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Lee Conklin's Grateful Dead: Icons and Iconography in the Development of the Psychedelic Poster

SCOTT B. MONTGOMERY

The Grateful Dead recorded an epic rendition of “Dark Star” at the Fillmore West in San Francisco on the night of February 27, 1969. Before long, it would become the iconic version of the song, due to its inclusion as the opening track of the album *Live/Dead*. Released November 10, 1969, the album was mostly recorded at the run of shows from February 27–March 2, featuring the Dead as headliners, as advertised on the poster designed by Lee Conklin (fig. 1).

Thanks to the album and subsequent box set, we know something of what the concerts sounded like. The look of the show was provided by the light show, courtesy of the Brotherhood of Light, as the poster noted. But the overall feel of the show—the experience itself—was what Conklin’s image managed to evoke, presciently. Conklin’s dazzling, sizzling imagery seems to be in flux, ever shifting, not unlike the visual experience at a light show-illuminated concert. While the poster does not *look* like a light show, it effectively conjures the churning sonic and visual intensity of the event. As an advertisement, it promises a potent show—

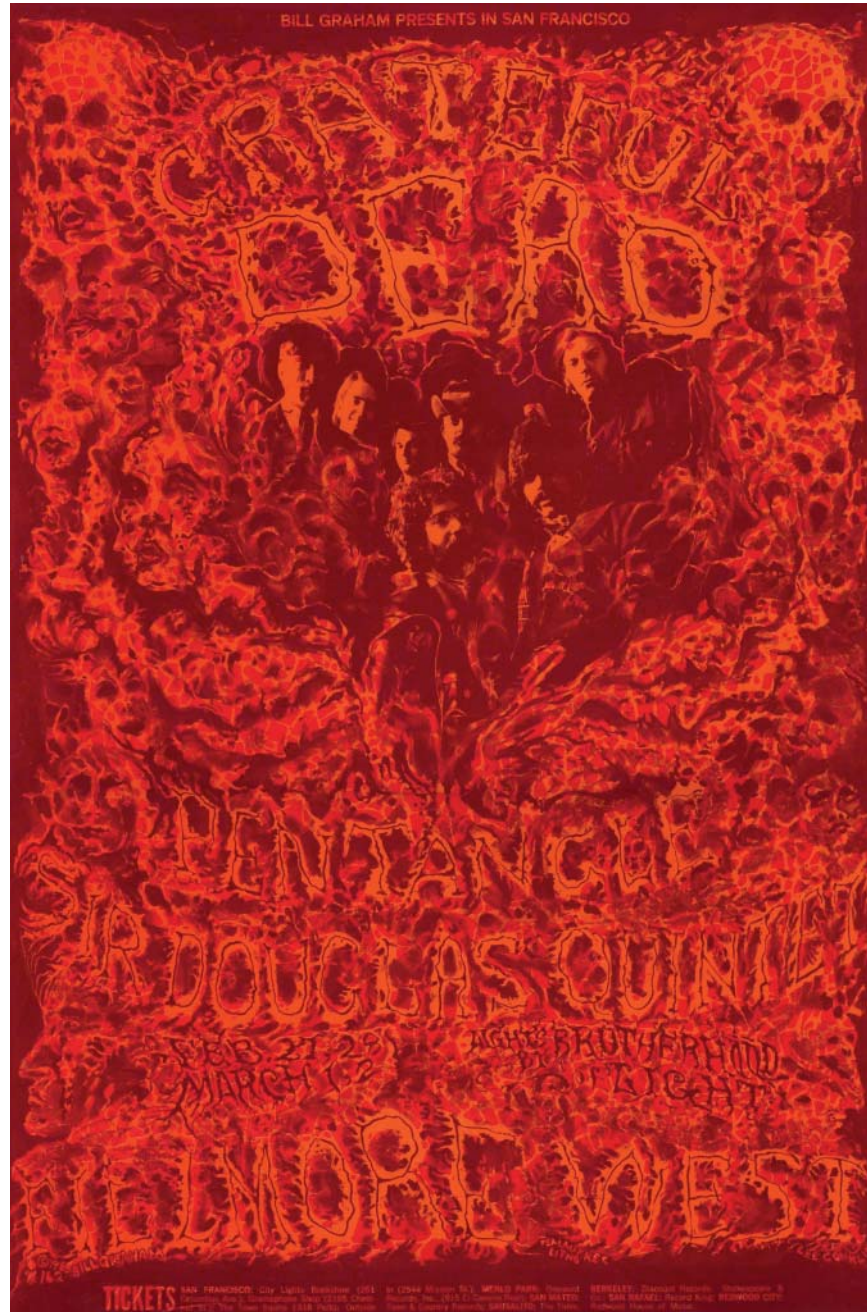


Figure 1. Lee Conklin. *Hell. Grateful Dead, Pentangle, Sir Douglas Quintet. Fillmore West, San Francisco, February 27–March 2, 1969.* BG 162. © Bill Graham Archives, LLC. Used with permission.

something the Dead delivered. But the post-performance “look” of the concert existed only on the poster, which not only advertised the shows but also fixed that look, documenting the feel of the shows for posterity. For thousands of fans who bought the poster as a post-concert memento, Conklin’s image *became* “what the concert looked like” in perpetuity. The poster took on the look of the event, inscribing it in history.

Yet the retrospective implied by that signification is deceptive: the concerts were multimedia events, and posters were part of that environment. From the outset, posters were an inextricable and indelible part of the concerts, an evocative and powerful expression that tapped the same energy of the events and channeled their historicity, adding a visual dimension that has shaped popular memory and recollection in profound ways. Conklin’s poster provided the accompanying visual for the exploratory expanse of the Dead’s live performance.

While musicologist Graeme Boone has analyzed this iconic performance of “Dark Star” and framed its achievement, the visual art surrounding the band remains a largely unexplored dimension of the Grateful Dead (Boone 1997; Boone 2010). This has begun to change: Nicholas G. Meriwether (2011) and Philip Cushway (2012) have pushed for scholars to include the visual culture of the Grateful Dead in the discourse, and Meriwether’s exhibitions at UC Santa Cruz presented the band’s poster art in a variety of settings and assessed it in several contexts (Meriwether 2019/2020). Both curators credit Conklin’s contributions to the litany of Grateful Dead imagery, but neither examined his work in detail.

That was true of the first major museum exhibition devoted to the psychedelic poster renaissance as well (Medeiros 1976). While the art of the psychedelic poster continues to receive increasing attention,¹ Conklin remains an undeservedly neglected figure, one whose art offers much to scholars interested in poster art and in the visual culture of the counterculture more generally. Complementing my larger study of Conklin’s art, this essay explores Conklin’s posters for the Dead as a lens into the larger issue of how poster artists grappled with the challenges of illustrating the music their posters advertised.

I.

How did Conklin choose to advertise a concert featuring San Francisco's premiere band, the Grateful Dead? For this set of concerts, his vision made the Dead the center of a churning world of faces and flame-like forms, an image he later dubbed "Hell," primarily due to the intense red printing (Conklin 2011). Collectors know it by its official number, BG 162, designating its place in the Bill Graham series. Centered around Herb Greene's photograph of the band, as Graham insisted, Conklin pictured the band as wispy faces emerging from an ethereal stew. The infernal suggestion comes largely from the poster's red and orange coloration. Were it printed in a pale blue, the forms could just as easily take on an aqueous feel instead of fiery. The reddish hues immersed the band in a roiling bed of flame, a strident coloration that overpowers some of the subtlety of the drawing and inflects its suggested meaning. It is a better Dead design than its coloring allows. Yet it is far from unsuccessful, for the drawing itself implies a perpetual, morphic state of becoming, which successfully conveys the visual analog of the band's generative, creative improvisations: those, too, could also plunge into the aural equivalent of the fires of Vulcan's forge, as "Caution," "The Other One," and even "Dark Star" showed.

It is a supremely psychedelic image, one that resists stasis, as the faces simultaneously emerge from the primordial flame and recede back into it. The only thing that does not shimmer is the band photo at the center: the Dead are the calm amidst the psychedelic storm. It is an apt and powerful artistic statement of the role they played in their concerts: the band was exactly that, the stable center of the psychedelic storms that many audience members were experiencing, an anchor that safely tethered explorers to terra firma. The effectiveness of the image is a testament to Conklin's art as well as an indication of what he was working toward, using his art to convey a deeper side of the band's music.

Given Conklin's penchant for fanciful epigraphy, it is surprising that the lettering is relatively uninspired, flame-like yet still eminently legible. This can be attributed to the quick turnaround time for the poster: artists often worked under tight deadlines that precluded more elaborate work. Above the lettering, Conklin clearly referenced the headline act

with skulls at the upper corners, flanking the band's fiery name. The skulls balance the fleshy faces in both photo and drawing to fashion an image of the intercourse of life and death, like the folk motif of the "grateful dead," which provided the band's name. Other faces emerge and meld within the fiery stew. In his inimitable style, Conklin's art suggests further faces that may or may not be there. This creates the dramatic effect of making the poster appear to move, as one's perception shifts while watching forms appear and dissipate. This temporal conundrum in the viewing experience fashions a nebulous cohesion that echoes the band's exploratory sonic journeys. It conjures the Dead not so much by employing iconographic tradition, but by evoking their musical ethos in a visual analogy. That this emerges from the central photo further implies that this morphic stew issues from the band. It is a more subtle (yet less successful) Dead poster because it focuses more on invoking the band's music than representing their look. At the time, the defining visual indicator was the skull and it only appears in the margins of Conklin's poster. Were the skulls central, the poster would be more readily identifiable as a Grateful Dead image.

The skull, with or without roses, is the earliest and most enduring icon of the Grateful Dead, extending back to the spring of 1966. The skeleton was first employed by Wes Wilson for a poster advertising the Grateful Dead at the Avalon Ballroom on June 10–11, 1966, numbered FD 12 in the Family Dog series. Announcing the frequent double bill of Quicksilver Messenger Service and the Grateful Dead, Wilson's image, titled "The Quick and the Dead," shows a cigar-smoking, dapperly dressed skeleton on the move. But it was not until three months later that the most famous iteration emerged: the skeleton and roses. Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley introduced the image on a poster for the Grateful Dead and Oxford Circle at the Avalon Ballroom on September 16–17, 1966. Designated FD 26, the poster has become one of the most iconic and sought-after works of the entire psychedelic poster movement. Kelley found the image, an engraving by Edmund Joseph Sullivan for an edition of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, in the San Francisco Public Library, where he and Stanley Mouse were looking for illustrations that might fit their sense of the band's name and image. Reproducing the Sullivan illustration as the centerpiece of the design, Mouse provided the lettering and

the pair added a border and color. It was a stunning image and an immediate success: with this poster, Mouse and Kelley adapted and augmented Sullivan's design, turning it into an emblem that would occupy a central place in the Dead's artistic legacy throughout the Grateful Dead's thirty-year career and after. The poster had an immediate and lasting impact on the visual identity of the band, establishing the skull as the preeminent symbol of the Dead. Kelley recognized that, revisiting Sullivan's design and his own border for the poster for the cover of the 1971 eponymous live album, nicknamed "Skull and Roses" for the cover. The image has endured, becoming one of the most lasting in the vast lexicon of Grateful Dead iconography—the band even used it on their business cards in the early 1970s.

Conklin's use of the skull in 1969 exemplified how it had already become the principal indexical reference to the Grateful Dead. As seen in BG 162, when Conklin was designing a poster specifically for a Grateful Dead concert, he employed the motif as iconographic signifier. In these cases, the works resonate as Grateful Dead posters primarily for the skull imagery. More incidental Dead posters inflect toward other associations primarily through the absence of skull imagery. But Conklin's posters for the Dead reflect the power and resonance of the skull icon as the originary and principal motif in the lexicon of Grateful Dead imagery.

The Dead were keenly interested in the art they inspired. Band members were outspoken in their praise for the art of Stanley Mouse, Alton Kelley, and Rick Griffin, and they made that respect concrete with the commissions they gave those artists, most notably for album covers but also for T-shirts, incidental graphics, and other works. They chose Mouse and Kelley to provide the art for their first album, released in March 1967, and they were so taken with one of Griffin's celebrated concert posters they hired him to adapt it for the cover of *Aoxomoxoa*, released June 1969. The artists felt the same way: they saw their art as working to convey a meaningful visual expression of the band's music from within the counterculture. That was true for Conklin as well. For him, the Grateful Dead were the band whose name, image, and music resonated most, and that inspiration spurred him to create a series of powerful images that contributed to the band's early visual identity (Conklin

2011). Conklin's posters for the Dead did not become the most famous, but at the time, they were formative—and merit attention today.

II.

To date, art historical scholarship on Grateful Dead imagery is sparse and nascent. While Meriwether (2011) and Cushway (2012) concentrate on the rich and varied visual culture that emerged around the Grateful Dead, both approach the art from the vantage of cultural history, not the artistic practice informing the images. Yet the cultural resonance of the imagery these works tap and the band's stature within the counterculture make the iconography of the Grateful Dead fertile grounds for art historical inquiry. How artists grappled with the challenge of emergent iconography provides a window into the evolution of these most countercultural of musical images. Lee Conklin's work is especially useful here, for his Grateful Dead posters and his experimentation with the nascent lexicon of imagery associated with the band also connects with the wider field of Grateful Dead studies in interesting and illuminating ways.

Lee Daniel Conklin was born in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, on July 24, 1941. Inspired by an article on psychedelic poster art, Conklin moved to San Francisco in November 1967. Shortly after he arrived, he brought his portfolio to Bill Graham, who promptly commissioned several posters. The first was BG 101, advertising concerts held January 4–6, 1968. For the next year and a half, Conklin was Graham's principal poster artist, creating thirty-three posters, five advertising concerts by the Grateful Dead. Considered one of the most psychedelic of the poster artists, Conklin's surreal visions resonated with the counterculture's embrace of ineffability. In this, he stands with Rick Griffin, Victor Moscoso, Stanley Mouse, and others as the high-water mark of the psychedelic poster movement.

Curiously, Conklin's most famous Grateful Dead poster is better known for another band. Officially known as BG 134, it is more commonly referred to as the "Santana Lion" (fig. 2). The image began as a drawing that was part of the portfolio Conklin showed to Bill Graham in late 1967. Conklin used the lion image for a poster advertising two weekends of Bill Graham concerts. On one weekend (August 27–29, 1968),



Figure 2. Lee Conklin. *The Lion*. Grateful Dead, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Sons of Champlin; Steppenwolf, Staples Singers, Santana. Fillmore West, San Francisco. August 27–September 1, 1968. BG 134. © Bill Graham Archives, LLC. Used with permission.

Santana opened for the Staples Singers and Steppenwolf, while on the following weekend (August 30–September 1), the Sons of Champlin and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band opened for the Grateful Dead. The drawing depicted the Grateful Dead’s name prominently emerging, like a roar, from the lion’s mouth.

Despite the power of the image, the poster didn’t resonate with the members of the Grateful Dead, and it was never reprised for the headliner. But the lion struck Carlos Santana as a cogent visual referent for his band’s sound, and he commissioned Conklin to reprise it for the cover of Santana’s first album, released in August 1969. From then on, BG 134 was forever known as “the Santana lion,” despite its origins as a Grateful Dead poster. The disconnect between headliner and image can be explained by Conklin’s use of a pre-existing design. Practically speaking, Conklin was not designing a Grateful Dead poster, he was creating a poster advertising a variety of shows, using an arresting image from his portfolio. No skull appears. For all its historic significance, it is only an incidental, almost accidental, Dead poster. That lack of specificity, and amorphous connection to Dead iconography, left the image open, allowing it to connect with Santana.

That ambiguity could manifest itself in other ways. Conklin’s Grateful Dead posters include one that he wished he had made. The following week’s poster, BG 135, advertised concerts by Chuck Berry, the Steve Miller Band, and Kensington Market at the Fillmore West on September 5–7, 1968 (fig. 3). For this poster, Conklin again pulled from his portfolio, selecting an image of a handy-antlered moose juggling five skulls. “The moose was in the same book as the lion,” Conklin recalled. “But I saw that the moose could easily have hands as the antlers ... and they ought to be juggling something” (Conklin 2011). While it is a successful, surreal image, Conklin still wishes that he had saved the design for the Dead: “With the skulls on there, I could easily have made that into a Grateful Dead poster” (Conklin 2011). Had he done so, it might have been a classic Dead poster, even adding a new icon to the band’s visual lexicon. But artists could not hope for a specific gig. Rather than saving an image for a possible future use, Conklin tapped the striking designs that he had stockpiled in his portfolio. That approach yielded gold with the Santana Lion; it was less successful with the Chuck Berry Moose.

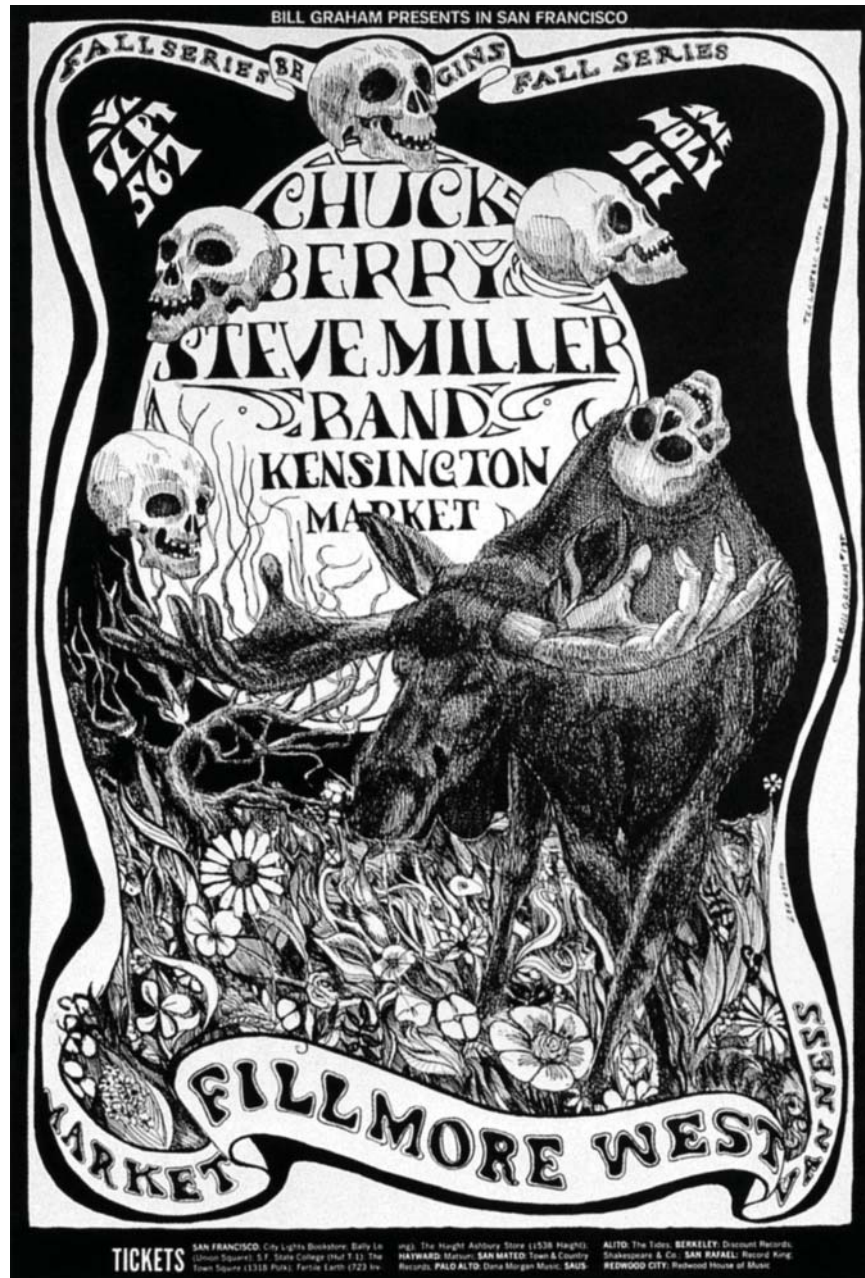


Figure 3. Lee Conklin. *Chuck Berry, the Steve Miller Band, Kensington Market. Fillmore West, San Francisco September 5–7, 1968.* BG 135. © Bill Graham Archives, LLC. Used with permission.

Conklin's next Dead-related poster provided both a practical and an artistic challenge: how to fit the Grateful Dead onto the bill, in both textual and figural form. Commissioned for a poster advertising Quicksilver Messenger Service and Linn County at the Fillmore West on November 7–10, 1968, Conklin fashioned an immense Mercury head in silver, with matching letters above (fig. 4).

The image shows that, when aware of the bands in advance, Conklin was able to draw a design befitting the headline act. But for this commission, Graham asked Conklin to leave some space for the yet-unannounced second band. When the Grateful Dead were added to the bill as a second headliner, Conklin was asked to include the name in letters equal to the prominent Quicksilver text. Adding the co-headliners in pliant black lettering that suspends from the silver words above, Conklin satisfied the demand for equal billing. But the image still remained profoundly Quicksilver-centric, with its surreal, Mercurial imagery. Conklin added a skull to the top of Mercury's caduceus, thereby bringing the Dead into the visual field (Conklin, 2011). By invoking the band through the skull—albeit a surreal, “Conklinized” skull, with footprint nostrils and apple eyes—Conklin referred to the one dominant Dead icon at the time. The skull was visual shorthand for the Grateful Dead and Conklin used it in a pinch to include the band on the poster. He named it “The Quick and the Dead” (Conklin, 2011).

This poster shows how Conklin's innate love of the interplay of text and image informed his art, producing posters whose imagery evoked the billing. His other Grateful Dead posters for Graham usually include visual riffs on the skull, by then the image most associated with the band. Those were possible because he knew the lineup before designing the image. These later works do not pull from his earlier portfolio, but rather draw their inspiration from the bands on the bill, as seen in BG 162. Conklin first purposefully referenced a band in his poster for Cream's appearance in San Francisco from February 29–March 3, 1968 (BG 109), with cascading white letters conjuring fluid cream. (His first conscious reference to the band occurred in the previous poster, BG 108, for the Who at the Fillmore and Winterland, February 22–24, 1968, where he reused an older drawing of flying ears seemingly asking “who?”)



Figure 4. Lee Conklin. *The Quick and the Dead*. Quicksilver Messenger Service, Grateful Dead, Linn County. Fillmore West, San Francisco, November 7–10, 1968. BG 144. © Bill Graham Archives, LLC. Used with permission.

His subsequent posters are full of such playful references to the band names on the bill. As in “The Quick and the Dead,” when Conklin knew the Dead were on the bill, he included a skull in the design. It became a matter of how to creatively utilize the indexical motif. Apprised of the band’s appearance for his two subsequent Bill Graham posters for the Dead, Conklin based both around prominent skull imagery. “The Dead and the Quick” (BG 152) advertises the Grateful Dead and Quicksilver co-headlining a multi-band bill again, this time ringing out 1968 and welcoming 1969 at San Francisco’s Winterland (fig. 5).

Aware of the double billing, Conklin was more successfully able to integrate the two bands, both visually and conceptually. A baby (the quick) sprouts from a skull (the dead), signaling both the transition from one year to another and also identifying the bands helping to ring in this calendric transformation. “Dead” appears prominently below the old year, balanced by “Quick” underneath the new year. Life and death, the quick and the dead, the soft baby and the hard skull; the poster works with the interplay of opposites. Cleverly drawing upon multiple meanings of the skull, Conklin presses it into service to visually advertise the band, but also to draw them into a larger artistic conversation. Next to the skull is a rose, situated beneath “Grateful Dead”—Conklin’s only combination of the skull and rose motifs. Below the skull, pink breasts swell, supported by a riot of cavorting forms. These breasts presumably nurture the baby of the new year, but they work with the skull to suggest a larger figure—the body of the old year from which the new one springs. The old year thus feeds the new year to which it gives birth. Similarly, flowers spring from the skull, as bloom and decay are interlocked. The architectonic interplay of orange bodies below culminates with two hourglass-bearing figures at the bottom, further signifying the passage of time. With this fusion of the bands’ names with a larger theme related to the event, Conklin produced his most successful conceptualization of Grateful Dead iconography—and in an image that also showcased his trademark love of wordplay.

It is interesting that the companion poster for the other Bill Graham New Year’s Eve 1968 concert features no visual reference to the bands on the bill (BG 153). While Vanilla Fudge, Richie Havens, the Youngbloods, and Cold Blood provided a formidable lineup, none of the bands had a

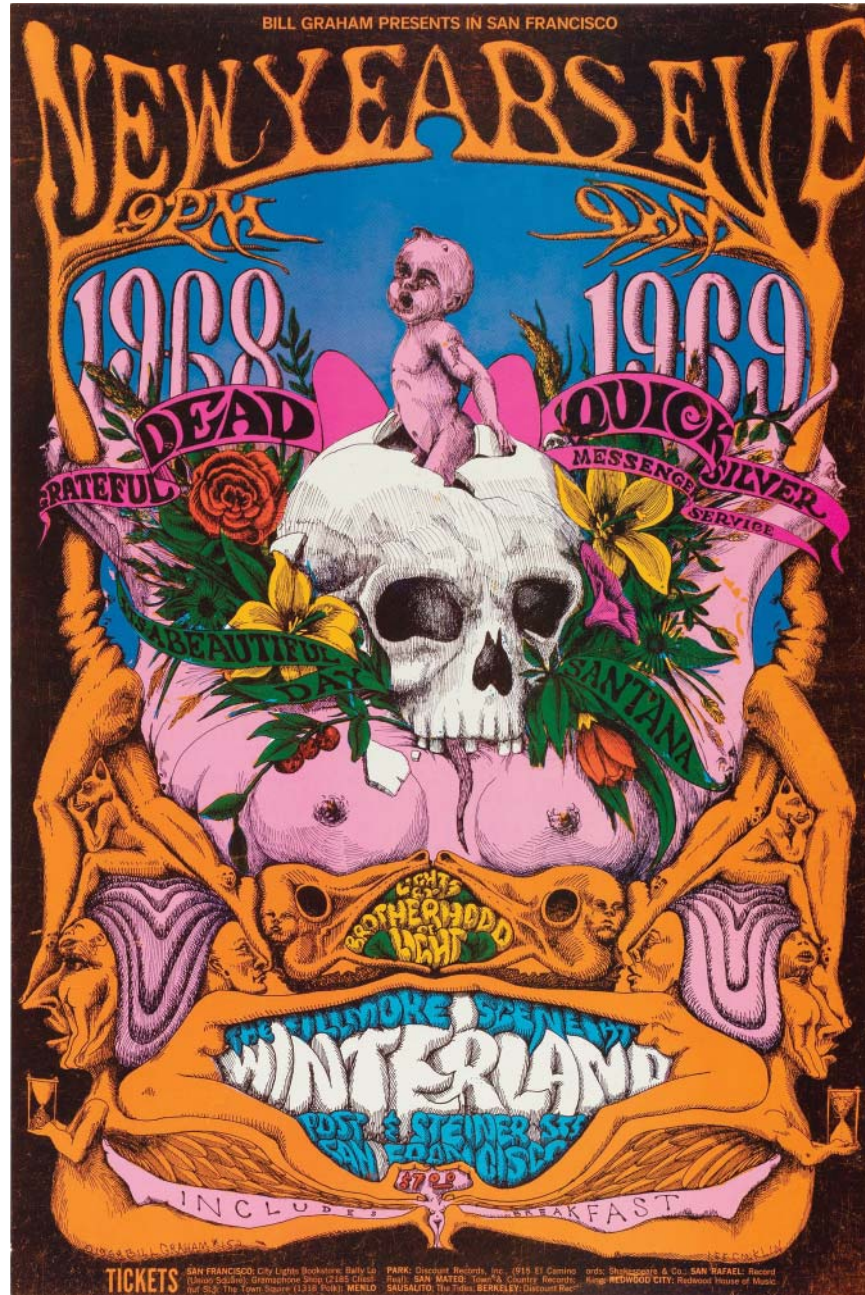


Figure 5. Lee Conklin. *The Dead and the Quick*. Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service. *It's a Beautiful Day*, Santana, *Winterland*, San Francisco, December 31, 1968. BG 152. © Bill Graham Archives, LLC. Used with permission.

distinctive visual identity. Nor did Conklin choose to reference the bands, as he did with Quicksilver in the companion piece. Rather, he included the performers' names on the support of a great hourglass filled with writhing bodies. The surreal image is arresting and references the passage of time but has no overt visual reference to the bands on the bill, as is the case with "The Dead and the Quick." This absence underscores the unique power and arresting intensity of Grateful Dead iconography, particularly the skull. Ever recognizable, yet replete with creative possibilities, the skull signified the Dead with an iconic directness that no other band's visual identity could match at the time.

It is at this point in Conklin's evolution as a Grateful Dead artist that BG 162 appeared, in all its fiery glory. This was the last Grateful Dead poster that Conklin created for the Bill Graham series. Indeed, it would be the last poster he designed specifically for the band. As with his other consciously predetermined Grateful Dead designs, he featured the skull as the principal icon. While this commission would not yield a new entry into lexicon of Grateful Dead iconography, Conklin added his own playful and creative touch to the close association between the Grateful Dead and the skull motif. Just as the associated album, *Live/Dead*, serves as a culmination of the Dead's early development, Conklin's BG 162 serves as a culmination of the evolution of Grateful Dead iconography to that point. Rendering the skull in his own inimitable style helped cement the icon's status as the preeminent visual reference to the band.

Conklin's final Grateful Dead poster is also, significantly, the first Hot Tuna poster. Advertising Jefferson Airplane members Jack Casady, Jorma Kaukonen, and Joey Covington at the Veteran's Memorial Building in Santa Rosa on June 27–28, 1969, *Ear Wig* is one of Conklin's more arresting images (fig. 6).² The central head sports the visual pun of a wig of ears, with a halo surrounded by text and additional auricular organs. The lower half of the poster advertises a second concert, featuring the Grateful Dead and the Cleanliness and Godliness Skiffle Band with lights by Marianne on June 29, 1969, at the Barn, a venue in Rio Nido, California. No skulls were incorporated into the design—understandable, given that it was essentially made to advertise another concert. The Grateful Dead appear in text only, swelling upward from the bottom of the

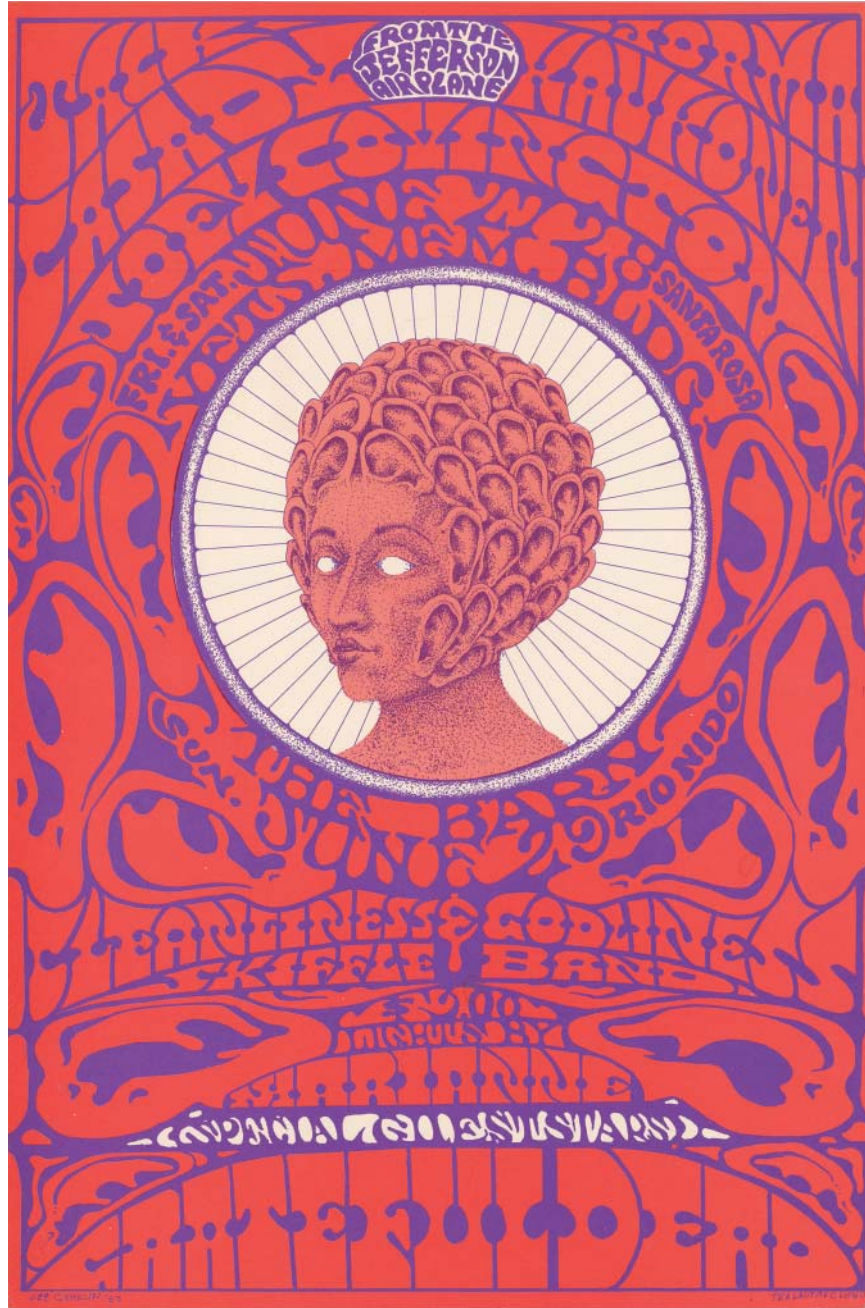


Figure 6. Lee Conklin. *Ear Wig*. Jack Casady, Jorma Kaukonen, Joey Covington. Veteran's Memorial Building, Santa Rosa, June 27–28, 1969. Grateful Dead, the Cleanliness and Godliness Skiffle Band, The Barn, Rio Nido, June 29, 1969.

poster. Without the now-telltale icon of a skull, it did not visually resonate as a Grateful Dead poster; here, that absence negatively accentuates the power of the icon. While an arresting image, Conklin's *Ear Wig* did not enter the Dead lexicon. Were it a skull thus bedecked, perhaps the poster would have had a longer afterlife as an image of the Dead.

III.

For art historians, Conklin's Grateful Dead posters serve as a microcosm of his art. Conklin is a consummate draftsman, but his designs often struggle with color when translated to the poster format. His conception and drawing are his strengths; his ideas are playful and often strikingly original; his draftsmanship is exquisite. Conklin's genius lies primarily in his line, in the pen in the hand, his vibrant, sketchy, linear strokes unthethered and unfettered by anything more than the imagination. Conklin's small body of Dead-related posters demonstrates this extraordinary capacity and remarkable facility, underscored by the challenge that color posed for such densely rendered images. Overbearing color or disjointed coloration, such as the orange and pink and green in BG 152, or the strident red-orange of BG 162, obfuscate the delicacy of the drawing. This problem is not unique to Conklin: many artists complained that a poster was ruined by the printer's color choices, or a print-run that went awry; that was a function of the process, in which young artists unfamiliar with the mechanics of offset lithography made mistakes or failed to communicate effectively with the printer (Meriwether 2011, 156). Furthermore, tight deadlines and budgets did not allow for proof copies and trial and error. The success of the simple black and white palette of BG 134 shows this, accentuating the meticulous drawing and producing a successful poster.

For Grateful Dead scholars, Conklin's work merits analysis despite its paucity: as Kenneth John Hartvigsen (2022) has argued, "The band's iconography is varied and complex, and deserves deep analysis. Inquiry should not, however, be reserved only for those pictures which enjoy a level of cultural saturation that makes them truly iconic." But Conklin's posters for the band are more significant than their number might suggest: they provide a window into the emergence of early Grateful Dead iconography and the challenges that posed for poster artists. Conklin's

posters show how early Grateful Dead imagery evolved, both functionally and artistically: the borrowed images work as art and advertising, but not always as illustrations of the band's identity. Only Conklin's skull-laden images announce themselves as visual references for the Dead. The degree to which the skull image influenced, and in some ways constricted, an artist as creative and imaginative as Conklin demonstrates its power as well as its ongoing resonance.

Appearing between the first appropriation of the image on a poster in 1966 and its reification on an album cover in 1971, Conklin's posters for the Dead reveal the outsized influence of the skull as an iconographic signifier. At the time Conklin was working, the Dead had only two albums: the eponymous debut and *Anthem of the Sun*, both featuring highly complex and therefore nearly unreproducible covers, the former by Mouse and Kelley, the latter by Bill Walker.³ As art works, they were effective, but that also inherently limited their influence; they were *sui generis*. With no lexicon to reference other than the imagery on earlier posters, Conklin utilized the skull—at that time, the only consistently resonant motif available. That primacy meant that, for Conklin and other artists, the challenge was how to creatively play with this iconic motif, as his design for BG 135 demonstrated, even if its moose-juggled skulls were not used for a Dead poster.

With only Sullivan's skeleton-and-roses engraving and, more generally, the skull as recognized signifiers for the Dead, artists charged with the challenge of creating art that conveyed an evocation of that evocative name either had to work with the motif or introduce new icons into the nascent visual art lexicon. Conklin adeptly navigated the former, yet his posters ultimately left few traces in the latter.

That mixed legacy obscures the impact of his contribution, however. Conklin's work for the Dead was a vital part of the early development of the band's artistic imagery: he was in the thick of the San Francisco countercultural fray, working alongside other artists to develop a visual identity for the Dead. Ultimately, his work underscores the resonance and enduring power of the skull in that identity: both directly and indirectly, Conklin's efforts to find different ways to express the Dead's elusive spirit revealed why the stark and ancient image of the skull emerged as the

primary and principal icon for then still developing musical and cultural force that is the Grateful Dead. Conklin made it clear that the skull was and remains the “Dark Star” of the band’s visual art, the embodiment of the soul and shape of the Grateful Dead.

NOTES

For their generous insight, assistance, and encouragement, I wish to thank Lee and Joy Conklin, Nicholas G. Meriwether, and Judy Irené. Special thanks to Mike Storeim of Classic Posters for assistance with images.

1. The bibliography of work on psychedelic posters is growing; see, for example, Moist (2004; 2010), Montgomery (2011; 2012), and O’Brien (2020).
2. The poster is generally cited as AOR 2.329 (Grushkin 1987, 229). The June 28 concert was later released as *Before We Were Them* (Casady and Kaukonen 2018).
3. The next major icons associated with the Dead, the Steal Your Face logo and the dancing bears, had yet to be publicly introduced on posters or album covers. The first Steal Your Face skull was conceived by Owsley Stanley as a simple, easily painted image to identify the band’s road cases and first used in 1969 but soon evolved into its much more artistic and elaborate incarnation by artist Bob Thomas, published on the Dead’s 1973 album *Bear’s Choice* and later on the cover of the 1976 album *Steal Your Face* (cf. Greenfield 2017; McNally 2002). The dancing bears first appeared on Stanley Mouse’s design for the back cover of *Bear’s Choice*.

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