

PHILHARMONIE DE PARIS

**THE  
VELVET  
UNDERGROUND**  
EXHIBITION  
**NEW YORK  
EXTRAVAGANZA**

30 MARCH - 21 AUGUST 2016



CITÉ DE LA MUSIQUE  
PHILHARMONIE DE PARIS

**PRESS KIT**

# THE VELVET UNDERGROUND

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## NEW YORK EXTRAVAGANZA

## FROM THE SIXTIES TO THE PRESENT

The Velvet Underground's career trajectory is one of the most fascinating stories in the history of art, music and popular culture: how did a band who never found success during its brief existence (1965-1970) gradually develop into the rock legend par excellence it is today? Too ahead of its time, too transgressive, too in-your-face, too rebellious, it soon became the go-to model for other movements in the following centuries, from the explosion of punk to the present day. With time and the aid of a few prestigious admirers (David Bowie, Kurt Cobain, Étienne Daho, among others), the famous 'banana album', which is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year, established itself as the new matrix for modern rock.

It all started with the improbable encounter between Lou Reed and John Cale, a supremely talented, albeit unlikely, team, in the only city likely to let them grow together: underground New York of the early 60s, a time when it was the artistic elite who decided that 'anything goes'. The poet-rocker and avant-garde musician built a group around them from some of their most fervent supporters – Sterling Morrison, a literature student and rock'n'roll fan; Moe Tucker, an androgynous-looking drummer from the suburbs driven by tribal rhythms; and Nico, the blonde iceberg whom Andy Warhol made lead singer of the Velvet Underground.

This exhibition retraces the Velvet Underground's journey from the street to the highest echelons of New York society, from the pop music world to that of film, painting and literature. Half a century after the encounter between the founding members, the Velvets are still the most modern and mysterious band in the history of American rock.

# THE VELVET UNDERGROUND

## chronology...

**16 October 1938** Christa Päffgen, the future Nico, is born in Cologne, Germany.

**2 March 1942** Lewis Reed is born in Brooklyn, New York.

**9 March 1942** John Cale is born in Garmant, Wales.

**29 August 1942** Sterling Morrison is born in East Meadows, New York.

**28 August 1944** Maureen Tucker is born in the Queens, New York.

**25 February 1947** Doug Yule is born in Long Island, New York.

**December 1964** Lou Reed and John Cale meet in New York. The two musicians start playing together immediately; three months later, Lou Reed moves into the apartment on Lower East Side where John Cale is living.

**Spring 1965** The guitarist, Sterling Morrison, joins Lou Reed and John Cale. Together, they rehearse long hours, and are joined by the percussionist, Angus MacLise, to provide the musical accompaniment for avant-garde films.

**December 1965** Maureen 'Moe' Tucker replaces Angus MacLise on the drums. The Velvet Underground is born; the band plays its first official gig in a New Jersey high school.

**16 December 1965** At New York's Café Bizarre, Andy Warhol attends the Velvet Underground's first concert. Inspired, he proposes becoming the band's manager.

**January 1966** At the first rehearsals held at Andy Warhol's Silver Factory, Nico is made lead singer of the Velvet Underground. On 12 January, she appears on stage for the first time with the band, who plays at the annual dinner of the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry.

**February 1966** At the Film-Makers' Co-operative in New York, the Velvet Underground takes part in a multimedia performance called *Andy Warhol – Uptight*.

**1st April 1966** The Velvet Underground embarks upon a series of concerts in New York to coincide with the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, a multimedia performance devised by Andy Warhol combining light show, instrumental improvisations, dance and film projections.

**16 to 23 April 1966** Within a few days, the Velvet Underground has recorded its first album in New York.

**May 1966** Some of the songs on the album are re-recorded in Los Angeles.

**12 March 1967** The band releases the album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*. The sleeve, designed by Andy Warhol, is known to fans as the 'banana album'. Albeit a commercial failure in 1967, the album, in time, goes on to change the course of rock history.

**30 January 1968** The Velvet Underground releases its second album, *White Light/White Heat*. Nico, who has now embarked upon a solo career, is no longer part of the band.

**1st October 1968** Doug Yule replaces John Cale in the Velvet Underground.

**12 March 1969** The band's third album is released, called simply *The Velvet Underground*. The band's sound changes: experimental distortion gives way to an appealing, discreet intimacy.

**23 August 1970** At the end of a concert given at Max's Kansas City in New York, Lou Reed announces his decision to leave the Velvet Underground.

**September 1970** The band's fourth album, *Loaded*, is released. Two of its songs, *Sweet Jane* and *Rock'n'Roll*, are to define the canons of urban rock.

**18 July 1988** Nico dies on the island of Ibiza, in Spain.

**June 1990** John Cale, Lou Reed, Sterling Morrison and Moe Tucker perform *Heroin* at the Fondation Cartier (Jouy-en-Josas, France) for an exhibition devoted to Warhol.

**1993** The Velvet Underground tours for the first time in Europe with two concerts at Olympia in Paris.

**30 August 1995** Sterling Morrison dies in Poughkeepsie, New York.

**27 October 2013** Lou Reed dies in Southampton, New York.

# EXHIBITION CURATOR

## CHRISTIAN FEVRET

At the same time as studying law and philosophy, Christian Fevret at the age of 22 founded the magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, of which he remained editor for twenty-five years. He also founded the festival of the same name, the literary review *L'Immature*, the monthly journal *Volume*, as well as conducting many interviews with musicians and artists.

## CAROLE MIRABELLO

After graduating from the *École supérieure de design industriel* in Paris, Carole Mirabello began her career as art director. In 2005, she founded her audio-visual production company 'A Better World', through which she set out to defend the hard-hitting documentary film. Since 2013, she has been working with Christian Fevret on a number of musical projects.



© Gerard Malanga, Courtesy Galerie Caroline Smulders, Paris

# SCÉNO GRAPHY

## MATALI CRASSET

A designer and scenographer, Matali Crasset likes to dabble in a variety of fields, from catering to electronic music, arts and crafts and reflections on the city. Challenging the codes that govern our daily lives, in her work she likes to explore issues such as modularity, appropriation, flexibility...

For the exhibition 'The Velvet Underground - New York Extravaganza', she offers a proposal solidly rooted in New York's verticality. The scenography presents us with a sideways glimpse, plays around with iconic symbols, and provides us with plenty of references: from urban architecture to Andy Warhol's Factory – the ultimate counter-culture reference. We are drawn into a world that becomes a vital, living space within the exhibition, and are invited to look and reflect upon why the spirit and sound of the Velvet Underground feel so contemporary to us?



© matali crasset



© matali crasset

## NICOLAS ROUVIÈRE

Exhibition's Graphic designer



## AN AUDIOVISUAL EXHIBITION

- Six films produced and directed especially for the exhibition
- Underground art films (Edward English, Alexander Keewatin Dewdney, Gerard Malanga, Marie Menken, Barbara Rubin, Andy Warhol, Danny Williams)
- TV archives

**AN IMMERSIVE, IMPRESSIONISTIC** exhibition a present-day interpretation by the eye-witnesses and contributors of the time.

## A MUSICAL EXHIBITION

- Live music spaces
- Headphones (provided) allow visitors to 'plug in' for personalised listening comfort.

## THE WORK OF CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

Inspired by the Velvet Underground: Antoine d'Agata, Léo Dorfner, Nan Goldin, Douglas Gordon, John Giorno, João Louro, Guy Peellaert, Alain Séchas, Jean-Luc Verna, Gus Van Sant...

## HUNDREDS OF IMAGES

Pictures taken by some of the photographers who witnessed the band's meteoric career: Nat Finkelstein, Donald Greenhaus, Lisa Law, Fred W. McDarragh, Gerard Malanga, Billy Name, Adam Ritchie, Steve Schapiro, Stephen Shore... And some **RARE ARCHIVES** contributed by many lenders and collectors.

## PORTRAITS

of the band's members: Lou Reed, John Cale, Sterling Morrison, Maureen Tucker, Nico, as well as those who together made the New York underground: Candy Darling, Allen Ginsberg, Piero Heliczer, Angus Maclise, Gerard Malanga, Jonas Mekas, Barbara Rubin, Edie Sedgwick, Andy Warhol, Danny Williams, La Monte Young...



# FILMS INSIDE THE EXHIBITION

Six films, entirely devoid of the classic documentary codes, give a present-day interpretation of the Velvet Underground experience:

- A 4-minute diptych film directed by **JONATHAN CAOQUETTE**, an American director with a keen eye for indie cinema. Using 'cut-up' editing techniques, he proposes a twin-faceted glance at America in the sixties: culture versus counter-culture.
- The face and voice of **JONAS MEKAS** welcome visitors to the Film-Makers' Cooperative with an editor's cut of the most symbolic extracts from avant-garde cinema.
- In a 12-minute film directed by Allan Rothschild, devoted to the youth years and the meeting between John Cale and Lou Reed, we hear three voices combined: those of **JOHN CALE, LOU REED** and Merrill Reed Weiner, Lou's younger sister.
- A 10-minute film directed by Véronique Jacquinet is an introduction to the captivating **NICO**: her first cinema experiences with La Dolce Vita, her years as a model and her disquieting presence within the band.
- A giant screen projection conjures up the New York spirit, immersing onlookers into the Lower East Side for a human view of the city.
- An 8-minute focus film by Allan Rothschild on one of the most legendary albums in the history of rock, the 'banana album', combining graphic narrative, archives and testimonials.



Jonas Mekas, 2013  
© Liz Wendelbo

# THE EXHIBITION

## 1 WELCOME TO AMERICA

After World War II, America's consumer machine rebooted and ran like never before: an obedient, family-oriented standard of life, as picture-perfect as the images circulated in the booming media. Inflammatory intellectuals and artists, who rejected all the fake smiles, were rife. They condemned the rigidity of a supposedly liberal society in which all deviance was deemed to be dangerous. Initially marginalized, these unclassifiable individuals would use, invent and fuse all forms of creation. They defended radically different ways of life, took alternative paths, refused rules and taboos. All this was embodied in the indefatigable figurehead of the Beat Generation poets, Allen Ginsberg.



< Greenwich Village, 1960. Photo courtesy Estate of Fred W. McDarrah © 2016 All Rights Reserved

< Le sang des poètes, 1959. Photo courtesy Estate of Fred W. McDarrah © 2016 All Rights Reserved

Allen Ginsberg, 1971  
© Gerard Malanga



## 2 REED & CALE, THE CHILDHOOD OF ART

It's difficult to imagine two more different personalities and trajectories than those of the founding members of the Velvet Underground. Before they met, John Cale and Lou Reed had nothing or almost nothing in common. The first of the two, born on 9 March 1942, came from a working-class, family in Wales. Encouraged by his parents and, thanks to his gift for music, he followed an academic curriculum, which might have made him destined to conduct an orchestra with a baton. The second of the two, born a week earlier on 2 March 1942 in Brooklyn, came from a middle-class New York Jewish family. Lou Reed very quickly went off the rails, laying bear a fragile temperament, ill-adapted to the small-town mentality of the suburb of Freeport where he grew up. The only thing the two had in common: a fascination for the rock'n'roll that was emerging and a clear penchant for extreme experiences.

< Lou Reed (center) on stage at the Syracuse University with his band L.A. And The Eldorados, 1964

Courtesy of Syracuse University Archives, Syracuse University Libraries

v John Cale © DR. Private Collection



# 3

## NEW YORK SPIRIT

In the eyes of the United States' heartland, New York has always been a huge Babylon, the foothold of a cosmopolitan life incompatible with the founding values of small-town America. At the start of the 1960s, in this city hit by recession and social crisis, no neighbourhood was as dubious as Greenwich Village, to the south of Manhattan – the stomping ground of idle students, impious artists and intellectuals with pernicious ideas. Repulsion and fascination went hand in hand: a decadent hell in the eyes of most, the Village was the promised land for others, an amazing breeding ground for talent. This was where experimental musicians, underground filmmakers, taboo-busting poets and young people challenging the diktats of the heterosexual norm all converged.

In this unique context, the verses of the Beat poets the audacious harmonics of La Monte Young and the experimentation of underground cinema would rub off on Lou Reed and John Cale before they brought the Velvet Underground to life. At the intersection of pop culture and the avant-garde, conceptual art and tribal beats, juvenile shenanigans and the most sophisticated of theories.



^  
Lou Reed and John Cale at Cafe Bizarre, December 1965 © Adam Ritchie



> Lou Reed, Sterling Morrison and John Cale on the *Venus in Furs* by Piero Heliczer shooting, December 1965 © Adam Ritchie

# 4 FACTORY YEARS

The Velvet Underground hadn't waited for Andy Warhol in order to forge its own sound, a world and an identity that broke so radically with the rock'n'roll canons of the time. Its poetry broached sex, drugs and existential questions head-on, and was set to music that was both schizophrenic and fluid, sombre and luminous, with paradoxes and extravagances that forced its audience to become involved and choose sides.

Fascinated by this singular image, the nascent prince of pop art welcomed the band into his studio loft, the Factory. This hotbed of talent and extravagance, accelerator of not so elementary particles, propelled the Velvet Underground into the limelight.



< Andy Warhol and Lou Reed  
© Stephen Shore, courtesy 303 Gallery, New York



<< Nico and Lou Reed at Castle, Los Angeles, May 1966  
© Lisa Law



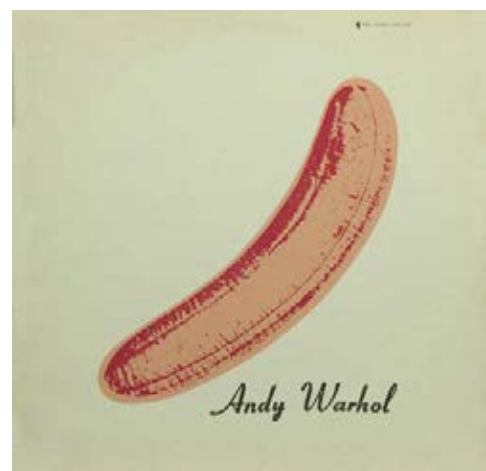
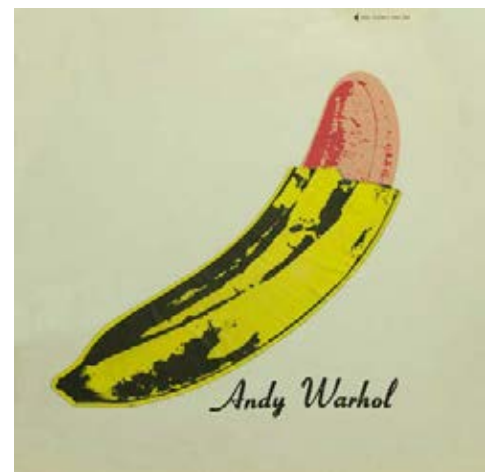
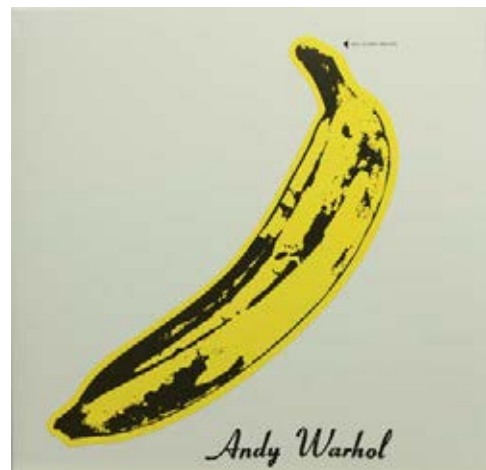
< The Velvet Underground in Los Angeles, May 1966  
© Gerard Malanga



<< Lou Reed, John Cale, Sterling Morrison and a policeman  
© Stephen Shore, courtesy 303 Gallery, New York

# BANANA ALBUM

In April 1966, when the band headed up by Lou Reed and John Cale began recording its first album, the cream of pop was wavering between two extremes. For sweet, melodic harmonies, fans turned to the Beatles. For scorching riffs, it was the Rolling Stones. By refusing to be categorised anywhere along this spectrum, the Velvet Underground were clearly going against the grain of DJ and listening audiences' habits: fatalistic, cold and dark, the Velvet Underground's songs held up the least flattering mirrors to the New York reality. Catering less to comfort for the ears or the soul than most music, the band's sound and arrangements opted more for tight rhythms, grating violins, screeching guitars and icy vocals. Yet beneath the uncompromising sonorities there lie sometimes heavenly melodies, whose haunting singularity were to trigger an aesthetic revolution in the early seventies. The future begins here, in a seedy New York recording studio.





# 5 REINVENTIONS OF THE VELVET UNDERGROUND

After Nico's eviction, followed by Warhol's and then John Cale's, the band that you might have taken for dead, took on a new form. Now the only leader on board, Lou Reed found introspection to be an infinite source of inspiration. He found a double by hiring a multi-instrumentalist, Doug Yule, who was able to reproduce his phrasing.

Calmer than before, the Velvet Underground zigzagged across America but snubbed New York, where the band would not perform between Spring '67 and Summer '70. In the nightclubs of Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia or the East Coast, audiences marvelled at its mixture of smoothness, sensuality and mischief. The posthumous album released in '74, *1969 Velvet Underground Live*, bears witness to this and launched underground music's fame.



^  
Lou and Doug © Henri Ter Hall  
^  
Concert poster, San Francisco, October 1968  
© Bellmer Wright



^  
Concert poster, San Francisco, June 1968  
© Raphael Schnepf



# 6

## ECHOS & HERITAGE

Lou Reed's departure in August 1970, marked the end of the real Velvet Underground, but this went more or less unnoticed.

Two years later, the band's name was on everyone's lips: commended by the man of the moment, David Bowie, the band's influence would only grow. Through pirate records, the release of previously unreleased material and the mea culpa of journalists who now raved about the Velvet Underground, the spirit and range of New York rock steadily won over the entire planet, like a revenge from beyond the grave. Far from being limited to just the musical sphere, the Velvet Underground's waves washed over art, photography, cinema and fashion: the band continued to inspire or amuse pop and rock culture in its entirety.



^  
Guy Peellaert  
The Velvet Underground, taken from *Rock Dreams, 1970-1973*.  
2004 ©The Estate of Guy Peellaert, all rights reserved

> Catel Muller  
Nico and the Velvet, 2015 © Catel atelier danube



This exhibition has been created with the invaluable help of Gerard Malanga, Jonas Mekas & Benn Northover, Esther Robinson, MM Serra, Merrill Reed Weiner, Olivier Landemaine, Allan Rothschild, Bruno Juffin, Gery Bouchez & NOD productions

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## VISITOR INFORMATION

TUESDAY – THURSDAY ————— 12.00-18.00

FRIDAY ————— 12.00-22.00

SATURDAY & SUNDAY ————— 10.00-20.00

CLOSED ON MONDAY AND THE FIRST OF MAY.

FULL PRICE ————— €10

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