

Jack Clements

2405789

BA graphic design

Martin Bush

Ways of perceiving

ADDA4023

**Storm Thorgerson: Outdoor Experience Tour
Singleton Park, Swansea**

Word count 1579

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Storm Thorgerson: Outdoor Experience Tour

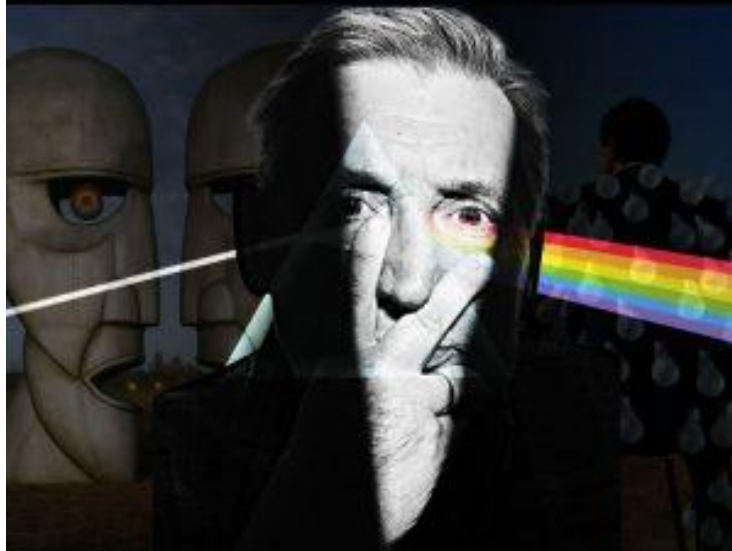


Fig1 Bicaalu (2024) Storm Thorgerson y sus portadas de discos

Experience the iconic artworks of the late, great Storm Thorgerson at full scale in this nationwide traveling exhibit. The prolific artist of design studios Hipgnosis and Stormstudios' 'cinematic sensibility that [he] applied to the world of album covers was heavily influenced by [his] 1960s MA studies in film and television from London's Royal College of Art' (Alleyne, 2014, p251). He was also inspired by the surrealists Magritte and Dalí, and utilised these influences to create curiously engaging album covers throughout the decades for the likes of Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, and Biffy Clyro.

Thorgerson and the artists of Hipgnosis helped transform the idea of album artwork in the mid-sixties,

[establishing] an era in which the artist was not obliged to appear on the album cover, [...] Their adoption of a re-imagined spelling of a known word as the studio's name was emblematic of Hipgnosis's reinventions of reality (Alleyne, 2014, p252)

Prior to their work, most album covers simply consisted of a photo of the artists with the title of the album and little else going on. The move to album artwork, especially of the surreal

variety uncoincidentally coincided with the psychedelic movement of the mid to late 60s.

Thorgerson, being a school friend of Pink Floyd, with their careers taking off simultaneously and codependently, was on the front lines of this change.

Thorgerson liked to work large, producing giant sculptures and scenes, with his ideas realised with little to no studio manipulation.

Thorgerson comes across as both madman and genius. What could possess a person to arrange 700 made beds in the English countryside, all for an LP cover? Thorgerson repeatedly conveys his disdain for the computer age, as he proudly proclaims the bulk of his graphics to be machine-free of any tampering or enhancement. Even today, the artist would rather build actual sculptures rather than virtual ones (Villano, 2000)

So, what better way to enjoy them than with accurate replicas of some of Rock's classic imagery, in an interactive, outdoor public space. The first stop on the tour is Swansea's Singleton Park. As you meander through this beautiful space, you can get up close and personal with physical representations of selected works from Thorgerson's 40+ year career. Delve into the backstory of each piece and the music it represents with the accompanying plaques written in Thorgerson's blunt sarcasm, and speakers playing the albums in full. In this space rife with photo ops you can lay down in the many beds from *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*, shake hands with the burning man of *Wish You Were Here*, or climb the Giant's Causeway on *Houses of the Holy*.

Dark Side of the Moon



Fig 2 Hipgnosis (1973) Pink Floyd – Dark Side of the Moon

Arguably the most iconic rock album of all, Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* depicts light refracting through a prism on a plain black background. The idea stemmed from Floyd's use of light shows at their concerts and was a response to Richard Wright (keyboards) wanting something 'simple, clinical and precise' (Powell, 2017, p122). Unlike much of Thorngerson and Hipgnosis' most famous images, this is an illustration.

The artwork was mainly mechanical – the spectrum was drawn up in the black line and the colours indicated. The prism was airbrushed, black on white, and the separator reversed it out of a mechanical (printer's) black background. We purposely fused indigo and violet together into one colour, purple, since we thought the two would not 'read' clearly in combination. (Powell)

When questioned by Thorngerson, the band couldn't say why they unanimously decided on this image, just that it felt appropriate.

In this exhibit a giant glass prism is positioned on a rotating plinth to catch and refract the sun's rays throughout the day, decorating the park with the spectrum of visible light.

Presence



Fig 3 *Hipgnosis* (1976) Led Zeppelin – Presence, Fig 4 *Hipgnosis* (1976) The Object

The various images within Led Zeppelin's *Presence* include a mysterious abstract piece, known as *The Object*, in various settings with people interacting with it as if it were a part of everyday life. 'Storm put together some photographs from old copies of *National Geographic*,' explains Howell, 'and stuck matte black outlines of the object onto them' (2017, p186). *The Object* was made of cardboard and black felt and it immediately drew in the band when presented to them. 'Jimmy Page and Robert Plant were captivated by it immediately. They cast aside the other roughs and drawings and asked me what it was all about.' (2017, p186 -187) It was originally a uniform shape until guitarist Page suggested twisting in and setting it atop an uneven base. The original plan was to have large versions of *The Object* in significant locations around the world, like The Eiffel Tower and The White House, but was abandoned when it was leaked by the press.

10 copies of *The Object* can be found unannotated throughout the exhibit in unassuming places for the visitors to find, with (in honour of the leaked plan) an 8-foot version at the end of the exhibition with the album cover, plaque, and the story behind it as the exhibit's finale.

Tiny Pictures

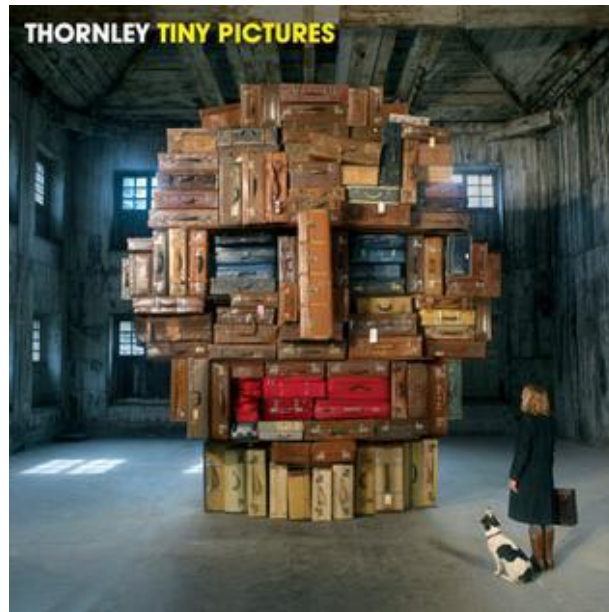


Fig 5 Stormstudios (2009) Thornley – Tiny Pictures

‘What you see is what you get,’ explains Thorgerson ‘a large number of old suitcases arranged in the shape of a head’ (Thorgerson, 2011, p112). Ian Thornley took it as a connotation of travelling which he felt a deep relation to within his songs, whether physically or metaphorically. Thorgerson saw it more as ‘the baggage we carry with us, and that we come to relationships burdened with [...] the luggage of our past’ (2011). He also has a secondary, more light-hearted reading of it; headcase, or nutcase. This piece was constructed in a warehouse in the Naval Yards at Chatham with roughly 200 cases borrowed from the National Theatre, on a wooden frame.

Uprising



Fig 6 Stormstudios (2009) Muse – Uprising

Composed of 150 half-buried 2-foot-tall teddy bears from Hamley's in London (acquired on very short notice) the artwork for Muse's single Uprising was set in a field belonging to a family friend of the Thorgersons' in Bedfordshire. On the day of the shoot the weather was miserable with only a brief window of sunshine to take the final shot. Storm recalled teddy bears being a theme he has revisited several times 'clearly some childhood trauma that I can't, or won't, recall.' (2011, p68) The bears can be seen as either sinking or rising from the earth, 'a 'glass half full – glass half empty' dialectic' (2011). An army of zombies *uprising*, or a morbid teddy bear graveyard.

The idea was received with enthusiasm by the band when Thorgerson met with them on a train from Exeter to London, and incredulity when they were told that 150 teddy bears would be buried for real. Later, Storm was slightly disappointed when he found out it had been demoted from the album cover to a single, replaced by what 'looked very like the work of a novice that had just discovered the computer, plus some drawing software' (2011).

Only Revolutions



Fig 7 Stormstudios (2011) Biffy Clyro – Only Revolutions

The title of this Biffy Clyro album comes from the title of a book about a fractured relationship between a man and a woman from both perspectives on opposite pages. That concept was distilled into this photograph through several subtle pieces. Firstly, the couple stand opposed on a field, connoting a field of battle, and hiding a rolling pin and a knife behind their backs, implying the intent to murder. The focal point of the image is the flags which billow behind the figures but also gag them. Thorgerson debated with Dan Abbott – another designer from Stormstudios – about whether real social change was achievable only through revolution, and how those involved were represented by important and symbolic flags. ‘Gags that become flags’ added Abbott (Thorgerson, 2011, p97) referring to how prisoners of revolution would be gagged, and how these bits of material become emblematic flags of revolution. The burning table in the background, Thorgerson continues, is ‘the table around which they can no longer sit to negotiate, any more than can revolutionary forces and the governments they oppose’ (2011).

In the exhibition you can adorn yourself with the flags and stand with an industrial fan sending it billowing above you.

The importance of interactive art



Fig 8 Daniel Arsham (2021) Bronze Eroded Melpomene

Being able to get into a piece of art's personal space and feel it allows the viewer to foster a deeper connection to it. Unlike in a museum where the exhibits are confined by a frame, glass box, or velvet rope, this outdoor experience encourages the visitors to physically interact with the art, to fully explore and understand the meanings behind it, and shoo the ideas of art being something unachievable or out of reach of everyday people.

In a report titled *Interactive Learning in Museums of Art and Design*, Marianna Adams presents the findings of studies on peoples' experiences of interactive exhibitions. The three main findings were as follows:

First, museum visitors value interactive experiences that enable them to engage in genuine exploration, follow their own interests and facilitate social interaction. Second, interactive spaces in art museums can help break down public perceptions of the art museum as an elitist and family-unfriendly institution. Third, engagement in interactive spaces over time provides visitors of all ages with inquiry and looking skills needed to have their own dialogue with objects of art. (Adams, 2002, p3)

Storm Thorgerson is not a household name, but his images are everywhere, whether people know what they are or not. The Storm Thorgerson: Outdoor Experience Tour is designed to change that through letting everyone explore his works, finding out how they were made, and to inspire them – proving the scope of a piece of art is only limited by imagination.

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Figures

Fig 1 Bicaalu (2024) *Storm Thorgerson y sus portadas de discos*. Available at: <https://www.bicaalu.com/storm-thorgerson-y-sus-portadas-de-discos/> (accessed 26 April 2025)

Fig 2 Hipgnosis (1973) *Dark Side of the Moon*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dark_Side_of_the_Moon (accessed 24 April 2025)

Fig 3 Hipgnosis (1976) *Presence*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presence_%28album%29 (accessed 25 April 2025)

Fig 4 Hipgnosis (1976) *The Object*. Available at: <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/384003662070> (accessed 25 April 2025)

Fig 5 Stormstudios (2009) *Tiny Pictures*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiny_Pictures (accessed 25 April 2025)

Fig 6 Stormstudios (2009) *Uprising*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uprising_%28song%29 (accessed 24 April 2025)

Fig 7 Stormstudios (2011) *Only Revolutions*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Only_Revolutions_%28album%29 (accessed 23 April 2025)

Fig 8 Daniel Arsham (2021) *Bronze Eroded Melpomene*. Available at: <https://yorkshirefoodguide.co.uk/book/yorkshire-sculpture-park-tickets/> (accessed 27 April 2025)