

**F**or decades, music album covers have been iconic symbols of popular culture, defining generations.

The Beatles' Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band of the 1960s, Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon in the 70s, Nirvana's Nevermind in 1991 and Coldplay's 2005 release X&Y are all good examples.

The album sleeve has been the canvas for some of the most inventive and captivating imagery by some of the world's most renowned artists, such as Andy Warhol and Peter Blake. But as an art form it is often taken for granted.

Until now, that is. Culture North's Patrick Murphy, along with The Civic, Barnsley, has spent the past two years touring the country with his unique exhibition, *Revolutions: From Gatefold to Download – The Art of the Album Cover*.

It brings together more than 100 of the most iconic and innovative LP covers of the last 80 years, including Elvis, The Rolling Stones, Oasis, Hard-Fi and Lemon Jelly.

Exploring the relationship between music and art, it will appeal not only to music buffs but design enthusiasts too.

"I'm a designer myself and I really wanted to explore this subject in more detail, so many designers and even agencies are represented," says Patrick.

"Mark Farrow is one of them. He really experimented and created some innovative and groundbreaking CD packaging for bands like Pet Shop Boys and Spiritualized.

"The designs have been selected on the basis that they experimented and pushed the boundaries of music packaging and it's interesting to see the development and influences as you move on through the years."

A film will also be showing, which will feature artists such as Malcolm Garrett discussing their work and influences.

"They treat it as a serious design discipline, which shows," insists Patrick. "It's quite rare to be able to go behind the thought process."

Split between decades, the exhibition charts the history and evolution of the format, from its beginnings with Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* all the way to the present day and digital downloads. To chart

the evolution and response to cultural and technological developments, each cover is presented in its originally released form, starting with 12in vinyl records and concluding with an iPod.

For some it will be an education, for others it will be a trip down memory lane. For all, it should be thought-provoking.

"The feedback has been great," says Patrick. "I've seen families with three generations visit and it's fascinating to see their reaction. They all have their favourites.

"You've got the grandparents who love Elvis and Frank Sinatra and really

relate to that era in terms of the imagery. Then you've got their kids, who like The Beatles and the 70s, and then obviously the grandchildren who are more aware of the contemporary bands.

"It gives all generations the chance to cross over and explore all kinds of work and creates a debate over which is the best."

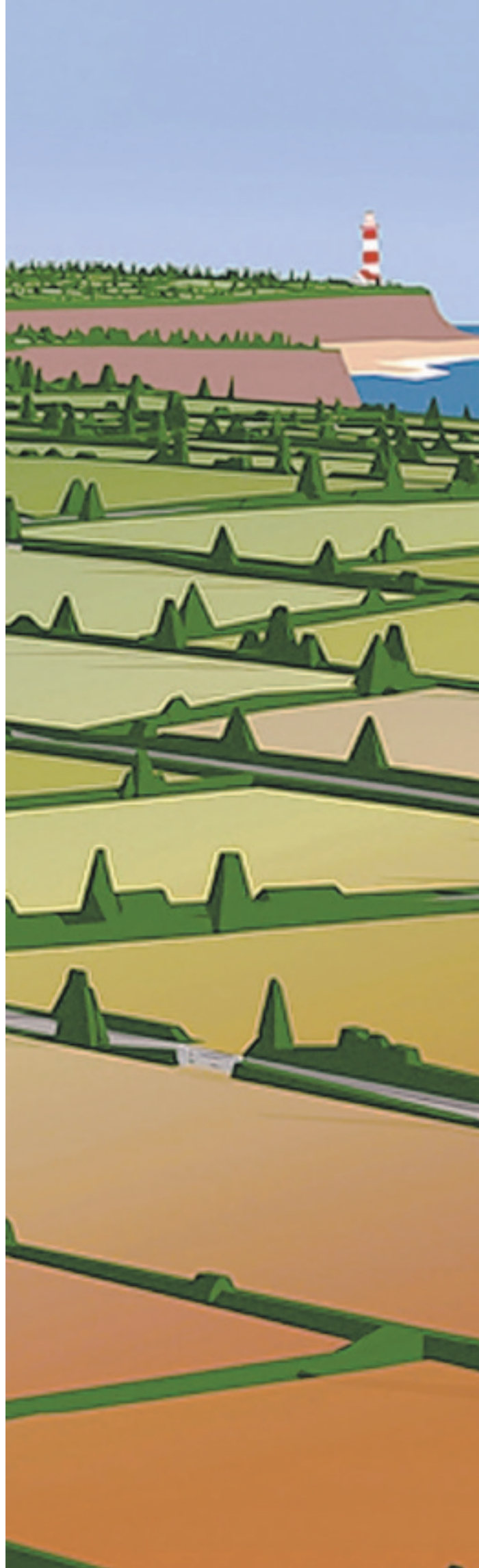
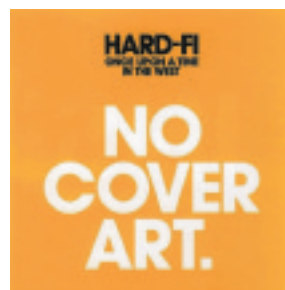
For Patrick, it's important for these album covers to be appreciated. He insists they aren't just a selling tool for musical acts, but representative of their generation.

"The importance of graphics on an album cover is much less now than it was," says Patrick. "People in the 60s, 70s and 80s were quite proud to walk around with a 12in vinyl sleeve in their hand. I think it meant something to them, like you were part of a group or a little niche.

"The packaging was part of it and I think graphics can sum up what the music is about in a visual sense. You can remember the sleeves almost as much as the music sometimes."

The digital era, however, has seen the art form begin to change and even disappear, with a big question mark hanging over its future. "In the current generation everything is geared toward the download and I feel the visual side is going to be lost altogether," explains Patrick. "The idea of having the iPod at the end is to pose the question: can it survive?"

**\* *Revolutions: From Gatefold to Download* is on until October 9 at Woodhorn Museum, near Ashington, with free entry. For more information visit [www.experiencewoodhorn.com](http://www.experiencewoodhorn.com)**



# The art of the album sleeve

A threatened art form features in an exhibition guaranteed to spark musical memories. **Ian McCabe** reports.



Lemon Jelly's Lost  
Horizons by  
Sirside