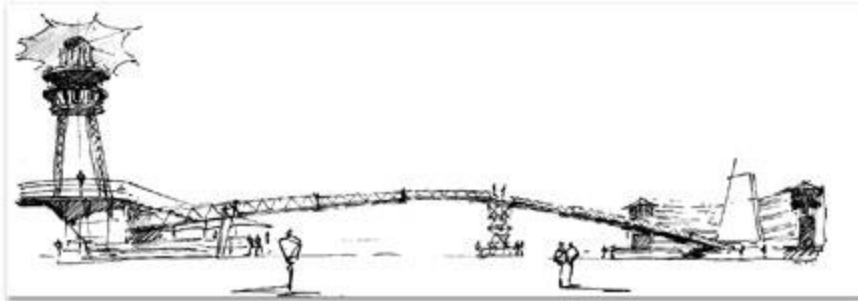


Bridges to Babylon

Blessed Poison

Here is a sketch of an idea that changed the name of this album from *Blessed Poison* to *Bridges to Babylon*.



Mark Fisher's sketch for the stage set's 150-foot cantilevered pontoon (the actual bridge was 160 feet long).

This is the story of the tour that gave an album its name and its cover.

Music Industry Economics

In the old days the Stones would record an album and then do a tour to promote the album. That continued into the 80s and 90s when the Stones, like all bands, went on tour to promote their albums. They made their money through album sales. Set designer, Ray Winkler, said, "In the past it wasn't crucial to make large amounts of money from touring because record sales were very healthy, and that's how bands made their income. When that income stream diminished then bands wanted to increase their income stream from another perspective, and that was the touring perspective."

Technology changed the way we consumed music. Album covers became CD covers. People burned copies of CDs and shared them. Illegally sharing music with peer-to-peer file sharing software like Napster and downloading music all ate into record sales. Touring became a major source of revenue for bands. Then tours became spectacles to grow the revenue even more. No longer were tours done to promote albums, albums were done to promote tours. Spectacular stages were an effective way of drawing crowds to concerts where the money made on tickets and merchandise supplemented record sales. Mark Fisher, architect of the BTB stage set was described by Mick Jagger as the man who instigated the "Star Wars" arms-race era of rock and roll spectacle. Fisher worked closely with musicians to match their thinking about a tour theme with visual effects. He enjoyed a fruitful symbiosis with the Stones. Fisher called his BTB creation "a cyberclassical opera house." It required a caravan of 75 trucks, 10

buses, and an expert technical crew of 250 to put it all together so seamlessly. It was an incredibly expensive undertaking.

Tours had gone from being primarily a way of promoting album sales to being the main cash generator in their own right. The grand age of spectacular bespoke stage sets may have been peaking around the time of the BTB tour. With the continued growth of downloading and streaming music, the economics of the industry continue to change and put different pressures on the touring industry. As album sales continued to fall off, the Stones lavish productions like the BTB stage, proved too expensive. To make up for the record sales cash fall, tour sets are likely to forego the lavish bespoke set to sets that rely more on renting stage components. Thus, BTB may represent a short-lived bygone era. It was the Stones stage that gave this album its title and that inspired the artwork.

A Tour and an Album

After the *Voodoo Lounge* Tour and *Stripped* projects of 1994/1995, the Stones took a little time off. By autumn 1996 the Stones had been off the road for a year and Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood were getting itchy to get back on the road. In October the Stones met in New York City to discuss their plans. Jagger thought it was too soon to make a record but Richards and Wood insisted. They were concerned that the five years between *Steel Wheels* and *Voodoo Lounge* was too long. Jagger said, "Everyone said, we should do an album and tour. And I said, well, isn't it a bit soon to do an album and tour? But I thought, well, we might as well get on with it sooner rather than later. You can just wait and wait and wait, and then it gets more difficult to do." Jagger knew a long absence would make it hard to sustain the Stones market position, so he gave in. By Nov 21, 1996 they were working on new songs for a project with the working title *Blessed Poison*. Just before Christmas a tour was announced.

Setting the Stage



The Stones approached Mark Fisher about a year before their tour was to begin. Their early ideas for the tour's theme were based on the seven deadly sins of lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride, depicting a period of decadence and hedonism often associated with the end of a millenium. Religious symbols were part of the initial ideas as seen in these early sketches of the stage. The initial concept was to have an inflatable figure representing each sin. This idea soon morphed into a more general theme of 'Gold' both as a color and as a representation of opulence, power and riches. This included elaborately carved stone temples from India (top sketch).

The final designs shifted the frame of reference to more classical notions of opulence, like Babylon, a place

synonymous with luxury and vice. The tour would ultimately feature a Mark Fisher creation that evoked an ancient lost City in the desert. The set has been described as a marvel of elegant design and technology, a science-fiction Babylon, so tall that the Federal Aviation Administration required that it have warning lights. Let's consider its evolution briefly.

Gerard Howland, art director for the BTB project, said the seven deadly sins concept survived into the final staging. He says the sins were represented by "a combination of large-scale standing sculptures, supporting speaker stacks, and inflatables." Miss Sloth (above) and Miss Gluttony were two 15 meter high inflatables that survived intact from the original inflatable idea. The gold opulence of the actual stage is more evident in the photos below.



Let's backtrack a little. Armed with the band's seven deadly sins idea Fisher began to investigate a range of sources for the design, including the Baroque, ancient Egyptian architecture, and futurist sculptor Bocchione, suggested by Gerard Howland who was also head of design at the San Francisco Opera. Jagger takes up the story, "The tour that was going to follow *Voodoo Lounge*, we got to a point where we still hadn't settled on any kind of theme and I was screaming and banging my head trying to find one. I had been going on about bridges for a while I have always been obsessed with bridges and I was particularly interested in the beautiful bridges that Santiago Calatrava was building in Seville and elsewhere."



Calatrava bridges in Seville

When the Stones were designing the stage for the *Voodoo Lounge* tour Jagger told Fisher, "I want to have this bridge, we'll have the stage there and then we can have a bridge to here, here and here." At the time, Fisher called this a useless idea. So, when this new tour came around and they found themselves short of an idea, Fisher threw Jagger's idea back at him. Fisher said "OK, if you give me one million dollars now, I can make a bridge that will emerge from the stage and land on the B stage." Jagger said, "You've got it but it's got to be ready by September 1."

The Babylonian Bridge

Two weeks before the September due date Jagger got the phonecall he had been half expecting. The bridge won't be ready. The structure didn't work because it wouldn't hold up without moving about. People were very worried about the audience beneath the bridge should it collapse when the band walked on it. Jagger says the band was quite nervous about going on it at all but in the end after they'd done it 50 times they were all running along and banging across the bridge.

They still did not have a title for the tour or the album until a model of the bridge had been built. Jagger asked his friend, Tom Stoppard, a British playwright and screenwriter, to come and look at it so they could get an opinion from someone outside the rock world. Jagger said, "Tom started to talk about Babylon and came up with a number of incredibly long titles. I shortened one and ended up with the *Bridges to Babylon* title for the tour and the album.

The ultimate album title was found in the tour staging and it was the collaborative product of many people including the band, especially Charlie Watts and Mick Jagger, their lighting designer Patrick Woodroffe and Jagger's friend Tom Stoppard. The staging for BTB was

a visually impressive, dynamic, metamorphising, over-the-top creation that celebrates the centerpiece of the Rolling Stones show, the band itself.

Jagger sums up the naming of the album, the title for *Bridges To Babylon* "came from looking at the stage. Because it was going to be the name of the tour as well as the record – it all had to fit together. We were looking at the stage one day and trying to find where we were with it. What does this design say to us? I came up with the 'Bridges' idea and a friend of mine came up with the 'Babylon' thing. The bridge to the B-stage worked perfectly most nights, except when it was too cold or too hot, and then it had to be sort of manually got together. It was always my worry that it wasn't gonna actually open."

Richards offered his own spin on the title when he told the French magazine *Rock et Folk*: "Babylon, you see, is the outside world. And our music is the bridge between that world and mine."

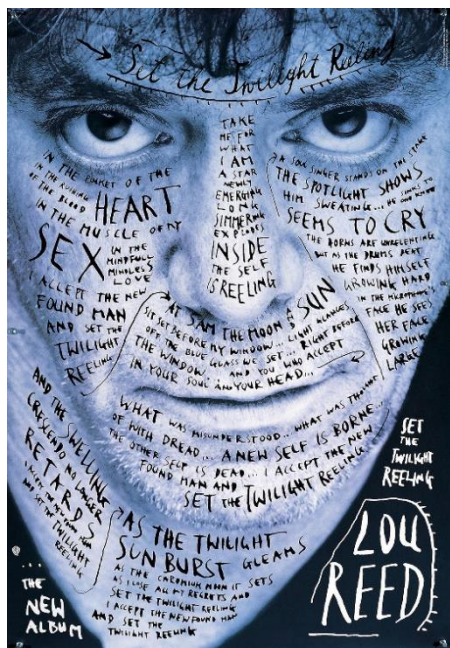
The Sagmeister

As the Stones began thinking about the tour, the album cover and the myriad details that go along with a tour, along with the music, Jagger knew he needed to hire a packaging designer who would design the album cover, the merchandise, posters, banners and all that went along with a project like this. He hired Stefan Sagmeister. When asked how he got the BTB project, Sagmeister said, "The management of the Stones called in about 200 portfolios (or so I've heard afterwards). They selected 5 to show to Mick. One of them was ours."

Jagger chose Stefan Sagmeister to be the project designer for the new album in late 1996 or early 1997. Sagmeister describes his process for working on an album cover, "We have an initial meeting with the band in which I refrain from talking about the cover itself. I try to focus on the

music, the band's inspiration for it, the lyrics, where the idea came from, and so on. We also listen to the music while designing the CD packaging."

Here is the account he shared of his first meeting with Jagger. "On Wednesday, a brand new and extra clean stretch limo picks me up at the studio, we are going to Newark airport, the driver hands over business class tickets for LA and I have a stupid grin on my face all the way to the airport, looking out over the New Jersey industrial landscape with the Statue of Liberty in my back, contemplating if this is one of those 'happy' moments that I have about once a year.



Next morning Jagger's assistant Lucy meets me in the bar, gives me a quick rundown on Mick and we go to the suite. In the elevator I'm nervous. Mick opens the door, turns around immediately without saying hello and I feel awkward. Lucy introduces us, he's friendly but busy going through a Sotheby catalogue with Charlie Watts. "At nine million that's a real bargain", he says in a heavy British accent looking at a Monet painting. "Pity I have no walls left to hang it." I help Lucy opening the water bottles, Mick grabs my portfolio and says, "So, you're the floaty one." "The floaty one?" "Yeah, all your covers seem to float in the plastic box." He likes the Lou Reed package, likes the attention to detail in some of the others and I can stop being nervous. I ask him about his favorite Stones covers and he mentions without hesitation: *Exile on Main Street*, *Sticky Fingers* and *Some Girls*. These are my favorites as

well: "We should have an easy time working together since I would have told you exactly the same covers only in a different order: *Sticky Fingers*, *Some Girls* and *Exile on Main Street*," Charlie Watts (in lowered voice) asks Jagger: "What's on the *Sticky Fingers*?" to which Mick replies: "Oh, you know Charlie, the one with the zipper, the one that Andy [Warhol] did." At the time of that first meeting the Stones album/tour theme was the Seven Deadly Sins. Sagmeister said, "They had a mock-up of a stage design that looked rather religious, even Catholic." As befits an album called *Blessed Poison*.

Sagmeister thinks that now that music is so easily downloaded the "high time" of art-directed CD covers is over. He adds, "I do think that for musicians, the fact that music is not being packaged is a big disadvantage because so much of the listening experience now is a playlist that somebody else has put together...Even though someone might like your song, it is very likely that they don't know your name."

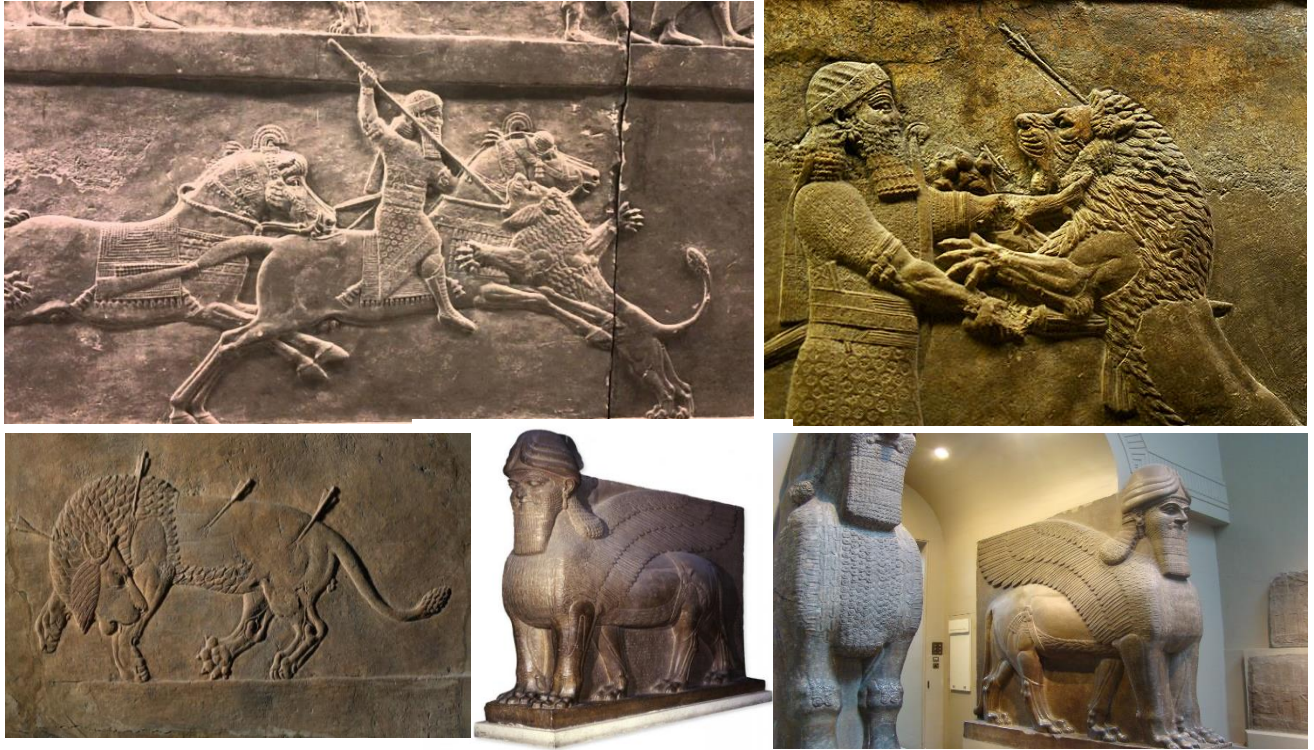
Later that year when Sagmeister met with Jagger in London he said Jagger had a new theme for the album. He needed new ideas. Of the new theme Sagmeister said, "He just had a new title: *Bridges to Babylon*, and the religious theme was out." In a morning meeting, Jagger suggested that Sagmeister go to the British Museum to view the collection of Babylonian and Assyrian sculpture. Sagmeister said, "I had to come up with an idea for that new brief in time for another meeting that same day." This visit inspired the majestic lion that rears up on its hind legs on the cover. Sagmeister describes the day like this, "I arrived at their

office in London in the morning, and they need to see sketches that night! After he told me the new title, Jagger suggested that I go to the British Museum, as he knew that they have a large Assyrian collection there. This is where I saw the Assyrian lion for the first time and I made a sketch of a mix between an Assyrian lion and a British lion. I also knew that Jagger was a Leo. We all agreed that an Assyrian Lion would make a good symbol for the CD cover as well as for the tour and various merchandise material. We designed all of that in the studio, most of the final art was painted by Kevin Murphy.” The band would later parlay this memorable image into Rolling Stones posters, stage designs and tour merchandise.

Sagmeister was reportedly most impressed by a Lamassu sculpture, featuring a lion with a human head and beard during his museum visit. He commissioned artist Kevin Murphy to paint a similar Assyrian lion in an attack stance. The first million units of *Bridges to Babylon* were encased in a special manufactured filigree slipcase, that gave the impression the lion was embedded in the filigree design. Sagmeister described the slip case, “Having seen a new mock-up of the stage design featuring a stylistic time trip with Roman columns, Babylonian patterns and futuristic sculptures we felt free to mix it up as well, put the Assyrian lion into a 16th century heraldic pose, had him illustrated in a 70s Sci Fi style and placed him into a specially manufactured filigree slip case featuring anything from German medieval to contemporary Japanese patterns.” The desert background of the cover was extended throughout an enclosed foldout booklet, featuring ruins that were to be in the Bridges to Babylon Tour stage design.

Assyrian Lions

With a title in hand the LP needed a cover. Enter the Assyrian lions. The British Museum opened in 1759 and was the first national museum to cover all fields of human knowledge that was open to visitors from anywhere. The Neo-Assyrian Empire collection of the museum is from the largest and last period of the Assyrian Empire which had reigned from 900 to 609 BCE. The royal Lion Hunt of Ashurbanipal is depicted in the first three photos. They are from a famous group of Assyrian palace reliefs from the North Palace of Nineveh.



The other two statues are guardian figures, called lamassu by the Assyrians. They flanked one of the entrances into the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II to protect the ruler from demonic forces. Notice the winged lion has five legs, wings, a braided beard, a braided mane, a helmet and, of course, a human face. These are the Assyrian lions.

They are among the images that Stefan Sagmeister would have seen the day he was sent off to the British Museum for inspiration. The eventual BTB lion sports the posture of the hunted lions and the beard of the lamassu guardian lions.

Kevin Murphy the Lion King

Sagmeister asked Kevin Murphy, who he had done some work with, if he wanted to paint the lion for the Rolling Stones new album. Already quite busy, Murphy declined the offer because it had a really short deadline. He was not a Stones fan, he knew the cover was a big deal but it was not a big deal to him. He sat and had breakfast and an hour or so after he declined he began to realize he had made a very stupid decision to turn down a Stones' cover. He called Sagmeister back in time to land the job.

Sagmeister came to Murphy with the overarching idea. The Stones wanted an Assyrian lion standing in a junkyard of the ages. The junkyard would have marble columns, classic cars, basically everything you could think of from Babylon until today that society would have junked. The only criterion he was given was that the lion had to be recognizable as a lion, even

in silhouette. By the time he got to start the painting he had nine days to complete it. Most of the work was done in Atlanta while he was on the road at a book convention.

Murphy said, "An Assyrian lion is basically a lion, it has this braided beard, braided mane, conical helmet and wings..It was a bit of a challenge...Stefan had an entire book of images and drawings. He had gone and researched the Assyrian lion, he had hand-taken photographs...in its seated position you really couldn't see it so it ended up being up on its hind legs." Murphy explained the lion originally had the wings, helmet, beard and mane but as the process of approval progressed, slowly but surely the lion lost the braided mane, the helmet, the wings and "the lion was slowly shaved down back into a lion." With each change, Murphy would paint out the feature being removed and rework the art. Murphy said, "I think somewhere in the mix, perhaps the braided beard, they got so accustomed to seeing it that they forgot to take that out too....So you end up with this interesting braided beard which makes it clearly an Assyrian lion...It's the only remnant of the idea of what the lion was supposed to be." Murphy did not know if Sagmeister, Jagger or someone in between was making the call on what to remove from the lion.

The original lion was done in sepia tone in a sepia tone junkyard. The intent was to make this cover look like an ancient parchment. When the filigree slipcase was designed it did not work well with the junkyard environment, so Murphy was directed to remove the junkyard and replace it with desert, which he did. At that point, it was clear that a sepia tone lion would not work with a desert background. In an effort to make the lion look more like the stone Assyrian lions, thinking of granite, Murphy painted the lion blue.

The lion was for far more than the album cover. It would appear on a giant banner hung from the Brooklyn Bridge, on t-shirts, cups, posters and all sorts of merchandise. Murphy's original painting was nine inches square. He had 33 hours to remove the junkyard, sand the painting down and remove the brush strokes. He missed the deadline by three hours but insisted on hopping on the train to deliver the still drying painting to Sagmeister. In the end, Murphy painted the front cover and one fold of the foldout. Alan Ayers then completed the foldout. The junkyard lion has never been seen by anyone outside the production team. Looking back Murphy said, "It was a very hard pace to get it done but it is great for me that I did it."

The Total Package

The album release was a single CD with a foldout booklet, seen enclosing the jewel case from behind. Let's unpack the art we find in there.



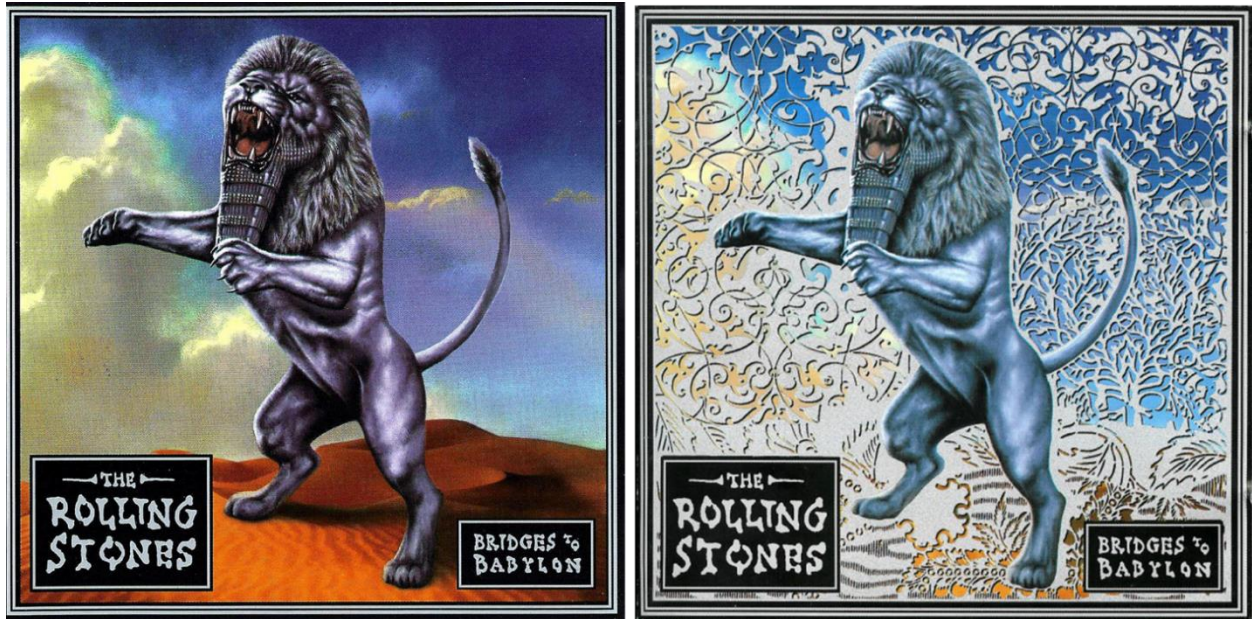
The Cover



The Bridges to Babylon cover features Murphy's modified Assyrian lion in a standing attack mode on the Plain of Shinar desert. The lion's mouth is open and its head tilted back emulating a fierce roar, its claws bared in an imposing attack position. The lion's tail is curved upward in a defensive posture.

The jewel case was embedded in a special manufactured filigree slipcase. The filigree slip case pattern comprises a mix of German medieval to

contemporary Japanese patterns. The album has a strikingly different look when in the slip case.



The BTB lion has become an ultra-high profile image with global reach. The Rolling Stones' *Bridges to Babylon* commission was easily one of the most coveted illustrations of the decade. This memorable album cover image has been parlayed into Rolling Stones posters, stage designs and tour merchandise.

The Foldout

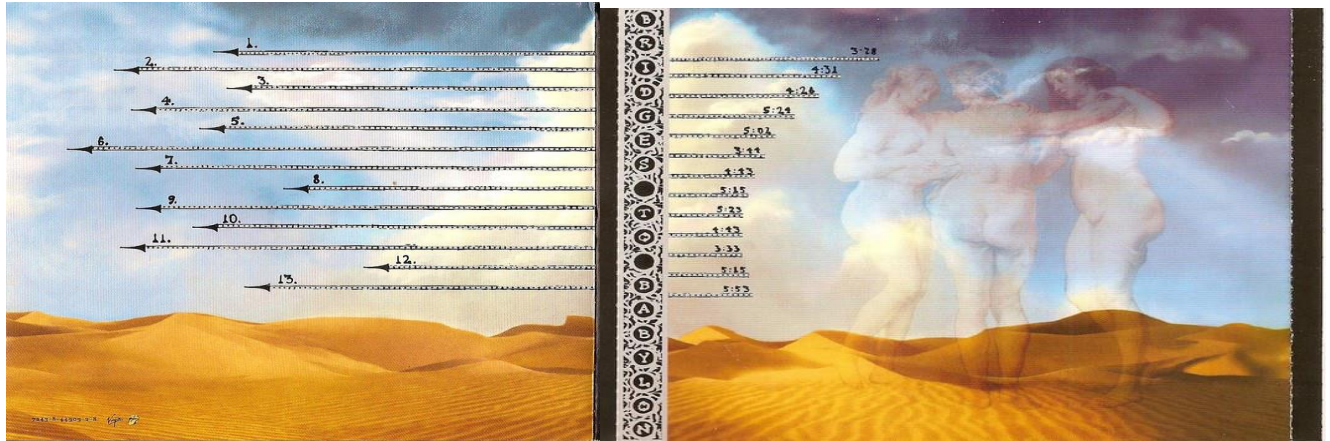
Stefan Sagmeister was responsible for the design of the foldout. He said, "We designed this all in the studio (Stefan Sagmeister & Hjalti Karlsson) with very exact sketches, the final paintings

Ayers role in BTB was not restricted to album art. He said, "I designed and painted Jagger's "Sympathy For The Devil" costume and collaborated on the design development of the "Seven Deadly Sins" concept of sculptures for the stage set, with the late Mark Fisher [which included]... a combination of large-scale standing sculptures supporting speaker stacks, and inflatables."

were done by Kevin Murphy, Gerard Howland (Floating Company) and Alan Ayers." Gerard Howland art directed the desert illustrations for the front cover and the enclosed foldout. The desert scene was digitally created and then painted. Alan Ayers took over at that point. He said, "The work I did on *Bridges to Babylon* was for the foldout. I created the ruins and much of the desert scene. I did not, however, create the Tower of Babylon or the lion." He got the job through his former representative in New York City and was commissioned to work directly with the art director on this project. He

had two weeks to work on it and delivered the art in August of 1997. Ayers recalled, "I was provided with various elements that needed to be combined into the long image for the foldout. The images provided were: Tower of Babylon, an unfinished portion of the desert scene (sand and sky), and the three women. In addition to combining these elements, I created the ruins. I did no lettering, line work, or additional work on Gerard's [It was actually Kevin Murphy's lion] lion."

The unusual 'bone font' that appears on the cover and in song titles was created by Sagmeister. The lining and lettering found inside the foldout were all designed in the studio by Stefan Sagmeister and Hjalti Karlsson with very exact sketches, the final paintings were done by Kevin Murphy, Gerard Howland (Floating Company) and Alan Ayers. Let's see what the foldout looks like. In the inside of the left side of the jewel case cover is a folded booklet. It has seven panels to a side.



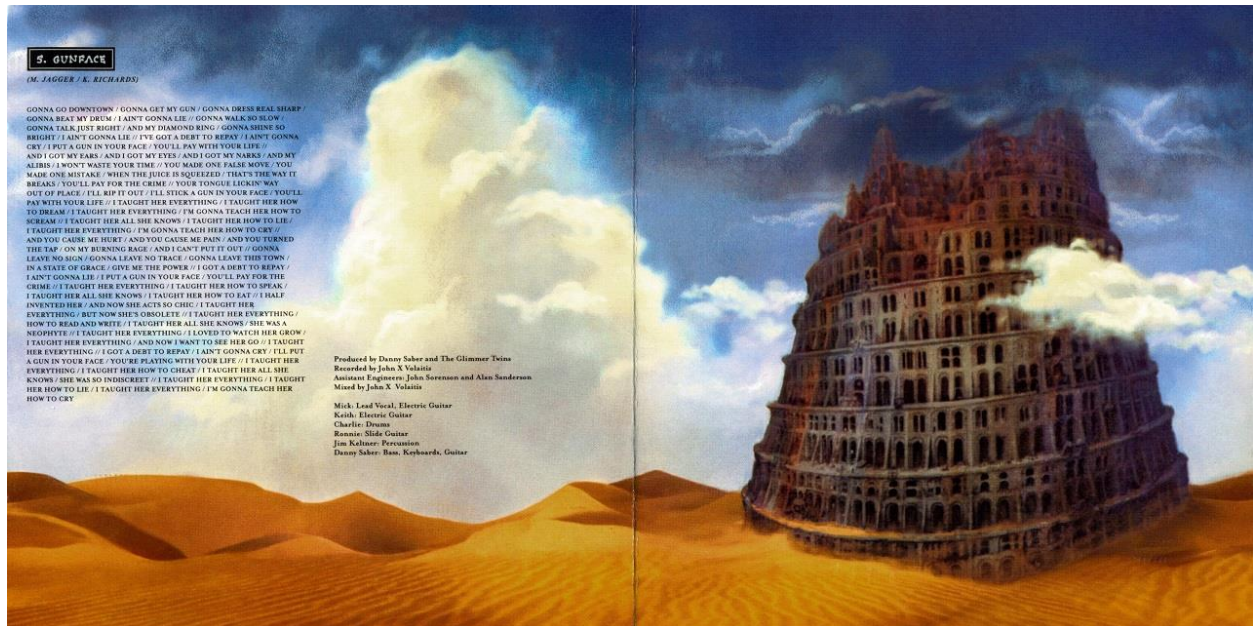
The foldout was an effective device to make the lyrics available along with some thematic art. Panels are numbered from the Stones picture first. The numbers before the song titles represent its play number on the track list.

Panel 1: Photo of four Stones dressed completely in black superimposed on the desert. The photos were taken by Max Vadukul.

Panel 2: Lyrics and credits for 2. 'Anybody Seen My Baby' and 3. 'Low Down' superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky

Panel 3: Lyrics and credits for 5. 'Gunface' on desert scene with cloudy blue sky

Panel 4: Tower of Babel superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky with gathering storm clouds



Panel 5: Lyrics and credits for 10. 'Always Suffering' and 11. 'Too Tight' superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky

Panel 6: Lyrics and credits for 13. 'How Can I Stop' superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky

Panel 7: Album credits and Special Thanks superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky and stone ruins setting on the desert sand

Panel 8: Lyrics and credits for 12. 'Thief In The Night' superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky and stone ruins setting on the desert sand

Panel 9: Lyrics and credits for 8. 'Saint of Me' and 9. 'Might As Well Get Juiced' superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky

Panel 10: Lyrics and credits for 7. 'You Don't Have To Mean It' and 8. 'Out Of Control' superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky

Panel 11: Lyrics and credits for 4. 'Already Over Me' superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky and stone ruins setting on the desert sand

Panel 12: Lyrics and credits for 1. 'Flip The Switch' superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky

Panel 13: Track numbers leading pointed silver lines (this is the presenting back of the booklet) superimposed on desert scene with cloudy blue sky

Panel 14: The album cover, a blue standing stylized 'Assyrian' lion superimposed on a desert scene with cloudy blue sky, band name and album title in silver bone font on black background.

Once unfolded you may find it impossible to refold it into its original format.

The Desert



Sagmeister was the art designer for the project. The desert setting for the album art is the Plain of Shinar. The Plain of Shinar is a geographic area known in ancient times as Mesopotamia. Two ancient empires were centered there, Assyria and Babylon. The Plain is located in modern day Iraq.

The Tower of Babel

The Tower of Babel is a biblical origin myth meant to explain why so many different languages are spoken by the people of the world. According to the story, in the years after the great “Noah’s Ark” flood, in the land of Shinar, humans agreed to build a tower tall enough to reach heaven. God, in His infinite wisdom, endowed their laborers with different languages so they could not complete the tower. The workers then scattered around the world. The BTB tower (right), found in the center of the enclosed booklet, is reminiscent of Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s ‘Little Tower of Babel’ painting (left), if it was translocated from the coast to the desert.





The Three Graces

Inside the jewel box on what would have been the right side of an album gatefold is an image of Peter Paul Rubens' 'Three Graces.' The 'Three Graces' were the subject of more than one of Rubens' works of art. This version was held in Rubens' personal collection until his death. In 1666 it went to the Royal Alcazar of Madrid, before hanging in the Museo del Prado. The three graces are connected with beauty and love in mythology and they often accompany Venus to weddings. They are, thus, gifts bestowed by the goddess on the couple to be married.

Sagmeister, has been quoted in an interview saying, "Many musicians have unsophisticated visual vocabularies. Most often, ideas take the shape of big-titted

female astronauts." When asked about the Three Graces, he said, "It was a comment on other rock music covers, who often featured hot women. We wanted to feature beautiful woman, but from a very different time."



Max Vadukul

The photo of the four Stones superimposed on the desert sands of the Plain of Shinar was taken by Max Vadukul. This is the only image of the Stones found in the album packaging. Little detail about the shoot has been found.

The Disc

The disc for the original release of the album with a slipcase was very much in keeping with the overall theme of the cover art. The image on the disc is of a desert and a blue sky. Releases without the slipcase have a disc imprinted with complex patterns quite

different from those found on the slipcase printed in white on a gray disc. Subsequent releases and releases in different nations display a wider variety of discs.



The Tour

The Bridges To Babylon tour was announced in a press conference held underneath the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City. It officially began on 23 September at Chicago's Soldier Field, and was followed by 55 more shows in North America, nine shows in South America, six in Japan and 37 shows across Europe. The production was designed by Mark Fisher, Charlie Watts, Mick Jagger and Patrick Woodroffe. Concerts opened with the sound of roaring lion, Middle Eastern chants, a circular central screen, the eye of a lion, exploding with fireworks, from which guitarist Keith Richards emerged playing the opening riff to 'Satisfaction.' (To capture a feel for the Babylonian theme watch and listen to the first two minutes here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Caad5eY6N7s>. The BTB tour was seen by 4.8 million people at 108 shows in 25 countries. Do the math above and you can see there is as much myth as fact in Internet rock history.

The Cast and Crew



Clockwise from top left: Stefan Sagmeister (packaging design), Ray Winkler (architect), Alan Ayers (additional illustrations), Gerard Howland (desert illustrations), Tom Stoppard (playwright), Kevin Murphy (lion illustration), Mark Fisher (architect), Max Vadukul (band photography), Hjalte Karlsson (graphic designer)

Collaborative Genius

No one person created this album art. It was light years removed from Andrew Loog Oldham and Gered Mankowitz covers. It was the child of the evolutionary synergy of a small group of extraordinarily talented people. Against this backdrop of collaborative genius working to create a cover, a stage, a tour, we have the band itself. The Stones, as a group, were once again not on speaking terms during the recording of the album, with Jagger and Richards each recording

their parts separately and rarely appearing in the studio together. Producer Don Was said, “I firmly believed in Keith's right to have a third vocal on the record, but Mick was having none of it. I'm sure Keith is totally unaware of all that it took to get *Thief in the Night* on that record. Because it was a total standoff between those two guys, neither one was backing down, and were going to miss the release date... And the night before the deadline, I had a dream, and I called Mick up and I said, I know your point about him singing three songs, but if two were at the end of the record and they were together as a medley, if there wasn't a lot of space between the two songs, then they would be seen as one big Keith thing at the end of the record... And he went with that... And so those two became one song.” It's sad but true, listen to the end of the album there is no space between the two songs. Rock and roll album art has a million stories, this was one of them.

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