

ART ON HIS SLEEVE

"I HAVEN'T felt like this since Sunderland were in the FA Cup final in 1973." **Vaughan Oliver**, left-field art dynamo and 4AD sleeve designer-in-chief is delivering a speech of thanks to a gallery full of French art/media types, most of whom probably think Sunderland was a surrealist poster designer.

'International culture' arrived in Nantes in France in the form of a major exhibition of ten years of Oliver and former creative partner Nigel Grierson's 23 Envelope design work. The show in Nantes presents the impressive range of record sleeves, posters and odd artefacts that have pushed 4AD to the top of the league for quality, weirdo-pretentious packaging.

What that means is record sleeves which can add something to the music as opposed to the usual back-lit, touched up 'star-portrait' rubbish. It means the stuffed monkey with halo sleeve of the Pixies' 'Doolittle', the laval explosions and fossilised dreamscapes of early Cocteau's cardboard, the pop-art jolt of the Ultra Vivid Scene cover (syringe supplied by Kurt Ralske) and the 'vaginal' interior to Lush's 'Scar' mini LP.

Perhaps what's unusual about shaven-headed Geordie Oliver is that he's a genuine fan of the music which his designs enclose, more used to listening to demos in his 4AD-attached Wandsworth studio than being pursued around France by TV crews. So how does he fit the images to the records?

"It varies. Like with Ultra Vivid Scene those are Kurt's images and I'll add things to them. Or with Lush they'll just say 'There's the music, what do you think?'. But it's up to the bands to like it. Nobody's obliged to use it at the end of the day."

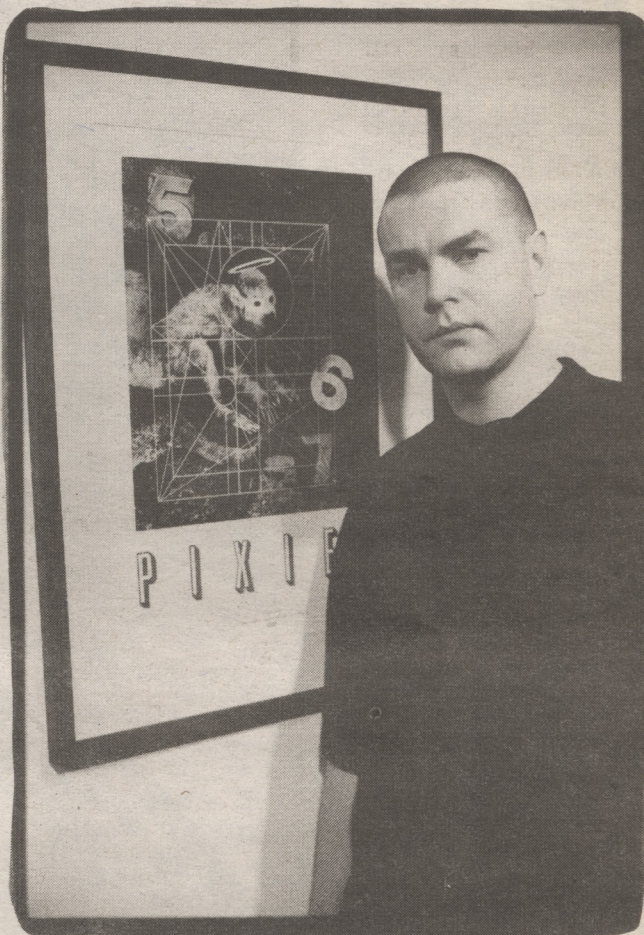
As well as supplying the bizarre conjunctions and sepia memory blurs for 4AD, Oliver is art director for Virgin's new music label Venture. Where does he think major labels usually go wrong on the design front?

"I think it's that they don't actually employ creative people to do creative jobs. Like I know that the art director of one of the major labels was a print company sales rep, and he's in charge of the creative department!"

Anyone special you'd like to do a sleeve for, Vaughan?

"Erm... the Pixies!... Ha, ha. Oh, and there's a Russian-Estonian composer, Arvo Part. It's sort of modern classical minimal stuff, which I really like... His sleeves are shit, though."

Get with it, Arvo.



Roger Morton

King 4AD: Vaughan Oliver