

Rochester Institute of Technology

**RIT Digital Institutional Repository**

---

Theses

---

5-2022

## **Capturing the San Francisco Sound: Psychedelic Posters of the 1960s Counterculture**

Hannah Riley  
hrr4189@rit.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Riley, Hannah, "Capturing the San Francisco Sound: Psychedelic Posters of the 1960s Counterculture" (2022). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact [repository@rit.edu](mailto:repository@rit.edu).

THE ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

Capturing the San Francisco Sound: Psychedelic Posters of the 1960s Counterculture

A THESIS SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE  
IN MUSEUM STUDIES

MUSEUM STUDIES PROGRAM

BY  
Hannah Riley

May 2022

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of Hannah Riley submitted on May 2, 2022.

---

Tamar Carroll, Ph.D.  
Primary Advisor

---

Steven Galbraith, Ph.D.  
Secondary Advisor

---

Juilee Decker, Ph.D.  
MUSE Program Director

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my advisors, Dr. Tamar Carroll, and Dr. Steven Galbraith. Your guidance and expertise helped take my idea for this project to the next level. I appreciate the support I had from my professors Dr. Tina Lent and Dr. Juilee Decker throughout the research and writing process of this project. You were all wonderful to work with and I am so grateful for your contributions to this project and without them I could not have completed it.

I would like to give special thanks to Cathleen Ashworth for the opportunity to work with the William C. Miles Poster Archive and use the collection as a part of my research project. The posters were the inspiration for this project and their connection to the 1960s counterculture was very important in conveying the San Francisco Scene.

## Abstract

The heart of 1960s American counterculture was in San Francisco. Here a hub of different people blended to reject mainstream American values and prioritize experimentation, creativity, and a freer way of life. Through art, performance, drugs, light shows, fashion, and rock music, a psychedelic scene was created. Rock music became the center of the psychedelic scene, and the San Francisco sound was developed with a new subculture of rock called acid rock, or psychedelic rock, that empowered the counterculture. The bands that highlighted the San Francisco sound include Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and Big Brother and the Holding Company. The counterculture movement has been largely documented through poster art that was mainly used to promote concerts. Artists like Victor Moscoso, Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse, Alton Kelly, and Rick Griffin captured the characteristics of the 1960s counterculture in their poster art. I worked with many of these posters when archiving the William C. Miles Poster Archive, which contains original rock, drug, and political posters from the 1960s and 1970s. From the collection and my research, I have designed an exhibition that illustrates the characteristics of San Francisco's counterculture in the 1960s, focusing on the San Francisco sound and the San Francisco Scene. This project answers the question: how can printed posters communicate aspects of the American counterculture of the 1960s in San Francisco, specifically the San Francisco Sound and the San Francisco Scene? Titled *A Trip to 1967*, the exhibit highlights topics like Big Brother and the Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead, the Summer of Love, the Acid Tests, psychedelics, Haight-Ashbury, the Monterey Pop Festival, protests, and the Vietnam War.

## Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Literature Review.....	5
	<i>A. Going Against Vietnam and the Previous Generation.....</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>B. Sexual Revolution.....</i>	<i>6</i>
III.	The Counterculture.....	7
	<i>A. Psychedelic Drugs.....</i>	<i>8</i>
	<i>B. Psychedelic Rock and the San Francisco Sound.....</i>	<i>9</i>
	<i>C. Haight-Ashbury and the Summer of Love.....</i>	<i>11</i>
	<i>D. Downfall.....</i>	<i>12</i>
IV.	Psychedelic Poster Art.....	14
	<i>A. Dance Hall Concerts and Poster Artists.....</i>	<i>16</i>
V.	Methodology.....	18
VI.	Exhibit Analysis: <i>Lights, Color, Fashion: Psychedelic Posters and Patterns of 1960s San Francisco.....</i>	<i>22</i>
VII.	Case Study: <i>A Trip to 1967.....</i>	<i>26</i>
VIII.	Conclusion.....	38
IX.	Bibliography.....	39
X.	Appendix.....	41

## I. Introduction

The counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s is widely known for its hippies, the use of mind-altering drugs including LSD, and its music. This new side of society was captured through visual culture, specifically poster art. These posters were printed as advertisements for concerts and events, but also as a vehicle to communicate the counterculture to a larger audience.

The counterculture's central essence and purpose was to create a new, freer, superior society based on alternative culture, ideas, values, and institutions. To reach this enlightenment and move humanity ahead they wanted a peaceful planet, and everything they did was to try and get there. Looking inward and celebrating life changed their values. Millions of young people revolted against the country's diplomacy, politics, values, laws, mortality, religion, government, and institutions.<sup>1</sup> Counter-culturists believed that they had found a better way of life and attempted to create a new society unencumbered by war, racism, competition, the nine-to-five rat race, and authority.<sup>2</sup>

Two main societal influences that sparked this cultural revolution were the looming Vietnam War and the introduction of LSD and marijuana to the youth. The war in Vietnam began in 1955 and Lyndon Johnson committed the first U.S. combat troops to Vietnam in 1965. By 1968 there were more than half a million troops in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> The US used napalm, poisonous gas, and fragmentation bombs on Vietnamese men, women, and children as weapons of destruction.<sup>4</sup> The youth found this violence, and the war itself, completely unnecessary. Many

---

<sup>1</sup> Damon R. Bach, *The American Counterculture: A History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents* (University Press of Kansas, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1f886zs>.

<sup>2</sup> Bach, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Bach, 38.

<sup>4</sup> Bach, 39.

male college students were being drafted right out of their classes, seeing their friends disappear pushed the youth to protest the war. These young men being drafted did not want to go to war.

The boomer generation rebelled against their parents by growing out their hair, doing drugs, and listening to rock music. Their questioning of authority and the government caused distrust between the adults and the youth. White middle-class kids searched for meaning and stimulation as a reaction to their parents' preoccupation with comfort and security.<sup>5</sup> This made the baby boomers eager to experiment with sex, drugs, new sounds, and something other than mindless consumption.<sup>6</sup> The emergence of LSD and drug culture in San Francisco can be attributed to the American Novelist Ken Kesey who wrote *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in 1962. The counterculture became attracted to LSD and other psychedelics because the drugs removed unconscious barriers, allowing people to fully experience the present moment. Kesey recognized LSD's capacity to reveal one's true inner self and wanted to share that with other people.<sup>7</sup> Kesey traveled around the country with the Merry Pranksters, a group composed of Kesey and his friends, in a psychedelic bus to "discover the unknown" and escape reality, sharing the wonders of psychedelics.<sup>8</sup>

Rock music falls at the center of the counterculture experience, influencing the counterculture but also growing with it and becoming its voice. Rock music served as an outlet of expression for the hopes and fears of the generation as they came to terms with American politics, the racial climate of the country, and the controversial war in Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup>

Psychedelic rock became the stylized voice for the counterculture, adopting its characteristics of

---

<sup>5</sup> Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (Columbia University Press, 2002), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Echols, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Bach, 80.

<sup>9</sup> Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: The Rock Years* (Cary, United States: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=3051954>. 92.



an alternative outlet to mainstream culture. The psychedelic bands that developed out of San Francisco were the Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Jefferson Airplane; together, they created the San Francisco Sound. The San Francisco Sound was a blend of psychedelic soul and funk, garage rock, jangle pop, folk music, and folk-pop, avant-garde crossovers with classical electronic music, psychedelic blues, and space rock.<sup>10</sup> San Francisco bands had a reputation for powerful live performances, they were experimental and sometimes songs lasted ten to twenty minutes.<sup>11</sup> Like the counterculture, psychedelic rock embodied an anything-goes mindset.

Posters played a large role in the growth of the counterculture, helping to get the word out about events like the Summer of Love in Haight-Ashbury, that drew people from all over the country to gather and create a new shared culture. Posters have been used as a means of communication for centuries to share information and to get the word out about events like social gatherings and educational meetings. The posters fashioned a style and a look that resonated with the counterculture movement. These posters intertwined with the counterculture movement because they expressed the ideals of the hippies with the promotion of mental exploration and shifting meanings. The optical mental pulsations of intense color and hallucinatory visions created by poster artists stimulated the psychedelic experience. Posters became a means by which people looked forward to events with great anticipation and afterward held on to the posters as memories of the sights and sounds of that night.

To convey the connection of 1960s poster art to the characteristics of the 1960s counterculture, I will be designing an exhibition comprised of a selection of posters from the

---

<sup>10</sup> William Echard, *Psychedelic Popular Music: A History Through Musical Topic Theory* (Bloomington, United States: Indiana University Press, 2017), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=4900803>, 126.

<sup>11</sup> Echard, *Psychedelic Popular Music*, 127.

William C. Miles Poster Archive. I used a variety of methods to create my exhibition. I spent time archiving and doing research on the poster collection. I developed a narrative around 1960s counterculture and posters, centering it around music and focusing on the counterculture in the San Francisco area. I established a background on the influences and characteristics of the counterculture and poster art in the 1960s through research in primary and secondary sources. I analyzed the posters in the collection to narrow down which ones conveyed the message of the San Francisco Scene and Sound to include in the exhibit. After choosing forty-five posters, I titled the exhibit *A Trip to 1967*. I developed a theme, wrote an introduction label, wrote up wall text for different groupings of the posters, wrote tombstone information labels for each poster, and created a playlist.

To help with the development of this project I had the opportunity to visit the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts to see an exhibit that related to my research called *Lights, Color, Fashion: Psychedelic Posters and Patterns of 1960s San Francisco*. The exhibit highlighted 1960s counterculture poster art mainly produced in San Francisco. The curator Julia Fell organized the posters, along with photographs, fashion, and a light show, around the idea that “San Francisco was a meeting place and melting pot where revolutionary and radically alternative trends were brought to life.” The way that the exhibit was designed and conceptualized inspired my research and selection of posters for the exhibit.

## II. Literature Review:

### A. *Going Against Vietnam and the Previous Generation*

Historian Alice Echols argues that to understand the significance of the 1960s, the postwar period (after World War 2) should be looked at as a whole. She argues that movements of the 1960s, like the civil rights movement, were not spontaneous but had begun as far back as the mid-1940s. In *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and its Aftershocks*, Echols challenges many of the assumptions about American culture since the 1950s, especially the assumption that the 1960s represented a total rupture with the past and that the 1970s marked the end of meaningful change. She describes the era before the hippies and how the 1950s set the stage for the counterculture to blossom in the 1960s. In the 1950s, the country was structured in a way that black veterans, unionists, women, and the LGBTQ community were controlled.<sup>12</sup> The Cold War intensified the anxieties of the 1950s by emphasizing a standard of family stability and traditional gender roles, which were made critical to the war against communism.<sup>13</sup> For example, women's role in the Cold War was to keep the family unit strong and intact, taking care of her husband and children and refusing to pursue a career. To many young women, this did not seem like an acceptable fate. Damon Bach, a historian who studies modern American social, cultural, and political history, discusses the rise and fall of the Hippie Movement from the 1950s to the 1970s in his book *The American Counterculture: A History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents*. Bach uses documents produced by self-described "freaks" from 1964 through 1973 for his research, such as material from underground newspapers, memoirs, personal correspondence, flyers, and pamphlets. His comments on the Vietnam War related to the counterculture are that

---

<sup>12</sup> Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (Columbia University Press, 2002), 57.

<sup>13</sup> Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 58.

“Those who became hippies found official government explanations, theories and documents related to the cold war and communist threat unpersuasive if not completely fabricated.” Young Americans did not fight for freedom in Vietnam but rather died for a “delusion.”<sup>14</sup>

Aside from the war, Bach describes two other facets that propelled the hippie movement. These were universities and police harassment. Students eventually dropped out of universities because they felt that they were being viewed as numbers and not individuals.<sup>15</sup> Students felt like the education system had prison-like conditions that severed personal and creative growth.<sup>16</sup> Rules dictated where one ate, slept, lived and what one wore, and women were given curfews. At Berkeley, the FBI tailed, and interrogated anti-draft organizers and the police became instruments of repression for the hip.

### ***B. Sexual Revolution***

The counterculture opened their minds to new ideas of sexuality and sex. In *The American Counterculture: A History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents* Bach argues that the counterculture spearheaded the sexual revolution because they considered sex fun, pleasurable, natural, and healthy. To them it was a form of expression to be celebrated not concealed.<sup>17</sup> For example, Richard Thorne, a twenty-nine-year-old African American and head of the East Bay Sexual Freedom League, promoted sexual liberation at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State.<sup>18</sup> Thorne handed out information on birth control (which was available to be obtained outside of one’s personal doctor through Planned Parenthood clinics) abortion, and STDs and preached that any consensual sex act between adults which did not involve force or physical harm should not

---

<sup>14</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*.

<sup>15</sup> Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Echols, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Echols, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Bach, 93.

be illegal.<sup>19</sup> This subject matter is also touched on in *The Sixties*, a documentary produced by Michelle Ashford, which describes the yearning of the youth for change from rigid ideas of sex and race that their parents had taught them. Many younger kids were changing their minds about things like contraception, abortion, and sex.<sup>20</sup> The counterculture created a judgment-free environment, so people could be open with one another. With this newfound sexual freedom, the rules were that there were no rules.<sup>21</sup> Many people had multiple partners when it came to sex because of the growing use of contraception and there being little judgment in the counterculture community. The growing sexual revolution poured into the media as well with more sexualized TV shows, books, and magazines like *Playboy*.

### **III. Counterculture**

The counterculture developed from a yearning for spiritual revolution and the need for a change after the age of Cold War conformity. The novelist Jack Kerouac, in books like *On the Road*, inspired this change and was deemed the godfather of the counterculture.<sup>22</sup> Along with other Beat writers, including Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, Kerouac wrote on topics like Catholic spirituality, jazz, travel, promiscuity and homosexuality, life in New York City, Buddhism, drugs, and poverty that inspired the younger generation to change the course of society. The Beat Generation was a literary movement started by these authors in the 1950s. Much of their literature was adopted into the characteristics and values of the counterculture.

One element to the enlightenment of the counterculture was sharing, exemplified by San-Francisco-based activists and actors, the Diggers. The Diggers were a radical community-action

---

<sup>19</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 93.

<sup>20</sup> John Heilemann, "Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll," *The Sixties* (HBO, August 14, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Heilemann, "Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll."

<sup>22</sup> Heilemann.

group of activists and street theater actors involved in the Haight-Ashbury community in San Francisco in the late 1960s. They shared everything in a community, especially food.<sup>23</sup> Their movement started in cities and then eventually grew into the idea of a rural commune.

### ***A. Psychedelic Drugs***

*The Sixties* documentary uses oral history interviews of people who were vital to the counterculture development like Joan Baez, a singer songwriter, Michelle Phillips, singer from band the Mamas and Papas, and Grace Slick, lead singer of Jefferson Airplane. This documentary also uses archival film footage from Haight-Ashbury, Acid Test concerts, and iconic festivals to display what the counterculture looked like in the 1960s. Ken Kesey, an American novelist, essayist, and countercultural figure was one of the first to introduce LSD to the counterculture. He originally volunteered to test LSD, and other psychedelics, for the CIA. He also created LSD communes that administered the famous “Acid Tests” because he wanted to get as many people to try the drug as he could, with the belief that it would allow you to see a larger truth. The events were held from 1965-1966 in private homes, sharing music, LSD, drink, art, and food. People would come to try the drug but also experience light shows and a new kind of psychedelic music.<sup>24</sup> The Grateful Dead was the band that played for these Acid Tests, and their music was a way to feel the acid, according to Lisa Law, an American photographer, and filmmaker, best known for her photographic chronicles of the counterculture era. Psychedelics affected the music people listened to and played.<sup>25</sup>

Bach describes the attraction of LSD and other psychedelic drugs to the counterculture and introduces Timothy Leary as a figurehead for psychedelics. Timothy Leary, an American

---

<sup>23</sup> Heilemann, “Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll.”

<sup>24</sup> Heilemann.

<sup>25</sup> Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 23.

psychologist, and writer known for his strong advocacy of psychedelic drugs, researched psychedelics in the early 1960s and experimented with magic mushrooms and LSD at Harvard.<sup>26</sup> Leary presented lectures at universities encouraging potential followers to “Turn on, tune in, and drop out.”<sup>27</sup> Bach argues that the hippies felt that they did not need Leary and they would have become enlightened without him and LSD.

### ***B. Psychedelic Rock and the San Francisco Sound***

At the center of all these new ideas and beliefs was rock music. The genre of folk music kick-started the beginning of the music of the counterculture. You would find these artists performing in coffee houses, which drew in a young, alternative crowd. Artists like Joan Baez and Bob Dylan are known for being the first famous folk singers. Bob Dylan thought of music as poetry and used it to send messages against war and violence, targeted at the Vietnam War. His lyrics spoke about broad social concerns: racism, Jim Crow, Cold War militarism, and the prospect of a nuclear apocalypse.<sup>28</sup> The Beatles also had a large influence on counterculture, the hip recognized that the band was aligned with them because they directed their message explicitly to the youth.<sup>29</sup> In 1967 the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*; the album tapped into the blossoming of the counterculture.<sup>30</sup> After the members took LSD they created this album and made references to acid, for example, the song “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” was recognized as having psychedelic influences.<sup>31</sup> Rock songs increasingly made illusions to dope and dope experiences. For example, a famously psychedelic song is “White

---

<sup>26</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Bach, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Bach, 60.

<sup>29</sup> Bach, 63.

<sup>30</sup> Bach, 116.

<sup>31</sup> Bach, 117.

Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane, the lyrics say “And you’ve just had some kind of mushroom, and your mind is moving low. Go ask Alice, I think she’ll know.” Grace Slick, lead singer of the band, wrote the song about curiosity which was inspired by an acid trip. Other psychedelic rock bands include the Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Jimi Hendrix and the Experience.

Popular music during the 1960s played a big role in defining the character and spirit of the 1960s. Rock and Roll developed and changed with the times, becoming rock. There were many genres of rock that developed during the 1960s but the one most associated with the counterculture is psychedelic rock or acid rock. According to Jacob Cohen, a musicologist specializing in American classical music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as American rock music from the 1960s–present, psychedelic rock is

“A subgenre of rock music that first emerged around 1965 in San Francisco and London. Independently, musicians in both cities responded in similar ways to cultural and social developments, emphasizing an alternative lifestyle to mainstream culture, consciousness expansion, love, and drug use. Originally, psychedelic rock (or acid rock) reflected the LSD experience, but it eventually came to represent a musical style less strongly associated with its initial connotations.”<sup>32</sup>

I will be discussing the development of 1960s psychedelic rock in San Francisco.

The San Francisco sound refers to bands such as the Grateful Dead, Big Brother, and the Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, the Charlatans, and Country Joe and the Fish, who pioneered psychedelic rock in the 1960s. Most of these bands came from folk and folk-rock backgrounds, which heavily influenced the psychedelic style.<sup>33</sup> Another obvious influence for the San Francisco sound and psychedelic rock was psychedelic

---

<sup>32</sup> Moore Allen, “Psychedelic Rock,” Grove Music Online, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.rit.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000046256>.

<sup>33</sup> Richie Unterberger, *Eight Miles High: Folk-Rock’s Flight from Haight-Ashbury to Woodstock* (San Francisco, United States: Richie Unterberger, 2001), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=3544810>, 44.



drugs. Richie Unterberger, an American author, and journalist whose focus is popular music and travel writing, talks about this influence in his book *Eight Miles High*. He says that “Nothing memorable would have come out of the movement if it hadn’t been crowded with talented songwriters, singers, and instrumentalists, but drug intake did fuel new musical and lyrical patterns.”<sup>34</sup>

The media did not recognize the region's rock scene until the famous Monterey Pop Festival in June 1967, which featured Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, Big Brother and the Holding Company, the Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and Steve Miller Band.<sup>35</sup> Big labels were slower to pick up bands from San Francisco, but the band's goal wasn't to “make it big”, they enjoyed hanging out and making the music they wanted.<sup>36</sup> Jefferson Airplane was the first band to emerge from the San Francisco scene with national success.<sup>37</sup>

### ***C. Haight-Ashbury and the Summer of Love***

The hub of counterculture in the 1960s was centered in San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury district. Houses went for \$175 a month in rent. Food and clothing were accessible through the Diggers who served food at Golden Gate Park and ran a free store filled with used and surplus clothes.<sup>38</sup> Here they put on the famous Summer of Love, which called for creative love happenings every weekend of the summer of 1967 in Haight-Ashbury. Almost 100,000 people came to participate in this transformative summer. Echols argues that rock music was what made Haight popular. She also suggests that the San Francisco rock scene would not have flourished without the city's bohemian culture.<sup>39</sup> Before the Summer of Love, there were gatherings called

---

<sup>34</sup> Unterberger, *Eight Miles High*, 97.

<sup>35</sup> Unterberger, 92.

<sup>36</sup> Unterberger, 92.

<sup>37</sup> Unterberger, 158.

<sup>38</sup> Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Echols, 18.

Be-Ins, which announced the arrival of the counterculture. These gatherings allowed all facets of counterculture to engage their unique values without obstruction.

#### ***D. Downfall***

After the summer of 1969, the hippies left Haight-Ashbury and the counterculture began to be exploited and commercialized. They were “discovered” by mainstream society and suffered the consequences of it. Some argue that 1969 marks the end of the Golden Age of counterculture, but others argue that it turned into something greater and more widespread.

After a euphoric weekend of peace, love, and music at the Woodstock Festival (1969), the image of the hippies started to decline. A meeting of 500,000 like minds from all over the country with no riots or harm was a glimpse of the alternative society that the hippies strived for. Unfortunately, it marked the end of it all. Another festival in California put on to reflect the Woodstock festival in New York, turned out to be the opposite of the euphoric scene at Woodstock. The Altamont festival hired the Hells Angels, a motorcycle gang, for security. The Angels brought a lot of speed and alcohol, which only heightened the violence that occurred. The Angels went on the stage and knocked out the lead singer of Jefferson Airplane and incited riots, which culminated with the stabbing of Meredith Hunter. Another event in 1969, leading to the downfall of the counterculture, was the Tate LaBianca murders orchestrated by Charles Manson who led a cult based in California where the members were labeled as hippies.<sup>40</sup> Before these murders no one associated hippies with violence and harm. This caused mistrust between mainstream society and the counterculture, many now felt uncomfortable giving a hitchhiker a ride whereas before it was common.

---

<sup>40</sup> Heilemann, “Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll.”

Haight-Ashbury quickly turned into a tourist attraction for people to watch the hippies in their “natural habitat.” They would run tour buses through there to watch and record them.<sup>41</sup> This drove them to disperse into different areas of the country and out of the cities. The idea of a commune, where a group of people would live together and share possessions and responsibilities, became more desirable to relieve the pressure of society. *The Sixties* documentary argued that other hippies “matured” and pushed themselves back into mainstream society by getting jobs and working a 9-5.

Bach offers a different perspective on what happened to the hippies after 1969 in *The American Counterculture: A History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents*. He describes the movement as turning more political as the years went on and dissolving into other counterculture movements of the 1970s like feminism, gay rights, and civil rights, among others. Bach claims that the national mainstream media played a major role in bringing about the problems that led to the counterculture’s downfall. The media sought to define the hippies' image, culture, and values, which caused outsiders to flood into Haight.<sup>42</sup> They called them plastic hippies, weekenders from the suburbs who did not seek spiritual awakenings. Delinquents, drug pushers, and criminals also migrated to the area which increased rapes, assaults, and STDs.<sup>43</sup> On Friday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1969 the “Death of Hippie” and “Rebirth of Free Men” ceremony was held and The Psychedelic Shop, a popular place in Haight-Ashbury that sold hippie clothing and jewelry, incense, records, posters, books, and drug paraphernalia, closed its doors for good.<sup>44</sup> The national press declared

---

<sup>41</sup> Heilemann, “Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll”.

<sup>42</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> Bach, 119.

<sup>44</sup> Bach, 119.

this the end of the hippie era but little did they know that the counterculture was growing at an astronomical rate.<sup>45</sup>

#### IV. Psychedelic Poster Art

Concert posters as visual culture is talked about in *The Art of Rock*, written by Paul Grushkin, an acknowledged expert in rock merchandise. The book is a collection of rock concert posters from the 1950s through today. The book describes movements, poster artists, and time periods in detail along with identifying famous posters throughout many eras. Bill Graham, an American impresario, and rock concert promoter, writes the preface, which describes these posters as more than just historical documents or promotional tools for his business. Graham reflects on what posters meant in the 1960s: “They are art, as the music is art itself, they are very fine, high art.”<sup>46</sup> A large influence on San Francisco psychedelic poster art was Art Nouveau, which was a deliberate attempt to create a new art style characterized by sculptural, organic shapes, arches, curving lines, and sensual ornamentation in the 19th century. William Echard, professor in the Music department at Carleton University, connects this 19th century movement with the psychedelic art movement in *Psychedelic Popular Music: A History Through Musical Topic Theory* by writing, “This style by the 1960s would have been nostalgic and archaic but at the same time it would have had continuing connotations of anti-establishment experimentation, the desire to treat art as a part of a total life and the pursuit of a new.” This style resonated with the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood because of its Victorian houses and ballrooms.<sup>47</sup> There were also other art influences, like Art Deco and Surrealism, along with contemporary popular culture

---

<sup>45</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 120.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Grushkin, *The Art of Rock: Posters from Presley to Punk*, 1st-- ed., Book, Whole (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), <https://go.exlibris.link/y8bhGqC0>.

<sup>47</sup> Echard, *Psychedelic Popular Music*, 128.

including films, comics, current events, science, and corporate logos.<sup>48</sup> The posters were vivid and imaginative, making the psychedelic era the golden age of rock posters and the flowering of posters in general. The field of rock poster art is a great deal more extensive than most people expect because rock posters have been around for as long as rock music has. The posters became an important medium for spreading the San Francisco visual style at the national and international level.<sup>49</sup> For example, Bill Graham made the posters he used for concert advertisement available to be bought through the mail, reporting 150,000 posters per week shipping globally.<sup>50</sup>

Each poster creates an instant recall of all the wondrous emotions in the experiences at the events. Posters had a place because they spread the word far beyond anyone's show, they were a part of the overall event, and they took the whole enterprise to another higher level.<sup>51</sup> People would even follow Bill Graham while he hung up posters around San Francisco just to take the posters down and put them on their walls as art.<sup>52</sup> Now, fifty years later these posters are being hung in museums around the world. The psychedelic poster has come to be recognized as one of the most influential artistic developments of the 1960s.<sup>53</sup> Rock posters have become a leading popular art form that has been a major influence in such related graphic art fields as advertising.<sup>54</sup> The posters are a visual history not only of the music but also of a little bit of the world that produced the music.

---

<sup>48</sup> Echard, *Psychedelic Popular Music*, 128.

<sup>49</sup> Echard, 128.

<sup>50</sup> Echard, 128.

<sup>51</sup> Titus O'Brien, *Dreams Unreal: The Genesis of the Psychedelic Rock Poster* (University of New Mexico Press, 2020).

<sup>52</sup> O'Brien.

<sup>53</sup> O'Brien.

<sup>54</sup> O'Brien.

Titus O'Brien, an artist, writer, and curator wrote the preface of *Dreams Unreal: The Genesis of the Psychedelic Rock Poster*, which describes counterculture and posters in the San Francisco scene. O'Brien writes about the psychedelic poster movement and what it meant to 1960s counterculture. He describes the psychedelic posters as being designed with "bold colors, mellifluous lines, surreal and pop imagery, challenging and inscrutable type." These are the main characteristics of the psychedelic poster and what made the art movement so unique.

#### ***A. Dance Hall Concerts and Poster Artists***

The demand for concert posters in the 1960s picked up during the era of dance hall concerts. The two most popular dance halls were the Avalon Ballroom and the Fillmore Auditorium. The Avalon Ballroom was owned by the Family Dog Productions, which was founded by Chet Helms. The Family Dog put on and promoted concerts throughout the 1960s and were known for their psychedelic promotional posters and handbills. Their competitor, Bill Graham purchased the Fillmore Auditorium in 1966 where he became a legendary concert promoter. Other San Francisco venues included the Jabberwock, California Hall, and The Ark, which you can see on many of the posters.<sup>55</sup>

Both Helms and Graham commissioned poster artist Wes Wilson to design posters to promote their concerts and dance halls.<sup>56</sup> After Wilson went to work with Graham full time, poster artist Stanley Mouse represented the Family Dog. Stanley Mouse, a psychedelic poster artist, went on to design many iconic images after teaming up with Alton Kelly and forming Mouse Studios. These artists influenced Rick Griffin who took poster art to another level in 1968. Another artist, Victor Moscoso, who taught lithography at San Francisco Art Institute was

---

<sup>55</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 71.

<sup>56</sup> Bach, 105.

also inspired by Wilson. Moscoso added to his posters “scintillating color schemes and impeccable modern flair.”<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Titus O’Brien, *Dreams Unreal*, 105.

## **V. Methodology**

During the summer of 2021, I archived a private collection of posters held by Cathleen Ashworth, a professor at Rochester Institute of Technology, called the William C. Miles Poster Archive. The collection consists of over 1,000 posters covering a wide range of topics. Many of the posters were made during the 1960s and relate to the counterculture. Most of the posters advertise concerts for genres like rock, jazz, and folk. There are also many protest posters for causes like the Vietnam War, drug legalization, abortion rights for women, the Black Power movement and more. Over the course of the summer, I analyzed all the posters and collected data on them, documenting the poster's artist, location, event, dimensions, condition, what year it was made, and what band was featuring on the poster. As I went through cataloging the posters, I began to recognize the psychedelic style and the popular poster artists like Wes Wilson and Stanley Mouse. I was very interested in this internship because I enjoy 1960s rock music and 1960s style. When looking at the posters I recognized many of the bands like Jimi Hendrix, Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan, etc. To me this internship was more than just gaining experience in the museum studies field of archiving, I really enjoyed cataloging something that I had a connection with. I wanted to take this experience to the next level and create an exhibit featuring some of the posters so that other people could experience a similar connection to the 1960s and its counterculture.

Choosing forty-five posters for an exhibit from a collection of one thousand posters was slightly overwhelming. I really had to focus on the direction I wanted to take for the exhibit. Since there are so many facets of the 1960s and its counterculture, there were many different directions to go in when choosing a topic. I strategized with what I love about the counterculture and what would inspire me the most, which was the music. Psychedelic rock concerts and



psychedelic poster art highlighted the collection, which pushed me further to choose music as the main topic. Chronologically, the 1960s was the perfect setting because most of the posters were made during that era. The 1960s was also the decade where the counterculture thrived and developed the genre of psychedelic rock, with 1967 being the peak. I then had to think about where geographically psychedelic rock could be represented the best, landing on San Francisco, California. Although San Francisco was not the only place psychedelic rock existed at the time, it was the place where it originated and developed into what we know it as today. After choosing a time, place, and a main topic, I developed subtopics that related to the counterculture, poster art, and rock music in the 1960s. These topics are psychedelic drugs, the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, Haight-Ashbury, psychedelic rock, dance hall concerts, and psychedelic poster art.

Coming to the decision of what posters to include in the exhibit was a multi-step process. After thinking about the themes, I wanted to develop in the exhibition, which was counterculture in San Francisco in the 1960s, I narrowed the poster choices down. At first, I focused specifically on the year 1967 and picked out all the posters made in that year. This came to approximately 300 posters. After looking at the content of the posters from 1967, I realized that there were a lot of important pieces that were missing and 1967 was too narrow of a topic. When doing my research for my literature review, I concluded that I couldn't talk about the counterculture without discussing what led up to it in the years before 1967. I decided to widen my chronological focus to the full decade of the 1960s. After doing this, I went back through the collection and began to focus more on the content of the posters rather than the year they were made. The content I was looking for were important milestones in the development of the counterculture and its rock music. Posters that would represent the different facets of the

counterculture, like music, protests, gatherings, festivals, and psychedelics. That came to around two-hundred posters and out of those I selected sixteen that I wanted to include in the exhibit no matter what, as these depicted the truly pivotal moments in the counterculture. These sixteen posters represented the San Francisco sound bands, Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and the Grateful Dead. I also selected posters for iconic events like the Monterey Pop Festival, the Acid Tests, the Human Be-In, the Summer of Love, drug protests, and Haight-Ashbury. I put all these posters into a spreadsheet to see what they looked like together and to compare what they had in common. I wanted to see the different poster artists, venues, and what year each poster was produced. After comparing all of them I looked to see what was missing. I knew I wanted to include art from all the Big Five San Francisco Poster artists: Rick Griffin, Alton Kelley, Victor Moscoso, Stanley Mouse, and Wes Wilson. I also wanted to include important San Francisco concert venues like the Avalon Ballroom, the Fillmore, and the Matrix.

I landed on two solid sections of the exhibition. The first half would discuss the San Francisco Scene. The scene would lead to the second half of the exhibition which would be the San Francisco Sound. The themes under the San Francisco Scene would be titled “Poster Art Influences”, “Gathering for the Summer of Love”, “Haight-Ashbury”, “Psychedelics and Drug Culture”, and “Can You Pass the Acid Test?”. The Themes under the San Francisco Sound would be titled “The Grateful Dead”, “Big Brother and the Holding Company”, “Jefferson Airplane”, “Dance Hall Concerts”, and “San Francisco Poster Artists”. I developed wall text for each section along with an introduction label. I eventually decided on the final forty-five posters for the exhibition and gathered tombstone information for each poster. After looking back at everything put together, I decided to title the exhibition *A Trip to 1967*. Finally, I added a playlist

consisting of 1960s psychedelic rock music that would be played while the visitors view the exhibit. The visitors can also scan a QR code to download the playlist to listen to at home. I was influenced in my development of the exhibition design by an exhibition I visited at the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, which will be discussed in the next section.

## VI. Exhibit Analysis: *Lights, Color, Fashion: Psychedelic Posters and Patterns of 1960s San Francisco*

The Bethel Woods Center for the Arts is in Bethel, NY, at the site where the Woodstock festival was held. Woodstock is one of the most celebrated music festivals in history. On August 15, 1969, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair brought 450,000 like-minded people together to experience the counterculture of the 1960s with drugs, music, and art. For three days legendary performers like Jefferson Airplane, Santana, Jimi Hendrix, and more, took the stage and brought people together. It was truly three days of peace, love, and music.<sup>58</sup>

The Bethel Woods Center for the Arts was founded by Alan Gerry who was interested in revitalizing tourism and the community in the Catskills. Gerry wanted to use the center to inspire the community through the arts and humanities. In 2002 the Gerry Foundation began designing the cultural and performing arts center that opened in 2006.<sup>59</sup> In addition, they built the Museum at Bethel Woods, which tells the story of Woodstock and the 1960s with immersive multimedia experiences, rare film footage, interactive displays, text panels, and artifacts. The Museum includes permanent and special exhibits, the festival field, the Woodstock monument, films, docent-led tours, the Bindy Bazaar trails, and supporting programming.

This year, in 2021, the museum put on a special exhibit called *Lights, Color, Fashion: Psychedelic Posters and Patterns of 1960s San Francisco*. The exhibit was curated by Julia Fell, assistant curator for the Museum at Bethel Woods. *Lights, Color, Fashion* showcased objects from collector Gary Westford who specializes in counterculture rock posters, photographs, and fashion from the years 1964 to 1972. The collection featured all the “Big Five” poster artists:

---

<sup>58</sup> “Welcome to Bethel Woods.,” Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, accessed September 7, 2021, <https://www.bethelwoodscenter.org/>.

<sup>59</sup> “Bethel Woods History,” Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, accessed December 26, 2021, <https://www.bethelwoodscenter.org/about/history>.

Victor Moscoso, Alton Kelly, Stanley Mouse, Rick Griffin, and Wes Wilson. The subject matter of the posters covered all topics, from rock concerts to protest posters to drug posters. The clothing ranged from designer to street fashion and illustrated the style and sense of self-expression from the West Coast during the time. A very important part of the exhibit, and to 1960s counterculture, was the light show made by San Francisco light artist Bill Ham. Ham's light shows were frequently featured at rock concerts during the 1960s and '70s.

*Lights, Color, Fashion: Psychedelic Posters and Patterns of 1960s San Francisco* was composed of about seventy-five posters and twenty photographs. The posters were positioned on the wall in two zigzagged rows, rather than lined up straight across the wall in art gallery style. This design resembled what the poster might have looked like hung up on a bedroom wall in the 1960s, which was where the posters mainly found their home. Because of this design choice, each poster did not have a label directly next to it. Instead, Fell placed all the information for each poster on a label at the end of the wall coordinating it with each poster using a diagram. This allowed for the groups of posters to look even more natural. Another design element that brought the exhibit together was the use of subtle psychedelic patterns throughout the exhibit pulled from one of the photographs in the collection.

The exhibit was not organized chronologically or by poster artist. Instead, it flowed through important themes of 1960s counterculture and its intersection with poster art. This was important because it helped the viewer understand the larger context of 1960s counterculture beyond poster art. Among the larger cultural topics covered were psychedelia, style, and social activism. More importantly, the exhibition covered important topics in 1960s poster art. Some examples are "The Poster Making Process", "Family Dog and the Avalon Ballroom", "Neon Rose", "Bill Graham Presents", and "The Matrix" sections of the exhibit.

The main idea of the exhibition was that “San Francisco was a meeting place and melting pot where revolutionary and radically alternative trends were brought to life.” This phrase was featured above the introductory panel when the visitor walked into the exhibition. The exhibit's intro panel gave the visitor a background to the counterculture of the 1960s that intersected with psychedelia, and introduced the visitor to important events, influences, and musicians of counterculture. The intro panel helped the viewer understand the wider scope of counterculture while simultaneously giving them insight into the creation of the psychedelic scene and how posters, light, and fashion were part of it. The exhibition began with a section on the artistic influences of psychedelic poster art. This section included art from different movements like Art Nouveau and op art that inspired the psychedelic style. Following this was a section on the poster-making process, which added a behind-the-scenes touch for the visitor. The exhibit then flowed into a section of photographs called “Who’s Who in the San Fran Scene”. The photographs pictured famous musicians like Jimi Hendrix, Grace Slick, and Janis Joplin. There were other photographs of famous counterculture influences like Ken Kesey and Timothy Leary. There were also photographs of poster artists and concert producers. This gave the visitor a slight background to who was involved in the San Francisco scene and matched a name that they might have heard before to a face they may or may not recognize. The exhibit then covered a range of important topics in poster art like “The Poster Making Process”, “Family Dog and the Avalon Ballroom”, “Neon Rose”, “Bill Graham Presents”, and “The Matrix”. These subjects are important for the viewer to understand how poster art circulated and what it was used for. In between these sections was a projection of Bill Ham's light show, which immersed the visitor in the experience of a light show at a psychedelic concert in the 1960s. In the center of the space were several mannequins wearing counterculture fashion from the 1960s. On one side was the

“high fashion” clothing with geometric patterns and vibrant colors. On the other side was everyday wear like bell-bottom jeans and embroidered leather skirts. At the end of the exhibition was an amazing room illuminated by a black light that held posters that were designed to be viewed that way. In this room, the posters came to life in neon colors which gave the visitor the ultimate psychedelic feeling.

Overall, Fell did a great job of communicating how posters, fashion, and lights intersected with the idea of counterculture and psychedelia in the 1960s. My takeaways from *Lights, Color, Fashion: Psychedelic Posters and Patterns of 1960s San Francisco* were that the design of the exhibit was reflected and expressed the feeling of the counterculture through poster art, fashion, and lights. It gave me some solid ideas for starting my idea for an exhibition, which will be explained in the next section.

## VII. Case Study: *A Trip to 1967*

“The San Francisco Scene was born with the emergence of counterculture in San Francisco and developed through a desire for experimentation and shared experiences, which was found through psychedelic drugs, art, and music.”

### **Introductory Label:**

The 1960s marked a period of discovery for American youth. College-aged men and women looked inward and outward for more than mainstream society was offering them in life. With the civil rights and antiwar movements, came a political consciousness that directly affected the lives of young people. The counterculture separated them from traditional values and social anxieties through their appearance and their lifestyle. Many dropped out of school, became political activists, embraced sexuality, and experimented with art, drugs, and music.

Events like the Human Be In, the Monterey Pop Festival, and the Summer of Love attracted young counter-culturalists to San Francisco, California, to connect with like-minded free spirits. Influential teachers like Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Ken Kesey lead the counterculture to collective beliefs, valuing peace, love, and exploration. It was in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco that this scene developed and flourished into a collective movement towards psychedelia.

Popular music during the 1960s played a big role in defining the character and spirit of the 1960s. Rock and Roll developed and changed with the times, becoming rock. There were many genres of rock that developed during the 1960s, but the one most associated with counterculture is psychedelic rock or acid rock. Psychedelic rock was born in San Francisco and centered around the Haight-Ashbury district during the Summer of Love. San Francisco was not only one of the first localized psychedelic scenes but also one of the first scenes in rock culture



overall.<sup>60</sup> Bands such as Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Jefferson Airplane pioneered the San Francisco Sound that influenced countercultural trends.

Psychedelic rock could be heard in dance halls around San Francisco. The Avalon Ballroom, Fillmore Auditorium, and the Matrix held psychedelic shows every weekend. The visual elements of psychedelic rock are crucial for communicating the values and beliefs of the 1960s counterculture. Major visual elements include fashion, album cover art, handicrafts, light shows, handbills, and concert posters. Poster art was revolutionized with the “Big Five” poster artists of San Francisco. Stanley Mouse, Alton Kelly, Victor Moscoso, Wes Wilson, and Rick Griffin created their posters for the psychedelic atmosphere, using pop culture imagery, radical, balloon style lettering, and intense color contrasts.<sup>61</sup> The posters are important because they were a medium for speaking the San Francisco visual and cultural style internationally.

(Figure 1)

### **Wall Text:**

#### ***The San Francisco Scene***

The San Francisco scene started around 1964 in the South Bay.<sup>62</sup> The scene developed quickly because there were several colleges in the area, giving musicians somewhere to study while waiting out the real world along with an audience of like-minded bohemians to play for.<sup>63</sup> These like-minded individuals were influenced by topics like the Beats, yoga, Hinduism, occultism, astrology, Jung, and conspiracy theories based around the CIA.<sup>64</sup>

(Figure 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)

---

<sup>60</sup> Echard, *Psychedelic Popular Music*. 127

<sup>61</sup> “Welcome to Bethel Woods.”

<sup>62</sup> Unterberger, *Eight Miles High*, 47

<sup>63</sup> Unterberger, 47.

<sup>64</sup> Echard, 127

### *Artistic Influences*

A major influence on psychedelic poster art in the 1960s was Art Nouveau, a style that would have been nostalgic and archaic because of its sinuous, sculptural, organic shapes, arches, curving lines, and sensual ornamentation. Around the 1880s the art movement Art Nouveau was a reaction to the existing art education and industrialized mass production of art.

In the 1960s this would resonate with the counterculture and have continuing connotations of anti-establishment, experimentation, and the pursuit of the new. This style also resonates with the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood because of its Victorian houses and ballrooms.

Other artistic influences for poster art include Art Deco, the Pre Raphaelites, and Surrealism. Poster artists also looked to contemporary popular culture for inspiration, including comics, films, science, corporate logos, and current events.<sup>65</sup>

(Figure 10, 11, 12)

### *Gathering For the Summer of Love*

The Summer of Love was put on by the Council for the Summer of Love, which consisted of the Family Dog, The Straight Theatre, The Diggers, The San Francisco Oracle, and others. The Summer of Love called for creative love happenings for every weekend of the summer in Haight-Ashbury. Almost 100,000 people came to participate in this transformative summer.

The main event of the Summer of Love was the Monterey Pop Festival, on June 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> 1967, which put San Francisco's bands on the map and transformed the world of Rock and Roll.<sup>66</sup> The festival featured the first major appearances by Jimi Hendrix, the first large-scale

---

<sup>65</sup> Echard, *Psychedelic Popular Music*, 128.

<sup>66</sup> Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 18.

public performance of Janis Joplin, and the introduction of Otis Redding to the mass American audience.<sup>67</sup>

From their experiences with LSD, these psychedelic rock bands from the San Francisco scene created new music, so raw and anti-commercial that it hardly sounded like what society knew as Rock and Roll.<sup>68</sup>

(Figure 13 and 14) (Figure 17, 18, and 19)

### ***Haight-Ashbury***

The center of the San Francisco Scene in the 1960s could be found in the Haight-Ashbury district. Haight-Ashbury was accessible to the youth because the rent was cheap, and it was close to the new San Francisco State University campus. These huge, once beautiful, old Victorian houses filled with students, graduates, dropouts, and musicians.<sup>69</sup> Bands like the Grateful Dead, Big Brother, and the Holding Company, and others lived in Haight-Ashbury for periods while transitioning from their folk, rock, blues, and jazz roots to electric rock bands.<sup>70</sup>

Haight-Ashbury was the place many other counter-culturists flocked to for an alternative, collective environment. These counter-culturists were runaways, poets, artists, Christian missionaries out to make converts, beggars, Hindu hippies, and people who claimed to be from UFOs.<sup>71</sup> Here, the younger generation could be themselves. Kids grew out their hair, wore psychedelic patterned clothes, and danced in the streets.<sup>72</sup>

(Figure 15 and 16)

---

<sup>67</sup> Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 18.

<sup>68</sup> Echols, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Echols, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Unterberger, *Eight Miles High*, 47

<sup>71</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 109

<sup>72</sup> Heilemann, "Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll."

### ***Psychedelics and Drug Culture***

The counterculture was attracted to drugs like LSD and marijuana. They used these psychedelic drugs to open their minds and reach a higher consciousness. In San Francisco, Owsley Stanley had developed the first major underground LSD factory that kickstarted the psychedelic lifestyle in the city.

The counterculture criticized the illegality of marijuana, which had been legal until 1937, and pointed to medical evidence to make their claim that it was less addictive and harmful than alcohol, which was legal.<sup>73</sup> They advocated to re-legalize it across the country.

A big advocate for psychedelic drugs was Timothy Leary. Leary was an American psychologist who researched and experimented with psychedelics in the early 1960s at Harvard. Leary presented lectures at universities encouraging potential followers to “Turn on, Tune in, and Drop out.” Turn themselves onto psychedelic drugs, tune in to psychedelic music, and drop out of school and mainstream society.<sup>74</sup>

(Figure 20, 21, and 22)

### ***Can You Pass the Acid Test?***

Ken Kesey, American novelist, and counterculture figure, ushered in the era of psychedelic drugs with the introduction of LSD into the counterculture community in the 1960s. After volunteering to participate in LSD testing for the CIA, he created LSD communes in San Francisco that administered the famous “Acid Tests”.

The Acid Tests were events held by Kesey and his crew, the Merry Pranksters, from 1965-1966. These all-night happenings featured live music played by the Grateful Dead, as their

---

<sup>73</sup> Bach, *The American Counterculture*, 52.

<sup>74</sup> Bach, 54.

music was a way to feel the acid.<sup>75</sup> The music was accompanied by colorful and eccentric clothing, elaborate light shows that mimicked hallucinatory movements, and posters with distorted lettering and shapes. Kesey strived to get as many people to try LSD as he could with the belief that it would allow society to see the larger truth and expand your mind.

(Figure 23, 24, and 25)

### ***The San Francisco Sound***

The San Francisco sound refers to bands such as the Grateful Dead, Big Brother, and the Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, The Charlatans, and Country Joe and the Fish that pioneered psychedelic rock in the 1960s. Most of these bands came from folk and folk-rock backgrounds which heavily influenced the psychedelic style.<sup>76</sup>

Big labels were slower to pick up bands from San Francisco, but their goal wasn't to "make it big", they enjoyed hanging out and making the music they wanted.<sup>77</sup> As the music grew popular in the counterculture audience, psychedelic bands grew in live performances. They began performing at larger concert venues such as the Avalon Ballroom and the Fillmore as well as communal outdoor events such as Happenings and Be-ins, which allowed for more volume to project to larger audiences as the San Francisco psychedelic scene grew.<sup>78</sup> Live performances featured extended, blues-based improvisations, surrealist lyrics with performances often loud and accompanied by lavish light shows. The effect was intended to evoke or support a drug-induced state.

---

<sup>75</sup> Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 23.

<sup>76</sup> Unterberger, *Eight Miles High*, 44.

<sup>77</sup> Unterberger, 92.

<sup>78</sup> Unterberger, 158.

**San Francisco Sound influences:** Psychedelic soul and funk, garage rock, jangle pop, folk music, and folk pop, Avant Garde crossovers with classical electronic music, psychedelic blues, and space rock.<sup>79</sup>

(Figure 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33)

### ***The Grateful Dead***

The Grateful Dead were the quintessential “live” rock band from the 1960s and remain so today. They were known for long jams that would wander through diverse musical styles and end in unexpected places during their live performances.<sup>80</sup>

The Dead adopted electronic instruments, lived communally in the Haight-Ashbury district, and participated in public LSD parties called the Acid Tests.<sup>81</sup> This put them at the forefront of the transition from urban rock music to folk rock and then to acid rock in San Francisco. They would eventually do more than any other band to popularize and sustain interest in psychedelic culture in the future and would, over time, play to more concertgoers than any other rock band.

**First Album:** *The Grateful Dead* (1967)

**Hit Album:** *American Beauty* (1968)

**Members:** Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, Ron “Pigpen” McKernan, Phil Lesh

**Hit Songs:** “Truckin”, “Touch of Grey”, “Casey Jones”

(Figure 34, 35, and 36)

---

<sup>79</sup> Echard, *Psychedelic Popular Music*, 126.

<sup>80</sup> Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, 160.

<sup>81</sup> Starr and Waterman, 160.

### ***Janis Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company***

Big brother and the Holding Company was an established rock band in San Francisco before the addition of female vocalist Janis Joplin joined in 1966. Joplin's first large-scale concert with the band was at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 where she gained fame for her performance almost instantly.<sup>82</sup> Her ear shattering, soul rock singing was attractive to the counterculture because it offered a connection and conveyed deep emotion with the lyrics she sang. Joplin's expression singing was inspired by blues singers like Bessie Smith and Big Mama Thornton.<sup>83</sup>

Big Brother and the Holding Company came out with their second album in 1968 titled *Cheap Thrills*, which reached number one on the pop charts. The album included the number twelve-hit song "Piece of My Heart", a cover version of Erma Franklin's 1960 RB hit. Like "Piece of My Heart", much of the band's early music was taken from old folk and blues songs.<sup>84</sup>

**First Album:** *Big Brother and the Holding Company* (1967)

**Hit Album:** *Cheap Thrills* (1968)

**Members:** Janis Joplin, Sam Andrew, Peter Albin, David Getz, James Gurley

**Hit Songs:** "Piece of My Heart", "Summertime", "Ball and Chain"

(Figure 37, 38, and 39)

### ***Jefferson Airplane***

As one of the original San Francisco "Acid Rock" bands, Jefferson Airplane was the first band to emerge from the San Francisco scene with national success. They emerged in 1965 as a

---

<sup>82</sup> Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor, United States: University of Michigan Press, 2008), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=3414687>, 42.

<sup>83</sup> Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, 159.

<sup>84</sup> Starr and Waterman, 159.

semi-acoustic folk-rock band, later developing a louder, harder, edged style with greater emphasis on open forms, instrumental improvisation, and visionary lyrics.<sup>85</sup> They rose to the national level with their second album *Surrealistic Pillow* featuring notably psychedelic hits singles “White Rabbit” and “Somebody to Love”.<sup>86</sup>

**Hit Album:** *Surrealistic Pillow* (1967)

**First Album:** *Jefferson Airplane Takes Off* (1966)

**Members:** Grace Slick, Signe Toly Anderson, Jack Casady, Spencer Dryden, Marty Balin, Jorma Kaukonen, Paul Kantner, Bob Harvey

(Figure 40, 41, and 42)

### ***Dance Hall Concerts***

By 1967 the live rock scene in San Francisco expanded from clubs and coffee houses to ballrooms and auditoriums. These dance hall concerts were held regularly in San Francisco and became central institutions for counterculture.

The Family Dog Productions laid the foundation for what dance hall concerts would become. Chet Helms, a music promoter for the Family Dog, saw the potential after hosting public dance parties in 1965, which then turned into hundreds of concerts in the years following.<sup>87</sup> The Family Dog soon became promoters at the Avalon Ballroom, and week after week they booked countless concerts with legendary gigs.<sup>88</sup> Helms had a good connection with the inside community because he was an authentic hippie. Bill Graham, who is known as the greatest concert promoter of all time, purchased the Fillmore auditorium in 1966. Graham had a

---

<sup>85</sup> Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, 158.

<sup>86</sup> Unterberger, *Eight Miles High*, 60.

<sup>87</sup> O’Brien, *Dreams Unreal*, 67.

<sup>88</sup> O’Brien, 71.



capital advantage over Helms and used it to book bigger national and international acts like The Who and Cream.<sup>89</sup>

Other San Francisco venues included the Jabberwock, California Hall, and The Ark, which you can see on many of the posters.<sup>90</sup>

(Figure 43, 44, and 45)

### ***San Francisco Poster Artists***

Many of the best-known poster artists got their start working for the Family Dog, as Helms was the first to commission unique, stylized posters to promote his concerts and gatherings.

These artists Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse, Alton Kelly, Victor Moscoso, and Rick Griffin were deemed the “San Francisco Five”. Helms and Grahams posted three hundred of these posters a week around town to promote shows and handed them out for free at the shows. The youth took to these psychedelic art posters. “Hippies and college students were clamoring for more cool, cheap, art to adorn their dorm and Haight apartment walls, signifying their membership in the new culture.”<sup>91</sup>

Newly opened head shops and hippie boutiques sold the posters, too; the shops devoted space primarily to the posters that were most followed, and artists had more reason to treat psychedelic art more seriously. The demand grew and concert promoters were producing up to 100,000 posters a week, providing a cash flow large enough to keep theaters afloat and pay

---

<sup>89</sup> O’Brien, *Dreams Unreal*, 70.

<sup>90</sup> O’Brien, 71.

<sup>91</sup> O’Brien, 106.

concert acts.<sup>92</sup> The posters influenced artists and designers, hipsters, insiders, and outsiders around the world.

(Figure 46)

**Playlist:**

This is a playlist created to be heard when viewing *A Trip to 1967*. The playlist consists of psychedelic rock bands and classic psychedelic songs. All visitors would be able to scan a QR code to download the playlist to their phone.

“White Rabbit” Jefferson Airplane

“Purple Haze” The Jimi Hendrix Experience

“Sunshine of Your Love” Cream

“Somebody to Love” Jefferson Airplane

“Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” The Beatles

“(We Ain’t Got) Nothin’ Yet” The Blue Magoos

“Incense and Peppermint” Strawberry Alarm Clock

“Black Magic Woman / Gypsy Queen” Santana

“Piece of My Heart” Big Brother and the Holding Company

“Summertime” Big Brother and the Holding Company

“Truckin” Grateful Dead

“St. Stephen” Grateful Dead

“Viola Lee Blues” Grateful Dead

“Evil Ways” Santana

“I Hear You Knockin” Quicksilver Messenger Service

---

<sup>92</sup> O’Brien, *Dreams Unreal*, 106.

“California Dreamin’” The Mamas & The Papas

“Good Vibrations” The Beach Boys

“Time of the Season” The Zombies

“Crimson and Clover” Tommy James & The Shondells

“She Comes in Colors” Love

“Eight Miles High” The Byrds

“Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” The Beatles

“Paint it Black” The Rolling Stones

“White Room” Cream

“Season of the Witch” Donovan

## VIII. Conclusion

Visual culture such as posters, art, lights, and fashion can communicate characteristics of the counterculture in the 1960s through surrealistic subject matter, kaleidoscopic patterns, bright/contrasting colors, and the morphing of objects or themes. Printed posters communicate these aspects of counterculture: psychedelia, unconventionality, experimentation, sexual liberation, and collectiveness.

Through a case study involving a thought-out exhibition concept titled *A Trip to 1967*, I was able to capture the visual culture of San Francisco in the 1960s and connect it to countercultural values and the San Francisco Sound. In the posters that depict the San Francisco Scene and the San Francisco Sound in the 1960s, from the William C. Miles Poster Archive, there are certain elements that recur in the posters that signify characteristics that developed in the counterculture. Working on this thesis has allowed me to expand my knowledge of fields such as American counterculture, visual culture, poster art, the 1960s, and music all which contribute to my overall academic interests and future aspirations of researching and working at the intersection of visual culture and American History.

If I had more time to develop the exhibition concept further, I would have added additional posters from the collection that touch of subjects of Vietnam War protests, Civil Rights protests, the sexual revolution, feminism, folk rock, and jazz. I would also like to add a timeline of the development of counterculture, psychedelic music, and groundbreaking events of the counterculture in the 1960s. I would also like to have a section with a screen that plays video footage from concerts and light shows in San Francisco in the 1960s, like the Monterey Pop Festival.

## IX. Bibliography

- Allen, Moore. "Psychedelic Rock." Grove Music Online. Accessed September 13, 2021. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.rit.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000046256>.
- Bach, Damon R. *The American Counterculture: A History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents*. University Press of Kansas, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1f886zs>.
- Bethel Woods Center for the Arts. "Bethel Woods History." Accessed December 26, 2021. <https://www.bethelwoodscenter.org/about/history>.
- Echard, William. *Psychedelic Popular Music: A History Through Musical Topic Theory*. Bloomington, United States: Indiana University Press, 2017. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=4900803>.
- Echols, Alice. *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks*. Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Fleiss, Mike, John Perry Barlow, Chuck Berry, and Neal Cassady. *The Other One: The Long, Strange Trip of Bob Weir*. Documentary, Biography, Music. Next Entertainment, 2015.
- Goldberg, Danny. *In Search of the Lost Chord: 1967 and the Hippie Idea*. New York, United States: Akashic Books, 2017. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=4769083>.
- Grushkin, Paul. *The Art of Rock: Posters from Presley to Punk*. 1st-- ed. Book, Whole. New York: Abbeville Press, 1987. <https://go.exlibris.link/y8bhGqC0>.
- Heilemann, John. "Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll." *The Sixties*. HBO, August 14, 2014.
- Marshall, Jim. "60s Fashion for Hippies - Women and Men." Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://vintagedancer.com/1960s/60s-hippe-fashion/>.
- Montgomery, Scott B. "Radical Trips: Exploring the Political Dimension and Context of the 1960s Psychedelic Poster." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 13, no. 1 (2019): 121–54. <https://doi.org/10.14321/jstudradi.13.1.0121>.
- O'Brien, Titus. *Dreams Unreal: The Genesis of the Psychedelic Rock Poster*. University of New Mexico Press, 2020.
- Grove Music Online. "Poster." Accessed October 14, 2021. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.rit.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000006505>.

Grove Music Online. "Psychedelic Rock." Accessed January 4, 2022. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.rit.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002267498>.

Starr, Larry, and Christopher Waterman. *American Popular Music: The Rock Years*. Cary, United States: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=3051954>.

Unterberger, Richie. *Eight Miles High: Folk-Rock's Flight from Haight-Ashbury to Woodstock*. San Francisco, United States: Richie Unterberger, 2001.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=3544810>.

Vox. *Where the 1960s "Psychedelic" Look Came From*, 2019.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vuqI2v2IRs>.

Zimmerman, Nadya. *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*. Ann Arbor, United States: University of Michigan Press, 2008.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rit/detail.action?docID=3414687>.

### Images

Wells Fargo Stories. "Haight-Ashbury Mural Celebrates Birthplace of '60s Counterculture," June 8, 2018. <https://stories.wf.com/haight-ashbury-mural-celebrates-birthplace-of-60s-counterculture/>

Getty Images. "Teenagers Browse through a Popular Psychedelic Poster Shop in The..." Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/teenagers-browse-through-a-popular-psychedelic-poster-shop-news-photo/576841222>.

Getty Images. "The Haight-Ashbury District Is Known for Its Victorian/Queen..." Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/the-haight-ashbury-district-is-known-for-its-victorian-news-photo/75925506>.

Wells Fargo Stories. "Haight-Ashbury Mural Celebrates Birthplace of '60s Counterculture," June 8, 2018. <https://stories.wf.com/haight-ashbury-mural-celebrates-birthplace-of-60s-counterculture/>

## X. Appendix



**Figure 1:** “Country Joe and the Fish” Avalon Ballroom, 1967 by Bob Schnepf.

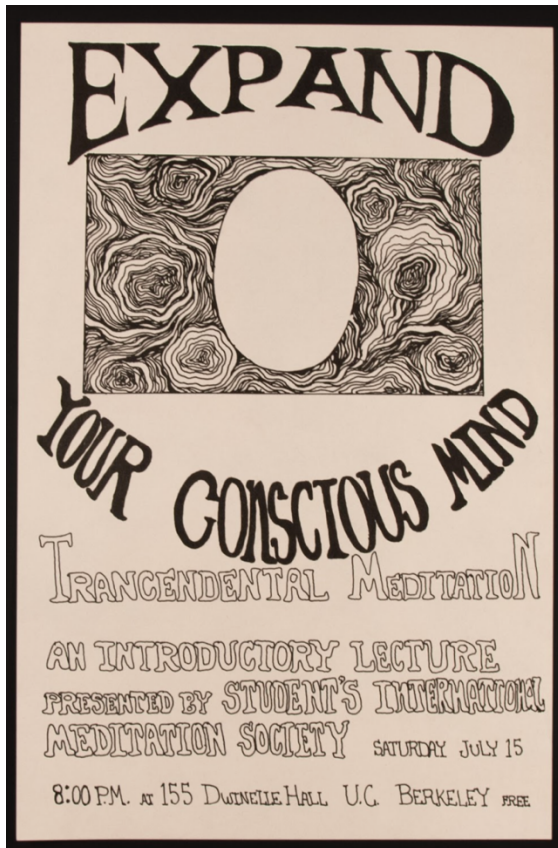


Figure 2: "Expand Your Conscious Mind" U.C Berkeley.



Figure 3: "Zodiac Terre" 1968 by Nathan Terre.





**Figure 4:** “Krishna Consciousness Comes West” Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, 1967 by Harvey Cohen.



**Figure 5:** “Zig – Zag” (Big Brother and the Holding Company) Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, 1966 by Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelly.



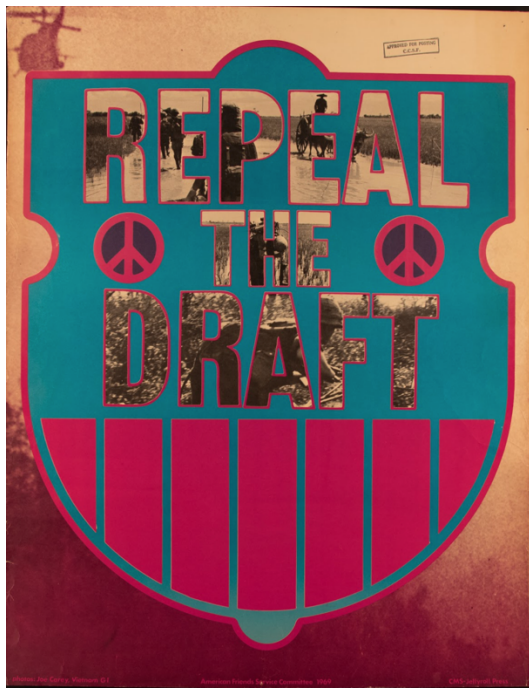
Figure 6: “KMPX” San Francisco Radio Station, 1962-78.



Figure 7: “University of California at Berkeley” 1967.



**Figure 8:** "Sunset Health Food Store" San Francisco, 1967.



**Figure 9:** "Repeal the Draft" (Vietnam War Protest) 1969.



**Figure 10:** “Blues Project” Matrix, 1968 by Victor Moscoso.



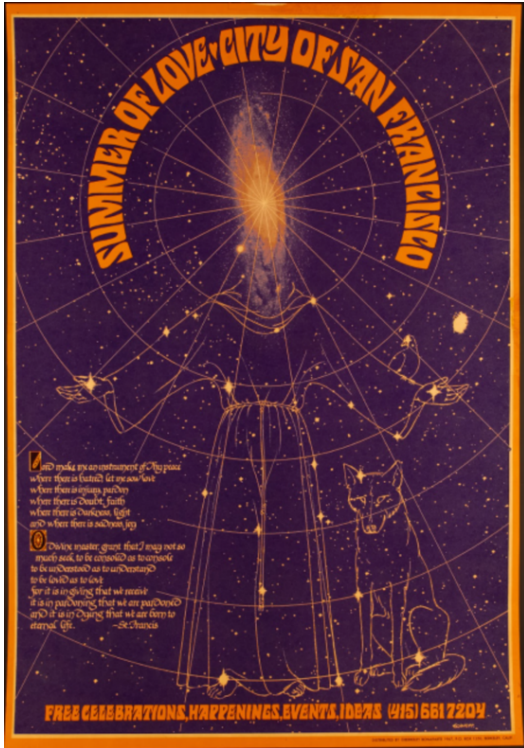
**Figure 11:** “Big Brother and the Holding Company” The Ark, 1967 by John Lichtenwalner.



**Figure 12:** “Youngbloods; Kaleidoscope” Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, 1968 by John Thompson.



**Figure 13:** “Monterey Pop Festival” Fairgrounds Monterey, 1967 by Tom Wilkes.



**Figure 14:** “Summer of Love” San Francisco, 1967 by Schnepf Summer.



**Figure 15:** “Haight-Ashbury Loves You” San Francisco, 1967 by Gomez.

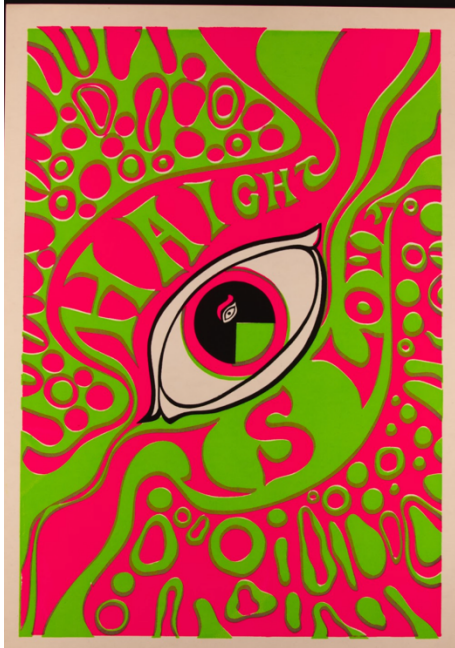


Figure 16: "Haight is Love".



Figure 17: "Human Be-In" Golden Gate Park, 1967 by Rick Griffin.



**Figure 18:** “Human Be-In” Golden Gate Park, 1967 by Stanley Mouse, Alton Kelly, and Michael Brown.



**Figure 19:** “Human Be-In” Golden Gate Park, 1967 by Dick Moore.





Figure 20: “Turn in, Turn On, Drop Out” (Timothy Leary) 1967 by OM.



Figure 21: “Acapulco Gold Rolling Papers” by R. Johnson.



Figure 22: “Re-Legalize Marijuana” by Greg Sobran.



Figure 23: “Can You Pass the Acid Test?” Muir Beach, CA, 1965 by Norman Hartweg.



Figure 24: "Acid Test Graduation" Winterland, San Francisco, 1966 by Gut.

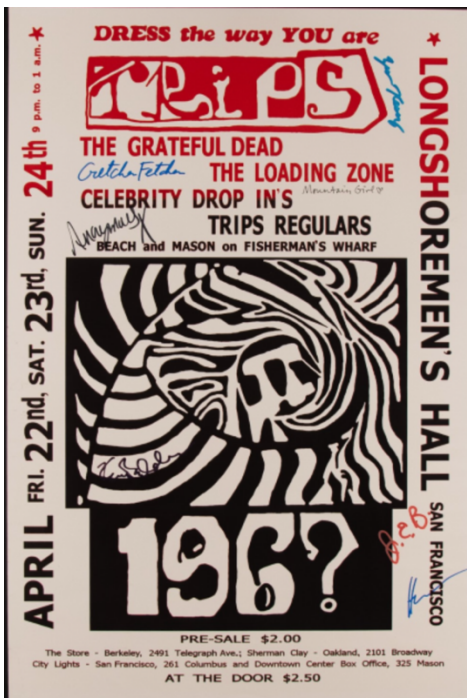


Figure 25: "Trips Festival" Longshoremen's Hall, San Francisco, 1966.



Figure 26: “Jimi Hendrix Experience” by R. Tolmach.



Figure 27: “Chambers Brothers” Grande Ballroom, by Gary Grimshaw.



Figure 28: “Steve Miller Band”.



Figure 29: “13 Floor Elevators” Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, 1966 by Mouse Studios.



Figure 30: “Cream & MC5” Grande Ballroom, Detroit, 1967 by Gary Grimshaw.



Figure 31: “MC5” Grande Ballroom, 1967 by Gary Grimshaw.

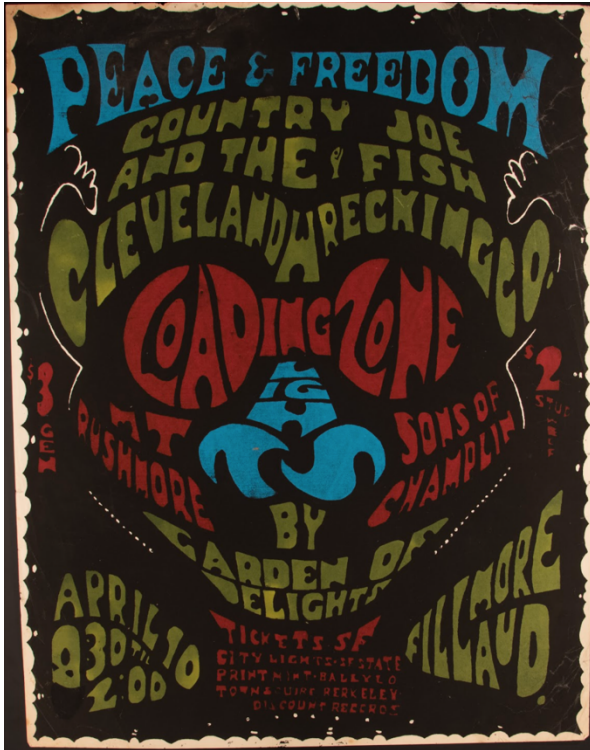


Figure 32: “Country Joe and the Fish” Fillmore Auditorium, San Francisco.



Figure 33: “Donovan” 1967 by John R. Moehring.



**Figure 34:** “It’s A Beautiful Day” Grateful Dead Honolulu International Center, Honolulu, 1969 by Rick Griffin.



**Figure 35:** “Grateful Dead” Straight Theater, San Francisco, 1967 by C. Braga.





**Figure 36:** “Skull and Roses” (Grateful Dead) Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, 1966 by Alton Kelly and Stanley Mouse.



**Figure 37:** “Big Brother and the Holding Company” Oxford, San Francisco, 1967 by Victor Moscoso.



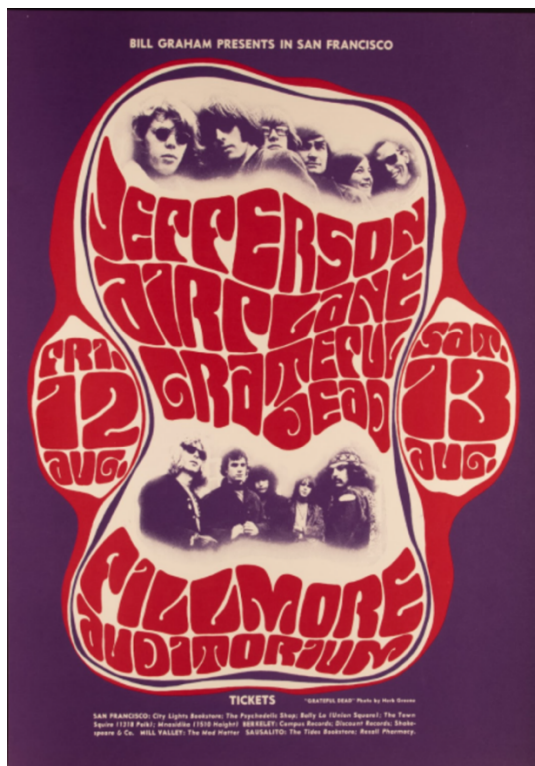
**Figure 38:** “Big Brother and the Holding Company” Fillmore Auditorium, San Francisco, 1968 by Patrick Lofthouse.



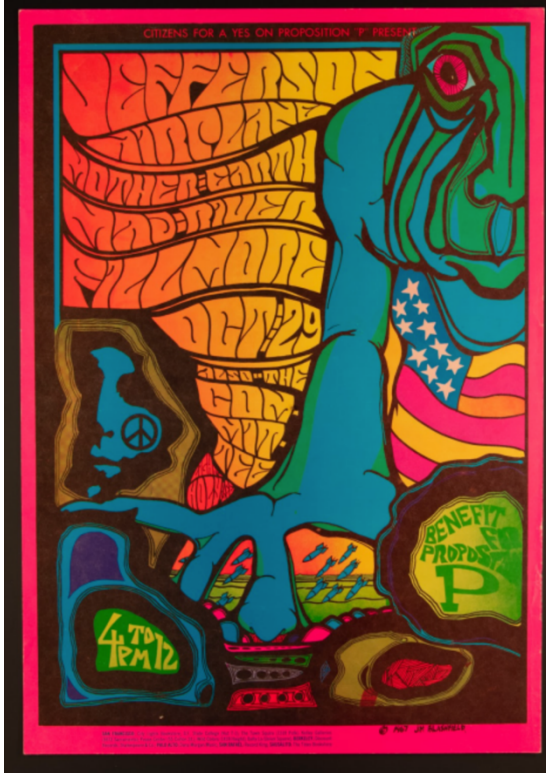
**Figure 39:** “Big Brother and the Holding Company” The Matrix, San Francisco, 1967 by Victor Moscoso.



**Figure 40:** “Edwardian Ball” (Jefferson Airplane) Fillmore Auditorium, San Francisco, 1966 by Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelly



**Figure 41:** “Jefferson Airplane and Grateful Dead” Fillmore Auditorium, San Francisco, 1966 by Wes Wilson.



**Figure 42:** “Proposition “P” Benefit” Fillmore Auditorium, San Francisco, 1967 by Jim Blashfield.



**Figure 43:** “Chamber Brothers” The Matrix, San Francisco, 1967 by Victor Moscoso.



**Figure 44:** “Jimi Hendrix Experience” Fillmore Auditorium, San Francisco, 1968 by Rick Griffin



**Figure 45:** “Miller Blues Band” Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, 1967 by Mouse Studios.



**Figure 46:** “San Francisco’s Big 5” (Alton Kelly, Stanley Mouse, Victor Moscoso, Wes Wilson) 1967.



**Figure 47:** Blue Cheer band members gather at the famous Haight-Ashbury corner in San Francisco in June 1967. Photograph by Jim Marshall.



**Figure 48:** Jimi Hendrix performs a free concert at The Panhandle Park in San Francisco on June 19, 1967 – the day after famously setting his guitar on fire at the Monterey Pop Festival. Photograph by Jim Marshall.



**Figure 49:** A light show performance during a 1966 concert by Grass Roots at the Fillmore in San Francisco. Light show artists projected layers of colored mineral oil and water under the heat of a lamp to produce changing color patterns reflecting the music. Photograph by Jim Marshall.



**Figure 50:** Psychedelic Shop, San Francisco, CA.



**Figure 51:** The Haight-Ashbury district is known for its Victorian style homes. San Francisco, 1967.





**Figure 52:** A hippie sits on her bed in an apartment decorated with posters. San Francisco, CA.



**Figure 53:** Teenagers browse through a popular psychedelic poster shop in the Haight Ashbury district. San Francisco, CA, 1967.



**Figure 54:** The Grateful Dead at their house in the Haight-Ashbury district. San Francisco, CA, 1967. Photographed by Baron Wolman.



**Figure 55:** Big Brother and the Holding Company at the Monterey Pop Festival. San Francisco, CA, 1967.