



paper

JULY 2001 Volume 18 No. 2.



TWELVE INCHES OF LOVE

ALBUM ART GETS ITS DUE

BY JONATHAN DURBIN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARC BERENSON

PEOPLE COLLECT VINYL FOR A REASON. SURE, there are purists who'll point to the analog skips and pops that make each listen unique, and there are people who rant, nearly two decades after the introduction of the compact disc, about the golden age of pop music—a simpler time when albums had one groove and you dug it. But there are others still who own the slabs of wax simply because the packages *look* good—fold-out covers allowed artists and graphic designers the space to push their creativity to the stratosphere. Those are the people “The LP Show,” now at New York’s Exit Art, aims to please.

Featuring some 2,500 album sleeves, the exhibit documents the history and ephemera of album design with a sprawling collection from over 50 different contributors, many of whom are musicians or DJs themselves, cataloging the obvious (death metal, children’s records) and the obscure (vintage foreign-language instruction and Christian ventriloquist LPs). There are surf LPs and Hawaiian music LPs, Muzak LPs and new wave synth LPs, and LPs with titles like *Deep Throat* and *Music to Break Your Lease By*. They’re all chosen for their graphic design rather than their musical value.



“The idea was to visualize the music and to whet the appetite of the listener,” says show contributor Alex Steinweiss, the 84-year-old designer who’s credited with the invention of album art during his tenure at Columbia Records in the 1930s and ‘40s. “It seems to have worked.”

In addition to featured collectors—like Steinweiss, Jim Thirlwell (aka Foetus), Man’s Ruin Records label head Frank Kozik, Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore, and avant-jazz experimentalist John Zorn—artist Christian Marclay and DJ Spooky will create individual installations. A summer DJ series is planned to bring the wall-mounted wax to life during gallery evenings fit for tourists and purists alike.

“The thing about album covers is that you’ve got all this great art being done in relative anonymity,” says Carlo McCormick, the show’s chief curator and a *PAPER* senior editor. “All these records would have been relegated to dust bins if not for the collectors. The show’s about them and their passion.”

“The LP Show” at Exit Art, 548 Broadway between Prince and Spring Sts., (212) 966-7745. June 9–Aug. 18., Tues.–Fri., 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; Sat., 11 a.m.–6 p.m. \$2 suggested donation. ★