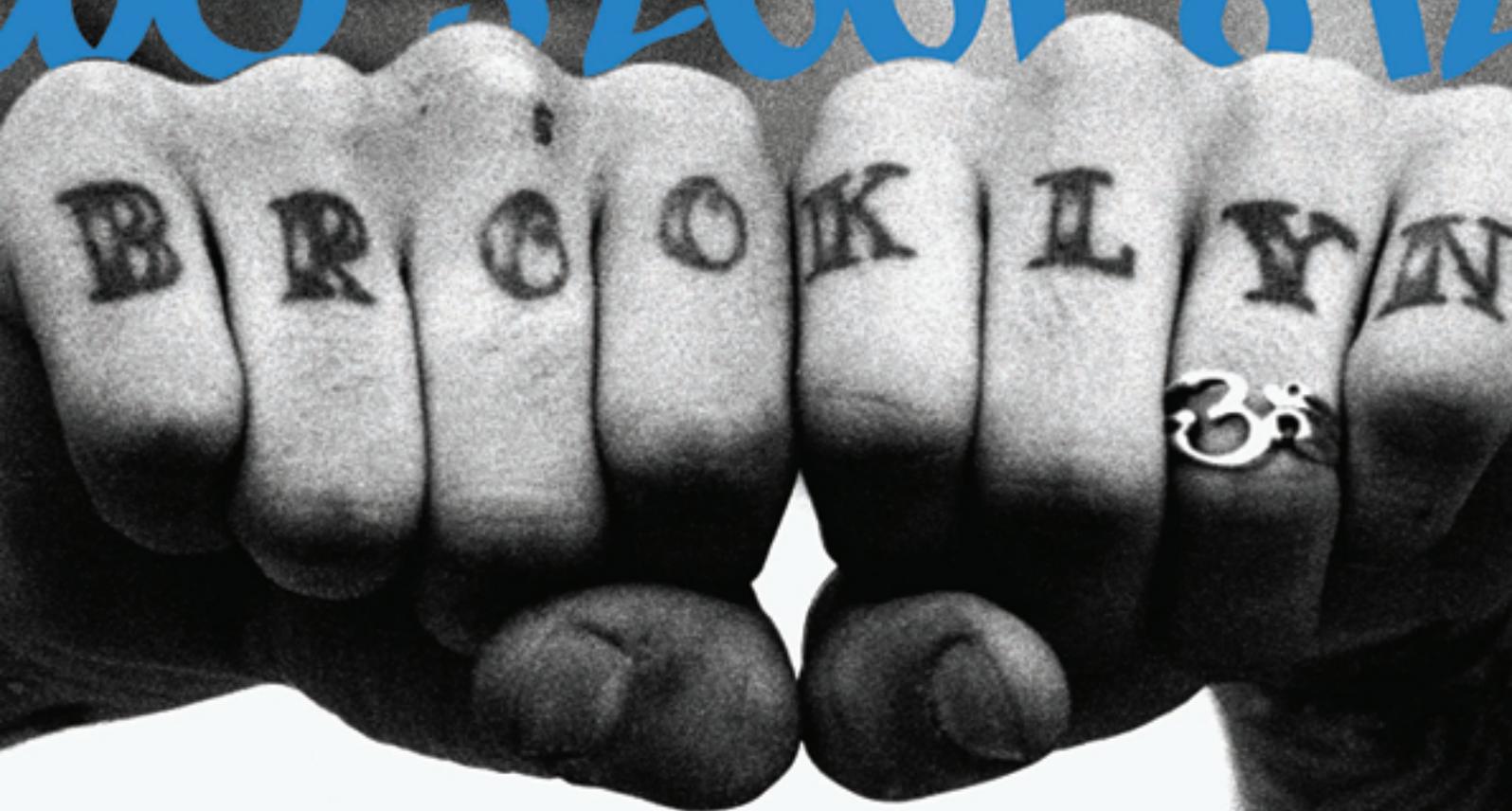


# NO SLEEP 'TIL



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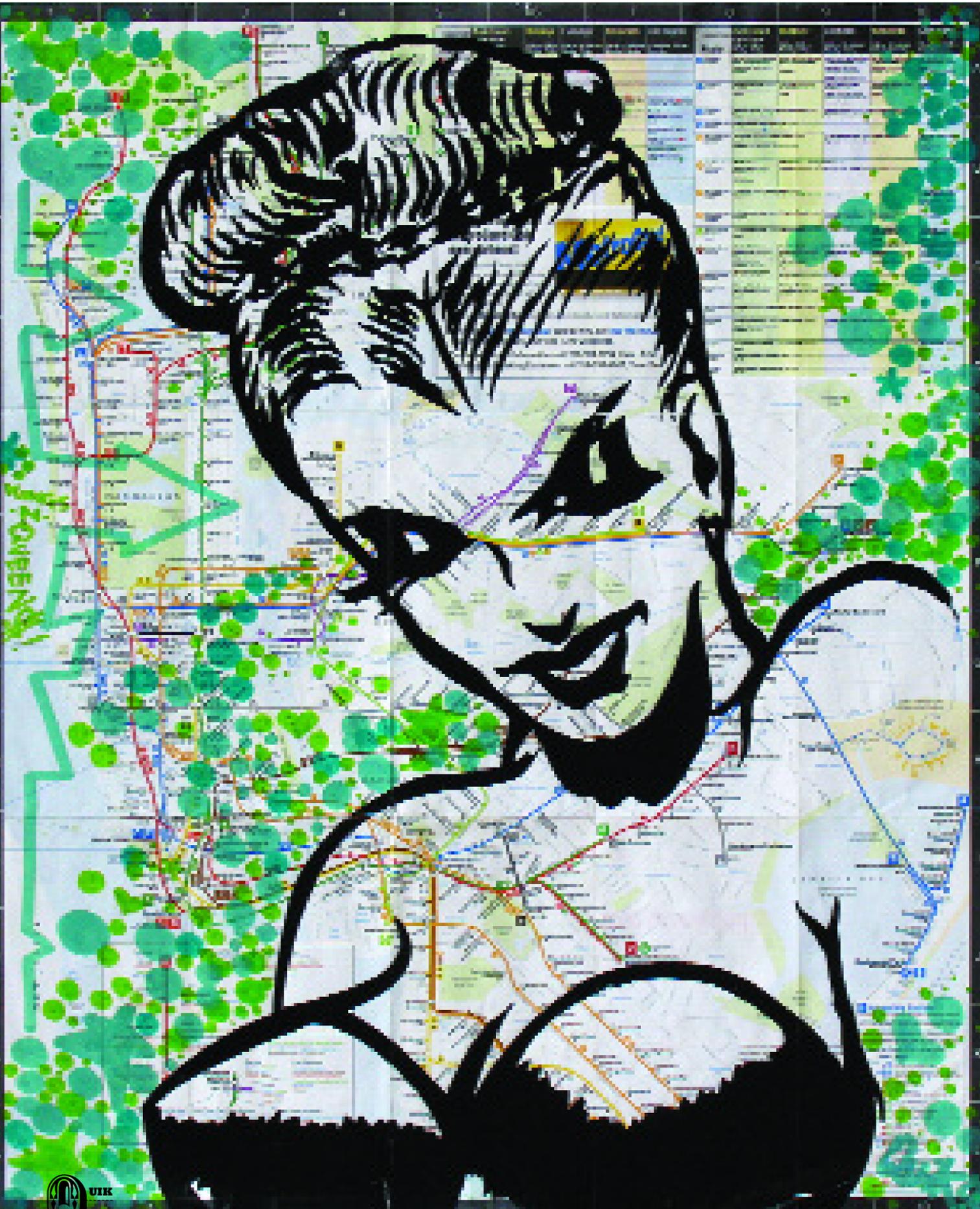
 powerHouse magazine

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## L ETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I grew up on the wrong side of the Bronx...

In the summer of 1978, my family moved from a small town on a lake outside Boston to a small neighborhood outside Manhattan on the Hudson River. Riverdale. A secluded enclave of spacious post-war apartment buildings nestled on hills dotted with countless parks. Best known for its private schools and higher-priced homes near Wave Hill, the population was primarily Jewish middle class with a smattering of Japanese families who moved in when fathers were transferred to the New York office. While there were a couple of abandoned lots and the occasional workers' strike, it was a haven in what was otherwise the city's most infamous borough.

Though later indicted for corruption, then-Bronx borough president Stanley Simon allocated funds to weekly Wednesday night summer concerts in neighborhoods populated by Democratic voting blocks. I remember reading the banner that hung outside the park (conveniently located opposite our apartment building) wondering why we didn't get salsa or merengue sessions. Instead we had bar mitzvah cover bands playing *Abracadabra*, *Upside Down*, and other AM pop radio classics. Thing is, back then, I didn't know any better; I loved those concerts. I'd show up rocking hand-me-down 70s synthetics, dancing with my friends, giggling at the grandmas who clasped hands, swaying in half-time to the beat.

It was only decades later, when reading Charlie Ahearn and Jim Fricke's astounding oral history *Yes Yes Y'all* that I realized how close I had been to the center of things. Not that my parents would have let me go to a Zulu Nation Throwdown. Err, no. But to know that it was happening only miles from me and the old ladies on quite possibly the same evening still astounds me. So near, yet so damn far.

Around the time of the concerts, another unexpected phenomenon occurred—Eddie Martinez and Jordan Milan (a couple of charismatic Puerto Rican boys in our class) showed up in airbrushed sweatshirts, straight-leg, pin-stripe Lee jeans, and shell-top adidas. At lunchtime in the cafeteria, they would jump into the middle of the crowd (that had mastered the casual side-to-side step) and start breakin' to *Another One Bites the Dust*, *Maneater*, and other 45s some teacher had thoughtfully provided. Shit was madness. They had backspins, windmills, ill freezes. The adidas would fly off their feet and rolled up sweat socks would sail across the room while we stood in awe, trying to figure out how they had these moves when the best we could do was spin a couple of hula hoops.

Sometime around fifth or sixth grade, I started going downtown—to Canal Jeans, specifically, to buy oversized sweatshirts, lycra leggings, and slip-on skippies in obscene colors to match the checkerboard pins I was snatching from the plastic bucket on the counter by the cashier. Lord have mercy on my outfits. I remember some of those looks: purple plastic peace symbol earrings; a turquoise fishtail skirt with a striped shirt and a wide belt; a white denim vest; fuschia pumps; maybe all of these at the same time. I don't think I was "hip hop" so much as

"don't stop," but at the time I was pretty damn sure I was Lisa Bonet on *The Cosby Show*.

See that was the thing: style is where you find it, and the 80s had it in spades. And when I got to junior high I saw it everywhere. JHS 141 had kids from all over Kingsbridge coming through in the best of the Boogie Down circa 86: shearlings and two-finger rings, bubblegum stretch jeans in pink acid wash, fake Gucci sweatshirts in white or navy, DAs with blonde tails (on girls too!)...I remember sitting in art class, opposite Kelly, a statuesque, light-skinned black girl, talking about LL Cool J. She was wearing pink (like Molly Ringwald that year), looking at where I had written INXS on my notebook. "What's 'inks'?" she asked, and it was at that point I thought about expanding my repertoire beyond WLIR. I was going through a New Wave stage; maybe it was the synthesizers and the wine coolers. But I still had a love for hip hop—so by the time I hit high school it was on. And though I had finally left the Bronx, it never left me.

It is unlike any other borough in the city. It is unlike the borough it once was. It is the birthplace of hip hop—the home of Kool DJ Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, Grand Wizard Theodore, the Cold Crush Brothers, of b-boys, MCs, DJs, and graff writers whose music, moves, and style would create an art form that swept the world like a couple of flares into a windmill or a DONDI train coming down the tracks. With the support of photographers, filmmakers, and personalities like Martha Cooper, Henry Chalfant, Charlie Ahearn, Patti Astor, and Fab 5 Freddy, my generation has been so profoundly influenced by hip hop that we have come to see it as more than an art form. It is a way of life.

Growing up in the 80s, I read *Interview* religiously. Little did I know that, one day, the artists and writers whose work and ideas inspired and influenced me would one day become my colleagues. I have always maintained a theory that New York City is made up of concentric circles, bringing together the worlds of art, architecture, design, fashion, beauty, music, film, theater, dance, and literature, sparking cultural phenomena to take root and flourish.

It is by virtue of working for powerHouse Books that I now stand at the center of so many circles that I must keep from getting dizzy by staying focused. In the strangest way, my life has begun to reference itself, and it is with great humility and deep appreciation that I realize that I have come to the right side of the Bronx, by way of Brooklyn—37 Main Street to be exact. It is here, in this laboratory for creative thought, that *No Sleep 'til Brooklyn* was born. Both the premier issue of *powerHouse magazine* and the inaugural exhibition at The powerHouse Arena, *No Sleep 'til Brooklyn* is a 30-year retrospective of hip hop culture: documenting its humble beginnings in the South Bronx through its glorious rise to global domination. But this is by no means a story of celebrity, fame, and mass market names. It is the story of the people and of the streets, a tribute to the founders, a salute to the innovators, and a nod to the next generation who will one day reign.

Welcome.  
—Miss Rosen









## MISS ROSEN

I checked my bags at the Luftansa counter at the Frankfurt airport with hours (to say nothing of Deutsch marks) to drop and needing to eat 'cause I had been up for a week, so I stopped in some spot in Terminal B not far from Escada and entered, exhausted and starved, smoking a cigarette for strength. I was waiting to be seated when some young German came up and stopped like what.

The lad was speechless, but not for long. "Who did you hair?" he asked with his eyes wide open, dilated pupils showing.

What sort of service is this, I wondered. "I did," I answered effortlessly and glanced longingly at the tables underneath the panoramic window overlooking the tarmac. Airport dining: pathetic yet soothing.

My gaze went ignored by this pasty cake whose pale eyes blinked in disbelief at my response. Looking strangely alert, he inquired, "How?"

I was amazed he cared when all I wanted was a chair. And a menu. "I pulled it back," I replied.

"And then what?" the young buck quickly followed up, shifting his stance in anticipation.

If I had the energy, I'd snicker. Ohh. Snickers. Do they have those here? Wait. What is he bothering me about? That's right. My hair. Aiii! Why does he care? "I put it up," I said succinctly, willing him not to dive in to a discussion of tools, techniques, or products.

The German guy nods admiringly for a moment. Then he declares, "It's so black."

It's so black and I'm so not, so I had to know what he thought. "What do you mean?"

He looked at me then focused intently on an image in his mind and searched for the words to verbalize the vision that had him tripping. "It's so black...like from the Bronx."

Slightly aghast, slightly a gasp—fuck it—completely taken aback, I spoke slowly to make sure I spoke correctly. "I'm from the Bronx."

My words caused his circuits to short or so it appeared 'cause he shifted gears with the speed of light years and asked with a bit of whist, "Do you think I could do my hair like that?"

(Is he on crack?)

Let me tell you, "like that" looks like this: Spiral curls slicked back into a ponytail, my face framed flawlessly by a hairline waved like a flapper bitch with a switch in her walk who'll make you twitch when she talks.

Back to the German. I looked at his lid. Nothing happening. Just a buzz cut in a fair blonde, a Nordic color I once strove for—before it all fell out at the crown due to excessive exposure to extensive bleaching treatments in the bathroom. Not that this stopped my platinum ambition; I just cut it all off and kept going (until people started calling me "Madonna." Yeah, that did it. Back to brunette.)

Meanwhile, his hair was thin in both texture and distribution so I decreed, "You need a weave."

He looked lost.

"You need extensions." If at first you don't succeed, repeat yourself.

His blank look defied me, defeated me. One glimpse into his crystal clear eyes—clueless to a world where women wear fake hair made from real human hair or better yet from plastic—left me unable to bridge the divide. I was tired. Weary. Hungry. "Can you take me to a table please?"

Moral of the story: There are no beauty supply stores in Frankfurt, or at least not in this airport or on any block I spotted—but lots of blocks (and train stops) got graffiti and a few of them pieces was hot so you've got to wonder what's goin' on in a city where this Jewish bitch from Rivahhdayle is black, like from the Bronx. ☑

