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SYD SHELTON ROCK AGAINST RACISM

17 JUNE TO 3 SEPTEMBER 2016

Syd Shelton's images capture a historic moment in British politics and culture, fashion and music. Rock Against Racism was a groundbreaking movement formed by musicians and political activists to fight racism through music from 1976 to 1981.

Rock Against Racism was a response to racial intolerance in the UK in the late 1970s. Right-wing politicians such as Enoch Powell had stirred up racial hatred. The National Front, a fascist political party, was gaining support. Racism was common in institutions such as the police force.

The spark for Rock Against Racism came when rock musician Eric Clapton made racist statements at a concert in Birmingham in 1976. Clapton urged his audience to 'get the foreigners out' and 'keep Britain white'.

Under the slogan 'Love Music, Hate Racism', Rock Against Racism staged marches, festivals, and over 500 concerts throughout the

UK. They brought together artists and audiences of different race, mixing musical styles and youth tribes – rudeboy and skinhead, punk and reggae, two-tone and ska.

Syd Shelton – activist, photographer and graphic designer – was one of the movement’s key members. He documented many of the concerts and photographed legendary performers including The Clash, Sham 69, Misty in Roots, Aswad, Pete Townshend of The Who, X-Ray Spex, Elvis Costello, Tom Robinson, and The Specials.

In addition, Shelton photographed important events, such as the Carnival Against the Nazis in Potternewton Park, Leeds, in 1981. He also captured the wider picture of protest and social conditions across England and Northern Ireland.

As well as photographs, the exhibition features memorabilia including the Rock Against Racism fanzine *Temporary Hoarding* and vintage posters, all in the distinctive punk style that Shelton helped to create. Paul Furness, a key figure in the Leeds Rock Against Racism group, has also loaned his photographs and memorabilia from the movement in Yorkshire.

In the five years that Rock Against Racism operated, the National Front lost support and any hope of winning an election. Shelton says, ‘I hope the exhibition shows that you can change things and you can actually take a stand, even in the most difficult of situations’.

To find out more pick up an Exhibition Guide, browse our Reading Area, or come along to hear Syd Shelton in conversation with co-curator Carol Tulloch on Saturday 23rd July at 2pm.

Syd Shelton (born Pontefract, Yorkshire 1947) is a British photographer and graphic designer. He has worked in Europe, Australia and the United States. He co-edited and was art director of a series of photographic books: *24 Hours in Los Angeles* (1984), the award winning *Day in the Life of London* (1984) and *Ireland: A Week in the Life of a Nation* (1986). His work was recently included in the exhibition *Words, Sound and Power: Reggae Changed My Life* at The British Music Experience: Britain's Museum of Popular Music, O2 Arena, London (2012) and The Photographers' Gallery exhibition *The World in London*.

Rock Against Racism is curated by Mark Sealy at Autograph ABP, in collaboration with guest curator Carol Tulloch, Professor of Dress, Diaspora and Transnationalism, University of the Arts London.