



Exhibition Review

We are Watching: OZ in London

By [Philomena Epps](#)

CHELSEA Space, London

Wed 14 June – Fri 14 July 2017

[Tweet](#) | [Share](#) | [Email](#)

“They [the conservative elite] were overly terrified ... [of] the fluorescent pages of our magazine in which we dealt with revolutionary politics, drugs, sexuality, racism ... they felt if they could shut us up, if they could stop *OZ*, that they could somehow stop the rebellion.” - Richard Neville, 1990.

We are Watching: OZ in London considers the output of the alternative underground magazine *OZ*, and its notorious contributors, over the six years it was operating in London (1967-1973). Founded in Sydney in 1963 as a satirical magazine, but soon evolving into the psychedelic or ‘hippy’ publication typified by the 1960s, *OZ* had a particularly radical and experimental approach to design, editorial content, and the lifestyle it embraced. The counterculture existence that *OZ* adopted was irrevocably linked to the personality of their various international contributors, including Richard Neville, Martin Sharp, Felix Dennis, Jim Anderson, Robert Whitaker, Philippe Mora and Germaine Greer. The exhibition also pays heed to other key individuals who were unaccredited at the time, including Marsha Rowe and Louise Ferrier. The wide-ranging array of material, borrowed from the estates and private collections of many of the above listed, provides an exciting and kaleidoscopic journey through the burgeoning liberated and humorous resistance within 1960s London



Posters, letters, photographs, t-shirts, films and ephemera related to the OZ Obscenity Trial at the Old Bailey in 1971 on display at CHELSEA space. Courtesy CHELSEA space.

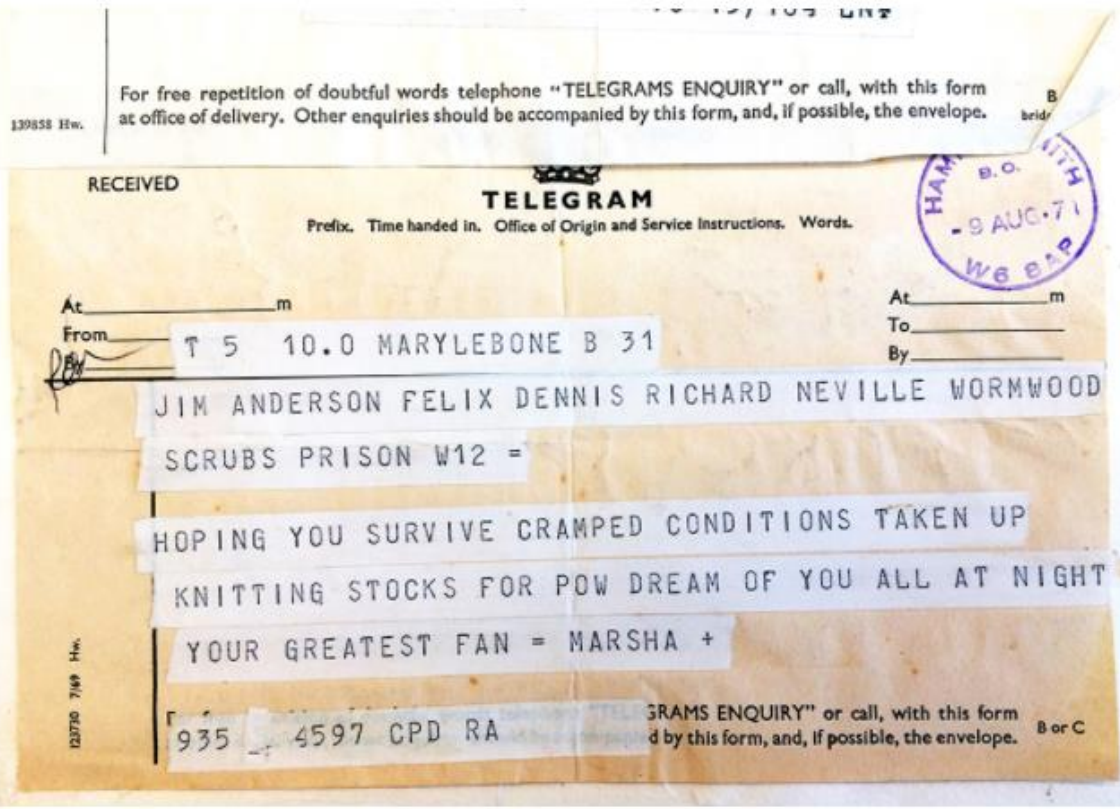


OZ 16 along with facsimile of artboards by Martin Sharp, reprinted by kind permission of the Estate of Richard Neville, from the Richard Neville Papers, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Courtesy CHELSEA space.

The OZ Obscenity Trial, which took place in 1971, marking the longest obscenity trial in British legal history, is a particular focus for the exhibition. Across the walls and in various vitrines are ephemera; letters from lawyers, newspaper cuttings and blown up headlines, stickers, t-shirts, etc, all related to the trial. The three editors - Richard Neville, Jim Anderson and Felix Dennis - were charged with conspiring to distribute an obscene magazine and intent to debauch and corrupt the morals of young children. They were jailed, but later acquitted after an appeal. One particular offending item in question was a highly sexualised, grotesque parody of Rupert Bear engaging in coitus - complete with an enormous, erect phallus. This cartoon strip was published in the *SchoolkidsOZ*, special issue, No 28, May 1970. The issue was actually produced *by* school children between the ages of 14 and 18, and not by the editors *for* school children, as the court alleged. A 15-year-old schoolboy called Vivian Berger was actually behind the Rupert strip. Other elements of the magazine included graphics, cartoons, and articles dedicated to sexual freedom, drug use, and corporal punishment. It is likely that the licentiousness of British youth, and the bubbling of discontent with society and the education system was a threat to the establishment, and thus influenced the severity of the trial. There is certainly something to think about here in an era of revamped draconian laws and morals, by a contemporary government that seems to put what it describes as 'traditional' values at the heart of education and begs the question what is a 'traditional' value and who does it belong to?



OZ Obscenity Trial Press pack and related material. Courtesy CHelsea space.



Telegram from Marsha Rowe to Richard Neville, Jim Anderson and Felix Dennis. Reprinted by kind permission of the Estate of Richard Neville, from the Richard Neville Papers, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

An assortment of magazine covers and spreads in the exhibition also highlight the general social and political issues that were addressed within the magazine throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Satire, serious journalism, and visual art all combined to form a strong voice which resisted race and gender prejudice and the mistreatment of prisoners, defended feminism and homosexuality, and raised awareness about drug use. Examples include a psychedelic poster depicting Jimi Hendrix, an insert feature about an occupation at Berkeley in 1969, satirical fake headlines to do with criminal acts, and a lithograph defending the legalisation of cannabis. The artist behind much of the now-iconic artwork was Martin Sharp, whose LP covers for Cream are also on the wall. Sharp's images have been cited as pivotal to the success of the publication, capturing the heady spirit of 1960s counterculture through depictions of both war and peace. Sharp's *Madonna of the Napalm* was the standout image of the first issue produced in London, which was published in January 1967. The parody depicts Lyndon B Johnson as the Virgin, with a halo of rifles, cradling a bomb. However, other images such as the *Plant a Flower Child* (OZ, No 5, 1967) poster (created with Robert Whitaker) depicted long-haired, blonde, female hippies, with only daisies covering their naked bodies.

[Philomena Epps](#) is a writer based in London. She is also the founding editor and publisher of Orlando magazine.