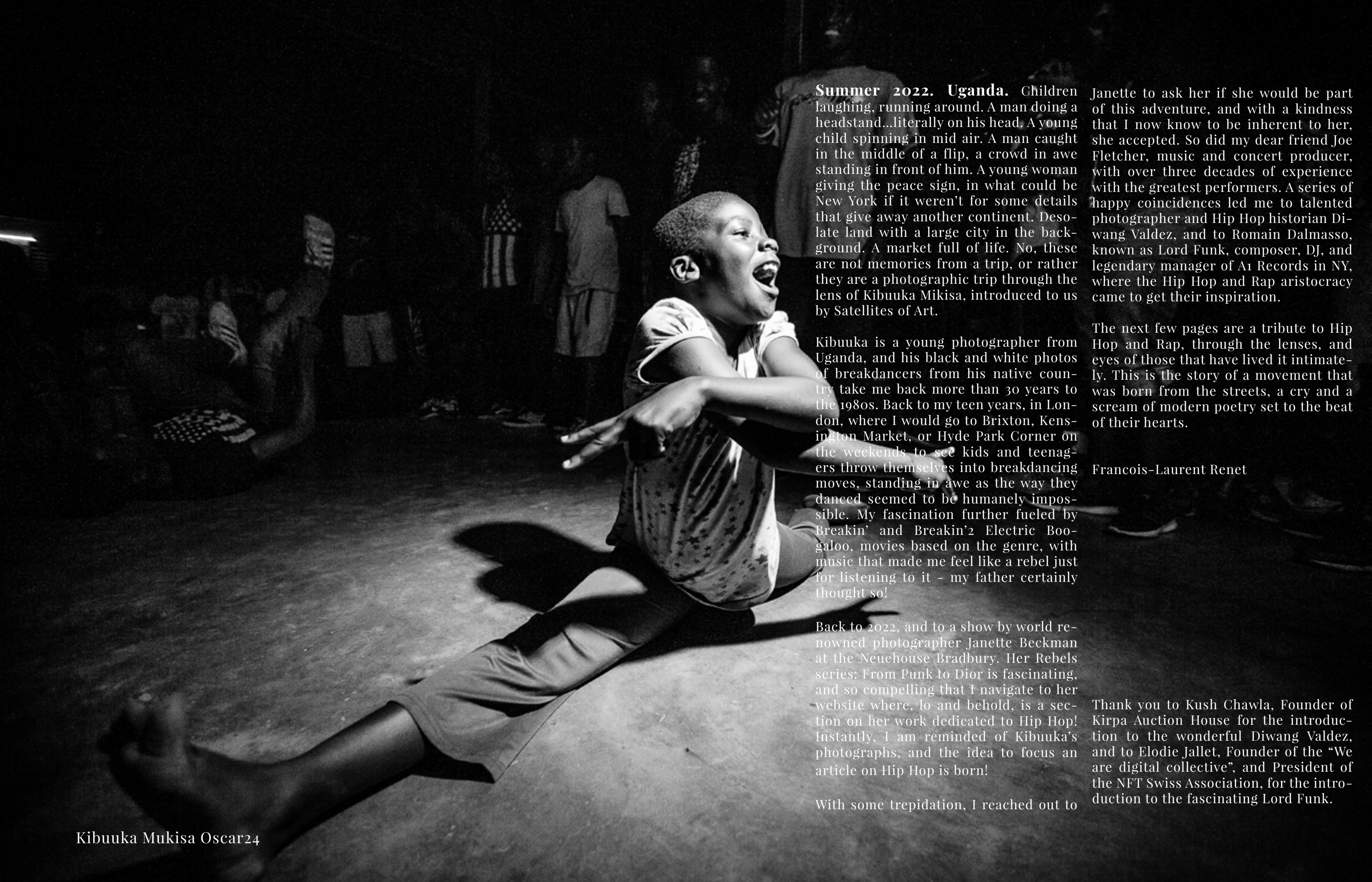


Hip Hop



"BORN FROM THE
STREETS, A CRY
& A SCREAM OF
MODERN POETRY
SET TO THE BEAT
OF THEIR HEARTS"

by Francois-Laurent Renet



Summer 2022. Uganda. Children laughing, running around. A man doing a headstand...literally on his head. A young child spinning in mid air. A man caught in the middle of a flip, a crowd in awe standing in front of him. A young woman giving the peace sign, in what could be New York if it weren't for some details that give away another continent. Desolate land with a large city in the background. A market full of life. No, these are not memories from a trip, or rather they are a photographic trip through the lens of Kibuuka Mikisa, introduced to us by Satellites of Art.

Kibuuka is a young photographer from Uganda, and his black and white photos of breakdancers from his native country take me back more than 30 years to the 1980s. Back to my teen years, in London, where I would go to Brixton, Kensington Market, or Hyde Park Corner on the weekends to see kids and teenagers throw themselves into breakdancing moves, standing in awe as the way they danced seemed to be humbly impossible. My fascination further fueled by *Breakin'* and *Breakin'2 Electric Boogaloo*, movies based on the genre, with music that made me feel like a rebel just for listening to it - my father certainly thought so!

Back to 2022, and to a show by world renowned photographer Janette Beckman at the Neuhouse Bradbury. Her *Rebels* series: *From Punk to Dior* is fascinating, and so compelling that I navigate to her website where, lo and behold, is a section on her work dedicated to Hip Hop! Instantly, I am reminded of Kibuuka's photographs, and the idea to focus an article on Hip Hop is born!

With some trepidation, I reached out to

Janette to ask her if she would be part of this adventure, and with a kindness that I now know to be inherent to her, she accepted. So did my dear friend Joe Fletcher, music and concert producer, with over three decades of experience with the greatest performers. A series of happy coincidences led me to talented photographer and Hip Hop historian Diwang Valdez, and to Romain Dalmaso, known as Lord Funk, composer, DJ, and legendary manager of A1 Records in NY, where the Hip Hop and Rap aristocracy came to get their inspiration.

The next few pages are a tribute to Hip Hop and Rap, through the lenses, and eyes of those that have lived it intimately. This is the story of a movement that was born from the streets, a cry and a scream of modern poetry set to the beat of their hearts.

Francois-Laurent Renet

Thank you to Kush Chawla, Founder of Kirpa Auction House for the introduction to the wonderful Diwang Valdez, and to Elodie Jallet, Founder of the "We are digital collective", and President of the NFT Swiss Association, for the introduction to the fascinating Lord Funk.



ICE CUBE, Ingelwood, CA 1990 ©Janette Beckman

Hip-Hop

Off the Wall
Off the Wall

Janette Beckman's Photography
at the "Intersection of
Gritty & Cool"

Hi Janette! Tell us a little about yourself.

JB: Growing up in London, I always knew I wanted to be an artist of some sort. I was always drawing as a kid, or in the art room at school. I went to art school to study photography and graduated just as the punk era was beginning, the British economy had crashed and nobody had money. I started working for music magazines The Face and Melody Maker, taking photographs of the bands and their fans, punks, mods, 2Tone, skinheads. I shot bands from The Clash to Boy George as well as three Police album covers.

In 1983 I moved to New York to document the new underground hip-hop scene, I photographed pioneers Run DMC, Slick Rick, Salt-N-Pepa, LL Cool J and many more.

My work has been shown in galleries worldwide and is in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Museum of the City of New York and the British National Portrait Gallery. I have published five books, including 'Rap Portraits & Lyrics of a Generation of Black Rockers'(1991). 'The Breaks Stylin' & Profilin" (2008 and 'The MashUp' (2018) curated by artist Cey Adams who invited his graffiti artist friends to reinterpret my hip hop images. My new monograph "Rebels From Punk To Dior" published by Drago in November 2021 covers 40 years of my work photographing, Punk, Hip-Hop, Jazz, Artists, Fashion, Street Portraits, Gangs, Protests and more. I have been lucky enough to work with many legendary brands shooting campaigns for Apple, Dior and Levis, Kangol, Schott etc . I am represented by the Fahey Klein Gallery in Los Angeles.

You've been a photographer for decades now, and you have "lived" hip hop since the beginning. Do you remember what

your thoughts were when you first encountered this new genre, which in many ways was not just an evolution, but rather a whole new genre like nothing before it?

JB In 1982, I was working for Melody Maker when the first Hip-Hop tour, 'The New York Scratch and Rap Revue ' came to London. It was a showcase featuring performances by Afrika Bambaataa, Ram-mellzee, Fab 5 Freddy, Rock Steady Crew, the Double Dutch Girls, and live painting by graffiti artists Dondi and Futura. I went to the hotel to take portraits of the performers. They were wearing Kangols, Cazals, tracksuits with lettering down the side, and fly sneakers perfectly laced. They had great energy, looked so cool and that night at the concert I was completely blown away watching rappers, graffiti artists, Dj's, breakdancers all performing on the stage at the same time. It was an explosion of culture that I had never seen before. A renaissance moment for me. Two months later I moved to New York City.

What attracted you to hip hop artists? How was working with them different from other subjects?

JB: Everything was authentic -- it came from the streets and people's hearts, When I came to New York in 1983 the economy was bad, and people just decided they were going to do things their way. Kids would steal out of their parents' house at midnight to go to a train yard to paint trains. They wrote poetry and practiced breakdance moves in their bedrooms and on the streets, got tapped to rap on stage, getting props from their community. The creativity was coming from the artists, rather than record company execs telling them what to do. I saw passion, intensity, dedication and commitment born from teenage rebellion.



MC LYTE Brooklyn 1988 ©Janette Beckman



Real Roxanne_Brooklyn 1986©Janette Beckman

Perhaps more than any other musical genre before it, hip hop came from the streets, a language of revolt, a scream and a cry. Would you say that what we see today, an evolution of hip hop to rap still has the same roots? What is different between today's artists, and yesterday's?

JB I think today's artists still have a voice, but because of social media and the desire to become 'rich and famous' they are coming from a different place. The idea that you can post something on Youtube or TicToc and become an overnight star with millions of followers has diluted the intensity for some artists.

Can you share some experiences with us? The good, the bad, the crazy and the great!

JB In 1984 the British style magazine 'The Face' asked me to photograph the up and coming rap group called Run DMC. In a time before cell phones and emails I called the contact phone number they gave me, Jam Master Jay's home, and Jay arranged to meet me the Hollis, Queens subway stop two days later.

I took my Hasselblad camera on the train, backs ready loaded, Jay met me at the station and we walked over to meet the group and some friends on a tree lined street. It was a middle class neighborhood, houses with back yards, so different from the 'Boogie Down Bronx'. Run DMC and friends were perfectly styled wearing Adidas, Kangol hats, Cazal glasses. They were just hanging out on a spring day I had my camera around my neck and started shooting. The photo seems like a moment in time.

In 1983 while spending the summer in LA I read about the 'Hoyo Maravilla' gang in the local paper. Fascinated I found the writer and he introduced me to them. Every day I'd drive East LA to hang out in this dusty park with my Hasselblad, wait-

to see who came by. I made portraits of the gang members often posing in front of a graffiti covered wall with their tags, they explained 'la vida loca', and invited me home to meet their grandmothers. It was great. One day I photographed three young women standing in front of their car, they told me they were the 'Rivera Bad Girls', La China, Yogi and Lil Giggles (aka Norma Vicki and Vivien) they had so much style and attitude.

In 2011, I reconnected with the three women in the photograph. They told me there was a huge gang war going on back in 1983, ninety per cent of the people in my photographs were dead or in jail. The girls had come to the park that day as they had heard that 'there was 'some crazy English woman' taking photos in the Hoyo Maravilla park. The women still live in the old neighborhood, still best friends, they have great jobs, have brought up families and made it out of the gangs.

I was teaching art and photography in a youth club in South London in 1979. The kids in the neighborhood were Mods. they came dressed, the guys in sharp suits, shades, 'pork pie' hats, the girls wearing mini skirts, mod girl haircuts and heels. One evening I brought my 35m camera to photograph them on the street outside the club. Years later, these photos were the inspiration (mood board) for the 2019 Dior campaign that I photographed on the same streets of London.

In 1990 I was in Los Angeles working on my first book "Portraits and Lyrics of a Generation of Black Rockers". I went to Torrance to meet NWA at their recording studio. The band were recording their new album but they made time for a quick photo shoot. We were outside the studio in the hood when I saw a cop car com-

ing down the street. I flagged him down and asked if we could please take a photo of the band with the police car. The cop agreed, he had no idea that this was NWA! they had just released 'Fuck Tha Police' protesting police brutality and racial profiling. The NYPD hated them. We got our shot.

Sex, drugs and Rock n' Roll. What words would describe hip hop and rap?

JB Hip Hop is Rapping, DJing, Breakdancing, Graffiti, Styling and Profiling.

More than ever the majority of people "follow" artists, and see what social media shows them. Which artist(s) are there the most misconceptions about? Who would we go WTH if we were to meet them in real life as opposed to the distorted lenses of social media?

JB I'm grateful that I've been able to witness and document so many amazing people that I've met throughout the years. From the bands, artists and musicians that I photographed at the start of their careers, before they were famous, to the Harlem bike club 'The Go Hard Boyz', to working with brands like Dior and Levi's, people have allowed me into their communities and lives. I love people who follow their passions and their beliefs no matter what. Sometimes you get recognition for it and sometimes people tell you what you're doing is rubbish — but you have to keep doing it. For me, photography is an obsession and an addiction, you just keep doing what you do. There's no choice in the matter. You can't help yourself.



Double Dutch Girls London 1982 ©Janette Beckman



BDP Scott La Rock & KRS One_NYC 1987 ©Janette Beckman

“Hip-Hop? She Won’t Stop Janette’s photographs capture what she calls “the godfathers and godmothers of hip-hop” in their element. Today they are gems, but back then they were simply snapshots of a lifestyle and movement Ms Beckman said she was lucky to get swept into.”
New York Times Lens Blog

“There isn’t a piece of Hip-Hop history that Janette Beckman hasn’t touched with her camera. More than a photographer, Beckman captures moments; her use of light and found art is legendary and rarely does anyone bring grittiness to still pictures the way she does.”

Life&Times (Jay-Z blog)



NWA_Torrance CA 1990 ©Janette Beckman



LL Cool J & posse NYC 1987 ©Janette Beckman



LEADERS OF THE NEW SCHOOL UNION LONG ISLAND 1990 copy ©Janette Beckman



Run DMC & posse Hollis Queens NY 1984 ©Janette Beckman



Stetsasonic Brooklyn 1988 ©Janette Beckman