

Wild Life Archive

by Silvia Bombardini



Before social media, there was the flyer: designed to intrigue and not to last, it was left around in record stores – remember those? – with the purpose to spread the word about a new club or rave or warehouse party or other. It was meant to vanish shortly after its expiration date, but sometimes it didn't. Sometimes, some of them at least, were salvaged and kept safe. For the past three decades or so, Steve Terry has collected the best, most iconic flyers of dance culture's most legendary nights, and his Wild Life Archive is now a museum-worthy subcultural record of music artworks and nightlife history that creatives from all fields – and famous fashion designers no less – routinely visit. Below, Terry recalls how his collection began and tells us whether or not the days of the flyer are counted, who made and still makes the best ones and all about his upcoming show in Bali.

S.B.: The cultural relevance of Wild Life Archive today doesn't need spelling out – its exhibition at world-renowned museums such as MOMA in New York or the ICA in London is proof enough of how dance music culture has found at last, some well-deserved and long-overdue recognition. But I bet their display in the glass

cases of international art institutions wasn't something you foresaw when you began collecting warehouse raves' flyers as a teen. What led you to keep them around, at first and over the years?

S.T.: Absolutely true, I did not initially foresee that this material was bound one day for a museum. This realization came much later, when I had already built the collection out and the cultural significance of the archive became apparent to me. I also started publishing books on club culture around 10 years ago – these publications had a fantastic response which also signalled a strong interest in the subject matter. At this present moment in time we are in the process of building out a new gallery space for Wild Life Archive at DESA Potato Head in Bali: the first exhibition will be 'Balearic Spirit: From Ibiza to Bali' documenting the journey of the Balearic beat, and will launch in December this year alongside a newly designed nightclub by DJ Harvey.

When I started collecting flyers as a teenager at the tail end of the 1980s in London they were mementos of nights out, or I kept them to see what raves were coming up, or because the flyer's design itself grabbed my attention. Flyers were part of the culture – alongside pirate radio, magazines, and word of mouth, they were one of the main sources of information on where club nights and raves were happening at that time.

S.B.: Not only are flyers ephemeral by design, beautiful as they might be – they're also, as all print is threatened to be, a vanishing medium. Still it's hard to imagine that 25 years in the future, someone might wish to put together a digital archive of all of our emailed 'save the date's and 'rsvp's to a party or other. Is there a case to be made for still printing flyers? Who's doing it best, in 2019?

S.T.: For me – yes. But I am biased! Digital is versatile as you can include music and moving image to an invitation, and have people respond instantly. So maybe flyers need to evolve and become more artistic, so that people will still want to pick them up and potentially keep them. There are people out there doing this right, like Rhythm Section in South London: they are making beautiful risograph versions of their event posters which I like to pick up. Zodiac Club in Jakarta are also making really lovely posters that I collect.

S.B.: I read you've collected so far over 4,500 items dating back to the early 1970s, from genres including New York disco, Chicago house, Detroit techno, Belgium new beat, the Balearic beat of your upcoming exhibition and UK acid house. What are some of the visual keys, or defining features when it comes to the artworks or graphics of each subculture, and what are some of your favourite finds? Is there something of a holy grail you're still looking for, and haven't found yet?

S.T.: When you start to look at the material output of each subculture, at scale and in detail, trends start to surface. Disco has likely been the most creative of all the dance music subcultures to date as the formats are so experimental – promotional material includes buttons, bandanas, clothing, records, magazines and more. Clubs

like Studio 54 & AREA in New York really pushed the envelope. At the same time, you can pretty much spot a British rave flyer straight away just by looking at the design, format and use of various icons. Some items I am looking for now may not be from the most well know clubs. I recently came across a flyer for a techno night in London called 'Knowledge': a small, but iconic night in its own right. There are a few things I am still after – I will let you know when I find them!

S.B.: I remember when flyers from the Wild Life Archive appeared in the winter 2014 collection of cult menswear designer Martine Rose – a match made in heaven, or the club, if such a thing exists. How was it working with her, and who are the people in general consulting the archive the most?

S.T.: It was so good to work with Martine. We are friends so that made the process even more enjoyable. I respect Martine's work as a designer, and our collaboration made total sense given the context of her interest in dance music culture and the general point of reference for her collections. I also recently worked with my friend Kim Jones of Dior on his 'A Magazine Curated By' issue which was a great project. We selected a set of materials from the archive that reflected Kim's own clubbing history, influences and involvement in dance music culture. In the main I work with the dance music community, with the art world and the fashion industry for both research and exhibition purposes.