

# SHE SHOT JOHN BELUSHI, AND OTHER BAD BOYS

*Marcia Resnick photographed the Blank Generation, punks, poets, and provocateurs, including Johnny Thunders, Gil Scott-Heron, Steve Rubell, and Roy Cohn. Finally, she's getting a retrospective.*



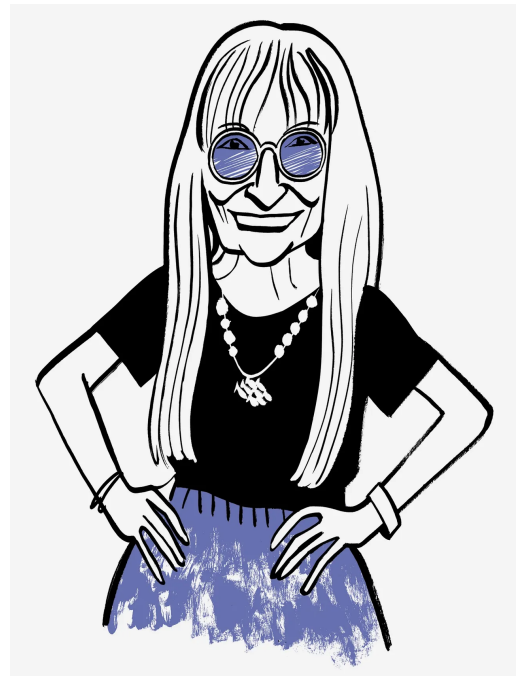
By Nick Paumgarten

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Marcia Resnick was the last photographer to do a studio shoot of John Belushi before he died, of an overdose, in Los Angeles, in 1982. She was a friend and had for a few years been eager to take his picture, for a series of portraits of more than a hundred New York “punks, poets, and provocateurs” that she was calling “Bad Boys.” One night, in late 1981, she ran into Belushi at a club called AM/PM, and said, “How about now?” When she got back to her loft studio, on Canal Street, his limo was waiting outside. He and his entourage came upstairs. It was five or six in the morning. “He was pretty high,” she recalled the other day. The famous photo of Belushi in a ski mask, and the one of him with a forearm across his forehead, half covering sanpaku eyes: that was the session. Afterward, he fell asleep on her bed. Six months later, he was dead.

That same week, the *SoHo Weekly News*, which had employed Resnick as its staff photographer, went under. She wound up in an emergency room with alcohol poisoning. Things went awry. Her brief marriage to Wayne Kramer, the MC5 guitarist, was falling apart. She struggled with heroin. Soon came the AIDS crisis and the deaths of so many friends. “The club scene died,” she said. “People got more insular. People were afraid of other people sexually.” Her career as an artist stalled. She sold her loft to Laurie Anderson and disappeared from public view. She went back to school.

Now Resnick, seventy-one, is getting a retrospective. It opens this week at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, before travelling to the Minneapolis Institute of Art and to the George Eastman Museum, in Rochester. It brings out of the attic of cultural oversight a wild record of her largely underheralded contributions to the evolution of photography as a fine art, and of her mostly unacknowledged place among the so-called Pictures Generation, to go with her better-known perch as a chronicler of the Blank Generation.



Marcia Resnick Illustration by João Fazenda

The other night in her apartment, in the Village, she wore a pair of super-flared Japanese overalls, a black T-shirt, thickets of silver jewelry, two layers of polka-dotted socks, and platform high-top Chucks. Her hair was long and unruly. “I’m a style maven,” she said. The apartment teemed with archives and artifacts—black-and-white portraits of Belushi, Basquiat, Jagger, and John and Yoko; an old-fashioned radio with a doll’s head, arms, and legs sticking out of it, the basis for an ad she designed for WCBS-FM (the slogan: “Let Me Entertain You”) while she was a student at Cooper Union; Myrtle and Schmo, the half-mannequins she used to keep in her 1963 Chevy Nova, to ward off thieves and meter maids.

A corner of her living room was occupied by some thirty three-foot-tall vintage dolls. “How do you like my pandemic family?” she said. “They were originally all girls. I turned some of them into boys by cutting their hair and giving them freckles.” She went on, “I like putting them into situations. They don’t move while I’m taking pictures. I’ve been writing conversations for them, too.”

She bobbed on her couch as she leafed through old work. “I recently learned that I have a movement disorder,” she said. She was reared in Brooklyn. Her father had a print shop in Brighton Beach, and her mother made copies of Old Master paintings. In Resnick’s yearbook from James Madison High, the class’s “brightest” girl and boy were her and Charles Schumer. Not her type. A few years later, her dalliance with a member of the Weather Underground led to an arrest for possession of a suspicious substance that was actually just boric acid, for the removal of a foreign object from her eye. (The mug shots are in the retrospective.) She split for California to study at CalArts, with the likes of John Baldessari. On a trip to Ansel Adams’s house, in Carmel, she found, in his library, a copy of her favorite book, of Lucas Samaras’s auto-Polaroids—inside which Adams had scrawled, “This is not photography.” Resnick declared to herself, “I am not Ansel Adams.” She’d started painting with oil on her photos, and experimenting with ways of seeing, and depicting seeing. She taught a course in three stages: Fun with Photography; Son of Fun with Photography; The Return of Son of Fun with Photography.

She moved back to New York in 1973 and self-published books of her work. In 1978, she brought out “Revisions,” a progression of staged images based on her adolescence, with accompanying text. (“Don’t call them captions,” she said.) A closeup of a loaf of bread crammed against a woman’s crotch: “She first learned the facts of life from a friend while on a class trip to the bread factory.”

At the *SoHo Weekly News*, she had a regular feature called “Resnick’s Believe-It-or-Not.” One series featured water-conservation tips: “Spit at each other to keep clean.” “Forget all about the boat people.” “Employees must NOT wash their hands.” Ripley’s sent a cease-and-desist, so she changed the name of the column to “Resnick’s Believe It.” By then, she was deep into the “Bad Boys” project. “Men were always photographing girls,” she said. “I wanted to take pictures of men, and turn the tables.” Johnny Thunders, Richard Hell, Gil Scott-Heron, Halston’s boyfriend Victor Hugo, Steve Rubell with Roy Cohn. Some bad, some *bad*. Most dead. ♦

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