**PRESS RELEASE**

**Q & A WITH JAMEL SHABAZZ**

There’s only a handful of people who are best remembered for photographing the glorious scenes of urban culture in New York City. One of the most renowned and prolific of these photographers is Jamel Shabazz. In the last 40 years, he’s visually captured the compelling New York City 70’s and 80’s street vibe. More than snapping cool street scenes, he is best at revealing the inner beauty and candid emotions of his subjects.

This season, Shabazz reunites with one of his favorite subjects, the PUMA Suede as he shot the iconic sneaker around Brooklyn on the feet of today’s young roster of tastemakers – Kyle Jenner, Young Thug, Yes Julz and Rae Sremmurd. PUMA caught up with Shabazz and here’s what he has to say about the Suede that's celebrating its 50th year on the come up.

**PUMA Hello Jamel! Tell us what keeps you busy these days? What have you been up to lately?**

# JAMEL SHABAZZ: Since January of 2016, much of my time and energy has been directed towards organizing my large archive of photographs, negatives, journals, publications and audio tapes. This undertaking has been long overdue as there are timeless items that are very dear to me. It is an enormous and consuming task that I take great pleasure in focusing on and the whole process is rewarding and full of new discoveries that have been buried over decades. I also am looking forward with great anticipation to my forthcoming book “Pieces of a Man” which is due to drop in the next few weeks. This limited edition monograph features over 320 classic photographs from 1980 to 2015, including many which have never been published. With the book in production, I am now channelling my energy towards completing the script for a film project based upon the 1980s, a time before crack.

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**PUMA: You’re still loving the New York City vibe it seems. How has the city changed in your eyes over the 40 years you’ve been snapping it?**

**JS:** I still have a deep affection for my beloved city and yes, there have been a number of visible changes that have taken place since I first picked up the camera. Most outstanding, is that the demographics have changed and I no longer see people that once made up the core of my community. Due to the high cost of living and lack of affordable housing, countless people who once lived there, are now moving south in record breaking numbers. This is visibly apparent in Harlem and certain areas in northern and central Brooklyn. With all honesty, I now feel like a stranger

# in places where I once called home. So much has changed from the people to the overall physical landscape. Despite all of these transformations, New York will always be home.

**PUMA: How has New York and the street scene influenced your work?**

# JS: So much of my work was inspired by historic photographs I saw of the great Harlem Renaissance taken by legendary photographer James Van Der Zee. I admired how he incorporated the urban landscape in many of his classic images, particularly of distinctive brownstones and gated storefronts. As my love for the craft grew, I sought to shoot at locations in New York City that had rich cultural and architectural history, to serve as backdrops to many of my photographs; very much like he did it. I developed a profound fascination for decorative bricks, detailed stoops, cobblestone streets, and narrow alleyways. Unable to afford a studio, the streets became my workspace and served my every need as a photographer. Some of my favourite locations were in Harlem, Bedford Stuyvesant, SoHo, Chinatown, and the Lower East Side. All proved to be ideal locations that still have somewhat of a vintage feel.

# PUMA: What makes you decide to snap a certain subject?

# JS: My decision to make a particular photograph varies. In the majority of cases, I seek to create an image that is insightful and provocative. Traveling the streets my eyes are constantly wandering searching for that hidden gem; it could be a person, place or a mere object. What helps with this selection process is having already established themes or projects in mind; it could be a theme on fathers and sons, twins, best friends, hats, or politically inspired statements. Having a visual conception just makes the whole image making process that much easier. Of course, there are situations that you may not have foreseen which is why it is always a good practice to have your camera out and at the ready.

**PUMA: What are the most unforgettable scenes you’ve captured from back in the day?**

# JS: There are so many, but some of my most memorable photographs were taken downtown Brooklyn, around the area of the once famed Albee Square Mall. That particular section became my unofficial studio where a number of my iconic images were made, as there was always an endless stream of positive and willing participants who didn’t mind having their history documented. Some of my most iconic and treasured images were taken at two local and very popular high schools in Brooklyn; Samuel J Tilden and Erasmus. There, I met and photographed so many young and promising students during the early 1980’s; many of whom I am still very close with today.

**PUMA: For years on the Suede still lurks on the streets. Why do you think it’s become a cultural icon?**

**JS:** For many of us New Yorkers who grew up back in the 1970’s, the *Suede* or ‘*Clyde’* as we so affectionately called them, represented style and ‘flava.’ It was the basketball great Walt “Clyde” Frazier who popularized the sneaker, while playing for the New York Knicks during his ten years with the team. Frazier was considered one of the most dapper “Brothers” in the game and he was the epitome of class and style. Many of us ‘Old Heads’ who came of age back in the day faithfully hold on to the memories of our youth. Oftentimes, it is the culture of music and fashion that we tend to languish on. The *Suede* is equivalent to a powerful time, not only in fashion, but also a time when a lot of people took great pride in the way they dressed and carried themselves. So, sporting this iconic sneaker reminds the wearer, whether young or old, that he/she has an appreciation for the old school.

**PUMA: How do you feel seeing kids wearing the Suedes today?**

# JS: Seeing young people wearing *Suedes* in this day and time, immediately takes me back to my precious youth and a time when life seemed less complicated; a time when people were more engaging and communicative. So, visually it is rather stimulating to see. However, I often wonder how much of the untold history young people know about the 1970’s and 80’s, a period I like to refer to as a time before crack. In some cases, when I see young people wearing *Suedes* I stop them and reference my various retro books as informative guides to help them better understand the history and culture. To my surprise, most of them say how they wished that they had lived in the 80’s, when everyone appeared fashionable and happier.

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**PUMA: What’s your all-time favourite Suede colourway?**

# JS: I have 3 favourite colours - forest green and white, cherry red and white, and navy blue and white.

**PUMA: The Suede is celebrating its 50th year next year – what would be the best way to celebrate it?**

# JS: I think to celebrate and preserve the legacy of this iconic sneaker it would be fitting to produce a classic coffee table book. A homage to the Suede and to celebrate its 50th year history along with testimonies from fans, supported by pop up exhibitions in major cities, featuring photographs and artwork of the footwear.

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