London Calling: The London Issue

Keep It Simple and Carry On: British masters of minimalism

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

Going underground: Harry Beck and the iconic Tube map.

   Designer: Peter Blake
   
   The band originally planned on including Leo Gorcey, Gandhi, Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler. Common sense kicked Hitler off the cover, the still-lingers 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.

2. **Pink Floyd - 'Dark Side Of The Moon' 1973**
   Designer: Hipgnosis
   
   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 others ideas to the band.

3. **Nirvana - 'Nevermind' 1993**
   Designer: Robert Fisher
   
   Spencer Elden, the baby on the cover, said he feels weird about his bizarre role in history. But what does this cover mean? ”Kurt was intellectual and deep-thinking about his work,” says Fisher. “I must assume that the naked baby symbolised 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**
   Designer: John Kosh
   
   Those who believed that Paul McCartney died around 1967 and was replaced by a doppelganger 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.

5. **The Clash, 'London Calling' 1979**
   Designer: Ray Lowry
   
   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. The pink and green lettering of the design was an intentional echo of Elvis Presley’s 1956 debut album.

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 per cent of the albums that readers selected come from the 1960s and the 1970s. Here are the Top 5:
Harry Beck and London’s iconic Tube map

By Dan Carrier
Harry Beck was good news for the tube. Passenger numbers had leveled off, and they needed a bright idea to sell the Underground. “Beck’s map was the catalyst,” says Garland.

“More than a million were in circulation within six months of being commissioned. Well maps were next: Beck was paid a further five guineas to produce one. But for something that is so recognisable as a piece of ‘trademark’ art, Harry Beck was not, according to Garland, part of the modernist movement that was sweeping through the circles of painters, sculptors, other designers and filmmakers of the period. “He was not influenced by contemporary art,” says Garland. “He knew little or nothing about it.”

“The diagram,” as Beck insisted it was called, was a lifelong obsession. As new routes were added, Beck would tinker with his design. He was constantly seeking to improve its clarity, and when the publicity department realized they had a hit on their hands, he had to fend off “helpful” suggestions from tube bosses.

“For the best part of 30 years, his home was turned over to the map,” recalls Garland. “There were sketches all over the place. The front room would often have a massive copy spread out on the floor for Harry to peer over. His wife Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night.”

But in 1959, after nearly three decades of working on the diagram, he was unceremoniously dumped from the project. Garland explains: “Harry went one morning to his local station and there on the wall was a diagram that was not done by him. It was devastating. To add to the insult, he thought it was a crude and ineffective version of his own diagram. It was signed by Harold F Hutchison, not a designer but head of the publicity department.” According to Garland, Beck had become known in the publicity department for being “difficult” when it came to the diagram, and there were moves to remove his stewardship.

Beck embarked on a letter-writing campaign to take back control of his life’s work. It was fruitless. London Underground accepted no argument that the current map was influenced by his work, or that it was an inferior design.

When Beck fell ill, his piles of sketches were destined for the dustbin, but Garland stepped in and saved them—recognizing that they were crucial to understanding its development. Among the papers Garland saved was the first print sketch of the diagram, now at the V&A Museum. The diagram’s iconic status shouldn’t be overlooked, says Garland. “It has touched so many people. The tube diagram is one of the greatest pieces of graphic design produced, instantly recognizable and copied across the world. His contribution to London cannot be easily measured, nor should it be underestimated.”

Harry Beck, the genius mind behind the London Underground.

After World War I, striking modern posters began to transform the stations of London’s underground railway system into public art galleries. The posters, now part of an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, were the crucial face of a pioneering public transport campaign for coherence and efficiency that also included station architecture, train interiors — and Harry Beck’s map.