

Hackney Diamonds, IORR

Buying A Rolling Stones Album

I only knew there was an album because I heard the announcement on a transistor radio the size of a pack of cigarettes. In early April of 1964 I walked a mile and half, passed my school, my church, a gigantic cemetery and a high school to get to the Hecht Company's department store in Edmondson Village. I entered on the ground floor and proceeded directly to the music department. There I selected England's Newest Hit Makers The Rolling Stones. I held the record



in my hand and looked slowly and carefully at the five young men on the cover. At that time, I did not know who any of them were. The cover photo was shot by a guy named Nicholas Wright who was younger than Bill Wyman but older than the other guys at the time. I pulled out two one-dollar bills, paid and got change.

On the walk home I pulled the album out of the thin brown paper bag and turned it over in my hands as I walked along. There was the band name larger than life on the rear along with headshots and names of the five band members. Some guy named Andrew Loog Oldham, with three names that guy had to be old, told me The Rolling Stones were a way of life. That walk home with that album cover in my hands may have been the most intimate time I ever spent with this band that would be with me all my life.

Fast forward. The Stones were teasing a new album long before the pandemic. On August 17, 2023 an ad in the Hackney Gazette teased the name of the Stones newest album and the September release of the first song from that album. That Song, Angry, was released September 6, 2023 in a terrific video that animated Rolling Stones album billboards from across the band's decades in the business. That same day the three surviving Stones met with Jimmy Fallon on live-streamed tv to tell the world about their new album.

A regular barrage of emails from The Rolling Stones [universalmusic.com](https://www.rollingstones.com) began to regal me with options for making sure I had the new album Hackney Diamonds that was set to be released October 20, 2023. I dutifully pre-ordered at the Rolling Stones official website. I pulled out two twenty-dollar bills and got change.

In the meantime, I learned there would be three alternate covers for the album and I had seen each repeatedly in digital images all over the Internet. I expected to receive the primary cover (seen below) on my album. I forgot there would be a delay in receiving the album by buying directly from the Stones and when I finally received my copy I learned I had an alternate cover. An alternate cover, whodda thunk it? An album has one cover and everyone who owns the



album experiences the same cover, right? Maybe in 1964 but not anymore. The Stones, once the greatest rock and roll band in the world, are no longer a band, so much as they are a corporate monolith that often bleeds on the cutting edge of marketing. It was true for a long time, it became official in 2021 when the Stones made a business decision to retire Brown Sugar from the setlist. Where was that rock and roll mindset? Alive and well with Keith Richards, who said, ““I’m trying to figure out with the sisters quite where the beef is. Didn’t they understand this was a song about the horrors of slavery? But they’re

trying to bury it. At the moment I don’t want to get into conflicts with all of this shit. But I’m hoping that we’ll be able to resurrect the babe in her glory somewhere along the track.” But now business trumps rock and roll as we hear in Mick Jagger’s voice, ““I never would write that song now. I would probably censor myself.”

Everything has changed about the way one buys a Stones album these days. Instead of a pleasant surprise one morning we hear about it for years and it is teased and rolled out over weeks. That first Stones cover was a picture of a hopeful young band taken by a hopeful young photographer. Andrew’s screed has been replaced by digital wizardry. My cover is one of 43 variations of this album in vinyl. There is nothing to read the corporate logo says it all. The Stones are back in vinyl. Our story begins the title.

The Title

We had the title before we had anything else about this album. What do you do when all you have is a new title? You go to the dictionary and then to iorr.org and Steve Hoffman to find out what people are saying. The Oxford English Dictionary offers enough definitions for hackney and diamonds to start an avalanche of rumored meanings. One of the proffered definitions did a pretty fair job of characterizing most of the fans’ comments. That would be the one that described Hackney Diamonds as horse poop, which missed on the album but was fairly spot on in describing the other thoughts fans offered on the meaning of the title.

So, let us go to the source on the subject. Mick Jagger described choosing a title as one of the most difficult parts of making the album. Jagger said, “We’d been throwing out a lot of ideas, but no one could agree on anything.” Richards said, “I was at the end of my tether.” Then a friend of Jagger’s, painter and sculptor Marc Quinn, showed him photos of what he called “Hackney Diamonds.” “Hackney’s a part of London, so Hackney diamonds is when you go out on Saturday night. And you feel rough and ready to destroy things. You smash the windshield of

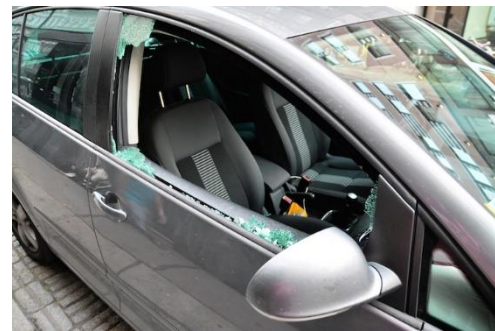
a car and it all splinters and the glass falls on the ground, and you call that Hackney Diamonds. I sent it round to Ronnie and Keith, and Keith said, "Yeah, go for it. I said, Thank God for that. We've got one."

A Sample of Fan Comments

- The artist Paulina Almira has a nice funky retro style, reminds me of 1970s airbrushers like Alan Aldridge.
- Im looking forward to the final cover art. it Cant be any worse that Grrr!
- If this is the artwork, I plead that's it's the best since at least Tattoo You.
- It's very vintage, retro and timeless all at the same time.
- Reminds me of something they could have done in the mid-seventies.
- The hand with the knife is not hers. She is getting murdered by the Midnight Rambler.
- Diamonds are sometimes called stones. Hackney Diamonds = worn out stones?
- *Blue & Lonesome* excepted, I'm glad the Stones' studio catalogue avoided the tongue and lips for the cover art. It's used just about every single other place possible, so it's nice that the albums actually stand out individually.
- Waiting for release to crap on it is SO boring. We'll just have to crap on the "assumed" cover.
- You mean it's going to be issued with a dozen alternative cover photos and two dozen alternative vinyl colours? Please no!

Richards summarized the album naming experience at the September 6 announcement from the Hackney Empire in London this way, "It got called Hackney Diamonds because I think we were flinging ideas around for titles. We went from "Hit & Run", "Smash & Grab" and (laughs) somehow between that we came up with Hackney Diamonds, which is like a variation of both - and also it's a London band, you know.' Asked if it was a slang term, Jagger replied, "Yeah (it's a type of slang). It's like when you get your windscreen broken on Saturday night in Hackney all around... and all the bits go on the street (laughs). A shattered windscreen."

We'll return to speculate on what it means shortly, but first we observe that Hackney



Diamonds was not initially introduced as the title of the album, it was introduced as the name of a company that specialized in glass repair. On August 17, 2023 an advertisement appeared in the Hackney Gazette announcing that Hackney Diamonds was

opening a new store on Mare Street in September 2023. Mare Street is in London's Hackney district. The ad, seen below, was placed without the Gazette's direct knowledge of the ad's purpose. The ad notes the firm was established in 1962. It telegraphs the Stones involvement with a Stones logo for a tittle over the I in Hackney Diamonds which reprises the font from the *Some Girls* album. The main message incorporates three song titles to say, "Our friendly team promises you satisfaction. When you say gimme shelter we'll fix your shattered windows."



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reports... cent im-... tive... is home... in April... using a... that all... there-... mined... /were... prose-... pene-... ; peril... as... sious... qual... re-... six... KC... De... ay... ch... y... it... it... Moon... 10-year... der... ing...

Hackney Diamonds
Specialists in Glass Repair

OPENING OUR NEW STORE ON
MARE STREET, SEPTEMBER 2023.

**OUR FRIENDLY TEAM
PROMISES YOU
SATISFACTION.
WHEN YOU SAY GIMME
SHELTER WE'LL FIX
YOUR SHATTERED
WINDOWS.**

CALL 020 3932 6088
NOW FOR A QUOTE.

Est. 1962
WWW.HACKNEYDIAMONDS.COM

A sketch of a finger using a dial up phone accompanies a suggestion that the reader “Call 020 3932 6088 Now For A Quote.” A call to that number revealed a Cockney-accented male voice teasing the release of the opening track of the new album, saying, “Welcome to Hackney Diamonds, specialists in glass repairs, Don’t get angry, get it fixed. Opening early September, Mare Street, E8. Register for a call at www.hackneydiamonds.com. Come on then.” The same website is listed at the bottom of the ad.

E8 is the postcode district that includes Hackney London. It is the home of the Hackney Empire (photo) a restored theater and music hall built in 1901. It became the site of the official September 6, 2023 announcement and launch for

Hackney Diamonds.

One week later the Gazette outed itself as punked by the band. By then the world had figured out the Stones were revealing the title of their next album. Simon Murfitt, senior editor of the Hackney Gazette and Islington Gazette said, “It’s very exciting to have such a massive band announcing their new album in our papers, especially in such a cryptic manner.” He explained they normally handle more local businesses. Murfitt told the BBC he only learned of the publicity stunt when readers wrote in asking for souvenir copies.



Seated on the Hackney Empire stage adorned with crashed chandeliers, the band said the title of their first studio album of new tracks for 18 years was inspired by East End slang for broken glass following a robbery. A London urban dictionary defines Dalston diamonds as, “Broken glass in the street, usually from broken car windows as a result of theft. Dalston is an area of Hackney, East London. They illustrate the phrase with

simple usage, as in “The street was shining with Dalston diamonds.” The same dictionary defines Hackney Disco as “three or more police cars with their sirens on going past,” apparently it happens a lot in Hackney, London. The phrase is illustrated with the example, “Mate, check the Hackney Disco. Somebody must of got murked.”

Gazette ad an album tease?

The Rolling Stones may have revealed title in this paper

Alex Marsh
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LEGENDARY rock'n'roll band The Rolling Stones may have revealed the title of their next album in an advert for a fictitious glass repair shop in this paper.

The ad, offering the services of Hackney Diamonds, believed to be the name of the band's new album, appeared in Hackney Gazette and Islington Gazette last week.

It was taken out by Universal Music Group, the company that handles the band's music catalogue.

References to The Rolling Stones songs are woven throughout the notice, with the company name written in the same typeface as the title on the band's 1978 album *Some Girls*.

The 'i' in Diamonds is also dotted with the band's tongue and lips logo.

At the bottom of the advert, the glass repair business claims to have been established in 1962, the year the band was formed.

The main text of the notice reads: “Our friendly team promises you satisfaction. When you say gimme shelter we'll fix your shattered windows”.

Eagle-eyed fans could quickly spot the references to three of the band's best-known hits (*I Can't Get No*) Satisfaction, Gimme Shelter and Shattered.

Hackney Diamonds also claims to be opening a new store on Mare Street in September in the notice.

When the number included in the ad is rung, would-be customers hear a recorded message that says: “Welcome to Hackney Diamonds, specialists in glass repair: Don't get angry get it fixed.

“Opening early September, Mare Street, E8. Register for a call at hackneydiamonds.com. Come on then.”

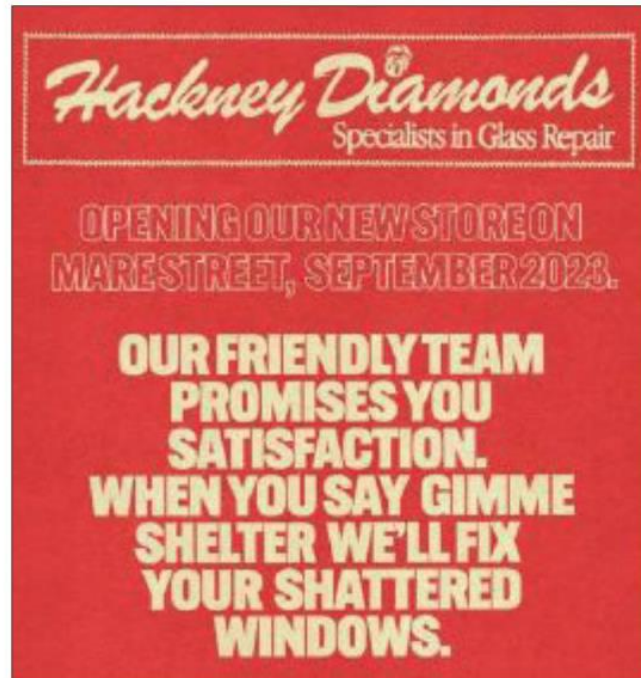
Simon Murfit, senior editor of Hackney Gazette and Islington Gazette, said: “It's very exciting to have such a massive band announcing their new album in our papers, especially in such a cryptic manner.

“I have already had several emails requesting back copies and no doubt the papers will become collectors items for music fans.

“I've always said The Rolling Stones have good taste when it comes to their local news and this just proves it!”

Earlier this month bronze statues of band members Mick Jagger and Keith Richards were unveiled in their hometown of Dartford, Kent.

A new Stones album would be the 31st in total, and first since 2016's *Blue and Lonesome*. It would also be the band's first release since the death of drummer Charlie Watts, aged 80, two years ago.



The Rolling Stones teased a new album with an advert in the Gazette last week

Gazette confesses being fooled by the Stones ad

What does the title mean to the Stones? Until some lips loosen we can only speculate. Every album cover project has a brief, a theme or idea the artists would like to see executed through the art. Sometimes it is nothing more than the title of the album, other times it is a more developed notion or theme. In my limited experience, artists have more often than not been willing to share the brief for an album. Studio Fury, the design studio for this and several more Stones projects declined to comment on the potential meaning of the title. Artist Marc Quinn declined to comment on his role in naming the album.

Absent more knowledgeable background we speculate a bit. This title may be a rosy bit of sentimental retrospection, harkening back to the days of 1962 when the core of the Stones met Charlie. When Hackney Diamonds were first a viable concept for the Rolling Stones they were young, naïve, hopeful, and full of piss and vinegar as young men discovering themselves often

are. Lest the wave of nostalgia I ride seems too much of a stretch the lyrics of “Whole Wide World,” reveal Jagger and Richards touring their shared journeys as young men:

*The streets I used to walk on, are full of broken glass
And everywhere I’m looking, there’s memories of my past
The filthy flat in Fulham, the smell of sex and glass
I never ever really knew, where I was sleeping next.*

Many years have passed but those images of ourselves in our early life remain strong, for better or worse. One of their best buddies, a constant throughout all those years, has passed. Emotions run strong. Combine that with the nostalgia seniors often experience and we get a picture of very intense feelings summarized by a nostalgic phrase that represents every shattered dream and relationship the Stones have shared over the six decades of their diamond jubilee. Welcome to Hackney Diamonds.

The Three Covers

Let’s have a look at the three main covers for the album, just to see what is there.



First, there is a heart-shaped diamond that has been shattered. No reason to page Dr. Freud for that image. Diamonds are stones, in fact they are known to be the hardest stones in the world. They are also the symbol for a 60th anniversary. It seems obvious the diamond represents the Stones.

A red feminine righthand appears to have been holding this heart shaped diamond. The hand is disembodied and fades into the shadows of the album. Support for the diamond? Let’s call this fans, friends, family, lovers. And all of that was not

enough to prevent the diamond/band from being shattered by the hand of fate. A masculine righthand emerging from the background wielding a dagger has apparently stabbed the diamond in the heart, shattering it. It is not a stretch to liken this to the death of Charlie Watts, the heart of the Rolling Stones. His death threatened the very existence of the Stones. There are at least 20 distinct shards of glass and two large pieces on the cover. The band name and

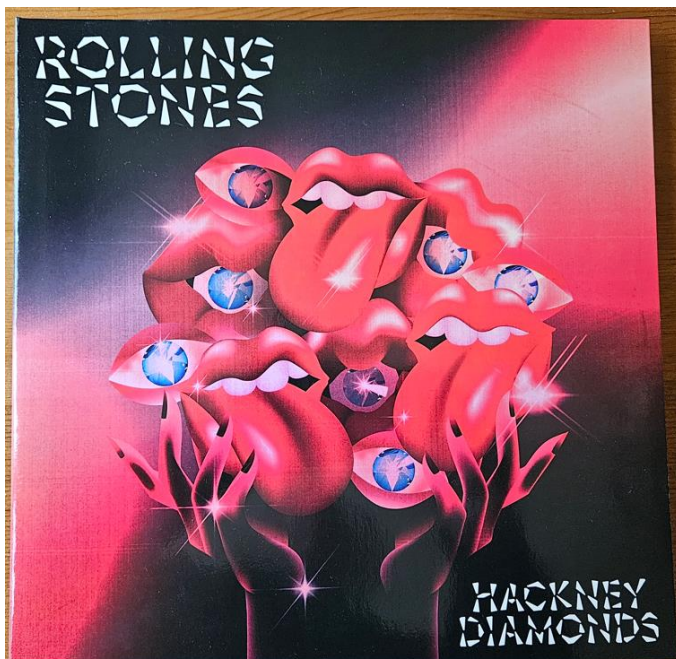
album title are printed in diamond shard or glass shard font on opposing corners of the album. The shards are a direct representation of the hackney diamonds of the title.

The second album cover works with the same heart-shaped diamond centerpiece. This time a red female form is embracing the heart, seemingly to keep it together. It speaks of the effort to preserve the stone that has been fractured by the hand of fate wielding a knife. There are fewer



shards visible in this cover, in part because of the arms and legs. There are minor differences in the coloring of the heart diamond. The “hand of fate” appears identical in appearance and effect on the heart of the band. This time the supportive element of the first cover is more expressed. The mystery feminine tries desperately to keep the diamond from splitting into a million pieces that fly off in every direction. She is using all that she has to keep the diamond as whole as possible under this fateful attack. And so it was with the album itself.

The third cover is quite different from the other two. This cover is about survival and continuing. The three Stones logos represent the surviving members of the band, Jagger,



Richards, and Ronny Wood. There are seven blue eyeballs all supported by feminine hands, which are clearly supportive and friendly. The two supportive feminine hands provide tender loving support for the survivors. In the iris of each eye is the reflection of the shattering diamond. If that number is significant we will have to wait until time loosens some lips to tell us so.

There are also parts of lips surrounding or adjacent to some of the eyes. Sparkles, like light reflected from diamonds, also adorn the cover.

My hot take is the primary cover reflects the shocking impact of the loss of Charlie Watts. It is all about threat and loss and shock. The second cover depicts efforts to keep the band together following the devastating loss of this attack by the hand of fate. It is about recovery. The third cover is about survival and moving forward eyes open to what inevitably lies ahead.

Or they could be three random designs dreamed up by a young woman from the Philippines, your choice.

The Love Letter Hypothesis

The cover art is a memorial to Charlie Watts, in fact it is almost a love letter. Losing Watts was a knife to the heart of the Rolling Stones and that is what we get on the primary album cover. And, of course, diamonds or stones as they are known are the hardest substance known, you have to be tough to last this long in a young man's game.

Let's back up a bit to move forward. In 1562 Mary Queen of Scots sent England's Queen Elizabeth I a heart-shaped diamond ring. This is one of the first documented mentions of a heart-shaped diamond. This gesture was regarded as an ardent symbol of friendship and goodwill between royals. Since then the heart diamond has been a symbol of love, admiration and friendship. On Hackney Diamonds we once again have UK royalty, rock royalty in this case, offering a heart diamond as a symbol of love, admiration and friendship. This time from the Rolling Stones to their drummer Charlie Watts.



Watts with his art design background was often involved in the band's album art decisions, dating at least from his cartoon on the Between the Buttons album cover. My take is that the Stones saw the album cover for this first album created since his death as the ideal way to memorialize the strong emotional attachment the band had with this man for the 59 years they knew him. Everything about this album art says we love you Charlie. It is no coincidence that a heart also symbolizes the rhythmic center of our existence, as Watts was for the band from the time he joined it in 1963.

The content of the album has only convinced me further. Sweet Sounds of Heaven is a fervent prayer offered by preacher Jagger in the style of a Negro Spiritual. The song is said to have originated one sunny afternoon when Jagger was at his London home. He was tinkering on his piano, inspired by the sound of the leaves rustling as the wind blew through the trees outside. A pleasant breeze has often been interpreted as the breath of God and it is not difficult to imagine Jagger falling under the gospel-infused spell of the moment as his thoughts turned to the band's momentous loss.

Early in the song he reveals the presence of his bandmate on his mind, as Jagger preaches, "Bless the father, bless the son, hear the sound of the drums." Stevie Wonder played keyboards on the song and he confirmed the presence of Watts during the recording saying, "I felt that the



song needed a place of celebration, a celebration of the spirit of the rhythms and the spirit of just everybody coming together for that event," Wonder added, acknowledging that the song reminded him of the Stones' late drummer, Charlie Watts. "It's not saying, 'Goodbye,' to me, it's saying, 'Hello.'" Jagger later said of the song, "Sweet Sounds of Heaven is kind of like a gospel song, but it's got personal things in it."

It only makes sense that Watts' memory and spirit presided over the band's studio work. It is only natural that the band felt an intensely personal

link to the man, and that seems to have compelled them to create this cover tribute to Watts and his time with the band. Richards said, "I think this record is halfway a tribute to Charlie Watts and the Stones' history, and (half) an attempt at the future and how much there is left." Richards added, "I think because of Charlie passing, we felt that we're still going and we should still retain an identity. And still say, hey, it's only rock and roll but here we are. I thought in a way that I made this record because Charlie sort of said do it." This strikes me as very congruent with that third album cover.

Bill Wyman returned for a song. He said, "Mick got in touch and asked if I would play on one of the new album tracks featuring Charlie on drums, which I was happy to agree to. It was a great opportunity to play alongside the late Charlie, my much missed and closest friend, once again."

Interestingly, the last song on the album, “Rolling Stones Blues” is performed by the two surviving original members of the Stones, sans drums. What more obvious tribute is there to Mr. Watts?

Not convinced? A heart diamond typically has 59 facets, look it up. Watts met the Stones in 1962 he died in 2021, do the math. It feels like something is at work here. The album cover as a sentimental memorial to Charlie Watts is not a hardsell. Did the universe mysteriously lead this way? Was it Charlie’s hand at play? Was it the Stones’ original brief? Time may eventually tell, but there is no mistaking Watts’ impact on the cover art and the music making process.

The Rear Cover, Gatefold and Sleeve

Turn the album over and you find a track list and a credit for Producer Andrew Watt along with 13 shards of diamond/glass, let’s call them Hackney Diamonds.



The gatefold is simple display of the band name written in the Hackney Diamond font created by Studio Fury.



The inner sleeve shows the Stones logo (below left) tweaked for the Hackney Diamonds look. The flipside of the sleeve contains musical and production credits. There is also a notation in the lower left corner that says. “DEDICATED WITH LOVE TO CHARLIE WATTS.”



Art Design-Studio Fury

Studio Fury has been the art design go to firm for the Stones in recent years. They designed the album art for Honk and Blue and Lonesome as well as Hackney Diamonds. They have also been

active producing anniversary books for Tattoo You, Goat's Head Soup, Stick Fingers and Exile on Main Street as well as On the Air in the Sixties.

Studio Fury makes sense for the corporate Stones. Need dynamic graphics? Call Studio Fury. This is light years removed from the days when photographer buddy, David Bailey, shot photos for the cover or when young artists on the way up like Gered Mankowitz played kick around and hung out with the band. They are smooth, efficient, effective and they are the go to designers of this moment.

What we do know is that the title was chosen before the album art was created and Studio Fury



was selected to design the album covers. Studio Fury's founder and creative director is Stephen Kennedy. He is bull doggedly mum on the details of the work they do for the Stones. It is, however, known that they found and commissioned Paulina Almira to do the artwork. She did the art for three alternate covers for the album. Studio Fury has a well-established working relationship with Jagger and the band and they coordinated directly with them throughout the project. Studio Fury is also credited with developing the font. The brief the

Stones provided is a closely guarded secret.

Stephen Kennedy, a principal of Studio Fury, says on his LinkedIn page, "I bring the visions of entrepreneurs, artists and cultural icons to life, helping them define their position, find their unique voice and create something valuable and lasting. My approach connects fluid imagination and crafted design with concrete business sense." That is exactly what we see in these three album covers.

I have rarely had trouble learning the brief from artists. I speculate that the closely guarded secret of this brief may be related to an intensely personal dimension for the band.

Kennedy is notoriously faithful to the Stones expectation of discretion and secrecy about their dealings. He is equally faithful to extolling the value of the studio over individuals, himself included. For Hackney Diamond he found a bright young talent to help the Stones find their voice on these album covers.

Studio Fury reached out to Almira's agency H+ Creative to commission her for the artwork. Although the details of the brief are a closely guarded secret it is known it talked about strong emotions associated with romantic relationships and it wanted the artwork to convey that intensity. Almira's work began around March of 2023.

The Artist-Paulina Almira

Paulina Almira is a young Filipina who describes herself on Youtube like this, "I'm a digital illustrator and I work primarily on Adobe Illustrator and After Effects. My style is surreal, macabre, retro-inspired, and ultra-feminine. Almira was justifiably proud of her selection for this gig as reflected in some of her social media posts. Let's listen in on her social media. Asked if she could name five songs from the new album she said, "SIKE! JOKE'S ON YOU because I can actually enumerate the entire tracklist 🤪 😊 Kidding aside, i'm humbled by this opportunity and i still can't believe some of the crazy things that have come out of my mouth over the course of this project like "Is this too pink for Mick?" (((AS IN JAGGER))) and the equally crazy things I've been told, such as "Keith likes it!" (((AS IN RICHARDS))) Are you kidding meeee???

The email that was meant to confirm I made it through the test rounds said something like "Well done, Paulina!" which obviously my paranoid brain didn't think much of. It took Stephen Kennedy of Studio Fury setting up a call to discuss the single covers for me to say, "Wait...is this final? I'm really doing their album art....like ACTUALLY?" He laughed, confirming with something like, "Yes, Paulina, the contracts are signed, I thought that was clear in my email!"



Only then did I allow myself a MINI freakout. I'm some random girl @studiofury and the Stones found on the internet and they put the aesthetic destiny of their first release in 20-ish years in MY TINY HANDS 🤪 Stephen, thanks for the razor sharp crystal clear art direction. Hannah, Elsa, as always, thank you for your project management magic - my work

shines the brightest when I know you have my back!

This is crazy you guys!!!!!!! 🤪 🤪 🤪 Not sure what I did to deserve an honor of this magnitude and i can't thank you (you, friends and family and everyone who's been moved by my art) for believing in me."

Almira's playful, surreal compositions have been described as dreamlike combinations of technology, fashion, and the natural world. Born in the Philippines, she grew up loving "Barbie and Bratz dolls, lavish dresses, the Powerpuff Girls, and anything sparkly", but she also spent a lot of her time reading "horror fiction, fantasy, and steampunk novels." She says she was

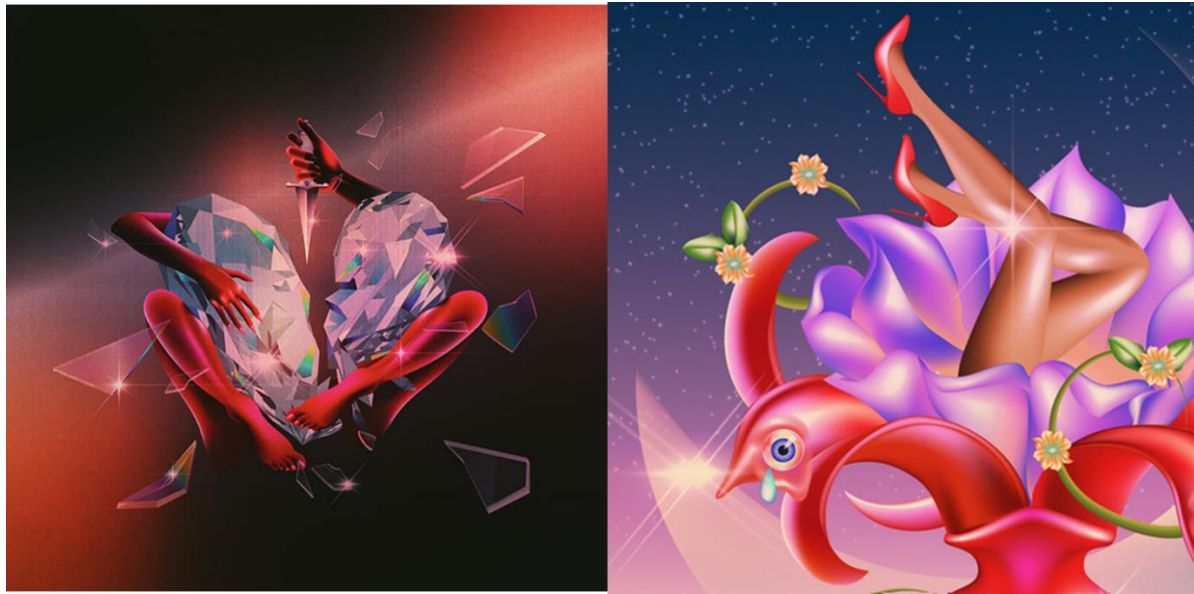
fascinated by “anything gory and morbid.” An early love of fashion kickstarted her creativity and she was studying to become a fashion designer in NY when Covid-19 ate the world. The pandemic disrupted the fashion graphics industry just enough for her to change her plans and pivot to graphic design. She describes herself as a very visual person, who thinks in colors.

There is ample evidence in her earlier work that she did not invent all the images in her covers for the Stones, elements of them were already extant in her work. But this is evidence of a good fit for this time in Rolling Stones history. Hackney Diamonds is very much on-brand for Paulina. Many of her previous works are redolent with disembodied hands, feet, legs, supportive nurturing hands, eyeballs, hearts, and pinks running to red.

Compare the hand image for the single cover for Sweet Sounds of Silence (right) to this earlier work (left). Her preference for pinks is amply on display in her earlier work.



Shapely legs appear in several of Almira's previous works, as seen in one of them below.

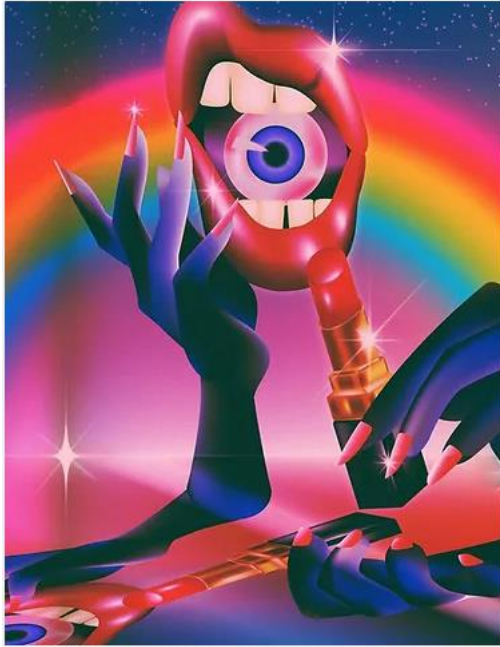


A comparison of one of the cover images (below left) and an earlier work called Chrome Heart (below right) is provided below. The soft supple shape of the hands and their positioning in a supportive nurturing posture are present in both.



Above Paulina Almira: Chrome Heart (Copyright © Paulina Almira, 2021)

Images of eyes are abundant in Almira's earlier work. The one below almost seems to foreshadow the third album cover for the Stones.



Her basic process, once she gets a stark image in mind is to sketch it on a piece of paper or a track pad, then she just draws on illustrator and colors it in.

Almira describes her work as “digital explorations of the surreal, the ethereal, the macabre and the pink”, she loves to create contradictions within her work.

These contradictions are abundant on the two knife-wielding covers. The primary cover shows a heart with its symbolism of love and life that is being shattered by a knife wielding hand of fate. The leg cover shows disembodied legs and an arm struggling to preserve the heart of stone, the very same heart diamond being shattered by the same hand of fate.



Almira explains her predilection for pink, her favorite color explaining ‘it’s widely associated with softness, femininity and fun – many of my pieces do tend to express those ideas. On first glance most of my pieces are playful and pink, but when you look closer there’s something fucked up happening, and I love the element of surprise that evokes.’ The pinks gave way to intense reds on the Stones’ covers. The colors are packed with emotion ranging from passionate, intense love to anger and violence. That pretty much runs the gamut of what one might feel on the untimely death of a lifelong friend. The red of the album covers is a hot, strong, stimulating color that represents intensity, energy and emotion.

Almira considers *Three Minutes Too Late* (below) to be her masterpiece. Notice the familiar hands and eyeballs as well as the dripping blood. Her masterpiece was inspired by the hit TV show, *Squid Game*. It demonstrates the artist’s ability to create a subtly macabre work that shifts and changes even as you look at it. There is much of this Almira in the Stones covers.

Almira has been well-schooled by the corporate Stones and Studio Fury. Apparently, Almira released some background images she developed for the Stones project that were available online for a day but the Stones legal team quickly had them removed from all the places they were posted. She declined to discuss the brief directly but did say, “I can’t share the exact details, but the brief talked about strong emotions associated with romantic relationships and wanted the artwork to convey that intensity.” This goal was undeniably attained in the final products. She submitted about 4 rough concept sketches for the main album cover.

When asked about her interactions with the band, she said, “I can’t say for sure because my only contact was from Studio Fury, the project’s creative director. I know he was speaking to Mick Jagger directly, so the feedback he relayed to me was a mix of Mick’s and his own. Sadly I didn’t get the chance to speak to the band at all, so besides hearing Mick’s feedback from the



creative director, I can't speak on the members' involvement in the design process. Working on this was a relatively straightforward process feedback was clear and concise, which is something I appreciate SO much. I like that I was encouraged to interpret the direction independently of the brief. You'd think that might have caused a clash in ideas but surprisingly my brainstorming usually led me to concepts that were fairly aligned with the design direction." I suspect Almira is going to be busy.

Cover Variants

Up until now if we identified a

Stones studio album and its country of origin there would be one and only one cover for that album, with two exceptions. If it was *Beggars Banquet* we'd have to specify if it was the original invitation album cover or the restored toilet cover and if it was *Some Girls* was it the original cover or the cover under re-construction. There were also some different color combinations for the *Some Girls* cover. It is a bit tricky to try to talk about the album art for *Hackney Diamonds*, released October 20, 2023, because there are so many different covers and packages.

Let's take a brief look backward for some context. Band photos graced the covers of Stones albums from the first unnamed album in 1964 through the US version of *Between the Buttons* in 1967. They innovated with a lenticular photo of the band for *Their Satanic Majesties Request* in 1967. *Beggars Banquet* was the first album cover not to feature the band. The original release was a printed wedding invitation but it has been restored to the originally intended cover photograph of a toilet in recent years. Photos graced the covers from *Beggars Banquet* in 1968 through *Goat's Head Soup* in 1973 but not one of them featured the band. *GHS* featured a veiled image of Mick alone on the front cover.

The first album cover, neglecting the Beggars Banquet invitation cover, not to intentionally use a photograph was the painted cover of It's Only Rock 'n Roll in 1974. A die-cut was used for Some Girls (1978), a painted photo appeared on Tattoo You (1981) and the first fully digital cover was Steel Wheels (1989). Blue and Lonesome (2016) was digital and Hackney Diamonds is digital with an asterisk because it also includes a photographic cover.

If you're keeping score with me there are 17 covers with photos of the band, 6 with photos of other subjects, 1 painted photograph, 3 paintings, 1 die-cut and 3 digital covers for 31 US and UK album covers between 1964 and 2023.

Universal Music's Orla Lee-Fisher said of the Stones, "Their work ethic is incredible, I have to say, and they've been doing stuff non-stop since the Hackney Empire launch." Hackney empire indeed. Asked about the Stones ambitions for vinyl sales and the range of products, she said, "Yeah, there are coloured variants and there's the one that we've always done from their bricks-and-mortar store, RS No.9 Carnaby Street, where we've always had the Pantone red vinyl that we started with the catalogue [reissues]. We've expanded that because of the pop-up stores and we're carrying it in those globally, so we're giving more people an opportunity with the red vinyl. There are colour variants, there's a picture disc, so vinyl is hugely important. But then you never underestimate the CD market for a band like the Stones, because they have such a wide reach. So it's something for everyone, physical but also digital."

Early conversations with people connected to the album art revealed there would be three cover variants. An October 24, 2023 count identified at least 43 vinyl variants. Polydor offers the sampler below. Heaven help the completists. I smell the sweet cents of heaven falling down falling down to the Hackney Empire.

With so many covers it is not possible to say what the "official album cover" looks like and that saddens me, just a tad. The figure below shows the range of ways the album can be identified by a fan. Studio Fury's designs occupy positions 2 through 4 in the figure below. Position 5 is a special edition created by British designer Paul Smith.



There are picture discs in clear sleeves that look like album art. At least one of them looks like the Studio Fury cover. The FCB disc is different.

But wait, there's more. If three album covers is not enough how about 30 more variations. What, you say, can it possibly be true? Yes, it is true. Each of the 30 major league baseball teams has a white album cover with a stylized Stones logo, with a tongue stitched like a baseball, done up in the team's colors with a three letter acronym for the team's hometown, also in team colors, riding above the logo teeth. In the upper left is the band's name in the glass shard font, in the lower right in place of the album name is a team logo. It is the most ridiculous tie-in I can imagine despite **Major League Baseball's announcement** MLB PRESENTS ROLLING STONES:HACKNEY Diamonds Exclusive COLLECTOR'S EDITION BASEBALL WHITE VINYL CELEBRATING THE NEW ALBUM & HISTORIC LEGACY OF ROLLING STONES & MLB. I must have had my head turned during that historic legacy. Here is my hometown Baltimore Orioles cover. The artwork is tailored to each MLB team specifically.



Paul Smith has a limited edition vinyl version. To commemorate their first studio album in 18 years, The Rolling Stones tapped longtime friend and collaborator, British designer Paul Smith, to create a special edition of the album cover. The artist was commissioned to create alternate cover art for the *Hackney Diamonds* vinyl, along with t-shirts.

For the vinyl, Smith opted to hand-write the band name and album title. He used a photoprint of smashed glass to make up the cover. That looks like a red flower behind the glass. The track list is also hand-written.

“I consider it an incredible honour to work with Mick, Keith, and Ronnie on this exciting collaboration – as a brand, we’ve always had a close relationship with the music business, and I count The Rolling Stones as one of my all-time musical heroes,” Smith said. I, for one, would not be surprised to learn that Smith may have paid a little something for this honor, but it would be irresponsible of me to so speculate.

“As well as being a fan, I’m also lucky enough to be able to call the band friends. It goes without saying that *Hackney Diamonds* is a phenomenal album, with a fearless spirit. For this launch, I wanted to create something that stayed true to the vision that the band set out – with a few subtle Paul Smith ‘twists’, as we call them.” The rear of the Smith cover is seen below.



There is a picture disc version with the shattered heart imprinted on the vinyl disc, which is enclosed in a clear PVC sleeve.

A zoetrope variant was limited to 10,000 copies. A zoetrope is a device used to animate drawings or photos in the days before film. The definitive version was introduced as a toy by Milton Bradley in 1866 and became very successful. A modern version

of a Victorian era zoetrope is seen on the left below. If, for some reason that escapes me, you are interested in seeing what the big deal is with this version you are in luck. Someone on Youtube has recorded it.

You can see side 1 of the Hackey Diamonds version at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1fttKRKGNo> and side 2 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amrSc8YKkoI>



There is at least one European football Club Disc for the Barcelona Football Club.



There is a traditional Carnaby Street wrapper for the red vinyl version that makes the sleeve look quite different.



Then there are other embellishments that create their own special looks.

Post Script

Had there been 43 versions of the cover of England's Newest Hit Makers I suspect I would still be at the Hecht Company trying to figure out which one to buy. The Stones started out getting buddies to photograph them, many of whom were trying to find their way in the field. Now the corporate Stones ring up their design firm and they can outsource the work to talented digital artists anywhere in the world who will have no reason or opportunity to interact with the band.

The world is changing. Album art is made differently. Albums are purchased differently. And unless we are buying vinyl no one holds the art in their hand and counts the eyeballs or the sparkles and wonders who the eyeballs represent or if the sparkles have any significance, but it sure has been fun to have this opportunity over and over again with this band cum corporate machine. That Andrew guy was right the Stones did turn out to be a way of life.

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