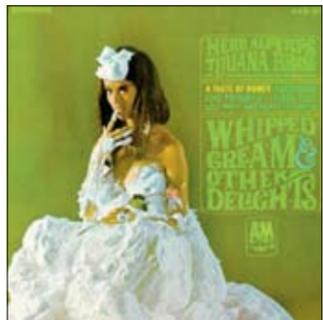




THE 30 BEST PHOTOGRAPHIC ALBUM COVERS

We pick the coolest, sexiest, and most iconic photo album covers ever. By Jack Crager



Of all the great album covers over the years, how do you select 30? We started with some rules: We wanted covers featuring photos, as opposed to illustrations or pure typography. We limited picks to one per artist (listed alphabetically). We mined the Golden Age of album design, beginning in the 1960s—when budgets and creative free-

dom expanded the art form and the “canvas” was the 12x12-inch LP sleeve. After an unscientific poll, we had to leave a lot of great covers on the cutting-room floor (visit popphoto.com to see more, or to name your own). Though chosen for their artwork, these are also classic albums—if the music’s no good, who remembers the cover?

◀ **Björk: Homogenic** (1997) Along with photographer Nick Knight, designer Paul White, and computer manipulation, this Icelandic genius created an eye-grabbing image with antenna-like hair buns, spiked fingernails, an elongated neck, stretched facial features, and an oversized kimono. The alien look fit her emotionally complex music.

Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass: Whipped Cream & Other Delights (1965) Frothy, sexy images have graced many covers, but this one takes the cake. Model Dolores Erickson posed for photographer Jerry Whorf wearing a sheet slathered with shaving cream; she later said her pregnancy accentuated her pulchritude. “I thought, ‘Just another job,’” she recalled—but it was far from just another picture.

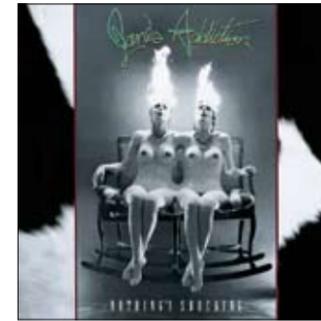
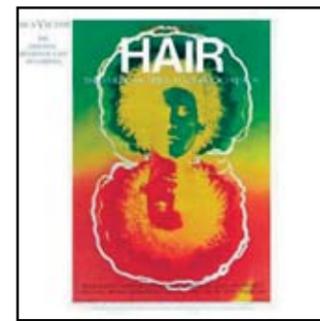
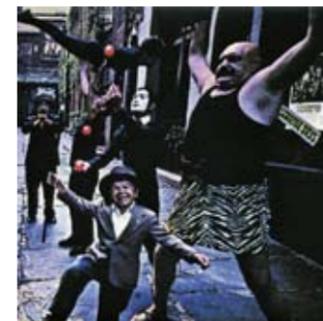
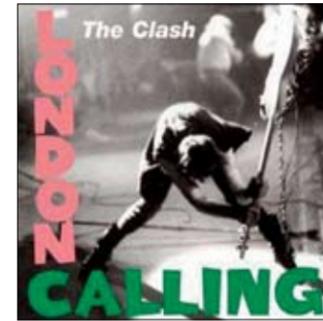
The Beatles: Abbey Road (1969) In '69 the Fab Four decided to name their last recording after the street in front of their studio and pose there. They gave photographer Iain McMillan about ten minutes. Most frames didn't work—but one was perfectly symmetrical, except that McCartney was out of step and he'd shed his sandals (which

led to lots of “Paul is Dead” hogwash). The shot capped a decade of brilliance.

David Bowie: Aladdin Sane (1973) Having reached superstardom after creating his Ziggy Stardust character, Bowie felt ambivalent about fame, reflected in this makeup job and image (by Duffy Design and photographer Sukita) in which glittery lightning seems to split the singer's head in two. A lad insane, indeed.

Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band: Trout Mask Replica (1969) This album's avant-garde stew of psychedelic rock, raucous blues, and free-form jazz had an equally bizarre cover, featuring Cal Schenkel's photo of a fish-head apparition (long before Tony Soprano ever dreamed of one) that drew on the lyrics of the Beefheart tune “Old Fart at Play.”

The Clash: London Calling (1979) This image almost didn't become a cover—photographer Pennie Smith fought it because it was grainy—but the Clash liked the nihilism of Paul Simonon smashing his bass onstage. The



type treatment copied Elvis Presley's first RCA album sleeve. “It was intended as a genuine homage,” said designer Ray Lowry, “to make plain the obvious sources of our insanities.”

The Doors: Strange Days (1967) With a freak show of performers on a Manhattan side street, this picture by Joel Brodsky looked strange indeed in 1967. “We didn't want anything psychedelic as we weren't that kind of band,” said keyboardist Ray Manzarek. What Brodsky gave them was weirder, befitting the album's darkly carnivalesque mood.

Bob Dylan: Bringing It All Back Home (1965) This record launched Dylan's electric phase, as he churned out increasingly surreal songs and improvised in the studio. Photographer Daniel Kramer captured the blur of changes by posing the bard with cultural artifacts (and Sally Grossman, wife of Dylan's manager) and by creating a streaky vignette in the darkroom.

Feist: The Reminder (2007) This is the new cover on the block—how can an image become “iconic” after only one year? We're mesmerized by the rainbow swash

(or is that a nerve chart?) behind Mary Rozzi's backlit silhouette shot of the artist, signifying her colorful singing and many-mooded songs.

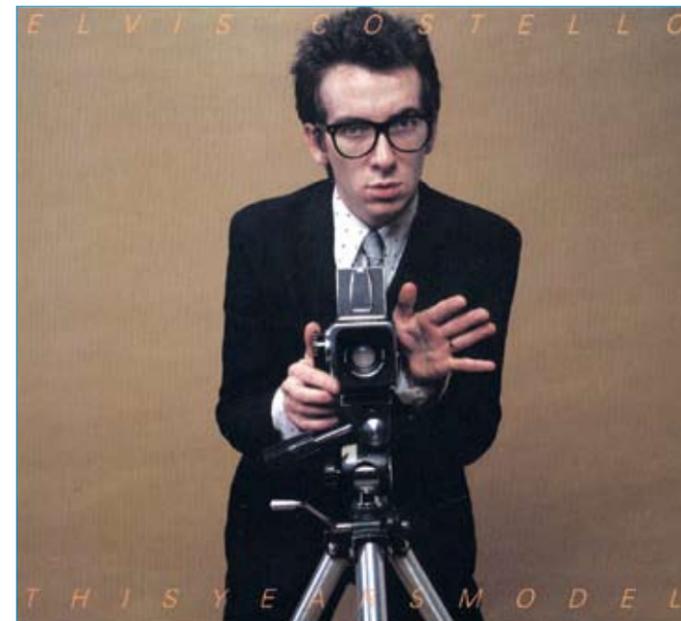
Peter Gabriel: Peter Gabriel (1980) A hyper-creative guy who couldn't be bothered to name his early albums outdid himself, visually, with his third one. Hipnosis designer Storm Thorgerson suggested the melting effect, obtained by prodding a Polaroid print as it was developing.

Hair (1968) In 1968, the idea of a Broadway musical based on the era's antiwar activism and hippy idealism seemed otherworldly, just like the color-saturated, mirrored picture on the original Broadway cast soundtrack. It's been going in and out of style, but the play, like the image, was built to last.

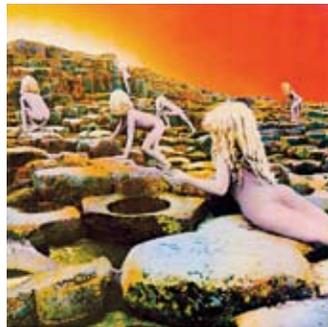
Jane's Addiction: Nothing's Shocking (1988) Perhaps nothing's shocking except nude Siamese twins with their heads on fire. Bandleader and photographer Perry Ferrell dreamed up this image, created the twins out of plaster using his girlfriend as a model, and experimented with flames until he got his shot.

Grace Jones: Nightclubbing (1981) It's possible that the ironic femininity of the 1980s—big shoulders, angular androgyny—started here. Photographer Jean-Paul Goude hand-colored the photo a bluish tint, which he later said suggested “a strange menacing alien, when all I had wanted to do was sublimate her African roots.”

Elvis Costello: This Year's Model (1978) Of course we love Elvis with a Hasselblad! Photographer Chris Gabrin set up Costello as a mirror image of himself, asking the singer to copy his exaggerated gestures. Costello reportedly put on an Eagles album during the shoot. “I bloody hate them,” he said, “but I want to look in a really bad mood.”



Led Zeppelin: Houses of the Holy (1973) The design firm Hipgnosis wanted to illustrate this album title with innocent children climbing rock formations at sunrise. But the weather on location in Northern Ireland was dreary, so a black-and-white image was colorized. Three children posed in various shots; the rocks hid the edges of the joined frames in a pre-Photoshop montage.



Madonna: True Blue (1986) Having quickly mastered the art of image making, Madonna asked her friend Herb Ritts to shoot the cover of her third album. His black-and-white vertical photo was cropped square and hand-tinted by designer Jeri Heiden. "It was like she was floating," Heiden said of the result. "She took on the appearance of a marble statue, goddess-like."



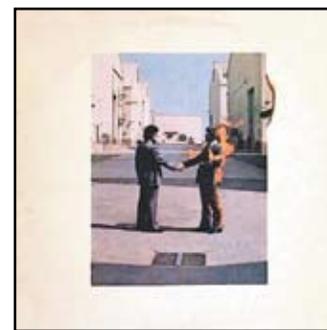
Marilyn Manson: Mechanical Animals (1998) My my, what a guy! (we think). Manson cemented his androgynous and freakish image with this portrait by Joseph Cultice, in which the nearly nude singer wore prosthetic breasts (the nipples were later retouched out), a plastic cup, and a coat of latex paint. Not to mention the sixth finger added onto his left hand.



Joni Mitchell: Hejira (1976) A painter before she was a singer, Mitchell illustrated many of her album covers; here she art-directed a photomontage of road scenes and a portrait by Joel Bernstein, echoing the album's themes of wanderlust and self-reflection—what Mitchell called "the sweet loneliness of solitary travel."



Pink Floyd: Wish You Were Here (1975) This LP originally appeared in navy plastic wrap (black in Europe) to accent its themes of "nothingness" and the fallacies of fame. But the Hipgnosis cover shot inside led many a stoned space-rocker to wonder: Is that real fire? It is, according to stuntman Ronnie Rondell (right), who wore a wig to save his scalp in the photo shoot.



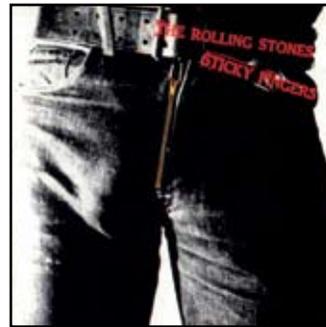
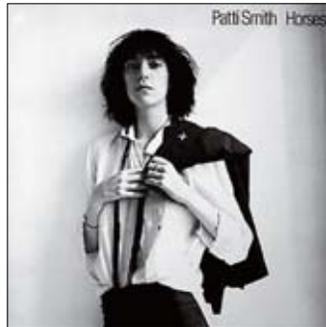
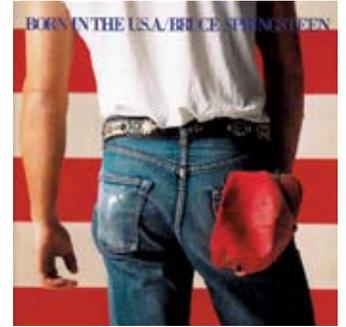
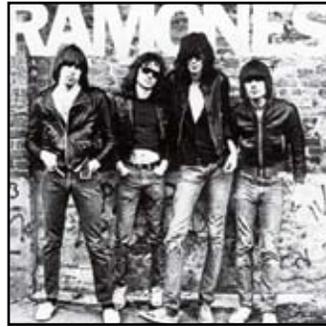
Ohio Players: Honey (1975) A continuation of the group's sexy album covers, this foldout sleeve featured *Playboy* playmate Ester Cordet and a honey jar, with the interior photo even racier. (A daft urban myth grew around the model and an audible scream in the band's hit "Love Rollercoaster.") Shot by Richard Fegley, the cover won a Grammy Award but got the album banned in many stores.



How about a baby in a pool? asked Kurt Cobain. Chasing... a dollar bill?

◀ **Nirvana: Nevermind** (1991) As an obscure indie band prepared its major-label debut, singer Kurt Cobain imagined a cover photo of an underwater birth, which was deemed impractical. How about a baby in a pool? Chasing...a dollar bill? With an underwater housing, photographer Kirk Weddle shot little Spencer Elden on his first swim—Elden's dad held him but was removed from the image, and the dollar and fishhook were added.

Rage Against the Machine: Rage Against the Machine (1992) This heavy rock band appropriated a Pulitzer Prize-winning 1963 photo by Malcolm Browne of a Buddhist monk self-immolating in protest of Ngo Dinh Diem's Vietnamese government—



a powerful cover for a politically driven debut album.

The White Stripes: *White Blood Cells* (2001) Who are the intruders on the White Stripes' third album? An inside photo reveals them to be paparazzi. The double edge of the duo's fame was reflected in Patrick Pantano's cover shot. "A lot of the lyrics are paranoid," said Jack White. "It does kind of match all these figures coming at us on the cover."

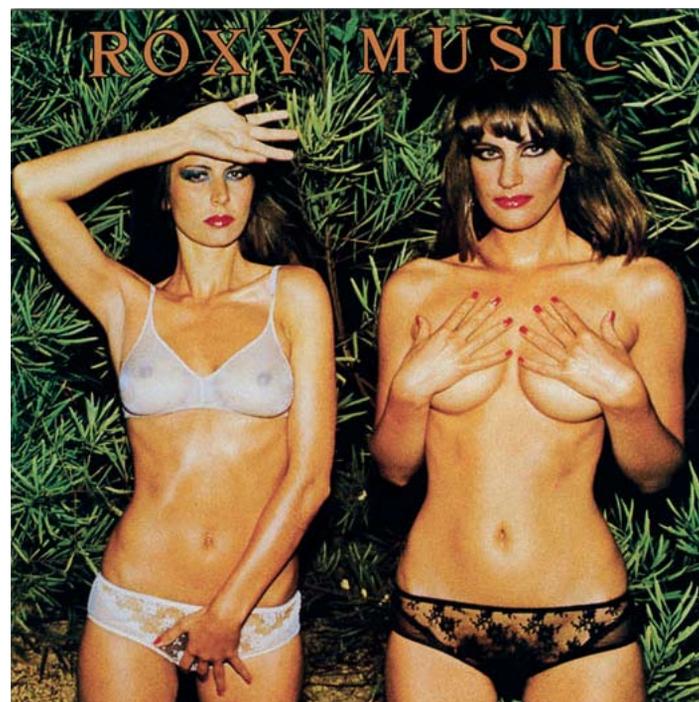
The Ramones: *Ramones* (1976) Photographer Roberta Bayley lined up four former juvenile delinquents from Queens against a wall and started a movement. The graphic, gritty, no-nonsense cover shot perfectly fit the raw sound of the genre-busting album, which *Spin* later described as "Britzkrieg pop stripped down to its 1-2-3-4."

Patti Smith: *Horses* (1975) Before either was well known, Patti Smith asked her pal Robert Mapplethorpe to shoot her debut cover. "We always dreamed of becoming successful together," she recalled. This photo launched both careers—hers as a poetess of punk, unkempt but elegant; his as the artist who had the uncanny sense to pose her under a triangular stream of sunlight.

The Who: *Who's Next* (1971) While driving to a cover shoot with members of the Who, photographer Ethan Russell noticed some otherworldly slabs in a heap and thought of posing the group in a *Space Odyssey*-like scene. But as they approached, one of the lads peed on a slab, and the others followed suit. They decided the shot fit their image.

The Rolling Stones: *Sticky Fingers* (1971) For their first album on their own label, the Stones tapped Andy Warhol to create the cover. He proposed a shot of artist Joe Dallesandro's crotch with a real zipper, which caused distribution trouble because it damaged other albums. The band's famous tongue logo debuted on back of the sleeve.

Bruce Springsteen: *Born in the U.S.A.* (1984) After the stark *Nebraska*, Springsteen set out to make a commercial album and hired Annie Leibovitz for the cover. "We took different types of pictures, and in the end, the picture of my ass looked better than the picture of my face," he said. The flag backdrop fueled a misperception that the angry title song was blindly patriotic.



The Edgar Winter Group: *They Only Come Out at Night* (1972) Would you buy...anything from this man? Winter pioneered the gender-bender cover with makeup and jewelry to accent his albinistic features. The image—which also evoked the 1910 film *Frankenstein*, the name of the band's monster hit—was out of character for both Winter and designer John Berg. But it sold millions.

◀ **Roxy Music: *Country Life*** (1974) Bandleader Brian Ferry met two beauties at a bar on holiday in Portugal, and he asked Eric Boman to photograph them in a garden. "We thought it would be nothing but a holiday snap," recalled Evaline Seeling (left). "We shopped for sexy underwear." Many stores banned the record; an alternate cover appeared with only the hedge. ■