

Voodoo Lounge IORR

And The Winner Is...

The category description guide for the 52nd Grammy Awards in 1995 said the inaugural Grammy Award for Best Rock Album of the Year is presented to "vocal or instrumental rock, hard rock or metal albums containing at least 51% playing time of newly recorded material." And the nominees are Pearl Jam – *Vs.*, R.E.M. – *Monster*, The Rolling Stones – *Voodoo Lounge*, Soundgarden – *Superunknown*, Neil Young and Crazy Horse – *Sleeps with Angels*. And the winner is The Rolling Stones for *Voodoo Lounge*.

Some thought *Dirty Work* might be the last Rolling Stones album. Three years later it was followed by the so-called reunion album *Steel Wheels*. It took the Stones almost five years to produce *Voodoo Lounge* the sequel to *Steel Wheels*. This award-winning double album was released July 11, 1994, just 1,777 days after *Steel Wheels*. It was the longest time between studio albums to that point in time.

Title

Mick Jagger and Keith Richards met in Barbados in April, 1993 to begin work on the new album at the familiar Blue Wave Studio. Richards, as was his tradition, staked out a corner of the studio as his territory. He marked it with a hand lettered sign that said, "Doc's Office."

A tropical downpour had come in one night and Richards was dashing through it to get some cigarettes. He heard a sound and, at first, thought it was being made by a toad. Let Keith take the story from here, "I looked and at the other end of this sewer pipe on the walkway was a sodden little kitty. Bit my hand. I knew there were loads of cats down there. Oh, you come from down the pipe, where your mother lives? So, I shoved him back in, and I turned around and he shot back up. He was not welcome in other words. I tried it again. I said, come on, you know your own kid, and he shot back out again. And he was looking at me, this little runt. And I said, fuck it, all right, come on. Put him in my pocket and I rushed home, by now I am drowning like a rat...We called him Voodoo because we were in Barbados and his survival was against the odds-Voodoo luck and charm...So the cat became Voodoo and the terrace became Voodoo's Lounge—I put up signs around the perimeter." The kitten moved into "Doc's Office" and made itself at home. Someone altered Richards' sign to say, "Doc's Office + Voodoo Lounge." Voodoo



eventually ended up at Richard's house in Connecticut and stayed there until he ran away in 2007.

After returning from Barbados, Richards moved into the granny flat Ron Wood had built for his mother and taped his sign in the window. Virgin Records needed the album title quickly. Richards said, "The record company's screaming at us, we need a title, an angle, artwork. Then, suddenly, Mick turns around and says, your sign." Mick told them it was *Voodoo Lounge* because he was looking at Keith's sign. Richards caps the story off with, "I'm the doc. It's like a ritual, a fetish... We agonized over (the title). And it was staring us in the face. Finally, it was Mick who said, *What about Voodoo Lounge?* Why not? Kind of like *Beggars Banquet*. Right number of syllables. I was really pissed with myself, though, after painting the sign and all. I'm usually the one with the cheap ideas, not Mick. His are usually real expensive." And so, *Voodoo Lounge* was conceived and

was later born to the public on July 11, 1994.

Mark Norton, Art Direction

Mark Norton worked on *Steel Wheels* and was tapped again for *Voodoo Lounge*. Norton had this to say about being tapped for *Voodoo Lounge*, "When you get asked to come and get involved again you really want it because it matters, culturally it matters. It's not any old band it's the band."

He went on to say, "*Steel Wheels* was a great door opener for us as a career. Actually, here was a chance to put an impact on everything because we now knew what we were dealing with, it's a bit of a dirty word in rock and roll, but we were dealing with a brand. And actually, these people were not ashamed of their brand they absolutely enjoy being...they know they are a brand. And they don't think of it as un-rock and roll, they think of it as the best fucking brand in rock and roll...The Stones know 'us' as me, they know us as Mark Norton...They don't want to be dealing with a company they want to deal with an individual." Norton emphatically went on to say he is not the only creator, he is the art director but he is not the only maker of art. His friend and colleague, Alex Quero, the drawer of the bunnyman, was his primary partner for the *Voodoo Lounge* project.

The Voodoo Lounge

When asked how developed the album art concept was when the Stones approached him, Norton said, "That is pretty much the state that it arrives in. The brief is two words *Voodoo Lounge*." Quero added there was, "...no tape to listen to...they must be thinking that whole arena, voodoo, Haiti and so forth. Actually, to me it's the Rolling Stones and that's what we've got. That was the jumping off point."

Norton continued, "Then we got this chance to kinda play with this idea but knowing that actually we were going to do it in a way that was a whole load of visual components which were an album, were a symbol, would be merchandise, would be, by this point, video stories, because there was now video projection...Part of this was new and technological and then at the same time we're dealing with this kind of ancient world, this kind of tribal thing, something that was spooky...In our heads we knew what the brief needed to be but we had no idea what the hell we were doing." Quero added, "We immersed ourselves in terms of what those two words potentially could be. In terms of our own research and that was looking at voodoo and traditional iconography. But what came out of this specifically was a metamorphosis, one state moving toward another...the ancient was at counterpoints with the ultra- modern."

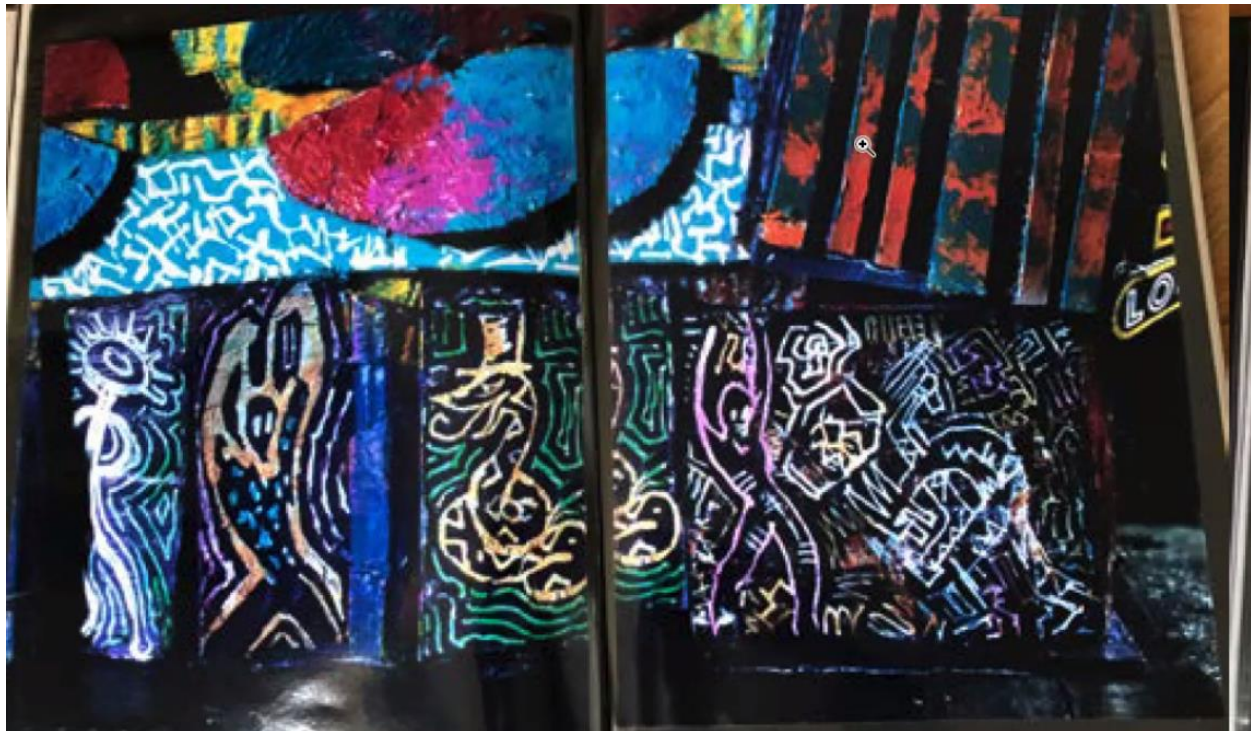
So, Norton and Quero dove headfirst into their research and creative process. What is a Voodoo Lounge? What does it look like and what goes on there? Fair questions all. The album art sprang from the imagination of Norton and Quero. Here is how it came about in Norton's own words. "We'd work like crazy all day and all night then we'd go out to a club and then we'd go to bed and then we'd do it again. So, we knew what clubs were but we really didn't know what a Voodoo Lounge was. We sorta decided the best thing to do was to build a Voodoo Lounge out of cardboard boxes and then paint it so we could kind of imagine this place. And in this cardboard box we had this pair of doors, on the cardboard doors, we put two kind of gatekeepers and one of them was the bunnyman."

Alex Quero not only constructed the cardboard Voodoo Lounge, he kept one of them. Quero described the model, "There is a door missing, there are two doors missing because it was cannibalized. But The underlying idea here was a ramshackle club on a side street in Haiti. It looks like a beaten up early 80s ghetto blaster...This model was constructed amidst many other stuff we were doing around the same time. As we said earlier, we immersed ourselves in all this and I have to say dealing with cardboard is a humble material." The model allowed them to explore ideas very quickly, the cardboard allowed them to explore the physical attributes of a Voodoo Lounge.



Alex Quero

Quero said they photographed bits of the model in abstract form and experimented with the images. It captured the spirit of the work. Examples of these photographs are seen below.



The bunnyman gatekeeper is second from the left bottom row.

Enter the Bunnyman

Norton and Quero quickly compiled four large ring binders full of ideas. They leaned heavily on their drawing skills to give form to these ideas. Norton explained, "Another value of drawing is you become an editor of what you see. You see everything...when you are designing logos and symbols you are of course editing out all the shit that is irrelevant until you get down to the thing that really matters. And the thing about Jagger is that he knows that too. He knows he's after something which does (claps hands together sharply) that to you. That goes hey, I'm here...he doesn't know what it is but he's actually quite intolerant of fuzzy thinking. And he was being actually quite difficult with us because our thinking was quite fuzzy."

Norton continued, "...It was kind of pre-Internet anyhow so you had to travel and you had to have books of stuff and they were full of sketches and drawings and some of these drawings were done with matchsticks and bits of ink some of them drawn on black paper with block out pens just to kind of make it feel crude so that you got something that was not careful and informed and technical, like *Steel Wheels* had been but which was the opposite."



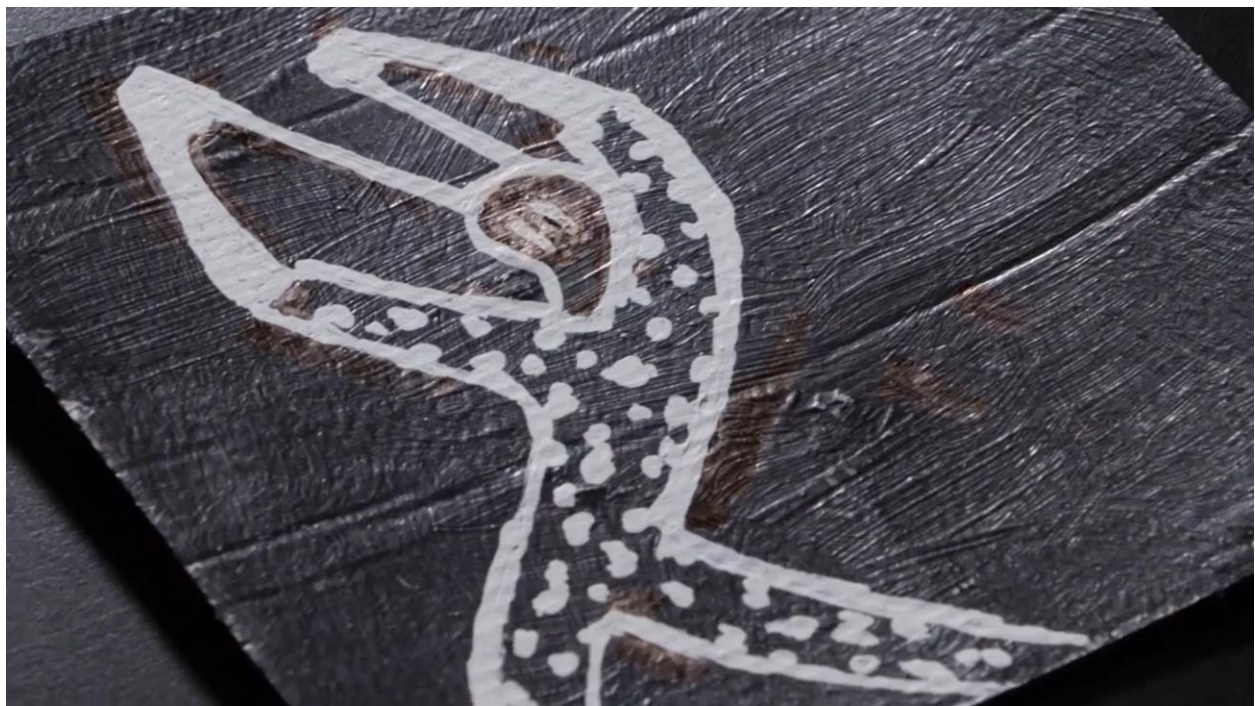
Norton described the evolution of the bunnyman (one of the original doorkeepers on the cardboard model), "It took a while for us to go ah, ah, ah, the idea is there on the door nowhere else. Now let's take the door, actually get rid of the door and just take the drawing and let's reduce the drawing and get rid of all those paint splotches and all those other colors and turn it to black and white. Then let's reverse it and then let's plunk a really poisonous color in there, yellow and black, yeah? Voodoo poison and we'll imply the club....and oh, shit we have a

presentation we need to make in two hours time and Mick's somewhere on the other side of the Caribbean from London and it has to be sent by fax because that was the only mechanism to send pictures in those days. So, it has to be a black and white image if it works on a fax Machine, how do we get this image to work?"

Norton xeroxed an old Apple mouse, the kind that had a speckled edge. He used the shape that resulted as the background for the black and white bunnyman. Quero described the bunnyman as the metamorphosis of the spirit. A spirit that was changing its form or nature into a completely different physical one.

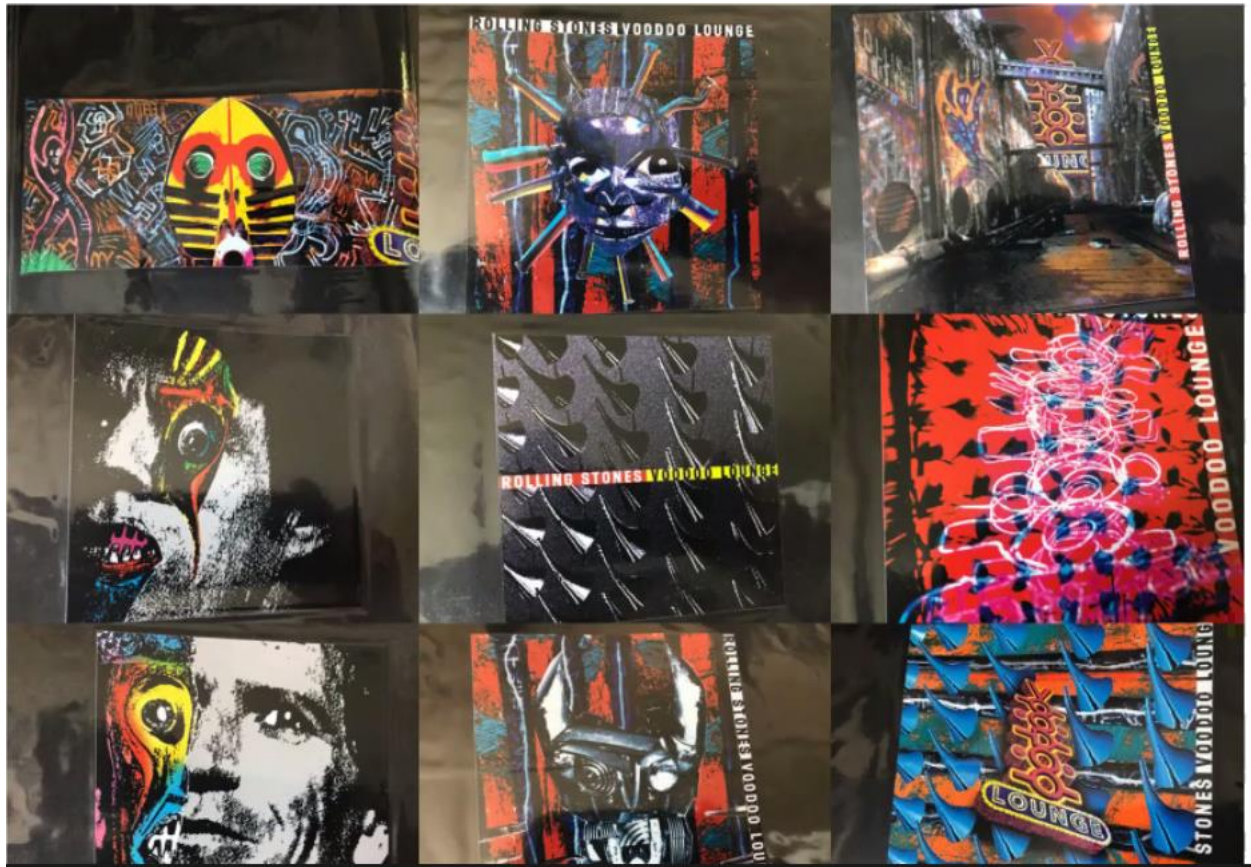
In explaining the origin of the bunnyman, Norton says, "Photocopies were great for graphic designers in the 80s and 90s because you could use them to reduce a picture to nothing to black and white to lith and that is what we did to this picture of the bunnyman on the gatekeeper of the *Voodoo Lounge* and he turned out to be a nice simple black and white figure. (See The Rolling Stones Who Is the Bunnyman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNKq3HfIOPs&t=7s.>)



Album Cover

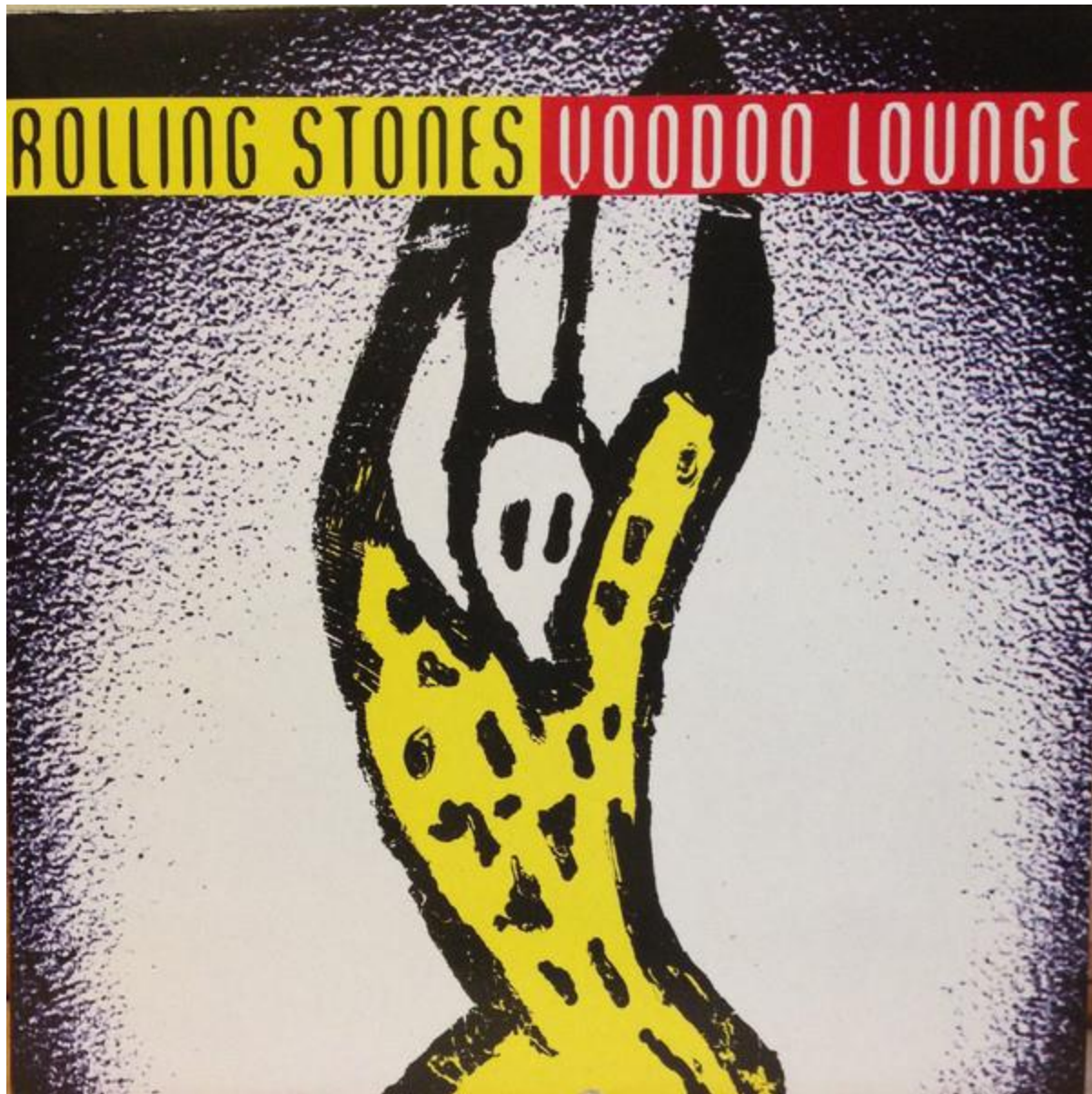
There were alternative covers that had been considered before Norton and Quero knew the bunnyman was it. The bunnyman continued to evolve and he can be seen in his dotted yellow doorman uniform against a strangely textured background on the final album cover below. It turns out that is the same mouse background the bunnyman was posed in front of for that faxed image. Here is Norton's explanation, "I got hold of the mouse and I turned it upside down and I put it on a black and white scanner and I got this thing that was a sort of a kind of formal shape but gritty and stuck it behind this figure and it kind of came together."



Jagger was quite fond of the totem seen top right and bottom right as well as the shield at top left.



A close up of the top right provides the impression of a dirty alley that leads to a place where a club, marked by the voodoo totem, could be. An alternatively colored bunnyman shimmies against the left wall of the alleyway.



The bunnyman appears to be shimmying to the music of the Voodoo Lounge. The band name appears in black letters on a yellow background while the album title appears in white letters on red.

The Rear Cover

Norton replicated the mouse background for the rear cover. The upper left corner includes production credits in white letters on black background. The track list is found in the center of the rear cover with record number and disc side in black lettering along with the run times for the tracks. Song titles appear in red letters. Beneath the track listing is a voodoo Stones logo

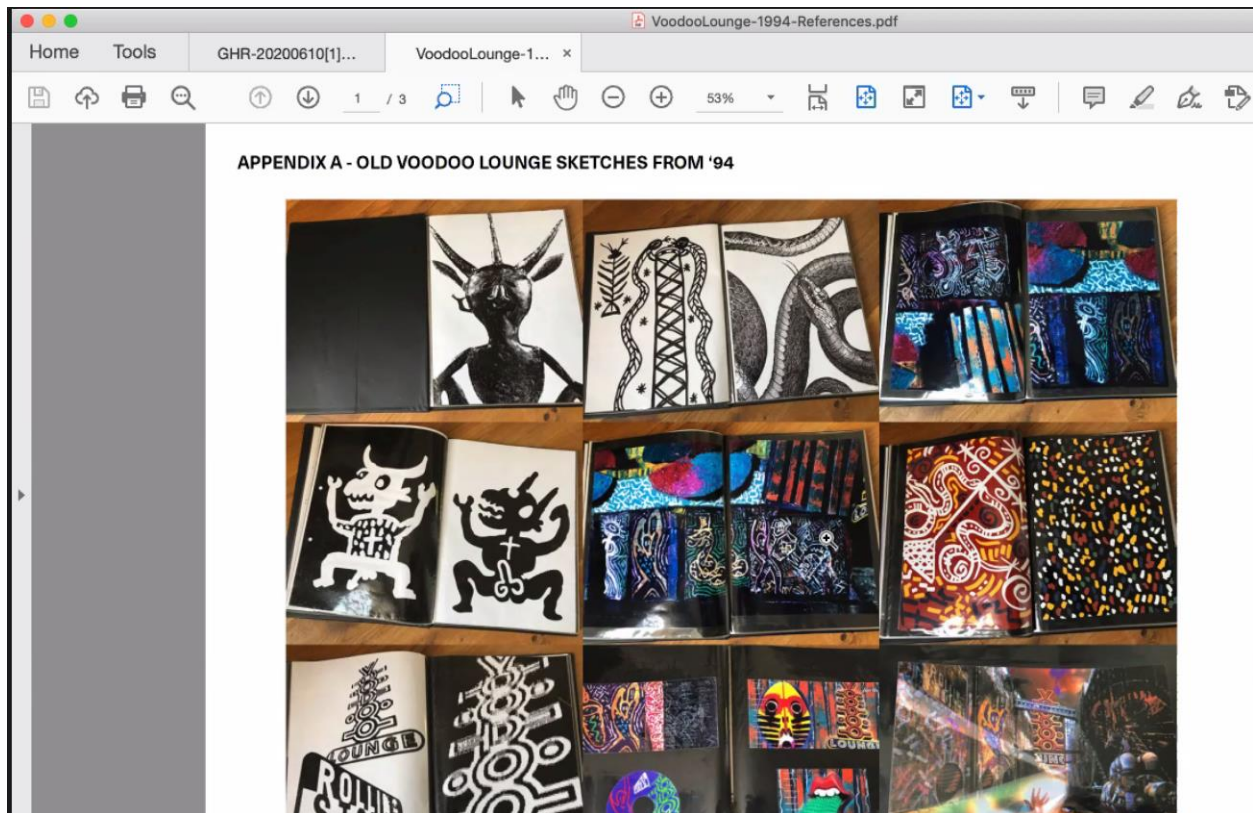
where a prickled tongue promises both pleasure and pain. More production credits and thank you's follow the logo.



Norton and Quero were given all the detail for the flipside of the album by the Stones' management and the record company. Norton noted, "We were never being bullied by record companies. We've never had to work for a record company. We've only ever worked, in this case, for the band. And that makes life a lot easier."

During their exploration of the voodoo theme, Norton and Quero came across voodoo sculptures with spikey horns and stuff. There were also some controversial sexual stuff going on there, a phallic sort of Stones idea maybe? Norton and Quero describe the whole idea of voodoo as kind of upside down, inside out, an inversion of reality. This melded well with their art history background, particularly Dada's impossible objects. Quero describes these as, "Framed with meaning, the clash of two opposites. I think we found a very fruitful route to explore meaning and ideas..." Norton picks up on that theme when he says, "And this is a band that is always a clash of opposites. At its heart it has this very fantastic dynamic between two very

strong characters. One is very masculine and random and the other is very feminine and quite ordered and so you've got this fantastic thing going on all the time."



Some of the phallic images developed along the way



Man Ray's flatiron and Meret Oppenheim's Furry Cup and Saucer

Here are two examples of impossible objects that indicate what Norton and Quero were going after in their redesign of the tongue logo. This is not a pleasure seeker's tongue. The spike idea was borrowed from the flatiron with nails. Norton said, "A nail of course ended up as the look of the Voodoo Lounge tongue and lips that we were playing with too."

The Gatefold



Voodoo Lounge was released amidst a swirl of brimstone and Santeria iconography. There was that strange ectoplasmic dancing Voodoo creature or was it a voodoo god in a trance or possibly shimmying on the dance floor, as well as skeletons, and fiery red demonic images of the Stones that gave an Afro-Caribbean vibe to the album. Anton Corbijn added to the vibe with his publicity photos depicting the band with Richards wearing the black top hat of the vodun god Baron Samedi while Jagger, Watts, and Wood sport voodoo masks. Even the Stones' logo was now armed with barbed thorns that promised pain rather than pleasure.



Asked, what took you in this direction for the gatefold, Norton replied, "We were given that (the Remise photo). It came from the band and it was like this, please use it. And being good designers we said yes. We have no idea how that came about but it does fit and it looks great."

Typecasting Keith

Baron Samedi is usually depicted with a top hat, black tail coat, dark glasses, and cotton plugs in the nostrils, as if to resemble a corpse dressed and prepared for burial in the Haitian style. He is noted for disruption, obscenity, debauchery, and having a particular fondness for tobacco and rum.

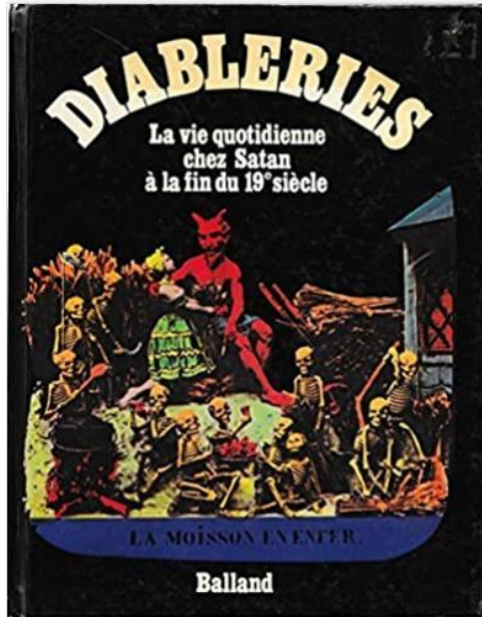
Here is the backstory to the gatefold. *Les Diableries* (devilries or devilments), published in Paris during the 1860s, is a book that presents a series of stereoscopic photographs. The stereoviews portray sculpted clay vignettes or dioramas that depict scenes of daily life in Hell reflecting the French preoccupation with Satanism and death. The dioramas are believed to have satirized the corruption and excess of Paris during the Second Empire. Napoleon III's authoritarian rule was a repeated target of criticism, as was the decadent lifestyle of the bourgeoisie.

The stereoscopic images were sculpted from clay by a select set of sculptors and photographed by renown photographers of the day. Below is a stereoscope photograph from *Diableries* of a sculpture attributed to Louis Alfred Habert. This stereoview, "Salle De Jev Chez Satan" (Satan's Gaming Room) became the gatefold for *Voodoo Lounge*. Notice the original vignette is a larger

scene than was ultimately used for the album. The original shows two portraits at the top of the diorama as well as three demons sitting atop the doorway, which have been omitted from the gatefold. On the left we see a skeleton sharing a private moment with a woman with horns that has also been clipped from the gatefold photo. A large chandelier and two wall sconces are also missing from the gatefold, which is shown on the page following the original stereoscope.



It should come as no surprise that the Stones gatefold built on the theme. The gatefold suggests a bit of what might go on inside a Voodoo Lounge. The print in the upper left of the gatefold says, ""Satan's Playroom" extracted from "Satan's Daily Life in the 19th Century" by Jac Remise Editions BALLAND @1978. Photography: Jac Remise."



Jac Remise was not personally involved in the album art creation but his art was used for the album. Remise is the author of *Diableries, La Vie Quotidienne Chez Satan A La Fin Du 19^e Siecle* (*Diableries Daily Life of Satan at the End of the 19th Century*) published by Balland, 1978. The book has been described as “containing 139 Diableries, 72 of which may have comprised one complete set of Diableries.” Louis Alfred Habert created the sculpture used by the Stones in the late 1800’s, scooping Robert Brownjohn’s *Beggars Banquet* sculpture by close to 100 years. He did not receive an art credit for the album!

The gatefold is credited to a photograph by Jac Remise who provided a set of updated photos in the book seen at left. The actual gatefold presents 12 skeletons and

two fleshy devils, one male and one female (center backrow) playing cards in a castle room.

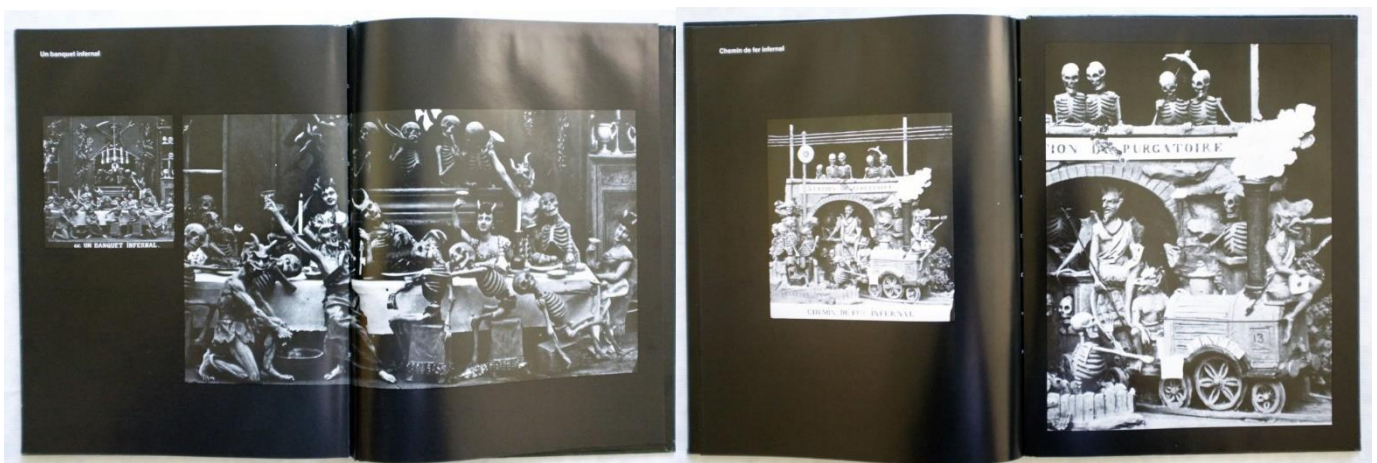
One of the skeletons is a waiter holding a tray with five cups, a sixth cup sets upon the table on the right side of the photo where four skeletons are playing cards at a table adorned by a six-



candle candelabra and what appears to be a serving bowl. At the table on the left a devil is raking in the chips as seven bony players look on.



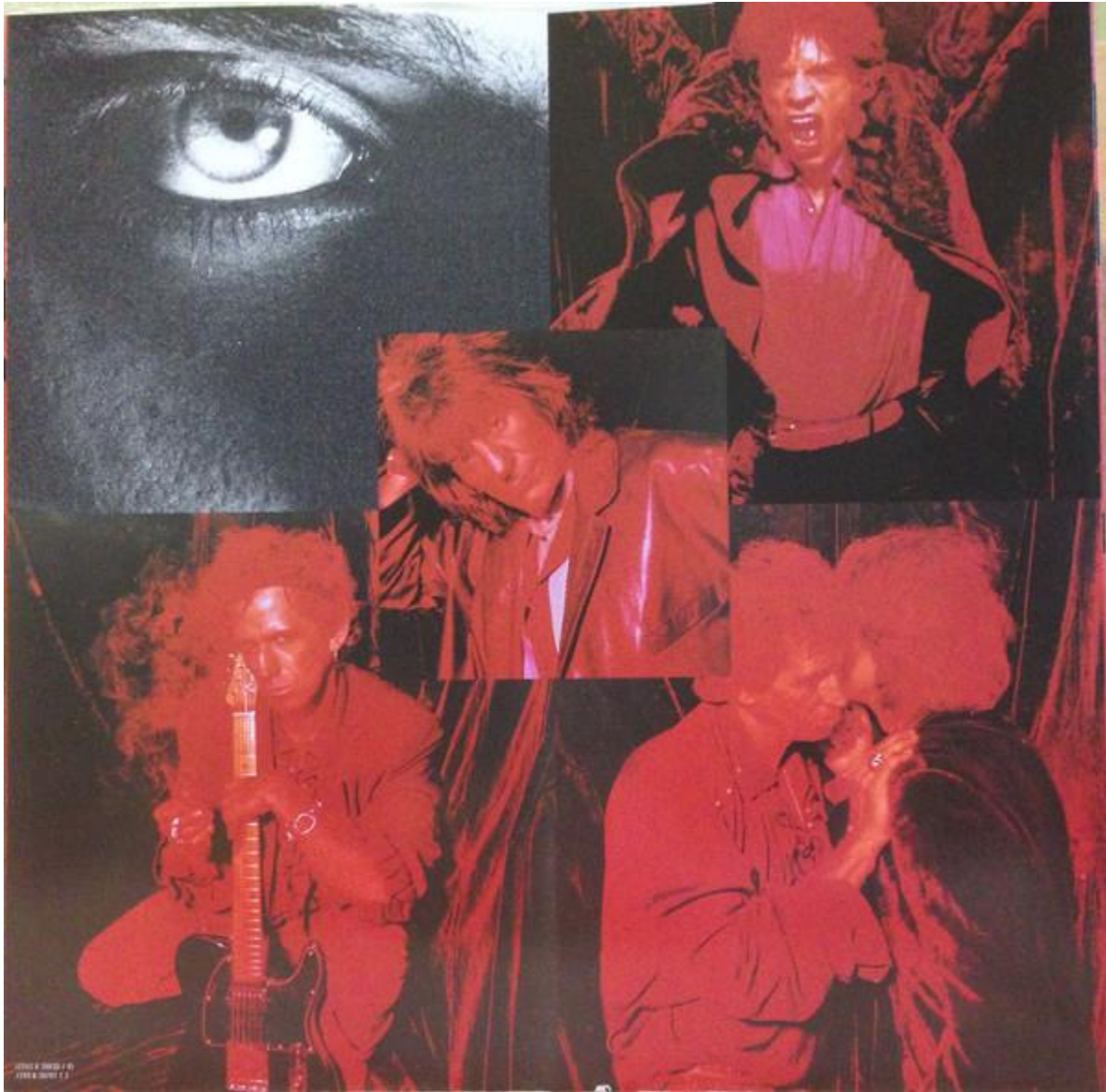
Above you see the Remise book page. Interestingly, the photos in the book include dioramas that may have well-suited other Stones album covers. Un Banquet Infernal (for Beggars Banquet) on the left and Chemin de fer Infernal (for Steel Wheels) on the right are two such diabolically whimsical examples.



Inner Sleeves

The inner sleeves present photos that could have well been taken inside a Voodoo Lounge. An evil (right) eye tops the sleeve for disc 1 across from it is a snarling, attacking red-tinted Mick Jagger. Ronnie Woods appears in the center of the sleeve his gaze seemingly fixed on a scene that both transfixes and perplexes him. In the lower left, Keith Richards and guitar bid you

welcome to the lounge. On the lower right Jagger and Richards huddle for a whispered exchange, Richards' skull ring adding a splash of white to the scene.



Turn the sleeve over and you find the track list and lyrics for Sides A and B of disc 1 displayed against a pattern of black dots and X's against a red background. The songs on Side A are: Love Is Strong, You Got Me Rocking, and Sparks Will Fly. Side B features: The Worst, New Faces, Moon Is Up, and Out Of Tears. The lower right quadrant shows the four Stones posed together.



The disc 2 sleeve presents a nattily attired Charlie Watts who looks as if he may have just stepped into Satan's Playroom and has not yet decided if he will enter or not. To his right is Jagger, whose facial expression suggests he has finally seen enough. Perhaps he is being calmed down by his friends in the lower left. The bottom right quadrant shows the left eye, no longer quite so evil, and the Voodoo Lounge's gatekeeper, the shimmying bunnyman.



The last inner sleeve side is anchored on the lower right by a photo of Richards with the neck of his guitar suggesting a life of music made possible by a pact with the devil. The remainder of the sleeve includes the track list and lyrics of Sides A and B of disc 2 displayed against a background of red dots and X's against a black background. The songs on Side A are: I Go Wild, Brand New Car, Sweethearts Together, and Suck On The Jugular. The Side B songs are: Blinded By Rainbows, Baby Break It Down, and Thru And Thru.

Norton arranged the images on the sleeves. “We were given a range of stuff (photographs)...you’ve got to make an even appropriate distribution of images. You’ve got to make sure you get a balance between...I’m not even going to say anymore.”

Cast and Crew

Mark Norton was the art director for Voodoo Lounge. He is a British born principal of Thinkfarm, a group that creates brands, helps them grow, formulates and writes messaging, designs brand identities and produces marketing campaigns to engage consumer, business and internal audiences alike. Sante D’Orazio is a Brooklyn born photographer. Jac Remise was a French author and collector. Alex Quero is an independent design professional who has worked on multidisciplinary projects in the media industry, creating brand identities in print and electronic media.



Sante D'Orazio, Jac Remise, Mark Norton, Alex Quero (inset)

The Concert Experience

August 15, 1965 was a significant moment in the emergence of rock concerts as cultural phenomena. The Beatles played Shea Stadium in New York. It was one of the first rock concerts



ever in a stadium setting. It generated one of the largest audiences ever to see a rock music event. Its spectacular success as a commercial event was only exceeded by its failure at a technical level (no one could hear a thing) and its total lack of understanding of the relationship between the performers and their audience (that is the stage all alone at second base).

The Stones long mastered the technical challenges of a large show. Perhaps more importantly they have become masters of

the powerful social interaction between performers and their audience that has become such a vital part of rock shows. The audience as a communal body takes an active role and becomes emotionally and physically involved in the tribal event of a concert. Rolling Stones stages have become three-dimensional thematic environments in which the theme and the album art are often related.

When the Steel Wheels tour was conceived in 1989 the Internet did not exist in any publicly recognizable form. Even though few people had direct access to the Internet in 1994 the potential for these technologies to shift the functioning of society was already on people's minds. Voodoo Lounge took the information age as its theme. It was stage architect Mark Fisher's challenge to represent the essentially invisible underlying economy of the new information age. This created a disconnect from the album art and a shift to a 'Buck Rogers-style' historical vision of the future; in other words, a technological fantasy. Fisher called the stage set 'Gigabyte City' about as far as one can get from a Voodoo Lounge. In fact, the album title and art were not settled as the tour set design began.

Once the title was set, Fisher was influenced by the book *Faces of God* which detailed the transfer of voodoo practices from the Ivory Coast of Africa to the islands of the Caribbean. These ideas led to the surreal tableau formed by a series of incongruous icons, the Voodoo Lounge on stage includes among other things a Hindu Goddess, a Madonna, Elvis, a Black Friar, Durga, Baron Samedi, a goat's head, a cobra, an alarm clock, a one-armed baby and assorted beads. The surreal tableau of Voodoo Lounge was a shrine of sentimental icons. There was no bunnyman.

Quero said, “Once the album was designed we had the opportunity to then take the visual source material because they were about to go on tour...to design the tour program and the subsequent merchandise...and the cherry on the cake was to take the iconography which we had been exploring so intensively and to have the opportunity to create some animated sequences which they then used for the stage.” So album art continues to spill over to marketing materials, merchandise, and the tour stage.

Norton said, “There’s the show design (as he points to a slide of the stage). Then of course it had this change where all the inflatables come pouring out. They are all kind of versions of this. They are all painted and gaudy. Turning this very technical thing into a very lurid Voodoo altar.”



He explained his role in all of this art meets architecture by saying, “Then these people are coming from all over the world. They are paying their money they are coming for a show. For them it is a massively important part of their lives. I am going to see the Stones. Something is being produced which is resident (sic—resonant) and great fun and huge entertainment and it is sort of my job to try and find ways to let them take that home.” That all begins with the album cover and in this case with the bunnyman.

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