

Storm Thorgerson, the last great surrealist

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Raised in a home that had Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and the like, regularly blaring from our record player, I'm not new to the enigmatic album art of Storm Thorgerson. On hearing the opening of the Raging Storm exhibition in Cape Town, I jumped at the chance to meet the man behind the fascinating surrealism, and possibly make an addition to my budding art collection.

Alas, each print costs roughly an arm and a leg and, in some cases, a torso; they are worth it, though. Even if you can't tell your Nigel Kennedy from your Peter Gabriel, or your Muse from your Pendulum, you will appreciate the unworldly creativity oozing in each piece. My favourites include The Cranberries, Bury the Hatchet (1999) and Wake up and Smell the Coffee (2001); The Steve Miller Band, Let your Hair Down (2010); Biffy Clyro, Only Revolutions (2009) and Steve Miller, Bingo! (2010).



The Cranberries, Bury the Hatchet
(1999)

[click to enlarge](#)



The Steve Miller Band, Let your Hair
Down (2010)

[click to enlarge](#)



Biffy Clyro, Only Revolutions (2009)

[click to enlarge](#)

Installations immortalised in album art

It will surprise you, as it surprised me, that most of the images created by Thorgerson were not artificially conceived. The envisioned images were captured from a performance art-like scenario played out specifically for that purpose. The scenes of 700 beds on a beach on the cover of *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* (1987), and the 100s of unleashed giant red balls on the cover of *Wake up and Smell the Coffee*, actually existed for a time. A man was set alight for *Wish you were here* (1975), and two large metal heads, each the height of a double-decker bus, were erected in a field near Ely, Cambridgeshire for *The Division Bell* (1994). These installations are immortalised in the album art of Thorgerson, and that's what makes them so exceptional.



Pink floyd, A Momentary Lapse of Reason (1987)

[click to enlarge](#)



The Cranberries, Wake up and Smell the Coffee (2001)

[click to enlarge](#)



Pink Floyd, Wish you were here (1975)

[click to enlarge](#)

"Obviously you can do all sorts of things in a computer that look better for doing them in a computer, but they are computer things. Whereas, what I do, mostly, is to rearrange bits of reality according to what the idea might be in an attempt to represent the music," said Thorgerson, in an [interview with Craig Bailey](#), host of the radio show, [Floydian Slip](#).

In a Q&A session at the exhibition, currently showing at [6 Spin Street](#) in the CBD, Thorgerson mentioned the two most important things about what he does:

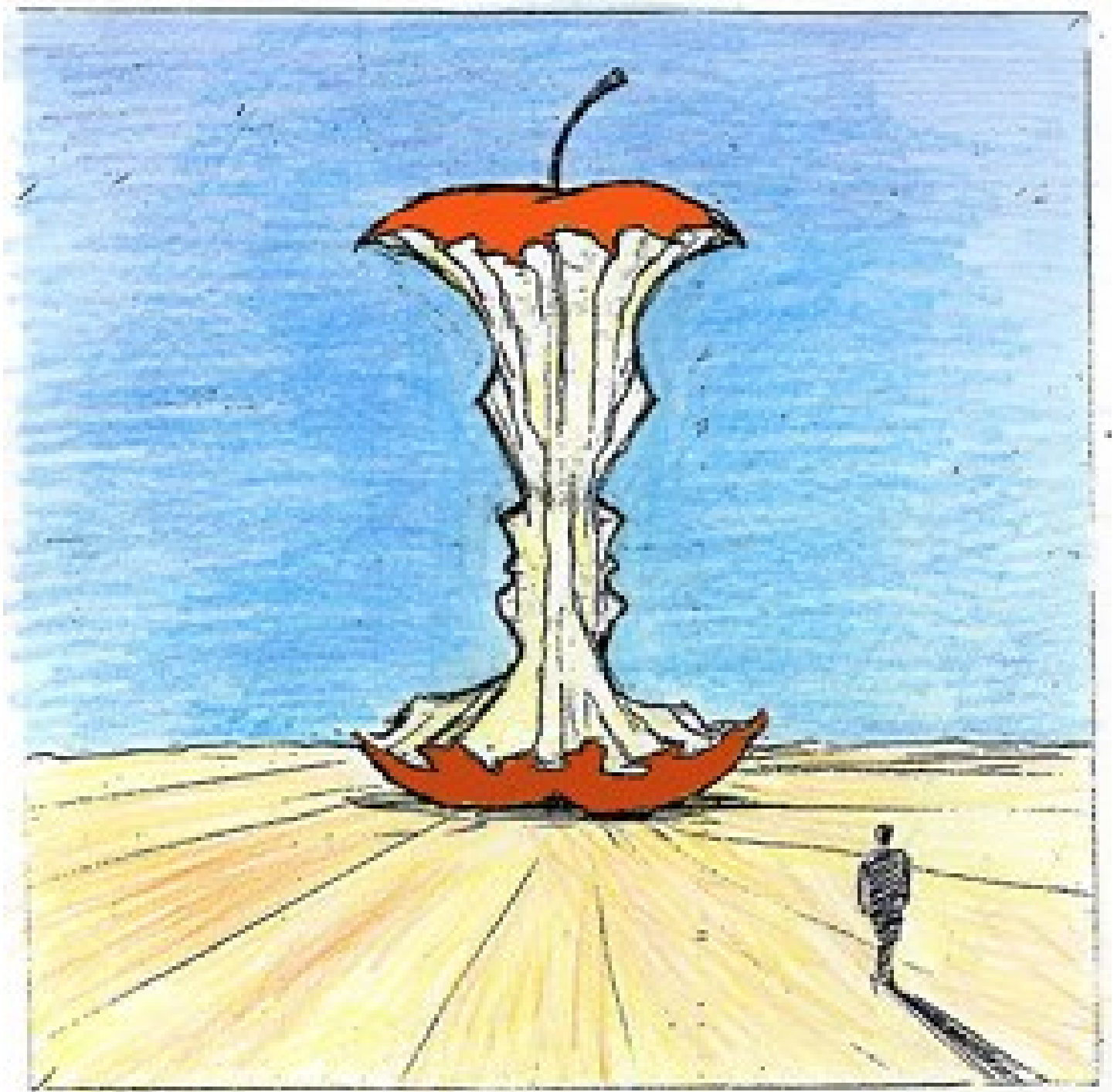
1. That the musicians like the work produced, as the image becomes an extension of the artist, and
2. That he fulfils the role of a translator - turning an audio event into a visual one.

While dubbed by some as one of the last great surrealists of our time, Thorgerson's creativity hasn't always been given the nod. He designed three draft cover concepts for the Red Hot Chili Peppers' Stadium Arcadium (2006), but according to a forum on the website dedicated to the album, [all were declined](#).



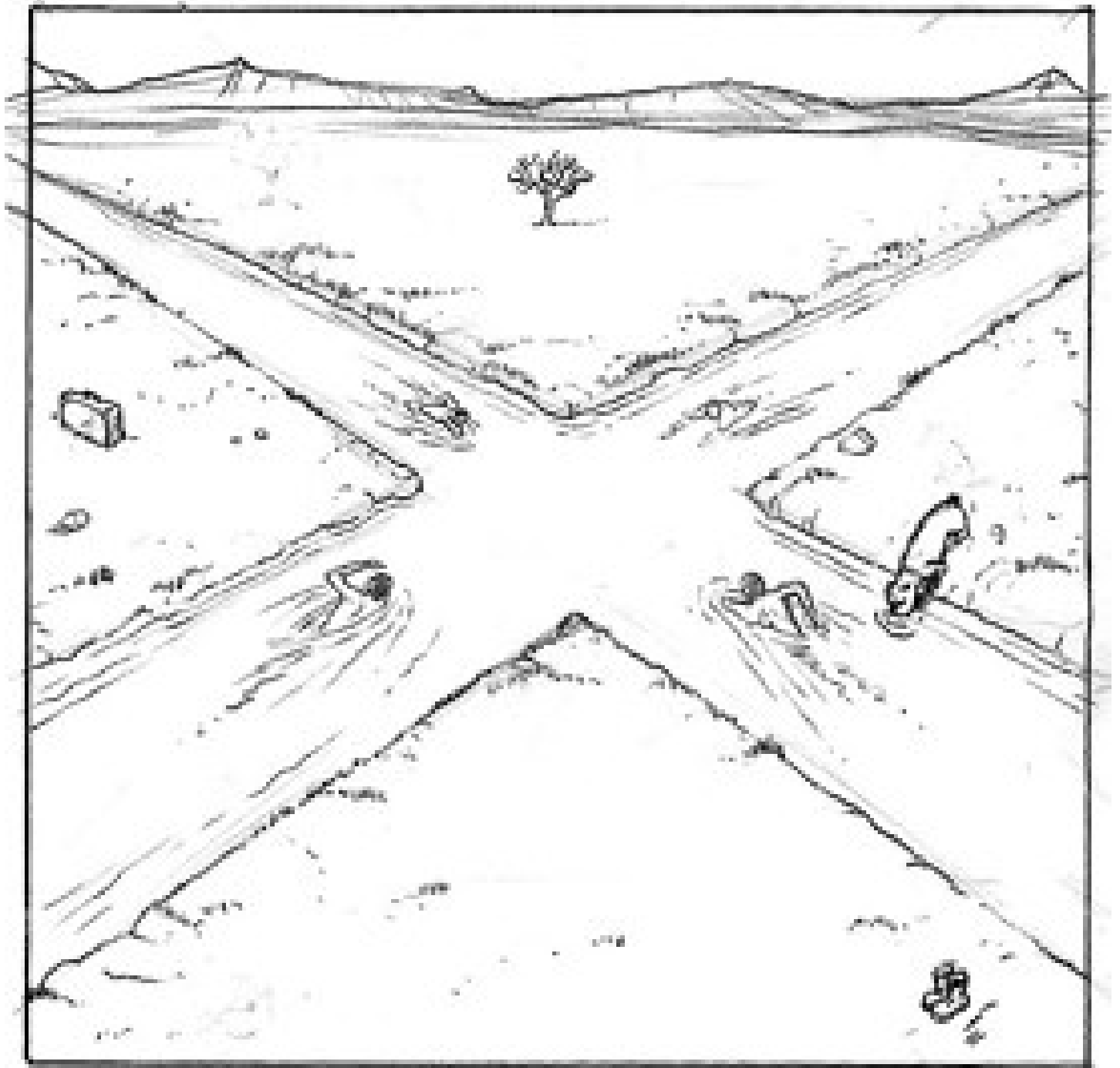
StadiumArcadiumdraft by Thorgerson (1)

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StadiumArcadiumdraft by Thorgerson (2)

[click to enlarge](#)



Stadium Arcadium draft by Thorgerson (3)

[click to enlarge](#)



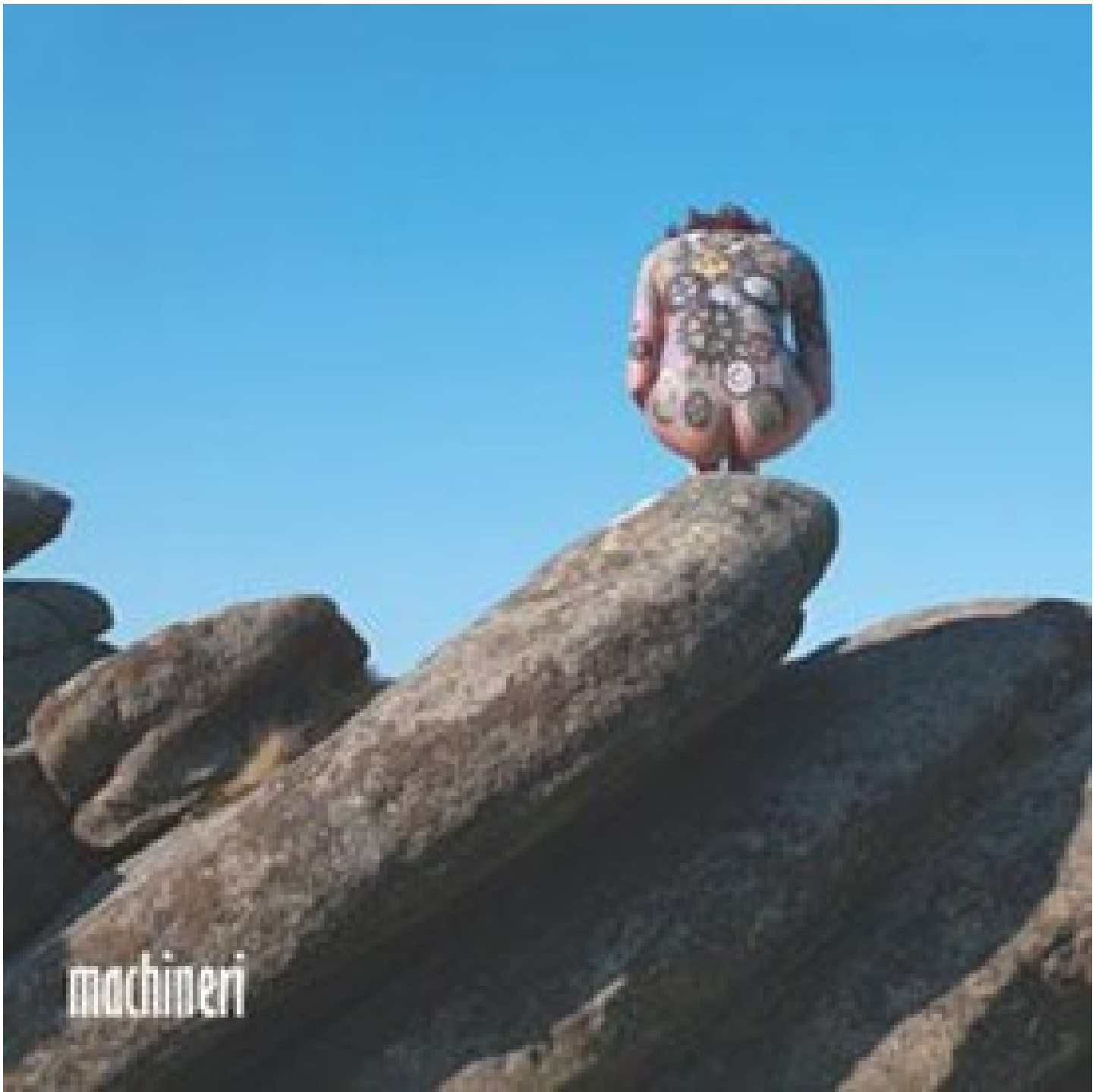
RHCP, StadiumArcadium (2006)

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Which would you have gone for?

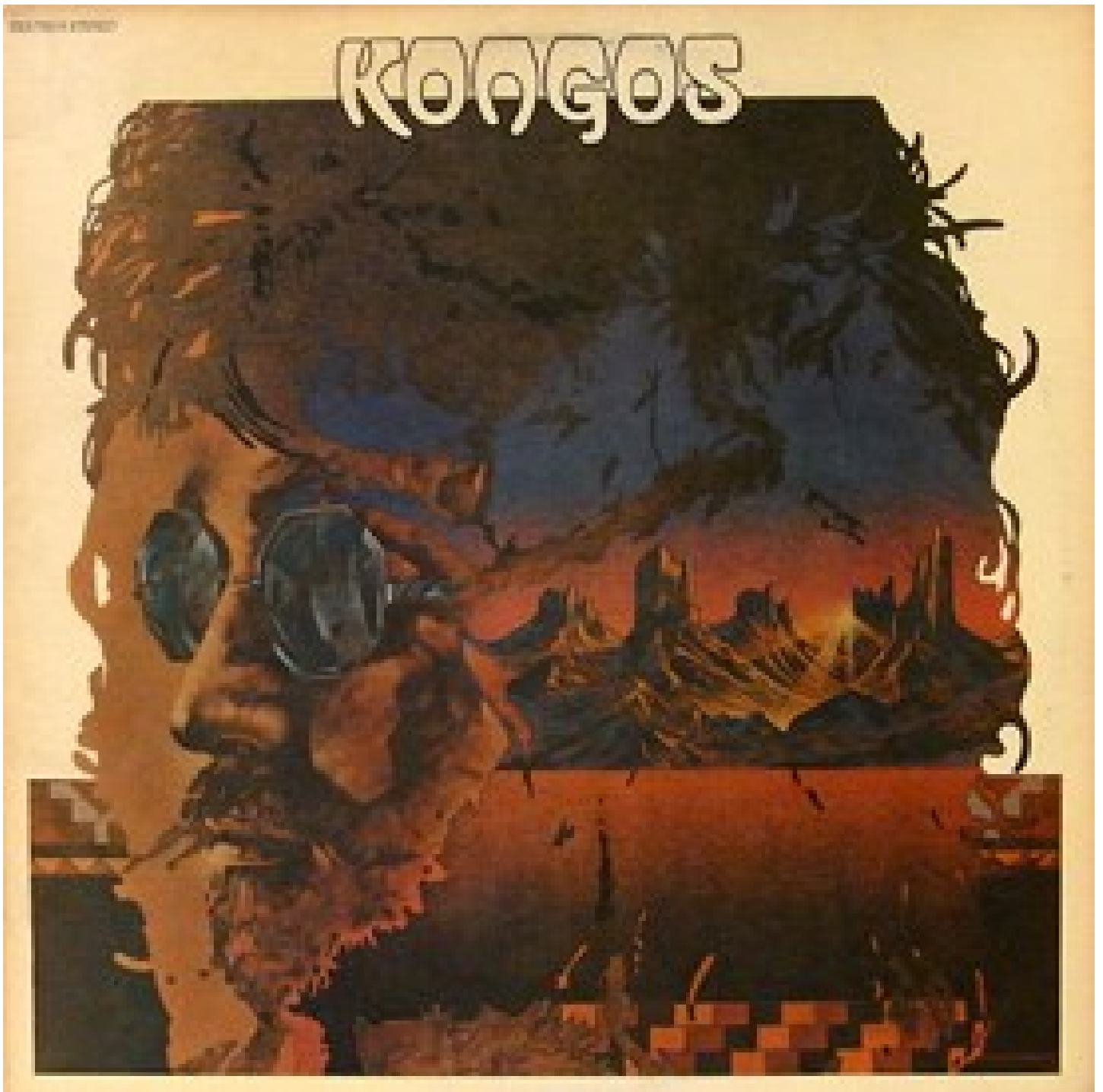
Thorgerson and SA

Thorgerson, surprise-surprise, has also had a hand in the cover art of more than one SA act. We're all familiar with the latest album cover he designed for Cape Town-based blues rock band [Machineri](#), but did you know he was also involved, as part of Hipgnosis, in the cover design of a John Kongos LP.



Machineri (2011)

[click to enlarge](#)



John Kongos (1971)

[click to enlarge](#)

I crossed my fingers and toes at the end of the night hoping I'd win the R20 raffle - the prize being a Storm Thorgerson piece - a liquid rendition of The Dark Side of the Moon (1973). Sadly, fortune didn't swing my way, and some lucky bloke went home smiling.

The Raging Storm exhibition, showcasing a selection of Storm Thorgerson's fine art prints, is currently open and free to the public until 10 March 2012 at [6 Spin Street](#), Cape Town. Gallery hours are all day Monday to Saturday from 8.30am.

For more:

- Storm Thorgerson: www.stormthorgerson.com
- Hipgnosis: www.hipgnosiscovers.com

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