

# LIBERAL ARTS ROXBURY

## **Phil's Ghost**

An Exhibition of Album Art

Curated by Roger Ross Williams

December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022-March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Opening Reception Saturday December 17<sup>th</sup>, 5pm



*“Steve Jobs was a pioneer of digital music. But when he went home, he listened to vinyl.”—Neil Young*

Roxbury, NY, December 6, 2022: LIBERAL ARTS ROXBURY is pleased to announce *Phil's Ghost*, an exhibition of album art honoring the late Phillip Lenihan, owner of the gallery under its previous entities, Orphic Gallery and the 8-Track Museum. *Phil's Ghost* is curated this year by Film Director and Producer Roger Ross Williams. Please join us on December 17th at 5pm for food, drink, music and dance to celebrate the opening of the show. LPs Courtesy of Joe from Chicago Archives.

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Selecting albums, both for the sounds and the cover art, is everyone's original collector and curator story. But collecting LPs—long-play recordings, pressed into vinyl—is generational. Anyone buying music into the 1990s, before the advent of the short-lived cassette tape and compact disc, collected record albums, those oddly proportioned, 12 x 12-inch objects with the broad surface of a road sign and the practical width of an angelfish. Today, in the digi-sphere, music has been atomized, “dropped” as endlessly shuffling singles, and is attended by little visual art. Which may explain, in part, the recent re-generational interest in collecting LPs as young people get into collecting albums as well.

Albums are three-fers: parts music recording, art poster and aspirational fetish. Through your choice of music, you define who you are. And this is what album collections have in common with other kinds of collections—of books, seashells, or art proper: they embody both who we are and who we wish to be. Such objects “choose us,” notes artist Moyra Davey; they conjure up a “portrait of the owner over time,” reflecting “what we are, or what we are becoming or desire.”

Beyond identity, albums embody memory: yes, the memory of who we were at a particular moment in time, but also what we experienced, *what we felt*. Ask anyone and they can readily provide a playlist of, say, a glorious summer, a beautiful love affair, or an unbearable heartbreak. And while the sounds are but phantasms played out in our minds, the albums exist as a hard residue, as a material relic of those memories.

There is a lot of great art on album covers, some by well-known artists, most by unheralded photographers and graphic designers hired to seduce, using the faces and fashions of the musicians as raw material. For the consumer of albums, the combination of cover image and music are often inseparable—albums too are judged by their covers. For anyone having once possessed a hard copy of Prince's *Purple Rain*, Joe Jackson's *Look Sharp!* or Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, the cover image (and perhaps the music video) will project in one's mind as the music plays.

After his death in 2014, Phil Lenihan's extensive album collection sat untouched in a back storeroom of Orphic Gallery, but this was eventually liquidated along with the remaining contents of the building at the time of sale. Only the piano, too heavy to move, and a single forgotten USO album hanging by a nail on a bathroom wall,

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remained. We are grateful to Joe from Chicago for lending albums from his extensive collection for the production of this *séance*, invoking the free spirit of the late Phil. And to Roger Ross Williams for being the first *Phil's Ghost* curator by lending his vast experience, well-honed taste and personal memories to the curation of the show.

**Roger Ross Williams** is an Oscar, Emmy, NAACP Image award, Webby and Peabody award-winning director, producer and writer. He is also the first African American director to win an Academy Award with his film *Music by Prudence*. Williams directed *Life, Animated*, which won him the Sundance directing award, and was nominated for an Academy Award and won three Emmys. Williams is the recipient of the Career Achievement Award from the International Documentary Association, The Woodstock Film Festival Maverick Award, The NYU Alumni Achievement Award and an honorary doctorate from Lafayette College.

Williams's production company One Story Up produced the acclaimed food series *High on the Hog*; an adaptation of Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*; the Ben Crump documentary *Civil*; and the award-winning film *Master of Light*. His documentary *The Apollo*, about the legendary Harlem theater, won the Prime Time Emmy for Outstanding Doc Feature. *Love to Love You, Donna Summer* will debut in 2023 on HBO/HBO Max. Williams's first scripted feature *Cassandra*, starring Gael García Bernal and Bad Bunny, will appear on Amazon Prime Video in 2023.

**Phillip Lenihan** (1953-2014) was a classics scholar and punk impresario. In 2010, he bought the large vacant building at the corner of Main and Bridge Streets in Roxbury, known locally as the Corner Store. There he opened Orphic Gallery, Yesterday's News, and the 8-Track Museum. Phil hosted many exhibitions, musical events, and parties at the gallery. He died in costume (dressed as a constable) on Halloween night, 2014.



Photograph by Amy Liddle