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PHAIDON



THE ART OF PSYCHEDELIA
An exploration of psychedelic art and graphics

Edited by Ellen Viney



03

Introduction

07

Leif Podhajsky

23

Takuya Hagihara

31

Laura Buckley

43

Yayoi Kusama

55

Robert Beatty

68

Nigel Waymouth

Inner

Psychedelic Art refers to all artistic creations emerging from the late 1960s that attempted to portray the inner world of the psyche through incredibly graphic and visual depictions. In doing so, art that appeared to be recreating experiences and hallucinations that were common after ingesting psychedelic drugs such as LSD and psilocybin were known to be 'psychedelic'.

The term 'psychedelic' was conceived by British psychologist Humphry Osmond after his extensive work with psychedelic drugs. Osmond stated that the word was used to imply a type of 'mind manifesting' that occurred after the consumption of drugs, with his term going on to represent the emotions felt after viewing psychedelic artworks. Psychedelic is also a concept derived from the Ancient Greek words 'psychē', meaning 'soul' and 'dēloun' which means 'to reveal.' In addition to the experience of viewing Psychedelic Art, the name of the genre made reference to the drugs that were popular within the youth culture at the time of the movement's peak. Artworks that emphasized incredibly distorted and almost surreal qualities through the use of excessive colour were considered to be psychedelic, as they were thought to depict the inner workings of the mind. Day-glo and anti-naturalistic in colour, psychedelic art often contained swirling patterns, erotic imagery and hidden messages. The works referenced the changing states of consciousness while under the influence of the drug. Much of the art grew out of the hippy community in San Francisco.

Within the Psychedelic Art period, a variety of different creative mediums were taken into account along with artworks. This included rock music, album covers, concert posters, murals, comic books, and liquid light shows to name a few. Despite all belonging to the creative world, these art pieces were connected by their common attempt to create kaleidoscopically swirling patterns of color that evoked LSD-type illusions.

The emergence of computer art has enabled an even bigger and more copious expression of psychedelic vision in digital artworks that have since been created. The development of two-dimensional and three-dimensional graphics allowed unparalleled freedom to form when it came to digitally rendered versions of Psychedelic Art, as artists seem to be no longer limited by anything. Suddenly, even amateur artists had access to the technology needed to create digital Psychedelic Art, which broadened the accessibility of the movement entirely.

This book explores the trippy world of modern psychedelia – from graphic album covers to art installations. Featured artists and designers include; Leif Podhajsky, a prolific graphic designer who has worked with the likes of Tame Impala and Foals to produce mind-bending album covers, installation artists such as Yayoi Kusama and Laura Buckley who explore trippy and visually-appealing themes in their work. Robert Beatty has also work on psychedelic album art for artists like Tame Impala but has also created posters and his own self-initiated work over the years.

LIEF



Leif Podhajsky is fast becoming one of the most prolific graphic designers in the industry. You may recognize his album covers, including both LPs by Tame Impala, as well as releases from Grimes, Shabazz Palaces, Lykki Li and Foals. He's known for his modern take on classic psychedelic art, employing repetitive geometric imagery and swirled-out nature tropes. Podhajsky's website rightfully boasts that his work 'explores themes of connectedness, the relevance of nature and the psychedelic or altered experience.'

Words by Zach Sokol

What was the first work that you got paid for? How do you actually feel about that piece now?

The first piece I got paid for in graphic design was probably re-doing a medical form [laughs]. It was completely boring and it was just layout and I think I got paid one-hundred dollars. I was pretty happy. I think I kept the check.

What was the first band you did graphic design for then?

I think it was actually Tame Impala. I didn't actually plan on doing album artwork. I just started putting stuff up online that I was doing at the time and Modular contacted me out of the blue to do a pitch for their album cover. That was a lucky break.

Did you study art at university or did you draw a lot as a kid? What led you to this career?

I was always drawing, but I studied graphic design in college and I studied at a studio in Melbourne for a few years doing traditional graphic design, then I started doing the art-based design stuff. Cover of Wax Poetics in support of Shabazz's Black Up LP.

Do you need a certain atmosphere to work in--a home office, say--or can you do your work anywhere from a laptop?

I have a home office at the moment but I'm just about to move into a studio. It doesn't really matter that much. I'm simple and I've done a lot of traveling so I've always had a laptop. I used to take pictures of desks I was working on because it would be in Berlin or in Mexico or in New York or London or back in Australia so it was a good way to track my work. It's good to be a little bit settled. I think it's easier to get your head around things.

I've read in your past interviews in which you describe your art as a connection among nature, altered states, digital techniques, and organic outcomes. Do you often spend time in nature to help focus your art and creativity?

I wish I spent more time. I'm actually stuck behind the computer way too much now. I'm always trying to make time to go out. We usually do in London. We've been doing a lot of hikes recently on Sundays. It's my little escape because London is pretty crazy.



Image courtesy of Foot District

Do you have an all-time favorite outdoor space? I know you've been all over the world, but do you have one spot that's your ideal outdoor muse?

I would have to say where I grew up in Byron Bay. It's the fucking rainforest in the back of Byron. A few of my friends have got really nice houses out there so I like going and staying out there--waterfalls, rainforests, the works. It's probably the most beautiful place I've been and I grew up there so it's special.

So how does your work turn out if you're in a negative mental state, if you're feeling depressed or angsty? Does it show or do you avoid working in that kind of mindset?

I think I try to avoid that. I leave those awful states by working because they always get me in a better headspace. [Work] is my little sanctuary and it keeps me in a good mood. I won't start any new jobs or artworks if I'm in a bad mood. I don't want to translate that negative energy across into the work. Some of my pieces are quite dark and there are darker themes but that's showing the opposite side of love which I always want to explore.

Was it a tedious process?

It was quite tedious. Getting all the effects layered takes a long time, especially to change anything.

Based on your aesthetic, I have to ask: Do you ever work in altered states? Do you smoke weed or take other drugs before starting a project?

Never. Never worked that way, really. If I've ever had any experience or trip like that it's always just taking something back from that and putting it into something while I'm working. There's that guy named Brian Lewis Saunders who's got that series where he does self-portraits under different substances. I've seen people's drawings from when they're on acid or coke or whatever and it's interesting to see the difference in what comes out. I once drew some pitches--ages ago--while on an acid trip.

How'd they turn out?

They were little scribbles and some words but it was fairly interesting. It was mostly words but you know - it was out there. I still rarely work like that though. I hate looking at a computer when on drugs.

Have you ever read Wind-Up Bird Chronicle?

That's on my desk right now, I gave it to my girlfriend to read. It's hypnotizing and shocking. Artist-wise I really like Storm Thorgerson, but he just passed away. I always looked up towards him. I also really like Killian Eng, too. All of these people I feature on Visual Melt.

What computer programs do you use when creating your designs?

For my album artwork I usually use Photoshop but I try to use it in strange ways to try and break things almost. I try to come up with outcomes that you usually wouldn't get out of Photoshop. For the Mount Kimbie video I used Adobe Premiere and my friend Colby helped me do the data mashing stuff. I'm not sure what program he used but you can get data-mashing kits and basically overlap two videos and remove certain frames and it causes that glitch. I worked with him on that and we added that in Premiere.

So how does your work turn out if you're in a negative mental state, if you're feeling depressed or angsty? Does it show or do you avoid working in that kind of mindset?

I think I try to avoid that. [Work] is my little sanctuary and it keeps me in a good mood. I won't start any new jobs or artworks if I'm in a bad mood because I don't want to translate that negative energy across into the work. Some of my pieces are quite dark and there are darker themes but that's showing the opposite side of love which I always want to explore.

Image courtesy of Foot District



It sounds like you've worked with a ton of your favorite bands and artists. Are there any artists you haven't collaborated with that you have your eyes on?

There's a young band called The Holydrug Couple. They're really small and I reckon I'd like to do something for them.

Based on your aesthetic, I have to ask: Do you ever work in altered states? Do you smoke weed or take other drugs before starting a project?

Never. Never worked that way, really. If I've ever had any experience or trip like that it's always just taking something back from that and putting it into something while I'm working. There's that guy named Brian Lewis Saunders who's got that series where he does self-portraits under different substances. I've seen people's drawings from when they're on acid or coke or whatever and it's interesting to see the difference in what comes out. I once drew some pitches--ages ago--while on an acid trip.

Would you focus on graphics or move on to other types of visual art?

I'd love to move into other types like sculpture. I'd love to start showing my stuff on big-scale platforms and in more galleries. The mesh between digital and physical could be really interesting to display in a gallery.



Podhajsky's artwork for Tame Impala's Innerspeaker album cover.

'...the hard part was getting the Droste effect just right, so that it felt like a normal landscape but with just enough of a surreal twist as to trick the mind into an infinite loop.'

TAME IMPALA | INNERSPEAKER

What hasn't been said about this album? Out of everything I've done, people still ask about this one the most; it's a blessing and a curse. What I like is that it's stood the test of time, it still feels timeless to me and I'm happy with that. I was living in Melbourne and if I recall correctly, Glen Goetze from Modular Records sent me a very short email asking if I wanted to put together some ideas for Tame Impala... had I heard of them? Yes, I had and I was excited by the prospect and a little daunted too, as I knew this album would sort of represent a time and movement that I felt a part of. Little did I know the impact this album would have on so many other people.

Kevin [Parker] had some ideas about creating this repeating effect that had a sort of acid haze. I locked myself away and just listened to some of the tracks he sent me; the hard part was getting the Droste effect just right, so that it felt like a normal landscape but with just enough of a surreal twist as to trick the mind into an infinite loop. I remember we went through so many options and I was starting to feel pretty exhausted by the whole process. But in the end, it was more than worth it. I think I still have an original 12" and some Innerspeakerolling papers in a friend's lock-up in Melbourne... that's if he hasn't lost or sold them.

YOUNG MAGIC | MELT

A classic! We go way back and this album, more than any, sums up my time in Melbourne. A very beautiful and explorative time, many seeds were planted. Isaac [Emmanuel] used to come around to my house and I would show him ideas or experiment in Photoshop. He would be sitting there saying, 'This is great, but this one also...' It was like one of those memes of a creative director hovering over your shoulder (laughs). But it was fine as we're really close friends and there was a lot of experimenting going on.

I think this one was a beautiful mistake. I was playing around with the warp tool... no, the liquify tool, and in CS4 that was a spasmodic, glitch-prone business, likely to crash the whole program. I made this mark and it just looked super otherworldly. We were both like, 'That looks cool...' I think I tried many of these effects but none ever looked as good as that first one. For me, this piece feels like the perfect blend of digital and organic. A weird paradox. I think it also sums up Young Magic's sound: super lush, organic textures, but with electronic digital warmth also.

'For me, this piece feels like the perfect blend of digital and organic... it also sums up Young Magic's sound: super lush, organic textures, but with electronic digital warmth also.'

Album artwork for Young Magic's Melt designed and created by Podhajsky.





Bonobo 'The Nothern Borders'
album cover, 2013 (top left)

Foals 'Holy Fire'
album cover, 2013 (top right)

Tame Impala 'Lonerism'
album cover, 2012 (bottom left)

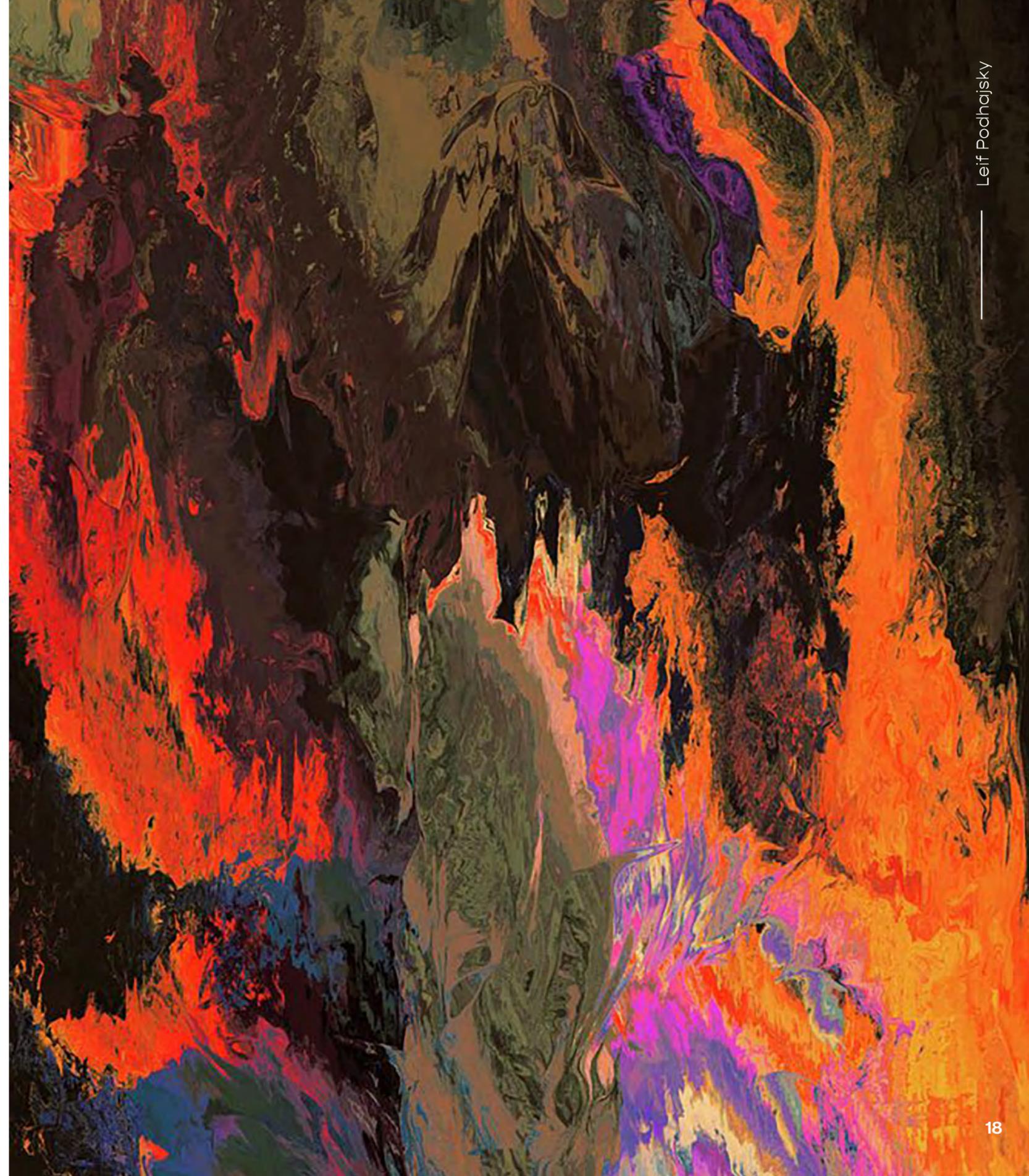
All We Are 'All We Are'
album cover, 2015 (bottom right)

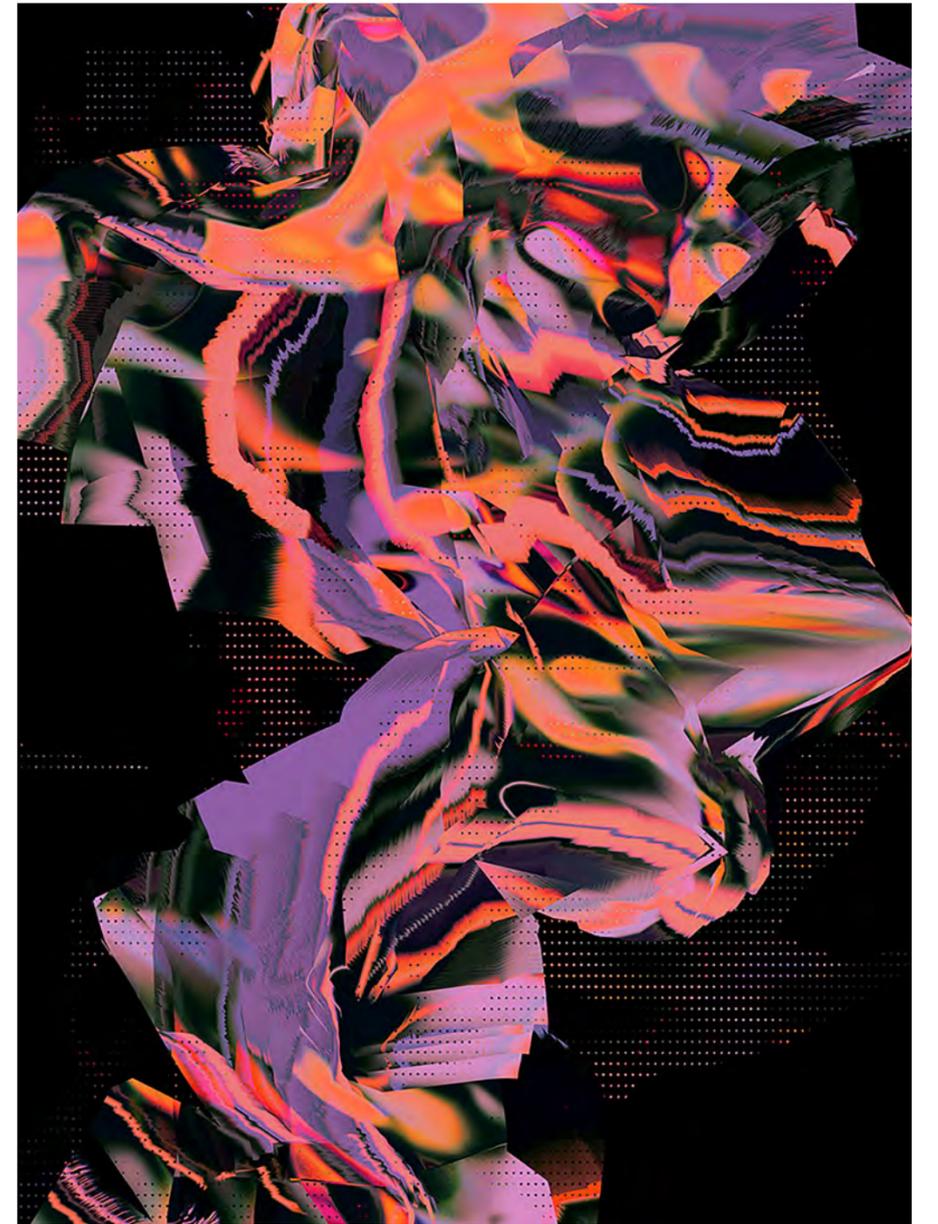
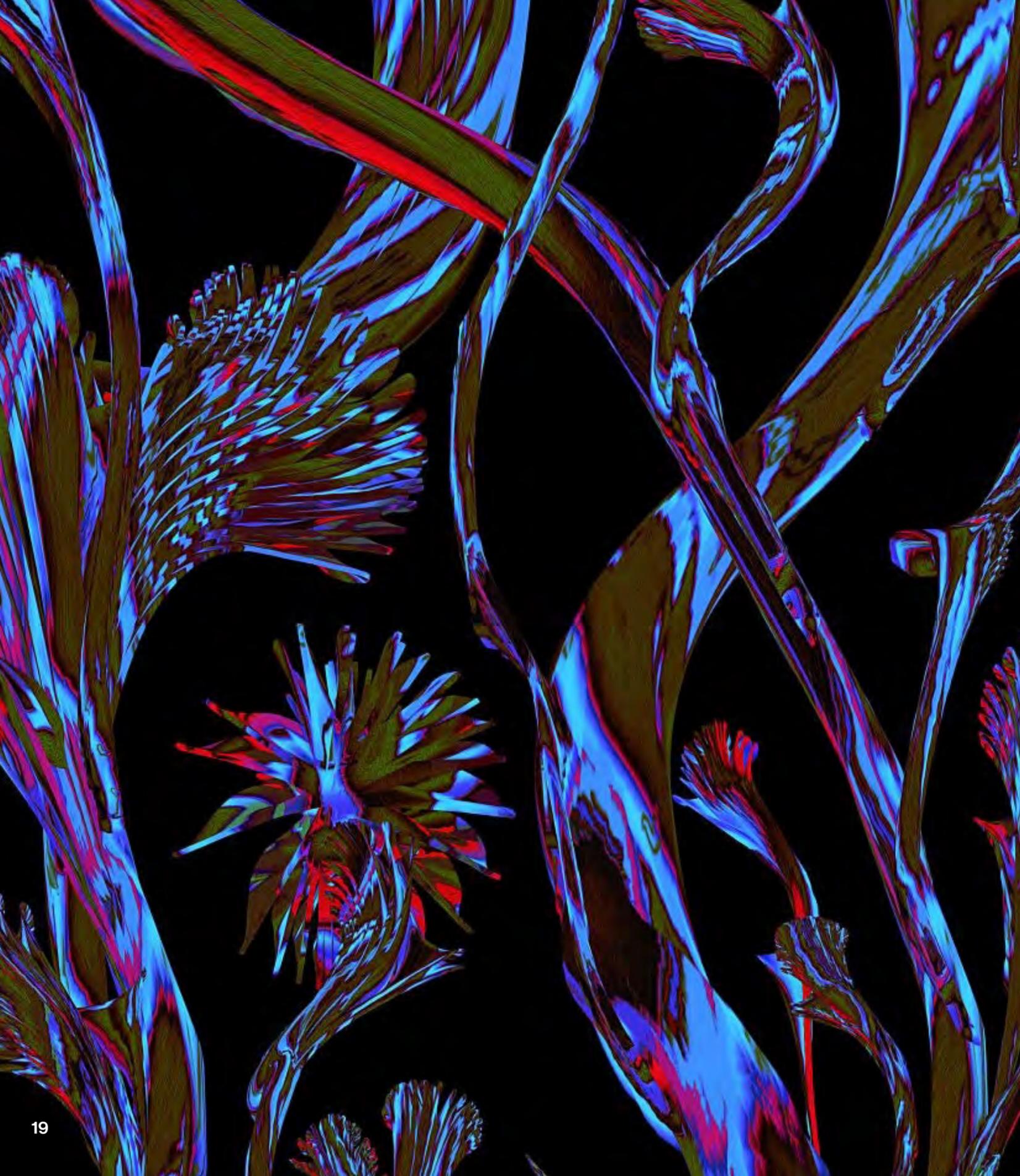


Flow State ▾
An art print by Lief Podhajsky



Devil Melt II ▷
An art print by Lief Podhajsky





Neon Flowers ◀
An art print by Lief Podhajsky



Post Nature ▶
An art print by Lief Podhajsky

To explore more of Podhajsky's work visit: www.liefpodhajsky.com and follow @liefpodhajsky on Instagram.