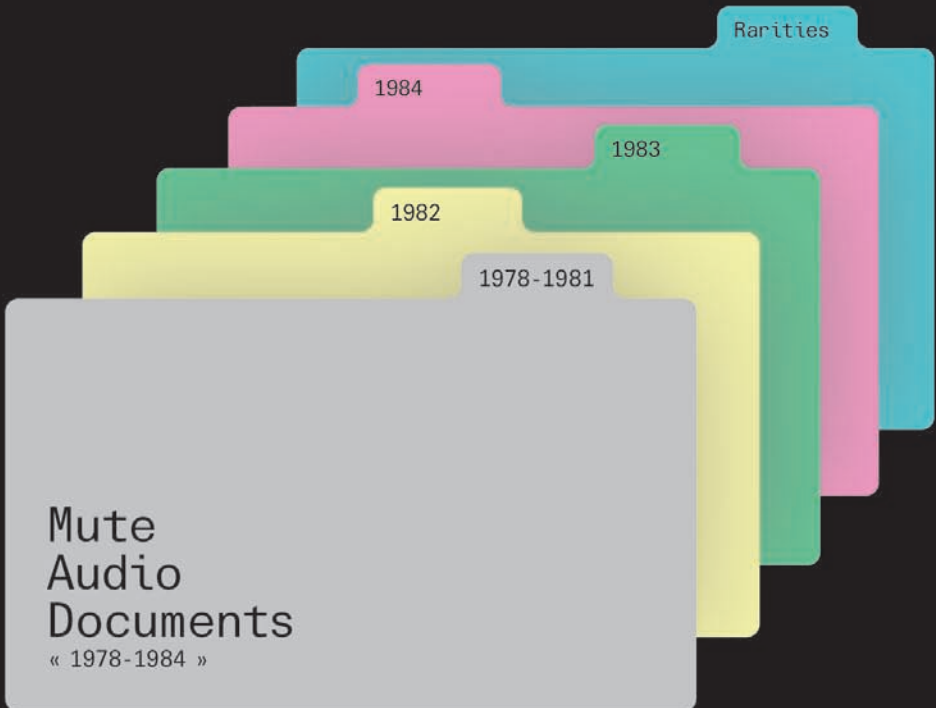


«This is a Mute product exploitation directive»

Letraset aesthetics and bedroom art direction: Mute sleeve art [1978—84]



Available in June
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Original poster for The Normal

A side and B sides of all Mute single releases from 1978 to 1984

Mute Audio Documents features:

The Normal » Silicon Teens » Fad Gadget » DAF » Non » Smegma » Robert Rental »
Depeche Mode » Boyd Rice » Die Doraus Und Die Marinas » Yazoo » Liasons Dangereuses »
Duet Emmo » Robert Görl » The Assembly » The Birthday Party » Einstürzende Neubauten »
Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds » I Start Counting » Bruce Gilbert » Boyd Rice & Frank Tovey

Letraset aesthetics and bedroom art direction: Mute sleeve art [1978—84]



Adrian Shaughnessy

The post-punk era has been rediscovered. What was previously regarded as a grey and shapeless period, significant only for the rise of Thatcherism and the beginnings of turbo-charged consumerism, is now regarded as a period of creative fertility, cool style and one of the last eruptions of a truly independent pop culture.

Looking back at this brief and unfairly neglected era, we now see that many significant musical entities emerged. It was the time of The Normal, Wire, Gang of Four, Devo, The Pop Group and Depeche Mode – musicians whose sharp angular sounds are now feted by a new generation of sharp angular musicians. It was also the time of labels such as Factory, Rough Trade, Fast Product and Mute; record companies that were to unwittingly create the blueprint for independent labels for the next two decades.

But it wasn't only the music and the spirit of independence that distinguished the post-punk era. The album covers were pretty good, too. Just as post-punk music was sharper and more cultured than the gobbing lurch of punk (or 'speeded-up pub rock' as Mute founder Daniel Miller called it), so too was the cover art. The style leader here was Factory. Simon Reynolds in his book *Rip it Up and Start Again* (Post Punk 1978-1984) writes about the 'austere elegance' of Peter Saville's cover art, which he eulogises as a 'breath of fresh air in rock packaging, a cleansing break both with pre-punk romanticism and the New Wave's own clichés.'

Mute covers lacked Saville's art school finesse. But they made up for it with their raw, untutored Letraset aesthetic. This DIY trend began in 1978 with Daniel Miller's design for his own double A side single TVOD/Warm Leatherette (released under the name The Normal.) This sharp little classic of home-made electro inadvertently launched Mute the record label, and its musical legacy remains with us today. Even the cover resonates: a triumph of bedroom art direction, no sleeve in the Mute catalogue is more emblematic of the label's ethos.

But Mute had its own Peter Saville: Martyn Atkins had actually been an early collaborator with Saville (they had worked on the celebrated sleeve for Joy Division's *Closer*) and post-Saville he was for a while to be the main Factory designer. In the book *Factory Records The Complete Graphic Album*, the author Mathew Robertson notes that Atkins' output "was a deviation from the austere nature of [Saville's] work, injecting a degree of graphic wit."

Working under the name T&CP (Town & Country Planning) Atkins designed numerous Mute covers, often in collaboration with photographer Brian Griffin. Now a photographer and film director based in LA, Atkins is one of the unsung heroes of British sleeve design. Less ostentatious than Saville, Brody and Garrett, he had his own signature and it can be found on many Mute sleeves.

Mute covers not designed by Atkins were often designed by the musicians and band's themselves. Frank Tovey (Fag Gadget) had been to art school and Boyd Rice – ever the auteur – was always keen to design his own covers as part of an overall sonic and visual statement. The DIY ethos is deeply ingrained in Mute culture.

Revisiting Mute cover art from the late 1970s and early 1980s is undeniably nostalgic. But this is not the nostalgia of the National Trust, warm beer and cricket. This is nostalgia for edgier, more uncertain times. Nostalgia for a time before bands were thought of as brands. Nostalgia for a time when anything seemed possible.

Adrian Shaughnessy was co-founder and creative director of design company Intro. Today he writes books and articles on design and visual culture. He runs ShaughnessyWorks, a studio dedicated to design and editorial direction.

Silicon Teens
Memphis Tennessee
7inch single

The Normal
T.V.O.D.
7inch single



Design:
Simone Grant

Design:
The Normal

NON
Physical Evidence
12inch Vinyl Album

Depeche Mode
A Broken Frame
12inch Vinyl Album



Design:
Boyd Rice

Design:
T&CP / Brian Griffin

The Birthday Party
Mutiny
12inch Single

Einstürzende
Neubauten
Strategies Against
Architecture
12inch Vinyl Album



Design:
**Anita Lane/
Nick Cave**

Design:
**Einstürzende
Neubauten**

Fad Gadget
Collapsing New
People
7inch Single

Depeche Mode
People Are People
7inch Single



Design:
**Savage
Leisurecentre**

Design:
T&CP

Robert Rental
Double Heart
7inch single

I Start Counting
Letters To A Friend
7inch single



Design:
Hilary & Liz Farrow

Design:
I Start Counting

The Assembly
Never Never
7inch single

Die Doraus & Die
Marinas
Fred Vom Jupiter
7inch single



Design:
Martyn Atkins

Design:
ATA TAK

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Mute vinyl available from www.mutebank.co.uk
Information on Mute artists from www.mute.com



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The Art of Mute Exhibition • May 3rd - May 17th

The Art Vinyl Gallery
20 Broadway Market, London, E8 4PH. Tel: 0207 2414129

Art Vinyl

The Art Vinyl Gallery on East London's Broadway Market (E8) is a unique space designed to celebrate art & graphic design created specifically for vinyl records. The Gallery hosts record cover exhibitions that change every two weeks as a different band, artist or record label take the opportunity to curate this original space. These exhibitions showcase vinyl cover art which celebrate the synergy that exists between art and music.

Play & Display

The Play & Display Flip Frame is the ground breaking home framing device which allows music and art enthusiasts to change the contents instantly without taking the frame from the wall. Unique in its design, it is the first framing solution designed to specifically hold vinyl records, accommodating for the differences in album and 12" sizes and giving the owner instant access to the playable contents.

Celebrate the Art of Mute with Play & Display Flip Frames available individually for £29.99 or as a triplepack for £69.99 from artvinyl.com.

'Art Vinyl Mix Art & Music'

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