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Commentary Album Cover Art: A Window On Art History

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Abstract

From the late 1960s, works by Salvador Dali, René Magritte, John Curry, Edward Hopper, and many other masters from art history remarkably found their way to the album cover. This commentary is about the intersection of pop culture and the fine arts via the medium of vinyl record album covers. It explores a large and diverse body of album covers with works by artists identified and discussed in traditional art history classes. The author suggests that one of the unintended consequences of this phenomenon was that album cover art beginning in the late 1960s introduced artists and artistic themes and styles from the past to a youthful audience who probably had no previous exposure to or interest in art history. For some, this exposure to album cover art initiated an exploration of art history that led to an independent or a formal study of the topic. Today, our students can download their favorite songs without seeing **any** art – a reality the author laments.

Keywords: Art History, Pop Culture, Album Cover Art

Introduction

The expression “golden age” is a metaphor used primarily by historians to describe a period of time in the life cycle of a civilization when it experiences extraordinary creativity in areas like science and technology or literature and the arts. An art form in our popular culture that certainly experienced a golden age between 1967 and 1983 was album cover art. Applying the terms “golden age” to this time frame implies, of course, that album artwork during this golden age was very different from the artwork on album covers before 1967 and after 1983. What was it that made the interior of those parameters a golden age?

It can be argued that Andy Warhol’s image of a banana on the cover of the March 1967 album, *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, was the first to signal that album art had really taken an alternative direction. When *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* by The Beatles was released on June 1, 1967 it was clear there would be no turning back. In the same year Cream’s *Disraeli Gears* was released in November and both Jimi Hendrix’s second album *Axis: Bold As Love* and *Their Satanic Majesties Request* by The Rolling Stones were released in December. Collectively, the album cover designs on these five albums exemplify a bold departure from the mediocre album cover designs of the Fifties and early Sixties that were dominated by band photos and conventional lettering styles. The Beach Boys’ *The Beach Boys Today* and The Dave Clark Five’s *Coast to Coast* albums, for example, demonstrate the lack of energy and imagination typical in the album cover designs of 1965. By 1967 things had changed dramatically. Artists declared their independence from the ordinary and began shaping what can be called a “golden age” in the life cycle of record album art.

Needless to say, it would be difficult to find a more intense piece of artwork than Barry Godber’s, “21st-century Schizoid Man” on an album cover prior to the late Sixties. It could be said that the work by Godber (1946-1970) on King Crimson’s *In the Court of the Crimson King* is to 1969 what Edvard Munch’s (1863-1944), “The Scream,” was to 1893. If one compares this album cover with the Rolling Stones’ *Out of Our Heads* (1965) or the cover of Sonny and Cher’s first album *Look At Us* (1965) it’s obvious that what distinguished album cover design during the late Sixties from album cover design before 1967 was its diminished emphasis on photography and its celebration of artwork.

Likewise, contrast the album cover designs of the top-selling record albums of the Eighties such as Madonna's *Like A Virgin* (1984), George Michael's *Faith* (1987), or Michael Jackson's *Bad* (1987) with Rick Griffin's (1944-1991) creative artistry on The Grateful Dead's 1969 album, *Aoxomoxoa*, or Lee Conklin's pen and ink drawing on Santana's first album (1969). The evidence is indisputable; photography rather than artwork took precedent on album covers in the years that bracketed the golden age of album cover art. That is to say, during the period between 1967 and 1983 record company art directors employed artists who resorted to traditional art mediums like oil on canvas, watercolor, or even woodcuts (e.g., Jethro Tull's 1969 album *Stand Up*) and newer mediums like collage (e.g., *Sgt. Pepper's*) and airbrushing (e.g., *Aoxomoxoa*) to produce an unparalleled era of album cover design.

Commentary

An interesting development that started during the golden age of album cover art was the inclusion of paintings by great masters in art history. In fact, this trend persisted in time even as far as 2008 when the British band, Coldplay, released their *Vive La Vida* album with Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People" on the cover and Fleet Foxes released their self-titled album with Bruegel's "Blue Cloak" on the cover! This linkage between major artists and artistic trends to popular culture turned out to be a fascinating feature of album art during the last thirty years of the twentieth-century and even into the 21st-century. Works by Salvador Dali, René Magritte, John Curry, Edward Hopper, and many others remarkably found their way to the album cover. Perhaps an unintended consequence of this phenomenon was that album cover art introduced artists and artistic themes and styles from the past to a youthful audience who probably had no previous exposure to or interest in art history. During the late Sixties and Seventies the so-called "fine arts" intersected with popular culture through the medium of album covers and there is a large and diverse body of covers to illustrate this.

The earliest artwork from art history to find its way to an album cover during the golden age can be found on Santana's *Marathon* album. This 1979 album features an ancient Greek theme on the cover. Carlos Santana, who chose Greek marathon runners to symbolically convey a spiritual message, did the design and concept for the artwork. Santana's guru at the time, Sri Chinmoy (1931-2007), articulated the message on the inside record sleeve:

An athlete runs in the outer world. A seeker runs in the inner world. The marathon is the longest race in the Olympics. It is 26 miles. In the inner life, it's not 26 miles but millions of inner miles that a seeker has to travel before reaching his destination. The sooner we start the inner race, the better.

The artwork on the album shows four men running a race. It is a partial image of a terracotta vase on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC. The jar dates to about 530 BCE and served as a prize for Olympic runners in Athens. The painting of the five runners on the amphora is attributed to the Athenian painter, Euphiletos (d.500 BCE).

Several album covers associated with the golden age (and even many years later) are indebted to the Renaissance. The most widely known work by the Renaissance painter, Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516), can be found on a Deep Purple album cover, for example. His most famous work, "Garden of Delights" (1505-10), is an enormous triptych and currently displayed at The Prado in Madrid, Spain. The left and right panels each measure 86 x 38 inches and the center panel alone measures 86 x 76 inches. The right panel of Bosch's triptych, called "Hell," was mistakenly reproduced in black and white (instead of color like the original) and used for the cover of Deep Purple's 1969 album *Deep Purple*. A small photo of the band members was inserted to the right of the musical instruments in the artwork.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569) was another respected Renaissance painter from northern Europe. His works were mostly of landscapes and scenes of peasant life inspired by his homeland in Flanders (i.e., Netherlands and Belgium). A 1559 oil painting on a wood panel by Bruegel is the featured artwork on the cover of Fleet Foxes' self-titled 2008 album. Bruegel's painting is entitled, "Netherlandish Proverbs," although it is sometimes called, "The Blue Cloak." The painting itself was meant to illustrate proverbs commonly known among the people of 16th-century Flanders. The painting is owned by the Staatliche Museum in Berlin, Germany.

Another of Bruegel's paintings was used on a Black Sabbath greatest hits album in the UK in 1977. The painting is called, "The Triumph of Death" (1562). Like Bosch's "Garden of Delights" Bruegel's painting, "The Triumph of Death," is displayed at the Prado.

Bosch and Bruegel were not the only Renaissance painters whose work was featured on an album cover. Kansas' third album, *Masque* (1975), showcases a painting by the Italian Renaissance artist, Guiseppe Arcimboldo (1526-1593). The Italian artist frequently employed fish, vegetables, fruits, flowers, and other objects in creating portrait paintings that on the surface looked grotesque but were, in fact, imaginative and well constructed. A variety of sea creatures including stingrays, shrimp, eels, and coral were used in creating the painting called, "Water" (1566). It's part of a series done that year by Arcimboldo called "The Four Elements" (i.e., earth, air, fire, water). The original painting is oil on wood and is exhibited at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria.

A slightly modified version of Botticelli's (1445-1510) "Birth of Venus" (1486) appears on Judi Pulver's 1973 album, *Pulver Rising*, and is yet another example of a work by a famous painter finding its way to the record album cover during the golden age of album cover art. (The naked body of Venus in Botticelli's work is censored, however, with a Halfway Inn towel on the album cover version. Jimmy Wachtel did the album cover design. "Venus" is the most celebrated work by Botticelli and for most modern art historians, epitomizes the secular attitudes of the Renaissance. Pulver, the American singer/songwriter, went on tour with Mott the Hoople in 1974 but the album and her career fizzled. This once promising singer with a slight rasp in her voice slipped into obscurity as a performer.

On the cover of Procol Harum's seventh studio album, *Exotic Birds and Fruits* (1974), is a painting by Jakob/Jacob Bogdani/Bogdany (1658-1724). This Hungarian-born painter from the Baroque Era (i.e., primarily the 17th-century in Europe) specialized in still life compositions featuring exotic birds like macaws together with more familiar birds seen in Europe. The original oil painting on canvas featured on the album cover is called, "Exotic Birds and Fruits." It was completed in the early 18th-century while Bogdani was living and working in England. Along with the peaches and grapes, a cockatoo (left) and what looks like a scarlet macaw (right) dominate the composition.

Columbia Records released an album by The Rascals that had a painting by another well-known artist from the West on it. The album was called *Peaceful World* (1971) and Paul Gauguin's "Tahitian Landscape" (1891) was selected as the artwork for the album cover. Gauguin (1848-1903) did this work shortly after arriving in Tahiti on his first visit to the island in 1891. Needless to say, the tranquility and beauty of the Polynesian landscape greatly affected him. Famous for his brilliantly colored paintings of Tahiti and Tahitian life, Gauguin sought to depict the peaceful world of traditional Tahiti rather than the Westernized Tahiti that he openly despised. Another of Gauguin's paintings was used on the cover for a Michael Franks album called, *Objects of Desire* (1982). The painting is called "Two Tahitian Women" (1899) and it was painted during Gauguin's second stay in Tahiti (1895-1901).

Another French painter, Henri Rousseau (1844-1910), depicted jungle or tropical scenes with wild animals – especially in the years 1891 until his death. Unlike Gauguin, however, there is no evidence that Rousseau traveled outside of France. He relied on his imagination and his visits to the botanical gardens and zoological galleries at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris for the vivid imagery of lions, tigers, buffaloes, and flamingoes in exotic landscapes (Morris and Green 32-33). "A Negro Attacked By A Jaguar" (1910) was one of his last paintings and it appears on Osibisa's *Osibirock* (1974) album cover. The colorful and lush landscape is a contrast with the sheer terror of a jaguar's surprise attack on a defenseless human being. A common element in several of Rousseau's jungle scenes is a red sun – usually centered in the composition like in his painting on the *Osibirock* album cover. The album *Mysterious Planet* (1989) by the jazz group, Ailana, features another of Rousseau's paintings. The painting is called "The Dream" (1910) and was the last completed work by Rousseau. Incidentally, Henri Rousseau was essentially a self-taught painter. Of particular interest about this painter, however, is that his work was an influence on Fernand Léger who, in turn, influenced Mati Klarwein.

Mati Klarwein (1932-2002) studied with the French artist Léger (1881-1955) and the Austrian artist Ernst Fuchs (1930-2015) while all three were living in France. Klarwein liked to claim that he was the most famous unrecognized painter in the world – probably because his works were used on numerous album covers and not routinely seen in art museums.

His most recognized painting, perhaps, is “The Annunciation” (1961), that appeared on Santana’s 1970 *Abraxas* album. Like Magritte and others many of Klarwein’s paintings were completed before they appeared on album covers. For example, his “Grain of Sand” was completed five years before The Chambers Brothers used it in a slightly modified way on *New Generation*. There are other examples. Klarwein’s “New York Angel” (1965) was employed five years later on Rueben Wilson’s 1970 *Blue Mode*, “Saint John” (1962) was used on the 1971 *Hooteroll* album by Howard Wales and Jerry Garcia, and “Kiss” (1968) was used on Joe Beck’s 1975 album *Beck*. Klarwein preferred painting in oil and tempera – a technique he learned from Fuchs. Many of Klarwein’s paintings are in private collections around the world.

A pastiche of “The Death of Marat” (1793) by the French painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) is featured on Andrew Bird’s latest album called *My Finest Work Yet* (2019). It’s another example of how art history continues to be influential on album cover art even into the 21st-century! David was, perhaps, the most celebrated painter during the French Revolution and he is associated with the Neoclassical style of painting. Contemporary graphic designer, Sage LaMonica, created the pastiche.

A painting by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) called “The Seated Bather” (1906) can be found at the Detroit Institute of Arts and also on the cover of the 1989 *Knuckle Sandwich* album by The Orange Roughies. Renoir, of course, was a French painter who is usually associated with Impressionism. He was known mainly for his paintings of nude women. In their literary work, authors Dumas and Collins remark, “To the end of his life, it was by his paintings of women that he wanted to be judged. They provided him with the most potent source of inspiration and are at the center of the idyllic, harmonious worlds he created” (Dumas and Collins 9).

A diminished emphasis on photography during the golden age of album cover art does not mean an absence of it. In the case of a Bow Wow Wow album, however, the photography came with controversy much in the same way Édouard Manet’s (1832-1883) painting, “Lunch On the Grass,” (1863) generated controversy when it first appeared in public. The album cover is clearly a recreation of Manet’s painting. Annabella Lwin, the group’s original singer, posed nude for Nick Egan’s (b.1957) design on *The Last of the Mohicans* (1982). She was then 15 years old. Needless to say, her mother accused the band and its manager of exploiting a minor for sexual purposes, which, in turn, prompted a Scotland Yard inquiry. The photograph was nevertheless used on some European releases of their original 1981 *See Jungle! See Jungle!* album and then on the 1982 release of *The Last of the Mohicans* in the United States.

The French Romantic painter, Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863), was a prolific artist. He is known to have done at least 850 oil paintings – and that’s not counting his watercolors, lithographs, or drawings. One of his famous oil paintings was “Liberty Leading the People” (1830). It’s probably his best-known work and it can be found on Coldplay’s 2008 *Vive La Vida* album. The subject matter is the 1830 revolution against Charles X (r.1824-1830). The painting glorifies the ideal of freedom. For a time, the French government thought the painting was too seditious and had it removed from public viewing (Honour and Fleming 655). They could do that sort of thing because the government owned the painting. It wasn’t until 1848 that it was finally put on display. A curious feature of the Coldplay album is that they are a British band using a French painting with a Spanish language expression on the album cover!

Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) could never have imagined his painting, *The Raft of the Medusa*, being utilized on an album cover when he finished the work in 1819. He had no reason to think how his gigantic oil painting that measures 16 ft. and 1 inch by 23 ft. and 6 inches would look on an album cover that measures only 12 and 1/4 inches by 12 and 1/4 inches! The fact is, reproducing a masterpiece from the 19th-century to fit the format of an album cover in the 20th-century lessens the impact of the original that was designed for a wall. Viewing the Géricault painting at the Louvre in Paris and holding the album cover of the same work in one’s hands yields two very different experiences. This is one of the issues record company art directors had to contend with. How much impact do you lose when you reduce an original artwork to match the layout of an album cover? The answer is, of course, that you don’t know unless you’ve seen the original in person. Despite the obvious conversion issues, the painting was used on the cover for a 1985 album by the Celtic punk band, The Pogues. The album was called *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash*. On this album cover Peter Mennim (b.1955) painted the faces of the seven members in the band into the scene in place of the original faces of the dead and desperate survivors on the raft.

The English artist, Maxwell Ashby Armfield (1881-1972), commented in a February 1917 edition of *Countryside* magazine that his mural “was designed for the living room of a London mansion.” The mural painting by Armfield referred to in the magazine article appears on a 1969 Fleetwood Mac album called *Then Play On*. The painting has no official name so for linguistic convenience it is simply called “Domesticated Mural Painting” by historians interested in the work. Armfield’s mural is relatively unique. He is known primarily for his portraits and his landscape paintings in tempera or watercolor and not for his mural paintings.

Romantic artists in Europe and in the United States frequently used emotionally charged subject matter for their paintings (e.g., Delacroix’s, “Liberty Leading the People”). “The Tragic Prelude” (1937-41) by the American painter, John Steuart Curry (1897-1946), presents a scene that tends to elicit intense feelings in the viewer and in some ways resembles Delacroix’s painting. The image of a fiery John Brown, his outstretched arms with a Bible in one hand and a “Beechler’s bible” (i.e., rifle) in the other, is not unlike Liberty herself looking over her shoulder as if rallying her followers. As a principal artist associated with the Regionalist group of American painters, Curry’s paintings primarily portray life in the rural Midwest. He frequently romanticized the lives of pioneers in Kansas, especially their attempts to cope with the violent forces of nature as well as with the volatile politics of slavery in his home state during its “prelude” to statehood. The band, Kansas, chose a section of Curry’s “The Tragic Prelude” for the cover of their 1974 debut album. The artwork on this cover is part of a mural Curry painted on the interior walls of the Kansas State Capitol in Topeka. One wall in the building depicts the abolitionist, John Brown. Kansas featured this image on the front of their album cover and proclaimed on the back “We are Kansas! Kansas is a band!”

Another Regionalist painter was Edward Hopper (1882-1967) and one of his most celebrated paintings, “The Nighthawks” (1942), appeared on The Nighthawks’ *Open All Night* album in 1976. Hopper was a master at conveying melancholy moods through his artwork and it’s easy to image why his painting was chosen for the album cover. His urban landscape with its empty streets and lonely people sitting at the restaurant counter is visually compatible with some of the blues band’s music.

Although slightly outside the chronological framework for the golden age of album cover art (1967-1983) Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers released an album in 1985 called, *Southern Accents*. On the cover is a painting by the famous American painter, Winslow Homer (1836-1910). Landscape painting was the genre of choice for many Romantic painters in both Europe and the United States. Although Homer is mostly remembered for his marine scenes, he also painted quite a few landscape scenes that reflected a time when life was simple and rural. There is an element of nostalgia in his “Veteran in A New Field.” The work was done in 1865. It depicts a Union veteran of the Civil War harvesting grain and it was painted just after the Battle of Appomattox (April 9, 1865) – one of the last battles of the war.

One of the most recognizable names in American popular art is Norman Rockwell (1894-1978). During his distinguished career Rockwell had painted portraits of celebrities and illustrated books and numerous covers for over thirty magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Life*. He enjoyed great success as a commercial artist. He was commissioned to do advertisements or designs for over one hundred fifty companies – one of them being Columbia Records. In 1968, Rockwell painted a portrait of Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper that was used on the cover for *The Live Adventures of Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper* album. The original is a 14” x 14” oil painting on canvas. It’s worth noting that Rockwell’s works appear on other covers. One of them was for Mahalia Jackson’s *I Believe* (1960) album – another Columbia Records release. Then, twenty-one years later, a Rockwell painting entitled, “Girl At the Mirror” (1954) was utilized on the cover for a Canadian rock band called, Prism. The Rockwell painting appears on Prism’s fifth album called *Small Change* (1981). This album was released on the Capitol label. This particular Rockwell painting also graced the March 6, 1954 cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Americans Hopper, Rockwell, and Homer all produced artworks that evoked somber moods and a kind of wistfulness typically associated with Romanticism. The painting on the cover of *It’s A Beautiful Day* (1968) by It’s A Beautiful Day, for example, is infused with the characteristics of the Romantic world-view. The artwork on *It’s A Beautiful Day* was utilized by Globe Propaganda (i.e., a San Francisco-based design company created by George Hunter) and represents an obvious compliment to Charles Courtney Curran’s (1861-1942) painting, “Woman On Top of A Mountain” (1912). Many of Curran’s most famous paintings were of young women enjoying a leisurely lifestyle or the views and breezes from atop the Shawangunk Mountains near his summer home in Cragmoor, NY.

Surrealism was one of those artistic trends in Western civilization that exerted a powerful influence on record album art and design during the late Sixties and through the Seventies. For example, “Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man” (1943) by Salvador Dali (1904-1989) was used on The James Gang’s 1975 *Newborn* album. (Interestingly, Salvador Dali also did a much earlier album cover artwork for the comedian, bandleader, and actor Jackie Gleason. The album is called *Lonesome Echo* (1955). On the back cover there is a photo of Gleason and Dali shaking hands and a statement by Dali describing the artwork. In 1969, works by René Magritte (1898-1967) appeared on two album covers. The Jeff Beck Group’s *Beck-Ola* featured a work by Magritte entitled “La Chambre d’Ecoute” (1958) and The Rascals *See* album featured a work called “La Grande Famille” (1963). *Visions* (1983) by Gladys Knight & The Pips featured a Magritte painting called “Les Memoires d’un Saint” (1960) and *The Heat’s On* (1981) album by R.A.F. featured a Magritte painting called, “Le Principe du Plaisir” (1937). In addition to these four original works, various themes created by Magritte can also be found on a few album covers. The artists Roland Young (b.1938) and Chuck Beeson must have had Magritte’s “Le Blanc-seing” (1965) in mind when they designed the cover for the Styx 1977 album *The Grand Illusion*.

The sophisticated visual illusions of the Dutch graphic artist, Maurits C. Escher (1898-1972) were popular during the golden age of album art. For example, posters of his mathematically inspired lithograph prints were mass-produced using florescent colors on black backgrounds and enjoyed in blacklight (i.e., ultraviolet light) environments. Many of Escher’s works were admired as “psychedelic” art. One of his lithographs, “Reptiles” (1943) was chosen for the cover of a 1970 (U.S. release) *Mott the Hoople* (self-titled) album. Another of his prints, “Three Worlds (1955),” was also featured on Beaver and Krause’s 1970 album, *In A Wild Sanctuary*.

Andy Warhol (1928-1987) is a household name in the world of pop art. He’s responsible for a number of iconic images (e.g., Campbell’s Soup, Marilyn Monroe) as well as an abundant number of album cover designs. In fact, his artwork on album covers spans nearly four decades (1949-1987)! Many of them were produced within the chronological framework of the golden age. In addition to his famous banana on the cover of *The Velvet Underground & Nico* album, Warhol’s artwork appears on the covers of albums by The Rolling Stones, Aretha Franklin, and many others. His artwork on Billy Squier’s *Emotions In Motion* (1982) and on Diana Ross’ *Silk Electric* (1982) are just two of many album cover designs he created.

The last studio album by the British band, Badfinger, was released in 1981. The album was titled, *Say No More*, and the cover art features a work by another famous pop artist: Peter Max (b.1937). Actually, the album cover has two works by Max. The front cover artwork is an original by Max called “The Poet ” (1976) and the back cover is an original called “Infinity Balancer” (1971). Both works are lithographs produced on paper. (NOTE: With regard to “The Poet” it should be noted that Peter Max produced a different print with the same title in 1978. Art historians refer to the latter as ‘The Poet II’ and this print is a serigraph rather than a lithograph). A unique feature of these two original works on the Badfinger album cover by Max is that they were small. “The Poet” measured 5½ x 5¼ inches and the “Infinity Balancer” measured 7 x 7 inches. This deviates from the norm. Most original artworks employed for album covers were larger than the approximately 12¼ x 12¼ inch required dimensions of a record album cover. In order for the record company art department to utilize Max’s original artwork on the two sides of the album cover the images had to be enlarged rather than reduced. When this is done there is always a worry that the enlargement may look diluted compared to the resolution of the original. In the case of the Max works on the Badfinger album cover, however, the resolution loss is negligible. The colors are still quite brilliant. It seems like the Max prints were ready-made for the Badfinger cover! Years later, Peter Max did the album cover artwork for Aretha Franklin’s *Through the Storm* (1989) and the Yes album, *Talk* (1994).

The trend of using masterpieces by well-known artists on album covers was not confined to just European or American artists. There is more than one album cover with a tribute to ukiyo-e artist, Hokusai (1760-1849) and his most famous work called, “Mt. Fuji Through the Great Waves Off the Coast of Kanagawa” from the series “The 36 Views of Mt. Fuji” (1830). Jade Warrior’s 1975 *Waves* album (1975) superimposes Hokusai’s “Great Wave” on a rather modern looking background. (A similar background was used on their previous album *Floating World*). Jeff Lancaster’s illustration on *Jazz: The 60s Volumes I and II* (1978) is another example of an album cover artist paying homage to Hokusai’s “Great Wave” print. Curiously, other albums by musicians such as Buddy Rich, Les McCann, Joe Pass, Roger Kellaway, and Gerald Wilson on the Pacific Jazz label all featured the exact same illustration by Lancaster.

This ukiyo-e influenced album cover art even extended beyond the golden age and into the 1990s. An album that came out in 1996 featured an ukiyo-e print from Hiroshige's "53 Stations of the Tokaido" (1834). The album is called *Pinkerton* and the band is Weezer. On the cover of the album is Station #16 called "Kanbara." It's one of the masterpieces from Hiroshige's series. The print shows a mountain village during the night and this village is obviously the victim of heavy snowfall. You see three people stoically struggling to walk through the deep snowdrifts. Of note also is the band's title for the album. The name "pinkerton" is a reference to one of the characters in Puccini's opera "Madam Butterfly" (1904). In the opera, B.F. Pinkerton was a United States Navy lieutenant stationed in Japan during the Meiji Period (1868-1912) in Japanese history.

The subject matter in numerous paintings by the Mexican artist, Jesús Helguera (1910-1971) is Aztec mythology. Aztec warriors, kings, and women dominate much of his work. One of his paintings was reproduced on the album cover for a San Francisco band called, *Malo*. Their self-titled first album was released in 1972. The painting shows the Aztec warrior, Popocatepetl, holding Princess Iztaccihuatl in his arms. The romantic characters in the painting are also the names of two volcanoes near Mexico City.

Helguera was a popular painter and a lot of his work was reproduced on calendars and even cigar boxes. Both Mexicans and Mexican Americans adored his work. His artwork defied the stereotypical portrayals of Mexicans and Mexican culture during the time - especially in the United States. In some ways, Helguera was to Mexico what Norman Rockwell was to the United States. Both were loved by the public but considered illustrators and not taken seriously as artists until after their deaths.

As one can see there are numerous famous artworks from the past that found their way to pop culture via the album cover. Works by Dali, Magritte, Bosch, Arcimboldo, Escher, Gauguin, Rousseau, Klarwein, Renoir, Manet, Delacroix, Euphiletos, Curry, Hopper, Homer, Rockwell, Curran, Hiroshige, Helguera, Warhol, and others can all be found on an album cover. Collectively, these artists represent movements such as Romanticism, Surrealism, Primitivism, French Impressionism, Regionalism, Pop Art, and even the ukiyo-e tradition in Japan! The intersecting of pop culture and art history during the golden age of album cover art forces us to ask why. More precisely, why did record company art directors (and sometimes the musicians themselves) choose to have a painting from art history on the album cover instead of hiring an artist to do a new work? I suspect in many cases it was simply a corporate decision that didn't have much to do with a sincere interest in art history. The intention of record companies was always to sell records and make money. With this motivation in mind, the record companies - in coordination with their art directors - might have found it cheaper to pay a one-time copyright permissions fee to a museum, an estate, or directly to an established artist if he/she were still living than it was to pay a new artist to create a new artwork for a cover. Perhaps the artwork was in the public domain in the first place and no fee was required to use the image on an album cover. Whatever the case may be, this strategy meant that the process of coordinating all the pieces that go into generating artwork for an album cover was fast and the album could be released quickly. There was little wait time for the artwork since it was already finished.

For some record companies there may have been another reason, too. Some of the well-known artists featured on album covers, especially during the golden age, died within that time period and it may have been a way for enlightened art directors and company executives to honor their legacies. For example, both Magritte and Hopper died in 1967. Helguera died in 1971, Escher died in 1972, and Rockwell died in 1978. It should be noted, however, that in the cases of Escher and Rockwell, their art on album covers appeared before their deaths. Still, their art on the covers pays tribute to their careers.

Thirdly, the utilization of paintings by the great masters in art history on album covers was in many ways a by-product of what scholars refer to as postmodernism. During the cultural haze of the late Sixties and Seventies the lines between the fine arts and popular arts became increasingly blurred. The progressive mindset of record company art directors (and to an extent the musicians themselves) paid little attention to traditional lettering styles and predictable portrait photography. Artistic standards were being challenged and barriers between disciplines were breaking down. Putting "highbrow art" on album covers was just another way to go against established rules.

Conclusion

The cover art on record albums – especially during its golden age - provided us with more than just a listening experience; they were visual experiences, as well. Art and music were taken together like a pill that increased the efficacy of both. The music was enriched by the art and the art was enhanced by the music. With a few exceptions, by the early Eighties that kind of harmonious relationship was already disappearing and the end of the golden age was in sight. In the years following the commercial introduction of the compact disc in 1982 the vinyl record as a means to store, play music, and display artwork was quickly replaced first by the CD and then by music services such as iTunes.

Today, we can conveniently download our favorite songs from the golden age - or any timeframe for that matter - without seeing **any** art. It seems a remarkable venue for initiating an exploration of art history has been abandoned in favor of expediency. For me, the artwork has always been as equally important as the music. Album cover artwork introduced me to Magritte and Escher and many other artists. I made a career out of teaching humanities courses that included art history and was often able to use the record album as a “hook” in the classroom to generate interest in art history among my students. I feel fortunate to have been born at a time when record albums were readily available in my culture. Maybe I’ll see you at the used record store! I have a lecture to prepare for.

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