

# “A pre-internet era of devotion”: The book immortalising the lost art of fan-made record sleeves

Published by CentreCentre, *Sleeve Notes* is a journey back in time to when music ephemera and visual displays of fandom reigned supreme.

Words [Olivia Hingley](#)

29 May 2025

[Work](#) [Graphic Design](#)

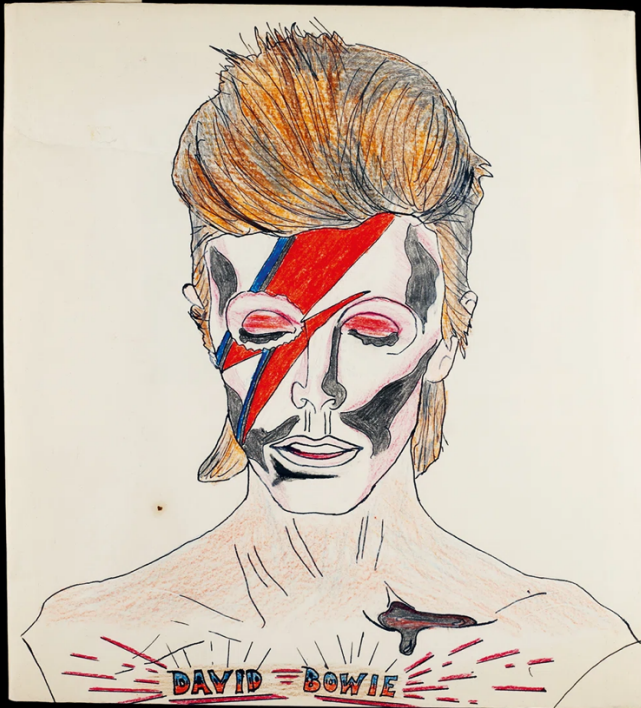
[Publication](#) [Book](#) [Music](#)

[History](#)



A few years ago, Dominique Russell’s dad, Kevan Russell, handed her two 45-inch record sleeves, one for the punk legends Sex Pistols, and another for rock royalty T. Rex. He’d uncovered them at his place of work – the Essex record shop, Crazy Beat – but they weren’t just any old record sleeve. They were fan-made relics, yellowing pieces of paper held together by Sellotape and adorned with collaged images and felt-tip pen drawings. These two dusty artworks quickly became a fixation for Dominique – a heritage and archival photographer who currently works at the British Library – and Kevan kept fuelling the obsession, looking out for handmade gems and asking other colleagues to do the same.

Now, 150 of the 200 sleeves that Dominique and Kevan have collected have been published in a book, *Sleeve Notes*, published by the independent publisher CentreCentre. It’s a striking book that traverses 50 years, from 1950 to 2000, spotlighting the bands and artists that struck a chord with young people and marking, in Dominique’s words “a pre-internet era of devotion, a time when music ownership was sealed with a fan’s own handiwork”.



Above Sleeve Notes (Copyright © CentreCentre, 2

You may be wondering how a record once ended up with no sleeve – as Dominique explains, there’s a number of reasons. Sometimes when orders of records would turn up to shops, there would be a surplus of records to sleeves, and, on the other hand, numbers can end up mysteriously being off, be due to misfiling and customer theft. “In the January sales, the sleeveless records needed to be sold to make way for new stock,” says Dominique. “This is where you could purchase a record with a blank sleeve and where, for many, their artistic adventure will begin.”

The styles, mediums and materials on display are varied and unpredictable. Some are dedicated to felt tip, whole sleeves brimming with illustrations with the neon ink; others include collaged photos of band members, salvaged from newspapers and posters; while some have made use of biro to render offbeat cartoons. A few stand out as impressive artworks in their own right – Dominique points to a David Bowie cover emblazoned with a pencil-drawn portrait feature on the *Aladdin Sane* album, and a hand-painted reimagining for Curtis Mayfield’s *Super Fly* LP. “They show the time taken to create something which mirrors the original sleeve and depicts a fan’s love for that group or track,” Dominique adds.

Some of the adornments prove much more mundane, but no less intriguing. Shopping lists, sole lines of lyrics and even bad-mouthings of friends are scrawled across the sleeves; others feature nothing more than an aimless doodle in the top corner. “The notes and messages evoke the day to day, they can often be found tucked inside sleeves along with love letters, paper money, concert tickets and sometimes drugs,” says Dominique. “It’s an eclectic mix of styles, but gets to the heart of how people identify with their music collection.”



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For both Patrick and Dominique, the sleeves aren't just a niche area of overlooked, 'outsider' art, they represent a whole bygone era of analogue music fandom, once dictated by homemade mixtapes, fan-art and bootleg merch. When working on the project, Dominique says she "kept to the same high standards as I do for museums, libraries and archives". She continues: "It's important to me that collection items are treated equally regardless of their value financially, and as a cultural item I feel they should be collected and preserved." In sum, *Sleeve Notes* is a gem of a book that pushes its audience to ponder both the vast visual history of music, and the personal stories behind the many hands that crafted each of these one-of-a-kind sleeves.



To house such an eclectic array of art, Patrick Fry, founder of CentreCentre tells us that nailing the sequence was key. “It was very important to establish a flow of images that felt connected and also in contrast,” says Patrick, “establishing a pace that keeps the viewer moving through the collection.” This flow is bookended with front and backmatter that frame and establish the “fun, DIY aesthetic and almost fanzine approach”, Patrick continues. *Sleeve Notes* opens with a black-and-white snap of the Crazy Beat Records shop, a creative reimagining of a music-crazy, misunderstood teen encountering sleeveless records, and a foreword from Kevan offering insight into the journey and lifespan of the artworks enclosed.

As the sleeves are photographed on black backgrounds to ensure visibility, Patrick says that they sought to add colour elsewhere, as seen with the baby pink front and backmatter pages, and the shock of 1970s-inspired burnt orange on the front cover. When it came to the title, “we wanted to evoke but not mimic the many forms of hand drawn bubble lettering inside the book”, Patrick says. The team looked through many possible fonts before landing on Studio Feixen’s suitably buoyant and suggestively retro Ease Full Rounded.



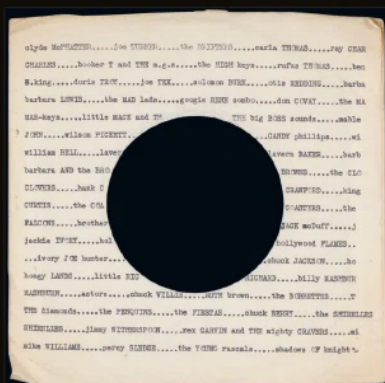




Left Sleeve Notes (Copyright © Dominique Russell, 2025)  
Right Sleeve Notes (Copyright © Dominique Russell, 2025)



Above Sleeve Notes (Copyright © Dominique Russell, 2025)

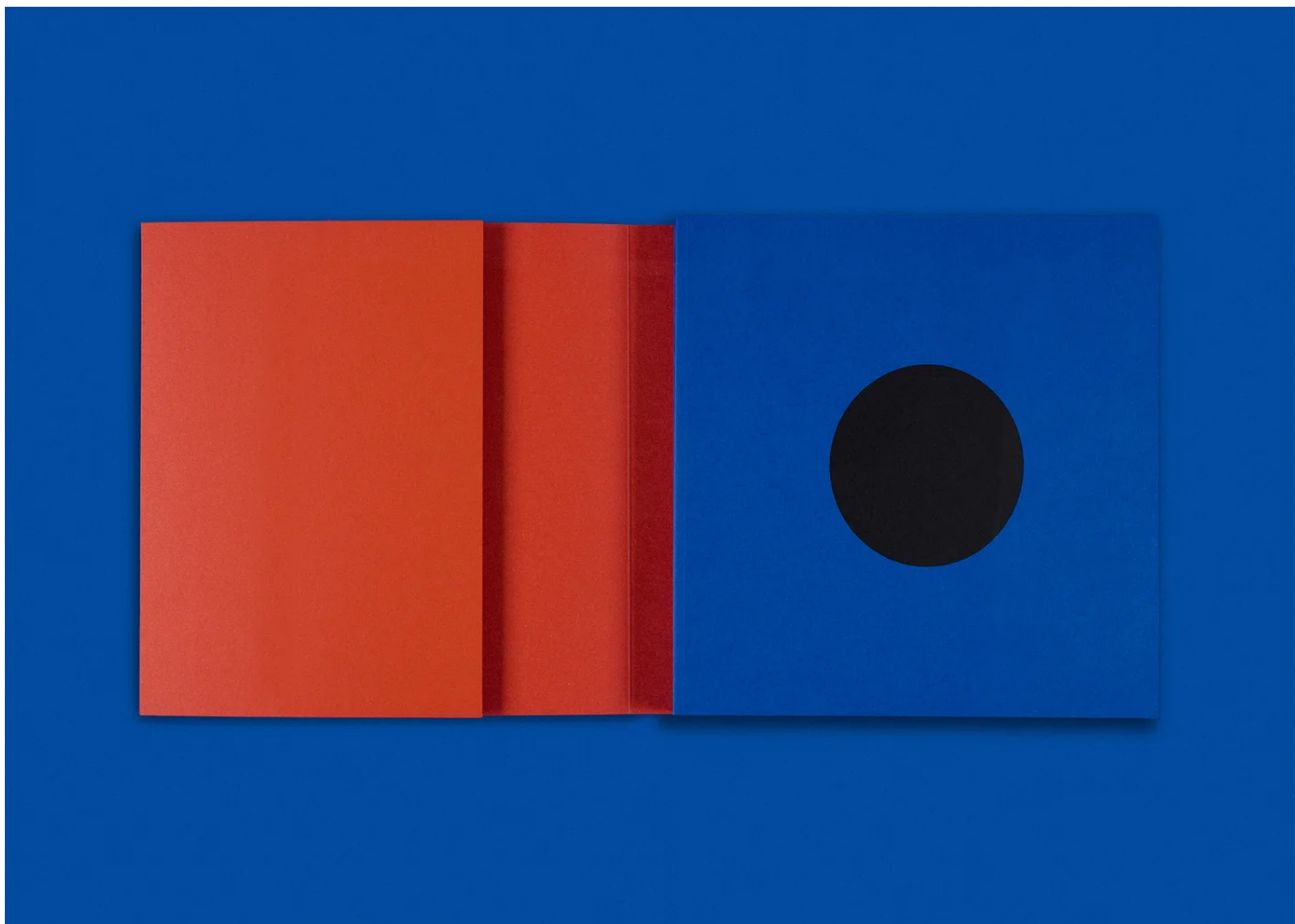


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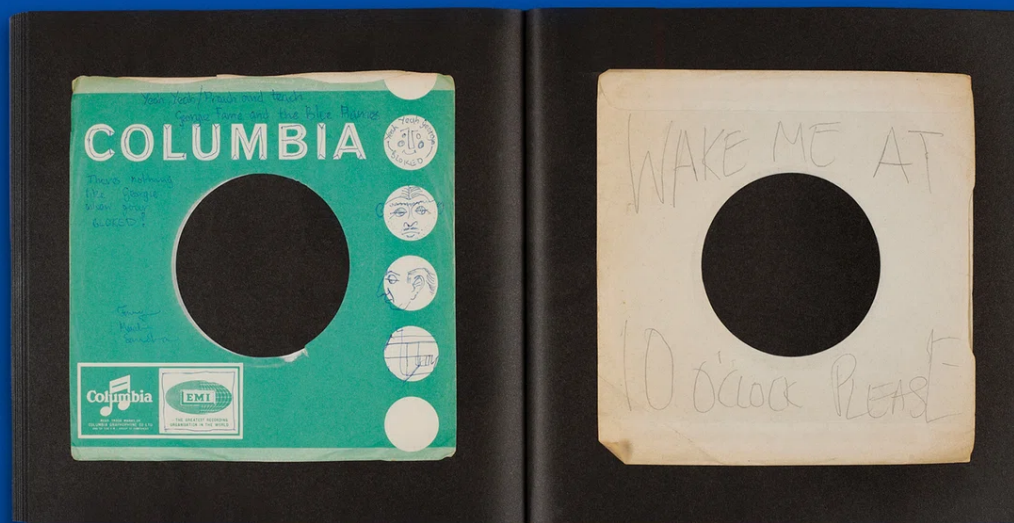


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