

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

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### Project Title

Subtitle

### COVART

What's your story?

### Personal Statement

Cover arts are importantly used as an artistic statement to showcase music. When a person picks up an album or sees a song for the first time, the visual element becomes the first and most apparent part of the project. Through this, informing the user with a compelling cover art that tells the listener what to expect. Telling this visual story is an important part into a song's delivery. Access towards an musician's visual story is assisted by a team, which is often easily recruited by releasing it through a record label, that have most of the resources to do so. Independent musicians often find a lot of complications when working with record labels today<sup>1</sup>.

For independent musicians, these stories could not be told as easily without finding visual artists, so I wanted to create a better way for these independent musicians to connect to freelance artists to tell the story of the music. As these musicians slowly transition into further pushing their music alone through Bandcamp or Soundcloud, I want to provide an easier resource for these musicians to visualize their stories<sup>1</sup>. This platform will support both artists who have a common interest of creating artwork and design for music, as well as independent musicians who do not have record labels and connections in their disposal to find artists.

### Introduction

COVART is an application that provides freelance services focused on album covers and artworks for independent electronic music producers. The aim of the application is to give independent musicians a visual story for their music. COVART envisions creating connections for these musicians with freelance artists to create bigger works, marrying visuals and music.

### Overview

History of Electronic Dance Music (EDM)

The invention and advancement of electricity prompted the first introduction of electronic musical equipment in the 19th century. Many inventors were experimenting how electricity could be implemented into the day's musical devices<sup>2</sup>. The invention of

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

---

computers and its public distribution prompted for a rise of music made through the computer in the 60s. Popular electronic music's rise in the late 1960s created further immersion of electronic music equipments, and many interpretations of electronic music<sup>3</sup>.

The start of electronic dance music began in the late 60s and early 70s with the birth of disco, a blend of funk, soul, and jazz with electronic aspects<sup>4</sup>. House, industrial, and techno began to gain popularity in the 80s and 90s, popularizing the early rave scene in Germany and UK. These raves were often located in warehouses and underground parties, dedicated to growing EDM culture<sup>4</sup>. As these genres grew, many sub-genres began to emerge.

The rise of EDM has influenced pop music to incorporate a lot of its sound into the mainstream, garnering new audiences. Dance music is popularized in pop culture through social media and live EDM events and festivals.

History of Album Covers &  
Visual Art

The first concept of album covers and cover art as credit to Alex Steinweiss, an art director hired by Columbia Records in 1938<sup>5</sup>. The illustrated covers for releases boosted sale numbers. The switch for record companies into folded board formats of their vinyls led to artistic experimentation for covers. Nat King Cole's The King Cole Trio attracted huge attention in America for its cover art design, where it topped the Billboard Best Selling Record Albums for the rest of the year<sup>5</sup>. The connection between artist and musician have never been stronger, as designers continue to push more and more of their creativity and originality within the music medium.

A new branch of creativity for visual art came in August 1, 1981 with the iconic release of The Buggles' "Video Killed The Radio Star"<sup>6</sup> on MTV, which popularized the term 'music video'. Since then, visual stories were incorporated in tandem with its sounds.

## Significance

The importance of album artwork was initially portrayed in the 40s in tandem with its booming album sales. This gave a new platform for artists to create illustration for music, and has been an important aspect of albums to this day. Avid music listeners appreciated album covers as a memorable display for their

Winston Setiawan

## **COVART**

What's your story?

---

collection. "They were large enough to make you feel like you were taking home your very own work of art", said Tony Bennett<sup>5</sup>. The development of these artworks began to flourish as the introductions of bold typography, photography, and conceptual art start to take place<sup>5</sup>.

Over the years, art continues to evolve further, as well as machine and technology. The introduction of streaming music into the mainstream began to become a crucial part of music listening. The simple access of albums through digital forms rather than physical form pushed music listeners to easily listen to these musicians online. Album artworks in display became smaller and smaller in display, distinctions of artists and album names became similar to everything else, and the introduction of playlists into streaming also became apparent<sup>7</sup>. This made the concept of an album less important. Contrary to popular belief, this only made physical albums and vinyls ever more crucial. Vinyl collectors and music aficionados kept the importance of physical releases, mostly to showcase their favorite albums and the artwork that goes along with it. More than 9.2 million vinyl records were sold in the US in 2015, a favorable increase since 2014<sup>7</sup>.

### **Struggles of a musician in the industry**

1. Getting your music out there is a very big problem for independent musicians today. Without the opportunities for releases on radio and marketing, they only rely on gaining public traction online, these musicians struggle to create a living off the multitude of hours they put into their work<sup>8</sup>. At one point, musicians would resort to contacting record labels, talent scouts, etc to push their music further into the public domain.
2. In the current digital world, musicians look up to record labels as their starting point for success in the music industry. With their established knowledge, resources, and connections, it is apparent how important their contributions are for a musician<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the years however, record label and publishing deals have proven to not only become a harmful connection to musicians, but have taken advantage of their success and pay<sup>9</sup>. A huge goal for any musician today is to successfully create a living from their passion for music, and with the current

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

boundaries and restraints as a musician, it becomes harder and harder<sup>10</sup>.

3. With digital streaming platforms taking storm of current music listeners today, concepts of an musician's intentions with albums began to diminish. The simplicity of skipping through songs, and choosing exact songs to play, as well as the addition of creating playlists created a new way music listeners would appreciate an musician's work<sup>7</sup>. Though this, musicians have began to create new ways of releasing their albums, and the conceptualization of an album. Some decide to create an announcing release of how the album should be perceived, and others structure their albums in different ways<sup>11</sup>.
4. The debate of how the portrayal of an album's cover art is in relation to its music is often questioned by music listeners. Anthony Fantano, an American music critic, mentions how, "I feel like the beauty of album art is sort of in the eye of the beholder whether or not that art conveys what it is supposed to." Some pieces of visual art in its first glance would not make sense to a music listener until they have conquered through listening through the whole album, where it would make sense then<sup>12</sup>. Some others would have visuals that gives a teaser towards what the listener would expect going into the project. "What's good about a piece of album art in my opinion is: Does it inform you of the experience? Or in some way, does it enhance the experience?"<sup>12</sup>

## Benchmarking/ Opportunities

1. Fiverr is a marketplace for freelance work and services online. Each service offered as gigs by freelancers, where they offer a service for a returning price. As Fiverr continue to develop, freelance work is not only limited to design, illustrative work, and copyrighting but have also dabbled deeper into mentorship, video editing, programming, etc. Fiverr also offers services for freelancers to create album artworks, but an freelancer's view in executing these artworks are different. It is noted that Fiverr owns your clients on the website, and most of the work being done has high pressure in order to keep your portfolio high up to avoid negative reviews<sup>13</sup>. This impact of competition and lost of connectivity with the artist is a vital part into creating a

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

- cohesive and compelling story for a musician.
2. Canva is a team-based graphic design platform used to create graphics through layouts and templates, often performed with the Canva's drag-and-drop feature. As starting designers could use this platform quite easily, Canva's design ability is extremely limited, and often uses layouts and templates as a main focus for the end product. It is important for musicians to have endless possibilities for what their album art should look like<sup>7</sup>, and artists to have free reign of their work from scratch.
  3. 99 Designs is a graphic design service platform where people could work with design professionals and experts from around the world. Their system initially consisted of the main feature of the "contest" submission process, but now have incorporated direct links to experts. A contest should not be the main focus of COVART. Rather, the correct direction and view for the musician's perspective with the artist's interpretation<sup>14</sup>. Unlike 99designs, COVART plans to only focus on music based designs and illustrations.
  4. CoverArt Factory is a design service centered around cover arts and lyric videos. The limit for the factory disconnects the designer and the musician's story. COVART combats that by giving these designers a direct connection to the music.

## Design Manifesto

Music has influenced new expressions of poetry, story, and sound. We get to understand ourselves through words and melodies. Music moves someone, motivates ideas, and takes us to new heights and experiences. But music is not only limited to our sense of hearing, but is a method of telling creativity through story, ideas, past and future. Music takes different medium from its rawest form, to creating visual art, or a world that surrounds a 13-track album.

Each person has their own story to tell, and in the current digital world, anyone can be an musician, and everyone wants to give glimpse their own side of their story. The music industry has been designed for musicians to not make money in the first place. For these independent musicians, who work 9-5 jobs to support themselves, and spend endless nights materializing their passion and stories into music, how are we not to appreciate their push towards their success?

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

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### Project Statement

Semi-professional independent musicians work tooth and nail to passionately drive their career into a full-time job. With the current music industry's rejection towards this idea, it is important to support these musicians in fighting back. My solution is to create a vital resource for these musicians to connect with talented visual artists and succeed in telling their stories to their fans.

**“COVART is a responsive application platform that provides illustration and design services for album covers and cover arts, and informs comprehensive electronic music genres for independent musicians.”**

### Constraints

Audience

COVART focuses on targeting semi-professionals independent musicians who are taking the steps to push their music journey online. These musicians do not have an easy access to record labels, and finding the right artist for their vision would be an arduous task. This constraint will outline the possibilities of finding talented freelance artists that have the right visual elements for a musician's storyline.

Collaboration

The platform would give the opportunity for artists and musicians to go back and forth with their work. The platform is not limited by a division of artists and musicians, but visual artists are able to upload music, and musicians could create illustrations and designs as well. COVART ensures the function between musicians and artists is a prominent part of the platform.

Connection

COVART focuses its content on privacy between users. As freelancing work could be a big hassle through copyright, it is important for the conversation and artwork between artist and musician to be private. It is also to have the possibility of a private conversation between the musician and the artist.

Context

The musical interpretation showcased in COVART is an important part into creating a successful idea for the freelance artist. It is important for the artist to understand the music in their own taste to design/illustrate. Therefore, COVART plans to create an informative element for specific electronic music sub-genres

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

---

that will help inform the artist of the roots of the genre, and its perception.

### Outcomes

Immediate Outcome

- Independent musicians get to showcase their tracks onto the platform, and freelance artists get to connect with the music and create visual story for this piece of music. This will allow these musicians to connect with these artists to understand their process work, as well as understand the musician's ideas.
- Both visual artists and musicians get to experience each genre in a different feeling and light, as well as get to know new genres. An informative overview of these genres will help inform new music listeners.
- Freelance artists who are interested in creating work for electronic musicians get to further push their passion for the industry through their talent in design.
- The application platform will be focused on creating UX wireframes, brand identity, and a motion reel.

Intermediate Outcome

Independent musicians would have a trusting platform where they could curate their music frequently, and freelance artists could discover new musical talent, as well as create new work based on their favorite styles of genres. This app would also push towards the discovery of new genres for new music listeners. In the long run, musicians and artists would get to consistently connect with each other through their future of music and visual art, where they could work in collaboration.

Ultimate Outcome

Going further into the future, COVART plans to provide covers for future musicians in all different sub-genres. COVART will not stray from its initial intention of only focusing on the relationship between art and music. COVART also plans to expand its reaches to provide a better platform for artists to showcase their music as independent releases and freelance artists to showcase their portfolio and talent as big features.

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

---

### Draft Investigative plan(s)

1. Primary research is very important. The plan for my primary research involves interviewing musicians who have had experiences as a starting musician finding designers and artists for their cover art, or how they work around creating their own covers for posting their music. I plan to also ask more about their views of the importance of cover arts in tandem with showcasing their music online.
  - Quick surveys for artists (10 questions), and asking an interviews at the end
  - Possible 1 on 1 interview going more in-depth about their own experiences and insights.
2. Deeper research of music genres, and get in depth into designing color palettes and moodboard for each genre.
3. Understanding different information architectures from all streaming platforms, freelancing services, and online galleries.
4. Research on UI frames for freelancing service applications, music streaming platforms, and online artwork galleries.
5. Branding identity research and font spaces, as well as brand application.

### Resource Person(s):

1. Foxsky: Will be assisting me as my mentor. A professional musician, starting off as an independent musician and later signed into a major music label, has imprints from all around the world and headlined a tour in Japan. He now manages future musicians for the music industry. Along a professional musician, Foxsky works as a therapist, designer, and event organizer.
2. Laces: Rising artist in electronic music today. Musician and designer. Recently made waves with his electrifying sound.
3. A-PAR: Rising artist focused on creating global club music in the current music scene, supported by big name artists.
4. American Dave
5. Quiet Bison: A rising artist who have released a few albums independently, now working on music in major labels.
6. Rob Gasser: Worked with major labels before for their designs and artworks.



Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

---

### Primary Research

#### Survey

1. Age, gender
2. Have you designed/illustrated your own cover art for your tracks?
3. Have you utilized using free templates/layouts to create cover arts for your tracks?
4. Have you commissioned artists or designers to create cover arts for your tracks?
5. How do you find artists or designers for your cover arts?
6. Do you often have an idea prepared for what you would like your cover art to look like?
7. Do you often recognize music based on its memorable cover art (physically and digitally)?
8. What do you think are the most important elements in the ideal album art/cover art?
9. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is a cover art/album art in relation to the music?

#### Interview

1. What are some points that you look for that determines a successful song release or an album release?
2. What are your opinions on the significance of cover arts to the album and to a single?
3. When commissioning for an album artwork, do you have an idea prepared immediately, or would you drive it towards the artist's interpretation?
4. What is your view on cover arts impact in the current digital streaming platform, and the vinyl records?
5. Enlighten me about your experience commissioning album art by communicating directly to an artist versus a third-party like a record label?
6. Is text important on cover arts?
7. What are some of your favorite album cover arts, and how was it communicative to the music?
8. If you were to make your next album, what are some specifications you would work with a designer/illustrator to get the most accurate visual of the album's concept or vision?

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

### Insight

- Impact defines a success of an album or song. Some songs could be popular, but be fleeting and short term. The success of a music comes towards the notion of it sticking with somebody or changes the way you feel, and has the longevity to continue to be inspiring and listened to in the long run.
- Cover arts are a bigger deal than most people think it is. People often underestimate how important it is.
- A lot of amateur musicians would often invest no time in putting effort into making cover arts, or would make cover arts themselves.
- People really do underestimate the visual design aspect of music. The cover art is your first, at-a-glance link to a song. The at a glance impact is very important. It primes you a certain way before you dive into the music. It mentally changes the idea of what you're about to getting into. A good cover art gets listeners more ready to be pleased for the release.
- In the digital age cover arts are more minuscule. People often collect vinyls just to collect them and not primarily to display them. The impact of a cover art is still the same, where social medias like Twitter and Instagram still utilizes the importance of that visual to promote music anyways. The social media algorithm is tuned towards an immediate visual stimulus.
- Often through record labels, cover arts are not under the direction of the musicians. With major labels, art direction is lead by the major labels and musicians trust that these labels would deliver what they'd want to do with the music.
- Sometimes musicians don't know what they want for the direction of their visual cover art.
- When commissioning artists for cover arts, it could often be frustrating. Musicians coming in with the idea and direction would mean that they will be nit-picky about the exact visuals they'd like. It is a joint collaborative effort for the musician and the artist to be happy with the product.
- Text is not exactly important for a cover art.
- Cover arts conveys an emotion that is portrayed in the music. It's a visual window to how you're supposed to feel or understand the music, or the personality of the musician, and it helps you build a better relationship with the music.

Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

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### Working Project Planning

Summer 2021

- Identifying current problems surround independent musicians
- Research on electronic music history & freelance marketplaces
- Detailed survey and interview for more heightened research
- Moodboard, genre color palette, and brand identity deliverables (possibly initial wireframes as well)

Spring 2022

- Further developing UX wireframes into a refined system
- Evaluate designs with benchmarks and project brief
- Refine logo branding, and introduce motion graphic element
- Clean documentation through online and presentation

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Winston Setiawan

## COVART

What's your story?

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