

Record Album Art

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Advances in technology don't always enhance all aspects of a particular product. In the case of audio compact disc technology, the advance from analog to digital music reproduction in the late 80s has enhanced listening pleasure for most of us. However, the art work on the diminutive cd jewel covers cannot approach the satisfaction offered by the larger format of a good vinyl album cover from the 50s to the 80s.

Like many of the objects associated with our recent and youthful past, the collecting of vinyl records is a popular past time and hobby. Many of us collect our favorite artists or groups or style of music. Some confine their collecting to musicals, country and western or soundtracks, while others collect only 45 RPM singles, or just their dust jackets. One area that is quietly gaining in popularity is the collecting and display of Album Art. The format and size of the 33 1/3 RPM record made the sleeve and album cover an ideal vehicle for artistic expression. Collectors concentrate on their favourite artists, groups, eras or genres. Some only collect art of one style such as the psychedelic art of the 60s and 70s, while others search for examples of individual musicians or artists. Reproductions of famous art and original art created for the album are all sought after. Custom frames are available from a growing number of sources to display this easily obtainable, affordable and sometimes uniquely original art.



It is fitting that an artist who symbolizes "Pop" art be well represented in the area of album art. Andy Warhol, famous for his portraits of Marilyn Monroe and the Campbell Soup cans, was commissioned in the early 80s to do portraits of celebrities and business moguls who fancied themselves immortalized by paying Warhol large commissions to do their portraits. Even Canada's Paul Anka had Warhol do his portrait for the album "The Painter". The portrait of Diana Ross reproduced here (Silk Electric 1982) serves as a good example of the particular portrait style where he focuses on his female subjects' lips. He apparently kept a book of lip templates which he used as he saw fit in his portraits. Warhol died in 1987.

The 1983 Duran Duran album "Rio" became the number one album in the world in the year of its issue. The cover artist, Partick Nagel, was heavily influenced by Japanese woodblock printing which used strong areas of black and white. Nagel, who died in 1984 at the age of 38, was well-recognized as a graphic designer and produced many magazine covers and illustrations over the years for such clients as Playboy and Architectural Digest. The Duran Duran group perhaps fell victim to the success of the packaging, marketing and the image of



the lady on the cover, as this hype became entwined with the group's sound, and critics never forgave the band for allowing this to happen.



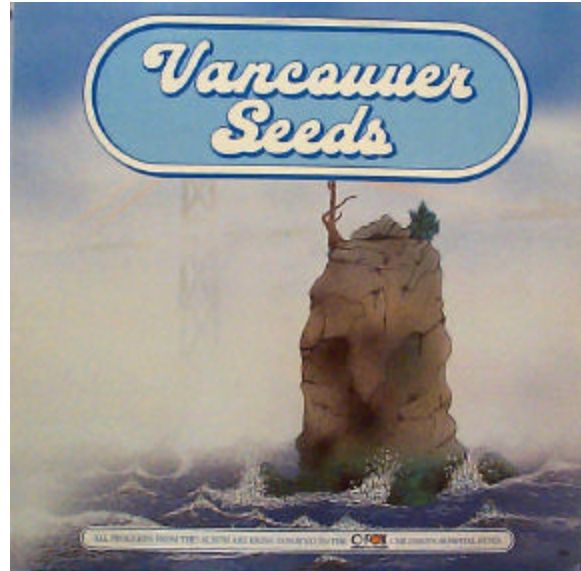
John van Hamersveld was a prolific artist on many posters, handbills and album covers. The Ventures, Blondie and Bob Dylan's "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid" were some of his album clients. Perhaps his most familiar album cover is the Grateful Dead's "Skeletons from the Closet" (1974). In this cover, Botticelli's Venus from "The Birth of Venus" is playing a record spun on the finger of the group's familiar "bon vivant" skeleton. Hamersveld's poster for 35th anniversary of the movie "The Art of Surfing" is now available in hand signed limited edition serigraphs of the original poster.



The famous lion on the cover of Santana's first album "Santana" (1969) is instantly recognizable to a whole generation. The viewer has to look very closely at this drawing to see all of the hidden images contained within it. The artist, Lee Conklin, did a famous series of similarly mysterious Fillmore concert posters. Santana appeared in Kamloops in the 70s at the KXA.

Nick Price did a Hieronymus Bosch type cover for Kate Bush on her album "Never for Ever" (1980). The symbolism of monsters and swans, cats and bats and butterflies, all emerging from under Kate's dress of clouds, cause the viewer to ponder what the music in the album must hold within it. Light and dark, good and bad, all types of emotions must flow out of Kate Bush and through her, into her songs. This is a sterling example of how the artist can portray the musician's desire to communicate with her audience.

In November of 1979, CFOX in Vancouver started a series of local musical compilations entitled "Vancouver Seeds". These featured local musicians and bands and served to provide them with much needed exposure. This venture



continues to this day and is, of course, now on cd. However the first 1979 album, featuring the Karroll Bros., Six Cylinder, the Foreman-Burns Band, the Powder Blues Band and Sparkling Apple featured the work of an unknown artist, at least to this writer. John Miller, described as an "art student", won the competition for the album art design. The cover seems to represent Siwash Rock, and has a delicacy of touch reminiscent of formal Japanese scenic painting. It would be interesting to know whether this fledgling BC artist succeeded in the field of art, and what life brought to him since 1979.



The Joe Jackson Band album "Beat Crazy" (1980), featured art work by Willi Smax. Originally a comic illustrator from Great Britain, this was the only album cover done by him. It is a good example of the type of energetic and stylistic comic art experimented with by illustrators popular in the late 70s and early 80s.

George Underwood is a prolific artist of original portraits, book covers, advertising and graphic art and record covers. He has his own studio and has frequently held shows and exhibitions of

his work. A large selection of his paintings were part of a large group exhibition in Liverpool in 1998, entitled "Glitter" on the theme of pop icons. Some of his album clients have included Tyrannosaurus Rex, David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust", David Jones and the FIXX. The FIXX album "Phantoms" was done in 1984, and he also did the cover of "Reach the Beach".

The collecting and display of album art can be both rewarding and enlightening. It is still relatively inexpensive as frequently the music inside the albums isn't as good as the cover art itself. Condition of the covers is very important, and collectors should make sure that record wear through the cover, frayed and damaged edges and punched holes are not evident. Of course, in determining the value of a highly collectable album such as the Grateful Dead compilation described, it is important that the record contained in the album is in good condition also. But the album art collector usually doesn't concern themselves with the record within, the art on the outside is what is valuable to them personally.