

S. Neil Fujita

Records: **E15, E16, E17, E18**

Sadamitsu “S. Neil” Fujita (1921–2010) was born in Hawaii of Japanese parents. In 1942, shortly after enrolling in Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts), he was forced to relocate to a internment camp after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. During his incarceration, he worked as art director for the camp’s newspaper, the Heart Mountain Sentinel. A year later he enlisted in the United States Army, and by 1949 had joined influential advertising agency N. W. Ayer in Philadelphia. When speaking of his influences during these formative years, Fujita reminisced, “When I was going to art school I liked the work of Paul Rand, but also Tomayo, Klee, Picasso, Braque.” His personal artwork took cues from these Modernist masters, typically in the form of bright, bold and colorful abstraction.

In 1954, Fujita started work as Director of Design at Columbia Records, on request of art director William Golden, despite having no experience in the music industry. This quickly changed, as Fujita immediately became responsible for art directing in excess of 800 pieces per year. For some of these sleeves, Fujita hired friends — including prominent artists Andy Warhol and Ben Shahn — to provide illustrations. For others, Fujita himself would act as photographer.

Fujita most flourished as an artist when working with Jazz records. In a 2010 interview, he explained “Jazz called for abstraction, a certain kind of stylization...” And the abstractions he painted were typically influenced to some extent by the music they were meant to promote. “Before I did Dave Brubeck’s ‘Take Five,’” explained Fujita, “somebody said that the group was returning from a tour of Asia. I had recently returned from the service with armed forces intelligence in the Western Pacific and I had been through East Asia, the Philippines and Calcutta, so I borrowed some colors and shapes that seemed to go with the mood.” Of these paintings, Fujita’s contemporary Milton Glaser summarized “It was a kind of synthesis of Bauhaus principles and Japanese sensibility.”

Curated by Scott Lindberg

Scott Lindberg is a freelance graphic designer and design historian based in Edmonds, WA. From 2011 to 2018 he ran New Documents, a shop specializing in important 20th century graphic design objects. During this time he partnered with seminal American designer and illustrator Seymour Chwast to sell pieces from the Push Pin Group archives. Scott’s personal design collection has been featured in magazines, books and exhibitions, both nationally and worldwide.

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Jon Henry

Records: **E19, E20**

The career of Philadelphia native Jon Henry (1916–1990) was a balancing of design and fine art, equally creating design for business and showing fine art in galleries. Henry was educated at the Philadelphia College of Industrial Arts and The New School in New York, before spending 1949–50 studying in the studio of Abstract Expressionist painter Robert Motherwell. As a fine artist, Henry worked primarily as a painter and collagist, showing at New York’s Camino Gallery in 1959 and continuing to exhibit his artwork across the United States for the next three decades.

Henry’s design work was always closely tied to the music industry. As Art Director for Grey Advertising he was responsible for the promotion of many high profile Jazz artists, including Benny Goodman, Bud Powell, Stan Getz, and others. As an album cover designer, Henry repurposed his collage-based approach to fine art, frequently employing fragmented imagery and photographic manipulation in his jacket designs. The influence of Robert Motherwell is also evident in his design work, particularly the two examples included in this exhibition.

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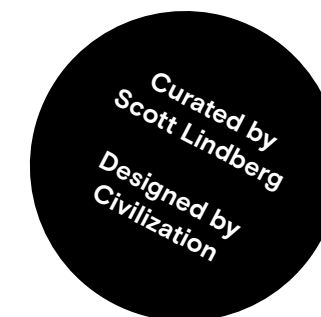
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100 Record Covers



Sam Suliman

Records: **A1, A2, A3, A5, A6**

Designer and illustrator Sam Suliman’s work is instantly recognizable by his simplified and abstracted representational shapes and bright colors. Primarily working for the recording industry, Suliman designed record sleeve art for both high production and budget labels through the 1950s and 60s, including Coronet, Baronet, Celebrity, Directional Sound, Parade, Silver Seal, Spin-o-rama, and Mercury Records.

Suliman created some of his most strikingly geometric abstract work as production director for Directional Sound, taking inspiration from both the simplified forms of the instruments used in the recordings as well as the syncopated rhythms of the music itself. These experimental percussion-heavy recordings, as well as the gatefold sleeves that housed them, were a direct response to — and highly influenced by — the series of percussion records being published by Command Records during the same time period.

Erik Nitsche

Records: **A7, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17, A18**

Born to arts-minded parents amid the rampant Modernism of early 20th century Switzerland, Erik Nitsche (1908–1998) was exposed to design from an early age. The eventual development of his crisp layouts, clean typography, and geometric compositions were certainly influenced by — if not directly inspired from — the presence of family friends including Bauhaus instructor Paul Klee, as well as the rationalist aesthetic starting to develop across Europe.

In 1950, just prior to his work as art director for General Dynamics, Nitsche was contracted by Decca Records to design covers for its “Gold Label” series, which would exceed 220 titles by 1953. This series of record art would include many of the same elements he’d later employ in those iconic General Dynamics posters and reports. *Gebrauchsgraphik* Number 11 (1951) sums up this body of work by lauding that it “... requires a high degree of versatility and ingenuity to find new and optically impressive solutions for these continually varying themes. Without exaggeration we may say that Erik Nitsche has solved his task splendidly.”

Emmett McBain

Records: **A19, A20**

Prominent African-American designer and advertising executive Emmett McBain (1935–2012) was born in Chicago, and began taking classes at the Art Institute of Chicago at the surprising age of 12. McBain began his design career in 1956 with Vince Cullers Advertising, the first African American-owned advertising agency in the United States. After a year, he joined Playboy Records as assistant art director, where he was quickly promoted up the ranks.

McBain went on to found McBain Associates in 1959, where he continued to work with music industry clients, most notably the Mercury Record Corporation. With approximately 75 covers to his credit by age 24, McBain was already a significant voice in recording industry graphics. Most of his work consisted of dynamic and colorful typographic arrangements, but in 1960 McBain produced a series of formalist abstract covers for Ultra Audio to promote wide range stereo to the consumer market, presumably in response to the success Command Records was seeing from its similar line of offerings.

Saul Bass

Records: **B1, B2**

While most of us remember Saul Bass as the designer behind the seminal Alfred Hitchcock film titles and posters of the 1950s and 60s, his importance to the design industry surpasses the medium of film. He was also responsible for the classic identity designs of Wesson, Minolta, United Airlines, and AT&T among others. Bass studied under Gyorgy Kepes at Brooklyn College, and began his career in the print industry making posters for film ads. After his 1954 collaboration with Otto Preminger to design the film poster for Carmen Jones, however, Bass’s career skyrocketed into the world of movie title sequence design where he continued to break ground over the course of five decades.

Of the few dozen record sleeves designed by Saul Bass, most were soundtrack LPs which simply repurposed his iconic title sequence, advertisement, and poster art. Two rhythmic geometric examples, included in this exhibition, stand out in particular as purely formal compositions.

Frank Parisi

Records: **B3, B4, B5, B6**

Frank Parisi designed dozens of LP sleeves for Avon & Urania Records in the 1960s. His sharply geometric illustration style for this series is predominantly representational in nature. A handful of examples, however, are purely formal arrangements, presumably in response to the music itself.

A. F. Arnold

Records: **B7, B8, B9, B10, B11, B12, B13, B14, B15, B16, B17, B18**

A.F. Arnold (1921-2012) was a prominent member of the mid-twentieth century design community, appearing in Graphis, IDEA, and many other high profile design publications through the 1950s and 60s. His work was featured in Ladislav Sutnar’s seminal *Design For Point of Sale*, a 1952 examination of store display design, as well as a 1949 exhibition of poster design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, titled *Poster Design: New Posters From 16 Countries*.

Arnold’s work for the music industry blossomed in 1953, when Epic Records hired him to produce artwork for their line of jazz and classical offerings. This body of work — consisting of approximately 50 pieces — relied heavily on abstraction, both illustrated and through manipulated photography.

Will Dressler

Records: **B19, B20**

Will Dressler was active in the early 1960s designing album art for Stereo-Fidelity and Somerset Records. The two pieces Dressler designed for Somerset were highly influenced by Josef Albers’ work for Command Records, with simple, repeating geometric forms, approximating the rhythm and syncopation of the music contained on the albums.

Gerry Olin

Records: **C1**

During the 1960s, Gerry Olin designed a handful of LP sleeves for labels including Command, Capitol, Westminster, 20th Century Fox, and Tetragrammaton Records. While virtually all the record sleeves we know she designed are figural in some respect, her earliest known work was also her most abstract. Published in 1960 by Command Records under the art direction of Charles E. Murphy, her cover for *Pertinent Percussion Cha Cha’s* is formed from irregular circles and parallelograms in pink, purple, and gold arranged into abstract sequences representing dancing couples. Subsequent sleeves by Olin tended to be more traditionally illustrated or photography-based.

M. Peter Piening

Records: **C2, C3, C4**

Bauhaus-educated designer M. Peter Piening (1908-1977) studied under Laszlo Moholy-Nagy before eventually being awarded his PhD from the University of Berlin in 1931. Piening fled Europe for the United States in 1934, where he worked as Art Director for N. W. Ayer and J. Walter Thompson as well as *Fortune* magazine (1942-46), and was on the editorial staff of Life magazine. His distinct graphic style shows a decidedly Bauhaus influence, with a tendency towards geometric experimentation.

This style carried through into his work for the American Recording Society. ARS was founded in 1951 as the first non-profit subscription music service in the United States, launched by a grant from Columbia University’s Alice M. Ditson Fund. Despite an emphasis on contemporary American composers, the company’s early jacket artwork tended to be anything but contemporary. Piening came on shortly after the company was founded to redesign the existing jackets and add further titles to the line, turning previously simplistic sleeve art into vibrant and dynamic Cubist abstractions, dividing space and image into flat fields of primary color.

Rudolph de Harak

Records: **C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C13, C14, C15, C16**

As a young designer in the 1940s, Rudolph de Harak (1924-2002) was inspired, along with Alvin Lustig, Saul Bass, and others, to form the Los Angeles Society for Contemporary Designers with a goal to shift Los Angeles out of the shadows of New York and other prominent East Coast design centers.

De Harak

Freelancing in 1950 on a contract with Monogram Art Studios, Rudolph de Harak published his first record sleeve. These early pieces followed were softly Modernist, with ethereal cloud-like forms and hand-drawn line work. By 1961, however, his approach became formalist, as is evidenced by the approximately 50 hard edge geometric and abstract expressionist record sleeves he designed for Westminster Records. In embracing classical Modernist tenets, he utilized his visuals in an attempt to unearth the “hidden order” within the project.

Alvin Lustig

Records: **C17, C18, C19, C20**

Alvin Lustig (1915-1955) was a design generalist who believed in the “power of design when applied to all aspects of life.” His work spans many genres of design — including industrial, graphic, and interiors — but he is perhaps most well known for his New Classics series of book jackets for New Directions.

Lustig

Lustig’s record sleeves employed may of the same devices as his book cover design: crisply Modernist type playing a supporting role to an expressive illustration that reinterprets the musician or composer’s intent. More interested in evoking a “feeling” than directly communicating the content beneath the covers, the dozen or so sleeves designed by Lustig distill the music down to its visual equivalent.

Brownjohn, Chermayeff & Geismar

Records: **D1, D2**

In 1956, Robert Brownjohn joined Ivan Chermayeff and Tom Geismar to form the design firm of Brownjohn, Chermayeff & Geismar. Brownjohn was a product of the Institute of Design in Chicago, formerly known as the New Bauhaus, while Chermayeff and Geismar both hailed from Yale. The firm quickly became known for its print work and typographic experimentation.

Brownjohn

Record sleeves produced by these three designers tend to fall fairly neatly into three primary categories. Their typographic covers include Brownjohn’s kinetic altered type experiments as well as purely formal Swiss-style type settings by Chermayeff and Geismar. Ivan Chermayeff is widely known for his collage work, which also made appearances on many of their record covers. But their purely

abstract iconographic designs are the pieces we focus on for this exhibition. The geometric abstraction featured on these sleeves is not far afield from the boldly abstract logos they famously designed for major corporate clients — bold, simple, non-representational symbols meant to evoke instead of describe.

Charles Murphy

Records: **D3, D4, D5, D6**

Charles Murphy (1933-2005) studied under Bauhaus master Josef Albers at Yale before accepting an invitation from Enoch Light to partner with Command Records as design director for Light’s breakthrough recording series. Murphy spent 1959 through the mid-1960s working with Light to produce a graphically advanced series of album designs that played off of Bauhaus concepts and geometric abstraction. Light explained that he “felt we had a new way to present popular music to America. This not only required a new concept in recording, but a new cover concept as well.” Over the course of his career with Command, Murphy supervised such great designers as S. Neil Fujita, George Giusti, and Josef Albers himself, among others. Murphy’s own work for Command tended towards avant garde representations of musical instruments, often in watercolor, to bold geometric assemblies directly inspired by Albers.

Josef Albers

Records: **D7, D8, D9, D10, D11, D12, D13**

Josef Albers’ (1888-1976) wide-ranging work encompassed industrial and graphic design, furniture, typography, photography, printmaking, and poetry. His most significant achievements, however, were in abstract painting and theory.

Albers

In 1959, he was invited by musician and recording artist Enoch Light to design sleeve art for a series of percussion records developed using conceptual recording techniques, including stereophonic sound and the use of 35mm magnetic tape. In all, Albers designed 7 jackets for the series — under the art direction of Charles Murphy, who studied under Albers at Yale — as a visual response to the sound of these records “bouncing” back and forth in the room. While these were not the first nonrepresentational geometric abstract sleeves, they are arguably the most well known and influential examples in the genre. Command, known for crediting their designers in the album liner notes, praised Albers as “one of America’s foremost contemporary painters.”

Richard Van Tieghem

Records: **D14, D15, D16, D17**

American designer, illustrator, and sculptor Richard Francis Van Tieghem (1929-1992) designed in excess of two dozen pieces for Desto Records in the early to mid-1970s. The sumptuous curvilinear forms bifurcated by thin bands of color featured in many of his compositions mimic the shape of stringed instruments. Van Tieghem was father of electronic musician & percussionist David Van Tieghem, who collaborated with experimental rock artists Laurie Anderson, Brian Eno and David Byrne. Van Tieghem lived in Ridgewood, NJ at the time of his death.

George Giusti

Records: **D18, D19, D20**

Italian educated designer George Giusti (1908-1990) emigrated from his home in Milan to the United States in 1939. Upon his arrival, he began a collaboration with Herbert Matter on the Swiss Pavilion for the 1939 New York World’s Fair. For over 40 years, Giusti designed scores of magazines, packaging, book jackets, and music recording covers. Giusti always intended to bridge the gap between design and art in his work, as is evident in his abstract and futuristic approach to visual communication.

Giusti

The work Giusti produced for Command Records was the pinnacle of his playfully surreal approach. While his earlier for Command tended to be whimsical and colorful hand drawn abstractions, several of his later designs for the company employed geometrically abstract three dimensional bas relief metal sculpture in copper, brass, and stainless steel, similar in execution to some of his magazine cover illustrations for Holiday magazine.

Barbara Jean Brown (Peters)

Records: **E1, E2**

Barbara Brown Peters (née Barbara Jean Brown) designed two beautiful LP sleeves for Command Records, both greatly influenced by Josef Albers’ orderly constructions of geometric shapes, sequenced to evoke a musical rhythm. Command was one of the very few record labels to include biographical information about the sleeve art’s designer on most of their jackets, but for some reason failed to do so on the two jackets Brown designed for the company. Brown’s work for Command is close enough stylistically to that of the British Op Art textile designer of the same name to warrant conjecture that they’re one in the same, although definitive evidence of this hunch has not been established to date.

Ronald Clyne

Records: **E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8, E9, E10, E11, E12, E13, E14**

Self-taught designer Ronald Clyne (1925-2006), starting drawing at about age 8, but it was as a teenager that he began collecting pulp horror and science fiction magazines — a medium that would inspire and influence him throughout his career. In the field of album art design, Clyne was extremely prolific. His work was featured on sleeves for Columbia, Urania, Vanguard, Westminster, and most prominently Folkways, among many others.

Clyne

Clyne’s earliest album art was produced for Columbia Records in 1951, as a freelance artist working for Monogram Art Studios. Monogram had contracted with Columbia during a period when the company had no permanent art director, and took on the redesign of a large portion of the company’s catalog. After ties with these larger companies were cut, some of the freelance artist — including Clyne — stayed on with the Columbia on a contract basis to continue producing jackets for their classical music library. Clyne’s work for Columbia was typified by a geometric division of space, with a diverse assortment of pattern creating the bulk of the image. It was the bringing together of these varied visual design elements into a single image that Clyne found compelling, once noting “A record cover should be seen at a glance. You shouldn’t have to study different sections of it. You should see the total instantly.”