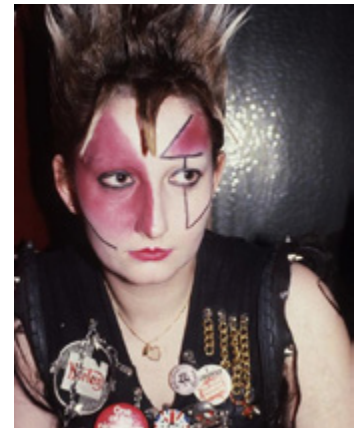


A prologue of pain and hope in the face of the high priestess of punk

Paula Guerra¹

With her peroxide beehive, Cubist face paint and Kohl-eyed stare, Jordan Mooney provided punk with some of its most enduring – and provocative – images. Born Pamela Rooke in 1955 and raised in Seaford, Sussex, by ultra-conservative parents (her mum was a seamstress; her dad a WW2 commando), she moved to London in the mid-70s, where her fearless attitude and outré wardrobe secured her a job at Malcolm McClaren and Vivienne Westwood's King's Road boutique, Sex. Pivotal to the aesthetic of both the Sex Pistols and Adam and the Ants, and a muse to Derek Jarman – who cast her as Amyl Nitrate in cult movie Jubilee – her influence can now be seen everywhere from Lady Gaga's wardrobe to Cara Delevingne's eye make-up. (Moody, 2017, s/p).



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- ▶ Figures 1 – Jordan in the late seventies
- ▶ Source: <https://www.mylondon.news/news/celebs/londons-queen-punk-jordan-who-23597124>

Jordan² Jordan was a special guest speaker at the 2018 edition of the KISMIF Conference. Her coming to Porto and Portugal - for the first time - fulfilled a long-standing dream of many of the KISMIF community members. Indeed, we were all able to chat, eat, laugh and dance with the eternal Diva of punk. Jordan in Porto was one of us. She established contacts, friendships. She was so paradoxically simple and human and therein lays her greatness. This text and a tribute to a star who from July 2018 began to call me 'my love'. And a cry of pain and of hope: of pain, because she will never call me that again, as she passed away on April 2, 2022; but of hope, because her legacy is memorable, namely when she said - repeatedly – 'Don't dream it, be it.'

I knew from a very early age that I wasn't cut out for an ordinary life. Growing up my two style icons were Spock from Star Trek and Margot Fontyen. At secondary school I was always in trouble. I'd go up to London to shop at Big Biba in Kensington or for gigs – I saw David Bowie at the Rainbow – or I'd go over to Brighton then hitch home. When I was 14 I went up to Smile in Knightsbridge to get my hair done by Keith Wainwright like Andy Mackay from Roxy Music. I had a big red mohican stripe down the middle and two pink stripes down the back. I got suspended from school for that but I really couldn't understand what all the fuss was about.

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2. Pamela Rooke (23 June 1955 – 3 April 2022), also known as Jordan and Jordan Mooney, was an English model and actress known for her work with Vivienne Westwood and the SEX boutique in the Kings Road area of London in the mid-1970s, and for attending many of the early Sex Pistols performances. Her style and dress sense—a bleached platinum-blonde bouffant hairdo with dark raccoon-like eye make-up—made her a highly visible icon of the London punk subculture. Along with Johnny Rotten, Soo Catwoman and Siouxsie Sioux, she is credited with creating the London punk look.



► Figure 2 – Jordan at Vivienne Westwood's 'Sex' shop on the Kings Road in 1976
 ► Source: Mirrorpix/Getty Images

It was around the time that I changed my name. I didn't want to be called Pamela Rooke any more. I'd read F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and there's a very powerful androgynous female character in it called Jordan Baker so I became Jordan. (Jordan in Moody, 2017, s/p).

Pamela Rooke (1955-2022), better known in the London punk scene as Jordan Mooney, was the face of punk, or its avatar, as Green (2022) says in her obituary in the *New York Times*. Jordan was just 19 when she walked into the SEX shop. But she was already an unmistakable presence, with a style all his own. The designer Vivienne Westwood, who ran the shop along with Malcom MacLaren, who was not surprised by much, told her she had never seen anyone like her. It was inevitable that she would offer her a job in the shop. But she was more than an employee, she was the face of the shop, the thing that stuck in people's memory the most. You can see this in photographs from that time, where she is leaning against the entrance of the shop and men would stop in surprise looking at her. Dressed in torn S&M clothes, with political and Situationist slogans, and even swastikas, she embodied the ethos of the shop, its transgressive and revolutionary idea (Cardoso, 2022).



► Figure 4 – Vivienne Westwood, Jordan, Chrissie Hynde, Alan Jones, unknown, and Steve Jones
 ► Source: Mirrorpix/Getty Images



► Figure 3 – Jordan and Adam Ant backstage at the Roxy Club in 1977
 ► Source: Mirrorpix/Getty Images

I wore a skirt in Brighton one day and someone asked me if I'd bought it at Let It Rock in London, and I'd never heard of the place. It was a fifties skirt, with musical notes done in gold filigree. Watermarked, moire... whatever it's called. I asked them where this shop was, cos I thought if I'm making this stuff up myself down here, scraping around, why not go up there and see if they've got anything to sell me direct, rather than search around for things. It was an original skirt, but someone was doing this stuff up in London, it was new. So already I was working on a parallel,

before I'd ever heard of them. It must have been '73 to '74. I went up there and it was closed. The next time I went someone was putting up this big pink sign saying 'Sex' on the door, and I went in and I was floored. I saw the manager, Michael Collins and I was pushing myself, I really wanted to work there. I was working in Harrods at the time, selling designer stuff. Velvet jackets and things like that. I never heard any more. I left Harrods and I got a call one afternoon from Michael Collins saying could I come and help for the afternoon. He was really desperate for someone, and that afternoon sort of blossomed, and I was there for seven years. It wasn't even a try-out, I suppose I just fitted. It was really based on how you looked. It was pretty important how you looked then. (Jordan in Savage, 1988, s/p).

Jordan herself tells in her biography 'Defying Gravity: Jordan's Story' (Mooney & Unsworth, 2019) that travelling to work was an adventure. Because she took public transport and didn't shy away from dressing in SEX's style, she provoked equal doses of loathing and attraction. Either people would 'run away' from her or – mainly men - go to her side and pretend to read the paper. She admitted that 'men were confused by her. They would whistle, shout anything and everything, even offer me money, this was because they didn't understand why I was dressed like that' (Jordan in Tierney, 2019).



► Figure 5 – Jordan c.1977 wearing her self-customised Westwood/McLaren t-shirt, 'Let It Rock' labelled, 1974-75
 ► Source: <https://www.kerrytaylorauctions.com/story/remembering-jordan-the-high-priestess-of-punk/>



► Figure 6 – Jordan c.1975 in a 'wet look' ensemble in SEX, circa 1975
 ► Source: <https://www.kerrytaylorauctions.com/story/remembering-jordan-the-high-priestess-of-punk/>

It was just my attitude. I thought I looked better than anyone else. I was very introverted, I know people thought I was an exhibitionist, but I was pretty stand-offish. Even today I don't take pictures smiling, because I think I look better when I don't smile. I felt powerful, and I think I looked powerful, I know I looked very intimidating. People were very worried, even the guy who eventually became my husband was very worried about coming in to see me. Adam was the same. By that time I'd built this reputation for myself. Yeah, and I didn't wear a coat or anything. Whatever I wore at work, because after I got the job I moved back here so I had to commute. I lost my flat in Sloane Square, Drayton Place, so I had to come back here and commute. I had a lot of trouble when I did it but there we are. What did I expect? The reaction was mixed, sometimes I'd get on a train and all I had on was stockings and suspenders and a top, that was it. People say it must have taken guts, but if it needed guts to do it, you wouldn't do it. You would look stupid creeping around the streets looking like that, worrying about what people were going to say. The fear part didn't come into it. Some of the commuters used to go absolutely wild, they loved it. Then you'd get ladies who'd say I was corrupting their son, and would I move? And I'd say, "well, you were here last, you move", or I asked the boy, "Am I corrupting you?" I even got the whole carriage once, "put your hands up if you think I'm corrupting this boy!" And everyone laughed, nobody put their hands up. The woman was absolutely furious, she went red with rage: "If I wanted my son to go and see a stripper on a train, I'd go and pay for him to see one!" – crazy. There's always one of those. That particular woman got up and left. Some of the men got rather hot under the collar, paper on the lap, yeah, there was absolutely nowhere you could

go where people wouldn't say something. It was just too blatant for them. People up on scaffolding would shout, there'd be tourists running, trying to get photos. This is long before it all burst, taking pictures of punks and what have you. I threw a camera out of the train one day. I know that German tourists are renowned for it, but they are really rude. (Jordan in Savage, 1988, s/p).

The SEX Shop's, and we might say Jordan's, most defining moment was when the Sex Pistols came out in 1975. Much has been written about the genesis of the band as a form of promotion devised by McLaren to promote the Sex shop. Jordan was part of the group's entourage and although he did not sing or play, he helped create further chaos by throwing chairs into the crowd or taunting the media when they appeared. The SEX Shop's, and we can also say Jordan's, most defining moment was when the Sex Pistols emerged in 1975. Much has been written about the genesis of the band as a form of promotion devised by McLaren to promote the Sex shop. Jordan was part of the group's entourage and although he didn't sing or play, he helped create further chaos by throwing chairs into the crowd or taunting the media when they appeared.

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Through her tight-knit friendship with McLaren and Westwood, Rooke was introduced to some of the most significant musicians and bands of her day. They included the Sex Pistols, for whom she became a de facto stylist, helping to shape their signature look of studded leather jackets, ripped T-shirts, and black suede creepers. She also served as an influential figure in the early years of Adam and the Ants, acting as the band's manager during their iconic Kings of the Wild Frontier days and even serving as a guest vocalist on their song "Lou," an ode to Lou Reed, during a BBC Radio 1 session overseen by the agenda-setting DJ John Peel. After marrying Rooke, bassist Kevin Mooney split off from Adam and the Ants to form Wide Boy Awake, which Rooke continued to manage throughout the 1980s. (...) Another pivotal friendship forged during these years—and arguably the one for which Jordan herself is best known—was with Derek Jarman, the genre-defying filmmaker and activist now remembered for his collaborations with a young Tilda Swinton in Caravaggio and Edward II. Rooke appeared in Jarman's debut film, Sebastiane, a queer retelling of the Saint Sebastian myth, before starring as the nihilistic Amyl Nitrate in his sophomore feature, Jubilee, the cult classic that pays homage to the rip-roaring spirit of '70s London punk. (She also made an appearance in the highly controversial first airing of the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." on British national television, standing at the front of the crowd in a T-shirt that read "only anarchists are pretty."). (Hess, 2022, s/p).

In addition to his Sex Pistols wanderings, Jordan also played an important role in the new wave or post-punk movement. She worked as manager and stylist for the band Adam and the Ants, and even featured in one of their songs called "Lou". In 1978 he had his cinematic role in the film Jubilee, directed by Derek Jarman and currently considered a classic. It was a film deeply influenced by punk aesthetics, and if you're talking about punk aesthetics, you can't miss Jordan, and that's exactly what Derek Jarman thought.

The 'Anarchy' shirt includes a swastika armband, which triggered a very serious argument. I was taken downstairs into the bowels of Granada TV to discuss it – I think it all happened in the Coronation Street dressing room, with all the clothes around us! The Sex Pistols wouldn't go on stage unless I was there. I wouldn't take the armband off; Malcolm wouldn't let me take the armband off; The Pistols wouldn't let me take the armband off, so there was a total impasse for a couple of hours. I wouldn't take it off because it was part of the make-up of the shirt, and I've always seen it as (a radical art statement) a desensitisation of the swastika as an emblem. It should be remembered that there was Karl Marx on one side and the swastika on the other. (Jordan in Baron, 2022).



► Figures 7 – Left: Jordan in British Vogue, December 1977. Right: New Musical Express magazine, 1977
► Source: <https://www.kerrytaylorauctions.com/story/remembering-jordan-the-high-priestess-of-punk/>



► Figure 8 – Jordan and Kevin on their wedding day, June 1981. Jordan is wearing a complete Westwood/McLaren 'Pirate' ensemble with a pair of 'Platypus' shoes
 ► Source: <https://www.kerrytaylorauctions.com/story/remembering-jordan-the-high-priestess-of-punk/>

In the early 1980s Jordan married Kevin Mooney, then drummer for Adam and the Ants. Apart from being immediately fired by Vivienne Westwood, for whom the marriage would be nothing more than a bourgeois remnant and irreconcilable with SEX's ethos, the truth is that the marriage was short-lived and very unhappy. It was a time when she reinvented herself and became a Burmese cat breeder and a veterinary nurse. Animal advocacy was one of her causes until the end of her days.

Defying Gravity, her candid new memoir, follows punk's rapid rise and fall, as well as her own evolution from keen ballet student to the Boudicca of new wave. It's the poignant tale of a small-town girl who dared to be different. "My mother wanted a girly kind of girl and that was never going to happen," she says. "She absolutely hated the way I looked and would walk several yards behind me on the street. I regret the anguish I caused." (...) Why Jordan decided not merely to be different, but to cause chaos with her appearance remains largely unexplained by the book. "Ballet taught me a lot of things: how to be strict with myself, how to work through pain," she says. "It taught me how to dress up and express myself. I didn't want to be scripted. I wanted to live my life in an impromptu and spontaneous way." (Jordan in Tierney, 2019).

Few people are better prepared than Jon Savage to talk about English punk. Savage says that if there are people who embody an era, Jordan was one of them. Young people, dissatisfied with the England of the 1970s and the beginning of Margaret Thatcher's rule, looked at her and saw an icon.

The only thing I think is very clear is that England is an enormous source of fashion, music, hair, the lot. You have this artistic freedom, no matter who's in government, Thatcher, whoever. I still believe that Thatcher will not get us down. I know we're under another repressive phase now, as you say, possession-gaining, of being in your own plot and being safe and happy, but the rest of the world looks to England, and every now and then England comes up with it. I really believe that this is the place to be if you want to express yourself in any form of art. If you want a really great haircut, England is the place to get it. And I've been

all over America, lots and lots of places. I can't put my finger on what was the catalyst for it all. I think that quite a powerful part of it was the particular English sexuality. The key to the whole thing is Sex, whether in the shop Sex or in the Sex Pistols. It was important in those days to be able to express yourself. I found very quickly that I was the advert for the shop, and there was no rehearsals, there was no indoctrination. I had to go to do an article with a Russian journalist who was sure that there was a hard and fast political reason for this happening here. Because that's the way Russians think. He thought the whole culture of punk was politically based somewhere. Like the Labour Party, that we all went to a place and had a meeting and it was the overthrow of the government, this terrible Russian paranoia coming out. I could not make him understand that there is still, amongst all this repression, that there was a certain amount of freedom that allowed people to do this, that nobody was going to jump out with a cosh, the police weren't going to come storming down the street in armoured cars and beat up all the punks. (Jordan in Savage, 1988, s/p).

It stayed that way for the rest of his life. Whenever punk was mentioned, Jordan was mentioned. With the return of nostalgia, as Reynolds tells us, there was more and more interest in his life, which resulted in the biography 'Defying Gravity: Jordan's Story', published in 2019. And it was with great pride that Jordan was present, as key-speaker, at the 4th edition of KISMIF 2018, "What difference do DIY cultures make?", in which she even addressed the issue of ageing as a punk and especially as a punk woman who does not bow down to social conventions. Very soon there will be a mini-series about the Sex Pistols called Sex. One of the main characters will be Jordan, of course. She will be played by Maisie Williams, a British actress who became world-famous playing Arya Stark in the TV series Game of Thrones.



► Figure 10 – Jordan with John Robb at KISMIF Conference 2018 in Porto
► Source: KISMIF.

Adam and I lost an awful lot of confidence in the punks because there were still a lot of punky people who were fans of Adam, believe it or not, even though he caught all that young audience, and they begged him to go and do these concerts and he went and did the Hammersmith Odeon as a warm up for the American tour, and no punks were there. So they were a big let down. It was all these young kids who had grown up a bit that turned up. I don't quite know what goes on with punks any more, I don't see many around, I don't know where they go, I don't know if they have revival meetings, or what. I was on the train not so long ago and there was this girl sitting opposite me, in a floral dress and a big hippy hat and lots of bells around her neck, flowers in her hair, and she looked at me really odd for about half an hour and said, you're Jordan, aren't you? I can tell by your profile. I said yes. 'She used to be a punk', I thought, this is really odd. (Jordan in *Savage*, 1988, s/p).

Today as we remember her memory, perhaps it is time to remember her words as Amyl Nitrite in the film *Jubilee*: 'Our school motto was "Faites vos désirs réalités" ... Make your desires reality. I myself preferred the song 'Don't Dream It, Be It''.

Following the deaths of Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen and her divorce from Mooney in 1984, Rooke retreated from the scene that made her name, returning to East Sussex to live a significantly quieter life as a veterinary nurse and a breeder of Burmese cats. "Things had become too hectic," she told *The Guardian* in 2019. "It sounds really corny, but normality saved my life." In recent years, she had begun a return to the spotlight with the 2019 release of her memoir, *Defying Gravity: Jordan's Story*, for which she made a number of public appearances and began granting interviews once again. So too is there set to be a revival of interest in Rooke's life story with the release of Danny Boyle's FX miniseries *Pistol*, a retelling of the Sex Pistols' rise to notoriety in which Rooke is played by Maisie Williams of *Game of Thrones*. Among those who paid tribute to her today were Glen Matlock and Boy George, who honored both her fearlessness and her pioneering sense of style. "The world seemed very gray, and I was determined to brighten it up a bit," she told *Another Magazine* in 2017. With her enduring legacy across the worlds of music and fashion, Rooke did just that. (Hess, 2022, s/p).

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- Figure 10 – Jordan with Matt Worley and Paula Guerra at KISMIF Conference 2018 in Porto
- Source: KISMIF.





▶ Figure 11 – Jordan with Paula Guerra and John Robb at KISMIF Conference 2018 in Porto
▶ Source: KISMIF.