



**SOPHIE BRAMLY – 1981 & +
17th June - 2nd September 2011
Launch on Friday 17th June from 6pm to 9pm
12 MAIL... a Red Bull Space, 12 rue du Mail, 75002 Paris.**

During the early 80's, Sophie Bramly was one of the first to witness the beginnings of hip hop in the Bronx. Her friends at the time were Afrika Bambaataa, Futura, Kurtis Blow and Crazy Legs. She took photographs of these legends in the making, creating a subliminal image of their difficult routine with endless talent and energy. Here is how Sophie tells the story, introducing this unusual exhibition which will star in our first edition :

“First of all, you have to remember the context. In New York in the early 80's, even a black taxi driver wouldn't stop to pick up another black man if he were wearing a tracksuit and trainers ! They were what the French affectionately call “Cailleras” (“Chavs”). Although segregation had been abolished for a while, there were still traces of it everywhere : not many white people went past 125th street and to get to the Bronx, you either had to keep patient and make your way through the underground, or get a car from the Bronx – otherwise daringly called a “limo” - to come pick you up. These were the first distinctive signs of survival in the local area : *everything was down to looks.*

Downtown, cool guys would welcome the “homies” who came around to show off their stunts and inventions in local clubs like the Pyramid or the Roxy. They rapped, but since the success of the Sugarhill Gang in 79, they were more and more familiar with the genre. They danced too, but on their head, on their elbow, or on other weird parts of their bodies... and when those gangs of identically dressed dancers did their thing, battling on the floor covered in cardboard for the occasion, most of us were simply flabbergasted.

There were girls too, skipping like nobody has ever been taught at school. Finally, the graffiti artists, with the talent to write their name wherever they could – beautiful names, colourful names, powerful names, in the ugliest, dullest and most hostile of places. They knew how to bring elegance to places of hate.

I never really thought about the movement at the time, I just followed it. I was just being soft about the simple ideas of Afrika Bambaataa who was leading part of the



youth in the Bronx. According to him, everybody has at least one talent and should make the most of it, and take up all new challenges. Competition makes you improve, forces anyone to reach further.

Is it all about banking on looks ?

In order to put their talent to its best, they had to have style. Some of the dress-codes were easy to keep up with at the time : oversized laces on trainers, non-prescription glasses signed by the German brand Cazals – just to look good, Adidas shoes and a Kangol cap. It was almost simple, especially since the brands were not that popular at the time (except for maybe Adidas). I couldn't say if the more they spread out of the Bronx and Harlem, the more they tried to identify to rich white men, but I can remember that branded accessories became indispensable and later it was a full wardrobe. Luxury brands, like Gucci and Vuitton in particular, became necessary to prove a delightful social status. Forging filled in the empty gap and the extraordinary Dapper Dan opened a shop with a unique concept : clients (rappers but also people like Mike Tyson) would sit in and talk for hours. During that time, at the back of the shop, tens of Asians were making fabrics monogrammed with logos such as Vuitton and Gucci and garments that went with it , pieces that the brands never even dreamed of manufacturing, like tracksuits, baseball caps, jackets, trainers... After fighting against fraud, the luxury industry ended making the most of these new popular products and enriched their business using somebody else's imagination. I don't have a particular interest in the phenomenal development of this industry, but I have a true fascination for the invention of a democratic luxury by a handful of initially rejected teenagers and by the way their anger and upset had become a way of life for people all around the world.

It is their obsession for showing off that I have photographed for a few years, never more than a yard away from them. I studied with utmost attention and pleasure the way they staged themselves and they payed attention to self-representation, with interest for what hid behind. At times they appeared fragile like if nude, and I found them touching and magnificently dazzling.

On stage they had sparkling outfits and were admired by the crowd, but most of them lived with their mothers, were already fathers and knew how to laugh about how ludicrous the situation was. It is the road that took them from their homes to the stage that can be seen here”.

Sophie Bramly started her carrier as a photographer and rapidly specialised in New-York rappers. As the movement emerged, she naturally started to produce television programs. In 1987, she created the well-known program “Yo!” broadcasted on MTV Europe and later on MTV U.S. She grew away from music in 2007 when she became inspired by feminine sexuality, creating the Internet site “secondsexe.com” and producing a series of adult films for Canal + named “X Femmes”.



To celebrate the exhibition *1981 et plus*, 12Mail and Red Bull France are to release a book in only 500 numbered examples. 12Mail is a space for exhibitions and encounters where you can discover artists and collectors of great talent in areas such as illustration, graphic design, photography and fashion.

Scans and printings : Fotodart Fine Art (www.fotodart.com)

MORE INFO

12MAIL : www.12mail.fr / infos@12mail.fr

