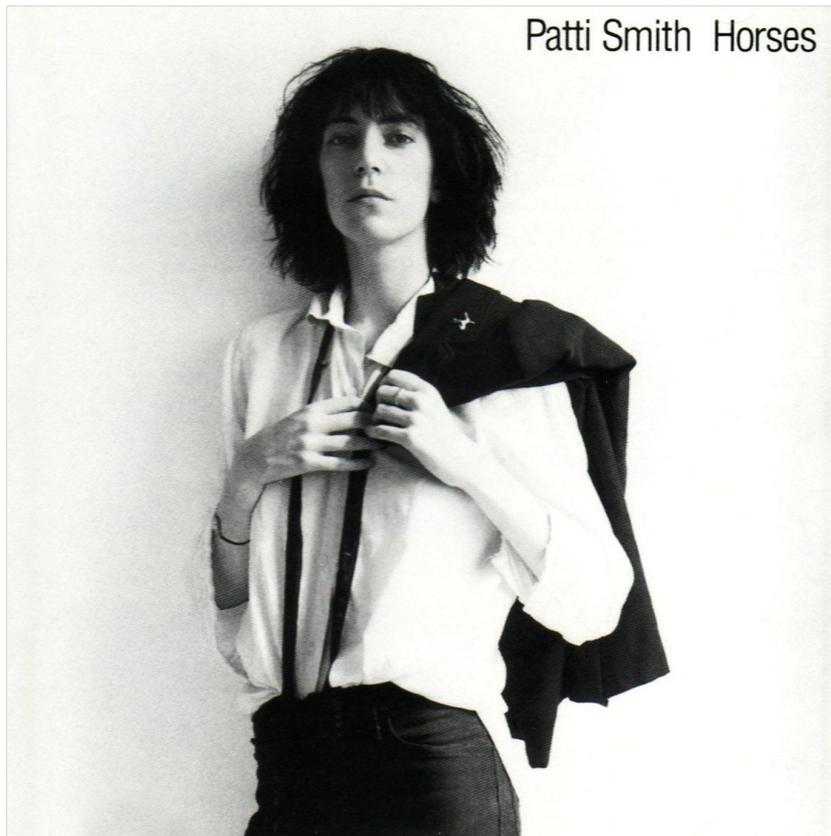


## Defining Patti Smith as Punk



*Figure 1*

It was a cloudy morning, but Robert Mapplethorpe was determined to capture his close friend, Patti Smith, in natural sunlight. So, Smith and Mapplethorpe nonchalantly grabbed grits and eggs at the Pink Tea Cup in the Village and waited. As the sun began to finally appear, they raced to Mapplethorpe's partner's apartment and shot only twelve photos. When describing the now iconic photograph, Smith states that, "I had no sense of how it would look, just that it should be true" (Smith).

For many, the album cover presents the true Patti Smith. Her men's shirt, Frank Sinatra- style pose, and androgynous haircut display her masculine style. Yet, her delicate hands, cropped cuffs, and reserved expression, convey a powerful portrait of a woman. The type of woman who is not afraid to transcend provincial notions of what a woman can and cannot be. The type of woman who refuses to be just one thing.



*Figure 2 and Figure 3 and Figure 4 and Figure 5*

It is this persistent refusal to be defined that earns Smith the label, “Godmother of Punk.” As illustrated in the photographs above, Smith possesses a complex and often contradicting persona. In the two images on the left, she uses her femininity aggressively. As a viewer, one can see that she is physically forcing her body on the crowd and her fellow band members. From the perspective of the male band members in Figure 2, she is explicitly declaring that she is undeniably a woman, but still deserves to be taken seriously. The stylistic decision to have the band viewing Smith’s breasts, an anatomical representation of women, but not the viewer, symbolizes that her message is physically directed at the music community. This brazenly challenges the rock industry to question their fundamental understanding of what sex qualifies as an artist.

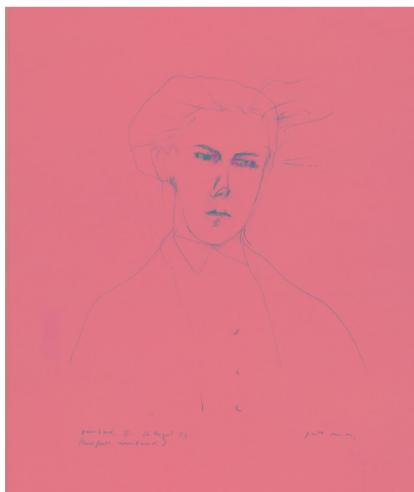
Contrastingly, the two images on the right portray a delicate and fragile feminine mystique. In the top image, the white doves and sheer dress combine to present an ethereal depiction of a mother nature-like figure. The other picture showcases a solemn and gentle figure dressed in black and carefully holding a fragile feather. This image depicts the idolized women: intelligent

and thoughtful, but always calm and gentle. These two images directly contradict the forceful method she employed to present her femininity in the pictures on the left.

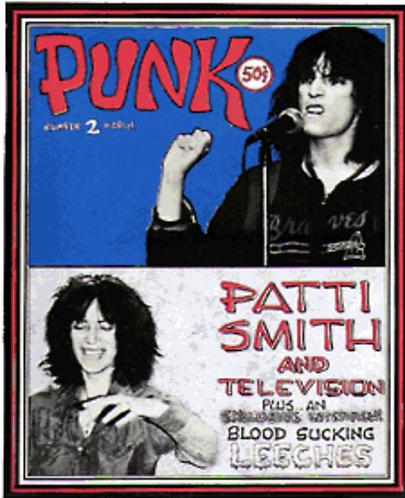
Still, the right-hand images remain powerful. There is strength in paradoxically employing silence to make people listen. Smith shows that she is able to apply multiple techniques to deliver her point. For example, Figures 2 and 3 demand attention and command the viewer to notice her. While, Figures 4 and 5 provoke the reader to question what the reason is for her reserved tone. It is arguable that making the viewer pause and ponder her aesthetic is more powerful than boldly forcing an opinion on the audience. In order to explore diverse tenets of femininity, Smith expertly weaves these two varying modes of message delivery together.

Together, the four pictures display the changing persona of Patti Smith and the different methods in which she uses to embrace her femininity. If punk is defined as a divergence from conformity, then the inability to define Smith as either a hardcore, intense feminist or a calm, serene leader, makes her punk.

In addition to her defiance of categories, Smith can be labeled as punk through her pursuit of a bohemian lifestyle. Smith illustrated the sketch below of her poetic idol, Arthur Rimbaud. One of Rimbaud's poems, "Ma Bohème" (My Bohemian Existence) praises alternate ways of life besides the upright middle-class customs ("Arthur Rimbaud"). Rimbaud's influence on Smith is widely noted and the photograph of her messy living space at the Chelsea Hotel proves her attempt to free herself from the middle class and live a simpler life. Instead of listing what her room contains, it is important to highlight what it does not. For example, there is no television or radio. Both of these items were stereotypical representations of middle-class America during the 1970s. Furthermore, her room is also missing curtains. This represents how she was not ashamed of diverging from the norm. She had the courage to openly allow people to look in on her life choices. This dissent from a mundane life further establishes Smith as punk.



*Figure 6*



*Figures 7,8*

Although Patti Smith does not self-identify with the punk movement, her impact on the punk scene is undeniable. For example, she was featured on the front cover of *PUNK* magazine's second issue (Figure 8). The cover displays the two contrasting faces of Patti Smith. In the upper half of the cover, her closed fist and gritted teeth paint a militant nature. In the lower half of the cover, she portrays a sweet and playful disposition. This cover reinforces the notion that Smith's punk legacy is centered around her conflicting personas.

The images above also showcase Smith's enduring influence on the punk genre. Fashion and street art both function as mediums that convey punk themes and ideologies. Street art is inherently punk because it repurposes a traditional structure to create nontraditional art. Individual fashion can also outwardly project parting from accepted popular styles. Therefore,

the fact that Patti Smith operates as a muse for both of these punk art forms represents her critical importance to the modern punk community.



*Figures 9,10*

However, by becoming a larger than life figure within the punk community, part of Patti Smith's originality is lost. Her presence in pop culture establishes a pre-determined notion of who she is. This makes it crucial for one to discover one's own functioning definition of her.

Through photographs, sketches, magazine covers, and murals, that present different aspects of Patti Smith and depict her influence on art, one can begin to develop a sense of her true identity. As Smith proposed when recalling shooting her *Horses* album cover, images can present the truth. Visual art allows the viewer to form their own opinion on how a specific thing or individual functions to them. In a broader sense, art enables one to seek their own truth and discover beauty in truth and truth in beauty.

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2. *Patti Smith, NYC*. 1977.
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6. *Patti Smith at Chelsea Hotel*.
7. *Portrait of Rimbaud*. 1973.
8. *PUNK: Volume 1 Number 2 Cover*. 1976.
9. *Minkoff-Patti Smith*. 2015.
10. *Patti Smith Punk Mural*. 2018.

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