The album cover dates from 1959, when Columbia Records art director Alex Steinweiss decided his label’s offerings might find a wider audience with some added visual appeal. Since the very first Steinweiss design, an album of showtunes by Rogers and Hart, album covers have represented the apogee and nadir of graphic design, and have touched all points in between.

Last weekend we asked our readers to select the best album covers of all time. In the age of the digital download, the album cover is sadly a lost art—which probably explains why 90 percent of the albums that readers selected come from the 1960s and the 1970s. Here are the Top 5:

1. **The Beatles**
   - Designer: Peter Blake
   - Total reader votes: 1,202
   - The cover was originally going to show the Beatles playing in a park. That slowly evolved into the final concept, where they stand amidst cardboard cutouts of their heroes. The band originally planned on including Leo Gorcey, Gandhi, Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler. Common sense kicked Hitler off the cover, the still-lingering bitterness of John Lennon’s “bigger than Jesus” comment kicked Jesus off the cover and Gandhi got the boot over concerns that India wouldn’t print the album. Actor Gorcey requested $400 for his likeness, a decision he probably lived to regret.

2. **Pink Floyd**
   - *Dark Side Of The Moon* (1973, Harvest records)
   - Designer: Hipgnosis
   - Total reader votes: 933
   - Hipgnosis had designed several of Pink Floyd’s previous albums, with controversial results: the band’s record company had reacted with confusion when faced with the collective’s non-traditional designs that omitted words. Their initial inspiration for Dark Side was a photo of a prism on top of some sheet music. It was black and white, but a color beam was going through it. Hipgnosis presented the prism design along with some other ideas to the band (including a design that featured the Marvel Comics hero the Silver Surfer).

3. **Nirvana**
   - *Nevermind* (1991, Geffen records)
   - Designer: Robert Fisher
   - Total reader votes: 755
   - Spencer Elden, the naked baby on the cover, said he feels weird about his bizarre role in history. “It’s kind of creepy that many people have seen me naked,” he said. But what does this cover mean? “Kurt was in intellectual and deep-thinking about his work,” says Fisher. “I must assume that the naked baby symbolized his own innocence, the water represented an alien environment, and the hook and dollar bill his creative life entering into the corporate world of rock music.”

4. **The Beatles**
   - *Abbey Road* (1969, Apple Records)
   - Designer: John Kosh
   - Total reader votes: 729
   - Beatles nuts who believed that Paul McCartney died around 1967 and was replaced by a dopplegänger found a lot to examine on this cover. They saw the picture as a funeral procession: John as the preacher, Ringo as the mourner, George as the gravedigger and Paul as the corpse. Iain Macmillan shot the cover on August 8th, 1969, outside of Abbey Road studios. The shoot involved just six frames and 10 minutes of work. Tourists flock to the spot, and it’s been parodied countless times—sometimes by members of the Beatles themselves.

5. **The Clash**
   - *London Calling* (1979, CBS Records)
   - Designer: Ray Lowry
   - Total reader votes: 695
   - Pennie Smith was snapping photos of the Clash at New York’s Palladium when she captured one of the most iconic images in rock history. Paul Simonon was annoyed by the relatively quiet audience, so he began smashing his bass guitar against the floor. Clash singer Joe Strummer loved the photo, but Smith tried to convince him it was too out of focus for the cover. The pink and green lettering of the design was an intentional echo of Elvis Presley’s 1956 debut album.

---

**LONDON CALLING: THE LONDON ISSUE**

Keep It Simple and Carry On: 5 British masters of minimalism

Giacometti at the Tate: After 50 years, the prodigal son returns

Going Underground: Harry Beck and the iconic Tube map

Peter Saville • Abram Games • Olly Moss

APRIL 2018
EDGE OF MADNESS
The Geniuses and Torment of Alberto Giacometti

In 1957, the writer Jean Genet described the studio of his friend Alberto Giacometti. It was “a milky swamp, a seething dump, a genuine ditch”. There was plaster all over the floor and all over the face, hair and clothes of the sculptor. There were scraps of paper and lumps of paint on every available surface. And yet, “In and behold the prodigious, magical powers of fermentation” – as if by magic, art grew from the rubbish; the plaster worked away at it with his knife, often on the floor; large silent walks with Samuel Beckett, and became a regular vision outside the cinema after the war. And once again be exhibited as they were at Picasso’s studio.

Even at his most successful, this was not so much an artistic career as it was an endless, inevitably failed attempt to capture life that hovered on the verge of obsessive madness. “Every trial. Every failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better,” wrote Beckett, perhaps the friend whose vision of the woman in his paintings.

Now he was able to enlarge his figures, but he found that as they became taller they lost heft, becoming inevitably more slender. It was thanks to these elongated, pointy figures with heavy feet that he swiftly rose to fame. He had some money now, though he insisted on living in his studio, refusing to indulge Annette in her desire for an ordinary home. He became acquainted with many of Paris’s most exciting writers and artists. He drank in cafes with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, went for late night, largely silent walks with Samuel Beckett, and became a regular visitor rather critical – visitor at Picasso’s studio.

During the second world war, Giacometti returned to Switzerland. There he met Annette Arm, the ingenious and adventuring girl who seems to have decided almost immediately that she would share his life, and waited patiently for him to agree. Living in a hotel with her in Geneva, he sculpted smaller and smaller figures, claiming that they shrank against his will. Many were only the size of a finger.

During the second world war, Giacometti returned to Switzerland. There he met Annette Arm, the ingenious and adventuring girl who seems to have decided almost immediately that she would share his life, and waited patiently for him to agree. Living in a hotel with her in Geneva, he sculpted smaller and smaller figures, claiming that they shrank against his will. Many were only the size of a finger.

As he worked away in a basement, perfecting the works that he was never quite prepared to declare finished. He will be his first major exhibition in London for a decade.

Giacometti was born in a remote Swiss valley in 1901, the son of a successful, conventionally realistic Swiss painter. He made his first sculpture of his brother Diego at the age of 13, and swiftly dedicated himself to art. In 1922 he moved to Paris, where he discovered surrealism, becoming a friend of André Breton. He stopped modelling from life and devoted himself to dreamlike visions, claiming in 1933 that for some years he had “only realized sculptures which have presented themselves to my mind in a finished state”.

During the second world war, Giacometti returned to Switzerland. There he met Annette Arm, the ingenious and adventuring girl who seems to have decided almost immediately that she would share his life, and waited patiently for him to agree. Living in a hotel with her in Geneva, he sculpted smaller and smaller figures, claiming that they shrank against his will. Many were only the size of a finger.

Now he was able to enlarge his figures, but he found that as they became taller they lost heft, becoming inevitably more slender. It was thanks to these elongated, pointy figures with heavy feet that he swiftly rose to fame. He had some money now, though he insisted on living in his studio, refusing to indulge Annette in her desire for an ordinary home. He became acquainted with many of Paris’s most exciting writers and artists. He drank in cafes with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, went for late night, largely silent walks with Samuel Beckett, and became a regular visitor rather critical – visitor at Picasso’s studio.

During the second world war, Giacometti returned to Switzerland. There he met Annette Arm, the ingenious and adventuring girl who seems to have decided almost immediately that she would share his life, and waited patiently for him to agree. Living in a hotel with her in Geneva, he sculpted smaller and smaller figures, claiming that they shrank against his will. Many were only the size of a finger.

During the second world war, Giacometti returned to Switzerland. There he met Annette Arm, the ingenious and adventuring girl who seems to have decided almost immediately that she would share his life, and waited patiently for him to agree. Living in a hotel with her in Geneva, he sculpted smaller and smaller figures, claiming that they shrank against his will. Many were only the size of a finger.

Now he was able to enlarge his figures, but he found that as they became taller they lost heft, becoming inevitably more slender. It was thanks to these elongated, pointy figures with heavy feet that he swiftly rose to fame. He had some money now, though he insisted on living in his studio, refusing to indulge Annette in her desire for an ordinary home. He became acquainted with many of Paris’s most exciting writers and artists. He drank in cafes with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, went for late night, largely silent walks with Samuel Beckett, and became a regular visitor rather critical – visitor at Picasso’s studio.

During the second world war, Giacometti returned to Switzerland. There he met Annette Arm, the ingenious and adventuring girl who seems to have decided almost immediately that she would share his life, and waited patiently for him to agree. Living in a hotel with her in Geneva, he sculpted smaller and smaller figures, claiming that they shrank against his will. Many were only the size of a finger.

Now he was able to enlarge his figures, but he found that as they became taller they lost heft, becoming inevitably more slender. It was thanks to these elongated, pointy figures with heavy feet that he swiftly rose to fame. He had some money now, though he insisted on living in his studio, refusing to indulge Annette in her desire for an ordinary home. He became acquainted with many of Paris’s most exciting writers and artists. He drank in cafes with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, went for late night, largely silent walks with Samuel Beckett, and became a regular visitor rather critical – visitor at Picasso’s studio.

During the second world war, Giacometti returned to Switzerland. There he met Annette Arm, the ingenious and adventuring girl who seems to have decided almost immediately that she would share his life, and waited patiently for him to agree. Living in a hotel with her in Geneva, he sculpted smaller and smaller figures, claiming that they shrank against his will. Many were only the size of a finger.