

SAN FRANCISCO was awash in distinctive forms of creative expression even before the Summer of Love. From the mid-1960s, local poster artists drew upon the city's storied past, adapting visual stereotypes from the Wild West and the Victorian eras to create work steeped with a dynamic sense of place. They continued an aesthetic of appropriation already established by the artists and poets of the Beat era, who had, a generation earlier, worked in similar terms

to render a critique on contemporary mainstream society.

rolling renaissance

**“The Hippies
are eclectic;
they draw
ideas from
everywhere.”**

THOMAS ALBRIGHT,
ROLLING RENAISSANCE,
1968

FASHION-FORWARD MUSICIANS

and their peers took a comparable approach, constructing unique ensembles from garments and textiles dating to earlier times and deriving from numerous cultural traditions. By sampling such wide-ranging sources as Art Nouveau, Native American iconography, and Eastern religions, the city's artists and designers generated a multilayered visual aesthetic reflective of the Bay Area's multicultural spirit that was soon transported around the world.

SAN FRANCISCO offered a haven from the 1950s conservatism that was lingering elsewhere in the country, but the social and political climate of the day still weighed heavily on the city's inhabitants. Whether collaging headlines as part of a critical exercise of reinterpretation, harnessing bold graphic design elements for provocative messaging, or creating moveable spectacles to draw attention to American foreign policy, the city's residents pushed to the visual fore the contemporary issues of identity and politics.

a
trip

without a

ticket

A MULTIMEDIA EXTRAVAGANZA, the Trips Festival was organized by activist Stewart Brand, promoter Bill Graham, author Ken Kesey (and his cohorts – the merry pranksters), and composer and artist Ramon Sender. It took place at Longshoremen's Hall on January 21 to 23, 1966, and featured liquid light and slide shows, film projections, electronic sounds, rock groups, experimental theater performers, dance companies, and more.

THE OPENING on Friday night was a relatively tame event, but Saturday night was a riot of activity, with five movie screens on the wall, a center platform with projectors,

and blinking traffic lights. While the Pranksters climbed the Tower of Control, a vaulting scaffolding of pipes and platforms, mikes, amplifiers, and projectors in the center of the hall, high up in the balcony Kesey scrawled messages on acetate that projected in large scale across the walls: "OUTSIDE IS INSIDE, HOW DOES IT LOOK?" Big Brother and the Holding Company and the Grateful Dead performed, and throngs of participants imbibed punch spiked with LSD, a legal substance at the time.

"Outside is
inside, how
does it look?"

KEN KESSEY, MESSAGE
PROJECTED AT THE TRIPS
FESTIVAL, 1966

THE TRIPS FESTIVAL, attracting upwards of ten thousand people over the three nights, was the first event to gather members of the counterculture in a significant way and it remains the pinnacle of the psychedelic era. There and then, many realized that they were part of a larger movement to expand emotional and perceptual consciousness and to upend traditional society.

the gathering of the tribes

"The good hippies, of course, wear quaint and enchanting costumes... their eyes aglow all the time with poetry of love."

MIKE MAHONEY, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, 1967

DURING THE 1960S, Golden Gate Park and its adjoining Panhandle emerged as a playground for San Francisco's countercultural movement. Youths mingled at Hippie Hill, a sheltered sunny slope just past where Haight Street ends at Stanyan Street, to listen to the sounds of sitar, guitar, and flute or to observe the Hare Krishna chanting.

ON A BRIGHT WINTER'S DAY, the most pivotal gathering took place on January 14, 1967. Aware of the disunity between the radical political activists in Berkeley and the bohemians of the Haight-Ashbury, the staff of the Haight's underground newspaper, the *San Francisco Oracle*, organized an event that would unify these

often divided factions. The event was christened "A Gathering of the Tribes for a Human Be-In." Rick Griffin's poster for the

happening featured a Native American on horseback, holding a guitar, underscoring the counterculture's fascination with indigenous cultures. The symbolism was clear: this new tribe was being summoned by the power of music.

COSTUMED YOUTH GATHERED, bringing with them beads, bells, blankets, cymbals, drums, incense, and flowers. Beat luminaries Allen Ginsberg, Lenore Kandel, Timothy Leary, Gary Snyder, and Alan Watts presided over the ceremonies, and the city's top rock bands — Big Brother and the Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and the Grateful Dead played. Leary delivered his already famous mantra, "Tune in, turn on, and drop out," and Ginsberg chanted, "We are all one, we are all one."

“Freaky, funny, and fashionable, these are the signs of our times.”

HERBERT GOLD, SATURDAY EVENING POST, 1968

VIBRATING BEACONS of San Francisco’s counterculture movement, ‘60s rock posters are characterized by striking juxtapositions of color, uniquely stylized lettering, appropriated imagery, and, on occasion, “trippy” graphics, that require an attentive audience to be fully understood. Music promoters such as Bill Graham and Chet Helms originally commissioned the posters to advertise upcoming concerts at the Fillmore Auditorium, the Avalon Ballroom, and additional music venues. To reach their intended mark, the promoters tacked posters onto telephone poles and pasted them into the windows of shops lining streets frequented by hip crowds.

the

poster shop

AMUSING OR SERIOUS, direct or impenetrable, the bold, mass-produced imagery also found its way to towns near and far through the ubiquitous poster shop. In San Francisco, such stores were especially plentiful in the districts of Haight-Ashbury and North Beach. Most famous among them, the Print Mint on Haight Street and Friedman Enterprises on Grant Avenue (later Gorilla Records and the Postermat) were papered from floor to ceiling in posters. They did a thriving business during the years surrounding the Summer of Love, sometimes moving upwards of 25,000 posters a month, selling what became touchstones of a generation.

“We would all like to be able to live an uncluttered life, a simple life, a good life, and think about moving the whole human race ahead a step.”

**JERRY GARCIA, “THE HIPPIE TEMPTATION,”
1967**

DURING THE MID-1960s, artists, writers, musicians, and activists moved into San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury district, lured by inexpensive rent and an inclusive environment. America was at a cultural crossroads, and the burgeoning social unrest was pronounced in this community of mostly well educated and artistic youth. With hopes of creating a new social paradigm, largely informed by their experimentations with psychedelics and their interest in Native American cultures and Eastern spirituality, they made the neighborhood the epicenter of their activities. Before long the community began to organize, publishing their own newspapers such as the *San Francisco Oracle* and the *Haight-Ashbury Tribune* and opening their own performance hall, the Straight Theater.

love

and haight

THE HAIGHT attracted as many as 100,000 young people from all over the nation during the highly publicized Summer of Love. This was many more people than the neighborhood could safely absorb, thus galvanizing the community to create its own social service organizations. By the end of the summer, many of the original Haight visionaries left the area. Yet for a fleeting moment, the Haight was the home to several of the leading figures of the 1960s counterculture. These young people did not just protest against political and social issues such as the Vietnam War and civil injustice, but on a more personal level they challenged the status quo of the mainstream American society.

denim cracy

“What’s scandalous about jeans is how you outrage them.”

**DOROTHY HARRINGTON,
LOS ANGELES TIMES, 1971**

FOR A GENERATION that rejected the trappings of their middle-class upbringings, denim, the uniform of the working classes, was a comfortable fit. Easily purchased at thrift stores and the Army Navy surplus, denim was not only affordable, it was durable. By the late 1960s, the all-American blue jean had become the ubiquitous look for the counterculture, with San Francisco-based Levi Strauss & Co. at the forefront. With Levi’s using their hometown as their incubator, the fashions of San Francisco’s counterculture rippled across the nation. Art Roth, general manager of Levi’s for Gals, told *Women’s Wear Daily* in 1971, “We’re charged with maintaining quality. Youth dictates this. They clamor for quality in food, environment, government [. . .] it’s a tremendous movement for social justice. . . . That’s the essence . . . San Francisco is the capital of the whole youth movement . . . the flare leg, fabric mixtures . . . the way they pull it all together. We learned from them. . . . We’re definitely in the right place, because we plan to learn more.”

making posters that rock

“I saw it as a throwback to Lautrec’s time, what with the artists and printers working together, the people in the audience and the bands on stage serving as weekly inspiration, the costumed people in the street, and colors, colors, colors everywhere.”

ROBERT FRIED

THE VIBRANT

psychedelic rock posters of The Family Dog, Bill Graham, and Neon Rose are recognized around the world, but few people know they were made using photo-offset

lithography. This workhorse of printing, with its complicated equipment and production sequence, typically leaves very little room for artistic experimentation. However, during the 1960s and early 1970s, commercial need and artistic vision came together in the creation of psychedelic rock posters in small offset lithographic shops throughout San

Francisco, including Bindweed Press, Contact Printing, and, most famously, California Litho Plate Co. and Tea Lautrec Lithography.

THE ROCK POSTERS were made before computers played a role in design and printing. The process was photomechanical — it required film photography to make the final printing plate. Before these posters could be printed, there was the prepress work that involved a series of complicated steps requiring skilled artists and offset lithography tradesmen: artists made black and white designs delineating separate color elements (called a mechanical); cameramen photographed the art to create film positives and negatives; strippers cut apart and assembled the film in preparation for exposure on the printing plates; and platemakers produced the final plates. When it came time to print, the artists had to get the right ink mixtures and color combinations to achieve the essence of the psychedelic experience.

“Since the art-nouveau style first began to stage a comeback, its tendrils have crept into every phase of graphic design.... Like a butterfly bombarded by gamma rays....”

TIME, 1967

WORLD CULTURES, previous art movements, and psychedelics all played a role in what has come to define the look of 1960s San Francisco. Though Art Nouveau has long been cited as a primary aesthetic inspiration behind the rock posters, they are – more accurately in art historical terminology – postmodern in their deliberate appropriation of a range of historical styles, from Art Nouveau and Surrealism to the contemporary expressions of Pop and Op. San Francisco’s independent fashion designers drew upon similar artistic practices as well as non-Western textile traditions when creating garments for their countercultural clients.

feed

Native American iconography and heritage also found itself at the heart of both creative forms.

y  **ur head**

CREATIVES ACROSS MEDIUMS

used alternative methods of collage to wed appropriation with contemporary culture. By combining dissimilar and unrelated fragments from historical and contemporary prints, textiles, and ephemera, these artists created new, complex images that could even, on occasion, give an aesthetic dimension to the psychedelic experience shared by many members of the counterculture. Even those who did not “turn on” – in the words of acid advocate Timothy Leary – to the mental stimulation of LSD to explore the mind’s potential made use of the psychedelic aesthetic rampant throughout the period.

“Forms and rhythms in music are never changed without producing changes in the most important political forms and ways.”

PLATO, *REPUBLIC*, AS
QUOTED BY RALPH J.
GLEASON, 1967

the

music never
stopped

IN THE MID-1960S, a now-iconic music scene emerged from San Francisco’s rebellious and colorful counterculture. The “San Francisco Sound,” as it would come to be known despite its lack of a single discernable sound, comprised such groups as Big Brother and the Holding Company, the Charlatans, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and, of course, the Grateful Dead. Whether impromptu and free in the park, or scheduled at the Fillmore Auditorium, Avalon Ballroom, or any number of smaller venues around the region, concerts featuring these and other bands, played an important role in bringing members of the counterculture together.

ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT, the scene at the ballrooms was electric. Music filled the rooms, light shows covered the walls, and people danced. Musical lineups varied from night to night, with acts from around the Bay sharing the stage with blues, jazz, soul, folk, and Latin-fusion musicians. At concerts throughout the period, the song-writing poets and the singers promoted a new world view, one that *San Francisco Chronicle* music critic Ralph J. Gleason described as challenging “the whole of our social structure . . . causing New as well as Old Politics to crumble and a tribalization process to begin.”

**“Every time
I hear
revolution,
I hear evolution
alongside it.”**

**LENORE KANDEL, VOICES
FROM THE LOVE
GENERATION, 1968**

PARTICIPATION was at the heart of San Francisco’s counterculture, and nowhere was this felt more strongly than in concerts and other gatherings where likeminded people came together in support of political and social change. Demonstrations, often accompanied by music, found frequent targets in the military personnel passing through the Bay Area on their way to Vietnam. In addition to joining in protests and attending benefit concerts for such issues as environmental, civil, and women’s rights, members of the counterculture could also use dress to signal an affinity for a particular cause.

**what
are we
fighting
for?**

THE 1960S are often discussed in terms of revolution. Throughout the decade and around the world, a generation of young people took direct action, affecting a series of cultural and political transformations,

while advocating such concerns as social justice, inclusiveness, and an awareness of the natural world. Fifty years later, government policies resulting from such interventions render a way of life in the West that would have been unimaginable to all but the surest of sixties visionaries.

do your own thing

“Hippie is more than a way of dressing. It’s a spirit which fills young people.”

**YVES SAINT LAURENT,
JULY 1970**

THE DIVERSITY of styles represented by the small cross section of Bay Area designers dispels any preexisting — and often limited — notions of sixties counterculture fashions. These wildly individualistic forms of dress showcase personal expression and reflect each designer’s singular philosophy within a culture that encouraged creative freedom. The movement’s influence was also found in garments created by mainstream designers of the time. The continued relevance of these works of art manifests today in the enduring trope of “bohemian chic” — represented in colorful free-flowing styles, natural fabrics, handwork, and the appropriation of global textile traditions. While the original sources may now be forgotten, these fashions conjure memories of a time of liberation and hope, one of the many lasting gifts from San Francisco’s Love Generation.