

The Photography of Leni Sinclair

Fifth Estate Collective

2023

Using the descriptor, ironic, to define almost anything has become an overused cliché. However, Leni Sinclair's 1966 photo of John Coltrane taken at Detroit's Drome Lounge deserves that adjective. The image has been displayed in museums and reproduced hundreds of times.

Leni Sinclair's photos first appeared in the *Fifth Estate* that same year in the then-tabloid's second edition. Although the paper's content was filled with articles about opposition to the Vietnam War and support for civil rights, the cover story was entitled, "The New Sound of Sound," written under her full name, Magdalene Sinclair, and was accompanied by her photographs of Detroit musicians who were turning the world of jazz upside down [FE #2, December 2–16, 1965].

The music, poetry, and other forms of cultural innovation and rebellion emanated from the Detroit Artists Workshop, co-founded by Leni, her partner, John Sinclair, and several others. She was born in Königsberg, Germany in 1940 and emigrated to the U.S. in 1959 where she studied photography in Detroit. Her award-winning photos have featured Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk and other jazz greats as well as rock bands such as the MC5, Iggy and the Stooges, and many more.

Leni, John, and Pun Plamondon, formed the anti-racist White Panther Party in Ann Arbor that called for a "total assault on the culture," as part of a revolutionary, anti-capitalist 10-Point Program.

Leni has had numerous other photos in the *Fifth Estate*, including covers, and she continues her photography. She has written two books, *The Detroit Jazz Who's Who* and *Detroit Rocks! A Pictorial History of Motor City Rock and Roll 1965–1975*. Recently, her photos were published as a 408-page, large format book, *Motor City Underground: Leni Sinclair Photographs 1963–1978*.



Leni Sinclair, 1960s



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