

Galleries

# Picturing Harvard Square the way it was

By Cate McQuaid

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Harvard Square in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a beacon for youth culture. Music venues such as the Boston Tea Party and Club 47, underground newspapers, love-ins and be-ins, and dreams of utopia characterized the square in the days before corporate America bought up much of it and turned it into a mall.

Steve Nelson was there, writing poetry and selling it on the street, producing rock concerts, and taking pictures. He's dug up those images, now artifacts of another time and, seemingly, another culture, and made an exhibition out of them at the New England School of Art and Design at Suffolk University.

Nelson was aiming more for documentary than art. He cites Andy Warhol as a major influence, and the sheen of glamour illuminating some of his more celebrated subjects — such as J. Geils Band frontman Peter Wolf, or rock bard Jonathan Richman of the Modern Lovers — suggests a hybrid: Warhol's weirdly self-aware references to fame mixed with an anthropological dedication to capturing a culture on film. Throw in a few abstract shots, and you've got a photography show by a young artist who hasn't found his vision but happens nonetheless to be in the right place at the right time.

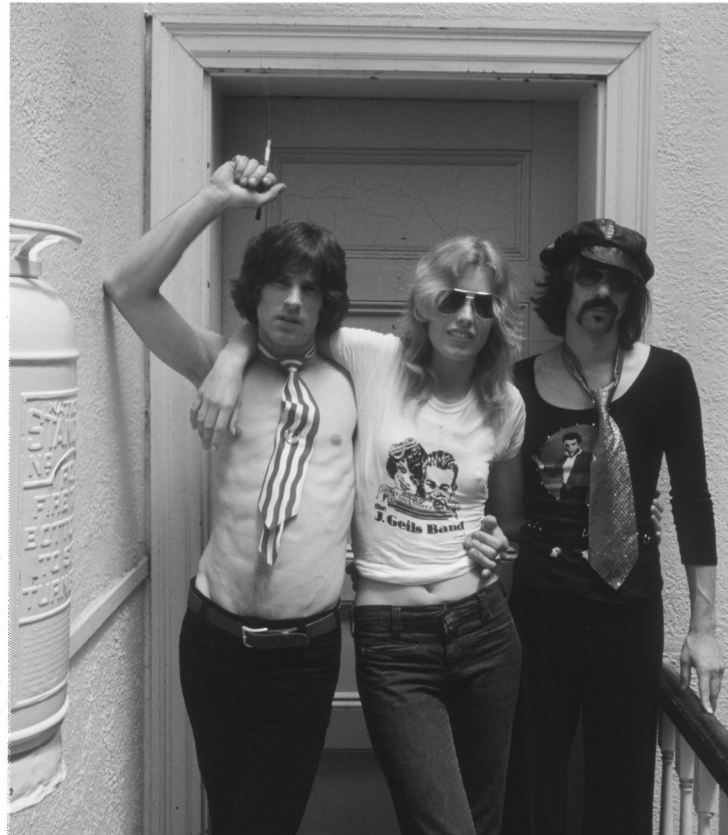
The shots of Wolf and other local musicians on the cusp of the big time are fun to look at; it's like leafing through your high school yearbook. But Nelson also evokes the contradictory moods of the era, pairing shots of graffiti that reads "Save the trees in Vietnam" with stern but colorful images of a Patriots Day ceremony on Cambridge Common.

He offers up the nascent hunger for celebrity that today has ballooned into fatuous reality television in a picture of Barry Savenor, scion to the gourmet food store family, dressed up in a white leisure suit. Nelson explains that Savenor passed on taking over the family business "to pursue his own muse, which included creating a huge series of snapshots of him posed with celebrities."

In all, it's a fun, nostalgic exhibit; even the more amateurish abstract pictures have their place, punctuating the bustle of the other shots with their stillness.

**Steve Nelson: The Square: Stills from the Scene, Harvard Square, 1967-1973 and Sue Yang: Self-Portrait**

At: New England School of Art and Design at Suffolk University, 75 Arlington St., through July 18. 617-573-8785.



PHOTO/STEVE NELSON

The photographs in Steve Nelson's exhibit "The Square" capture local musicians and artists, including Peter Wolf (right) and Hallucinations guitarist Doug Slate (left), who are shown with an unidentified companion.