

Bob Fried

Short Biography



with Michael Erlewine

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INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design.

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BOB FRIED

[IMO, one of the most important graphic designers, painters, and poster artists in the Sixties movement. I have had thousands of posters and only a few on my walls. Poster artists Gary Grimshaw is one, and the I have a whole wall of Bob Fried's work. That should say something.

Bob Fried was born April 7, 1937 in Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York.

Fried was raised in a family of scholars and illustrators. His father, Henry B. Fried, was a well known clockmaker and horologist, an expert on clocks and time pieces from antiquity to the present. He authored many books, things like "The Watch Escapement" and "Bench Practices for Watch and Clockmakers." These books contained very technical drawings and Henry Fried did all of his own illustrations, but he also taught his son Bob. Even as a young person, Fried's father was training his eye. One of Bob Fried's jobs in the family was to do these very, very precise illustrations.

Unlike many of the other poster artists from the '60s, who were either self-taught or came up through doing comic illustration and pin stripping cars, Bob Fried, like {Victor Moscoso}, came up through formal training in commercial and fine arts. He was always sketching, and it was primarily figurative drawing and portraits. He worked in charcoal and graphite. From an early age, Bob Fried was focused on his art, and in the process of discovering what his own work might be.

He took classes at the Pratt Institute when he was still quite young, between the ages of 11 and 14, taking classes during the week and on weekends. In fact, his father insisted that he study commercial art and sent him to New York City College to study graphics. This was in the

late 1950s. He did some agency work and eventually landed a scholarship to Cooper Union, a distinguished art school, where he worked with {Nicholas Corone}, a figurative draughtsman, who was highly regarded as a teacher at the school. It was at that time that Fried became involved in abstract work, doing very large abstract paintings, some reaching 8x10 feet in size. While studying at Cooper Union, Fried received a second scholarship to do printing at Pratt Institute, where he learned print lithography. He graduated from {Cooper Union} in 1962, and was granted two consecutive Fulbright scholarships, to study in Spain. During this time before his sojourn in Spain, Fried taught at the Provincetown Workshop, in association with {Victor Candell}, one of the founders. He served as {Robert Motherwell}'s assistant.

Two Years in Spain

He had met his wife Penelope in 1961, at an art exhibition in Brooklyn and they were married in January of 1963. Penelope was an art student from South Hampton, England. She was working in water color and tempura, at the time. Fried felt that, since artists almost always went to Italy to study art that he would go to Spain. Together with his new bride, Penelope, they went off to Spain in March of 1963, on the premise to study the artist {Zubaran}. From interviewing Penelope, these were very happy times for them both. They took a large flat in the center of Madrid and Bob, who was always prolific, painted just all the time, and many were very large paintings. {Penelope Fried} notes that you could buy Sandos LSD at any pharmacy, where it was sold as a headache remedy. They lived in Spain from 1963 to 1965.

Relocation to the West Coast

After returning from Spain in 1965, they settled in New York City for a year, while Fried applied to various schools,

places like Yale, UCLA, and the Art Institute in San Francisco. His wife, Penelope, recalls:

"He didn't want to go to Yale, because it was on the East Coast. He had some idea he wanted to go to the West Coast, and UCLA didn't accept him. And he wrote a very stinking letter to the chancellor (and I can't remember his name), at that time, and the chancellor was stressed that Bob hadn't been accepted and offered him a place at UCLA in the art department to get his masters. And I think by the time that letter came, he'd also been accepted to the {San Francisco Art Institute} here, and so we came to San Francisco. And we drove across country." By this time, they had a child, Zephania, who was about a year and a half at the time. This was in 1966.

They found a place in San Francisco and settled in. Life was somewhat of a struggle for the family, because Fried was involved in going to school and supporting a family at the same time. Penelope states, "He was painting! And that's also when he first started to do silk screens, again,. He'd done litho before, years ago, but he started to do silk screens and do hand cuts." He did a variety of free-lance graphic work, at first but not posters.

His first posters were for theater works, followed shortly by some for the {Family Dog}. And he liked posters. Penelope Fried, was busy making hand-made clothing (for people like {Janis Joplin}) for the '{Orbit}', the first boutique on Polk Street remembers:

"He really enjoyed posters. He liked that. He really enjoyed knowing the musicians and I mean it was, it was a full experience for him, I think. He really liked doing the posters, because I think he had that, you know, he'd had all of that training in graphics, and then also the fine arts, so it was really an opportunity for him to bring it all together."

And he began to meet some of the other artists on the scene, with a special admiration for the work of {Victor Moscoso}, who had kind of befriended him. They both had gone to Cooper Union. He also became friends with and liked the work of {Rick Griffin}. In fact the two families, Griffin and Fried, both had small children, so they hung out together. Penelope:

"But Bob would be the kind of person who would really go into his studio and be absorbed, and Rick could sit at the kitchen table with everything going on around. You know, so their personalities were really different. I mean Rick stayed in one place, basically, the kitchen table." When the Frieds moved to {Marin County} in early 1970, the Griffins were already living in Lagunitas.

Bob was very political

Penelope: He didn't study Zen and he didn't meditate. He worked a lot. He read all about things. He liked {Gustave Corbet} for his philosophical and political action. A lot of his prints came from Corbet's action. He liked peyote, so he had his own peyote experience and ritual. Yes, so, I think through those experiences, there was a lot of opening and he became very compassionate. I mean he was very compassionate.

Fried's abstract work is both visionary and sometimes visually shocking, causing more than a few viewers to comment that it is somewhat reminiscent of an acid trip. According to his wife, Fried took acid but "He didn't do it often. He did it significantly. So it wasn't like a recreational thing. Yes, it wasn't a hip thing, at all. It was really a discovery, I think."

Inspired by the Beat Movement

Bob Fried, like many his age, found inspiration in the beat movement, even though it was like half a generation

before him. Bob was considered by some as a beat painter, and himself identified with the scene.

"But you know, he was sort of that crossover. He was in that bridge," Penelope notes, "You see in Provincetown also, a lot of those people were bi-coastal and Eric Somebody or other, I don't know, he was always in Provincetown. There was a big mix of people in Provincetown and, although he wasn't really a beat person by any means, there was this sort of entourage. We used to stay at Millbrook with {Timothy Leary} and {Ram Das}, who was still {Richard Alpert} at that time."

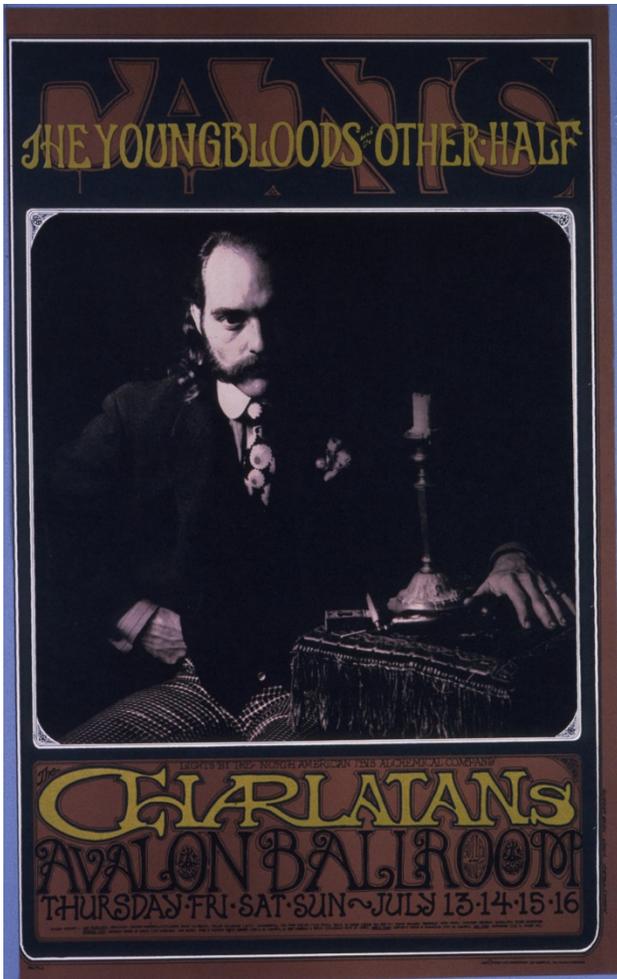
"it was a very... it was a mixed community, and in New York at that time, when things were beginning to happen in San Francisco, the hippie movement was really growing in a different way. You know, it was very intriguing and I think also the fact that we met people who had come from San Francisco might also have been part of his leaning, to accept the {San Francisco Art Institute} over UCLA. "

Fried like music, jazz, rhythm & blues, and rock n' roll, and he went to many of the dance concerts at the {Avalon} and {Fillmore}. Because he was an artist, he could get in free. He would go backstage and hang out.

Fried had been raised in a large conservative Jewish family in Brooklyn, and as his wife points out "He spent Christmas' with his Italian neighbors..."

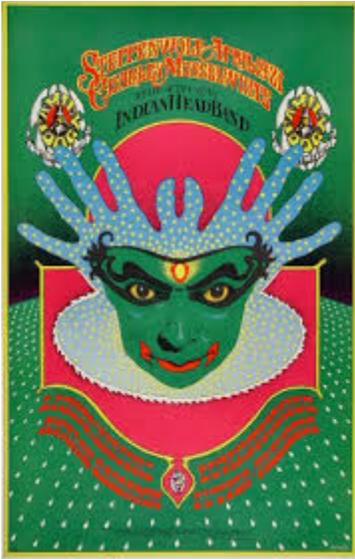
Poster Artist

His first rock posters was to do one of the triptych for the {Charlatans}, a job handed to him by {Rick Griffin}, who asked Fried to finish the set for him. He also did a poster for the {Michael McClure} play "{Billy the Kid}."



Bob Fried went on to do a series of posters for the Family Dog, from the summer of 1967 through the late spring of 1968.

A few of these are outstanding examples, such as the poster he did for {Canned Heat}



And another for Steppenwolf:

}

"I think having his own voice was always important to him. Never would he have copied {Wes Wilson}, for instance. You know there, there may have been things about other people's work that he liked and would filter in, in some way. Apart from having to be interesting and eye catching, he wanted people to get it. He wanted the impact."

"I think it was the experience of doing them he really liked. It was just different, you know. He was always mentally restless, so he would like what he was working on, most of the time. Sometimes not. But then, once it was done, he would move on to another piece. And yet he did a lot of, you know, this little drawing is a very playful little piece, or, you know, {Tina Turner}. Am I being clear enough for you?"

Fried began doing more posters as his studies and work at the {San Francisco Art Institute} was coming to an end. He had been doing work for the institute's catalogs. It was not

long after, when he started a small company that he called "Food." And he did posters for a group called the "Singing LSD Mother's Society," something else which he has started.

Fried created a couple of large perforated sheets with facsimiles of U.S. postage stamps. As the story goes, these stamps were actually used to send off party invitations via the U.S. mail. Those invitations that actually got through the post office and were delivered, came to the party, while (obviously) those that were not delivered lost out. Not many of these sheets still exist and they are very fragile.



Postage Stamps by Bob Fried

It was a great loss to his family and to the entire poster community when Bob Fried died in January of 1975 for a cerebral aneurysm, on the day of his opening at the San Francisco Museum of Modern art.

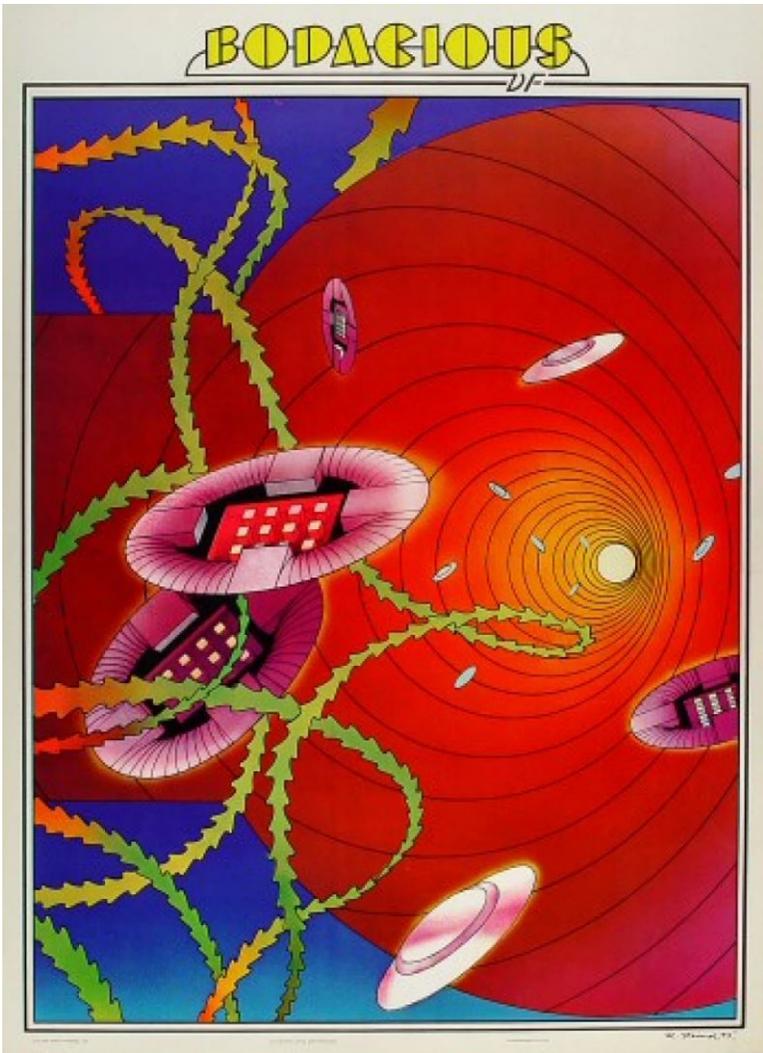
A Brief Look at the Work of Bob Fried

Bob Fried, like his fellow-artist {Victor Moscoso}, had an academic art background first, and learned the lingo and gestalt of the emerging psychedelic scene later. Mix this with his interest in the beat scene, and we might have a fair picture of the temperament of this artist.

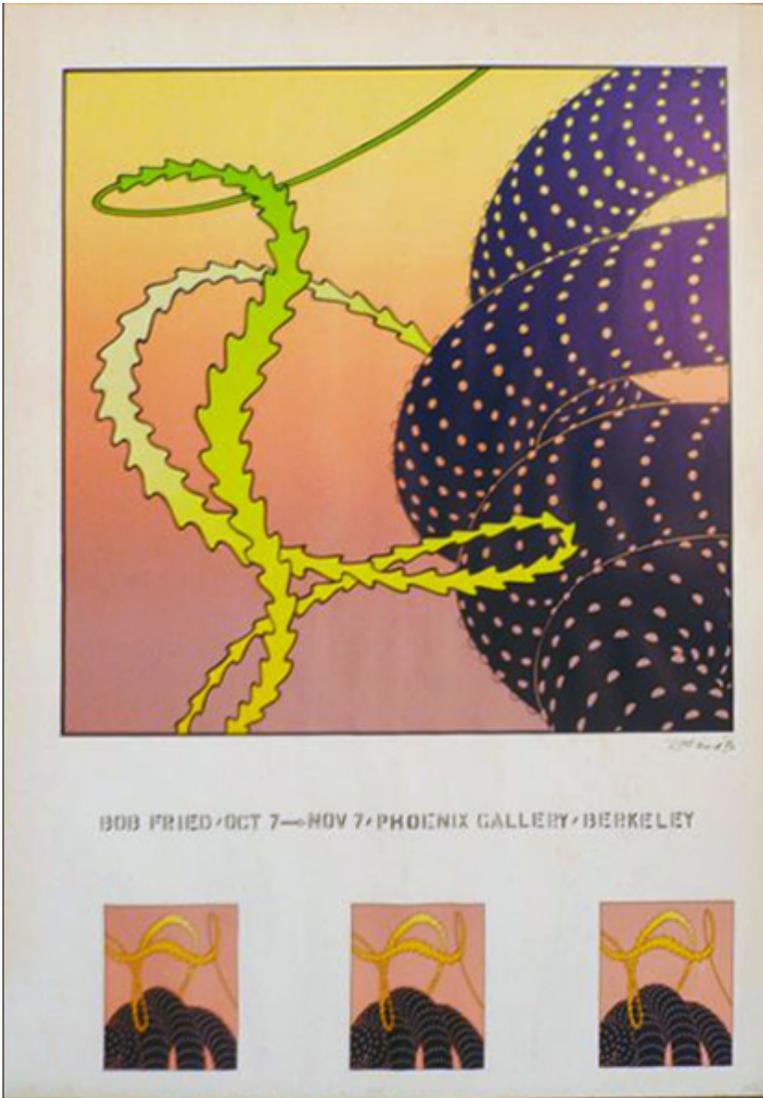
On the one hand we have his considerable output of large abstract fine-art paintings, some of which can still be found at the {Saisset Museum} at Santa Clara, and some in Brooklyn. And this fine-art, abstract style has found its way into a few popular posters and prints, things like:



Bob Fried Print



Bodacious



Phoenix Gallery Print

Then we can see something almost a little Warhol-like in things like:



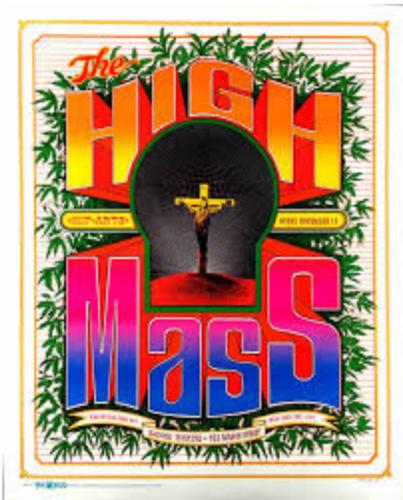
R. R. R.

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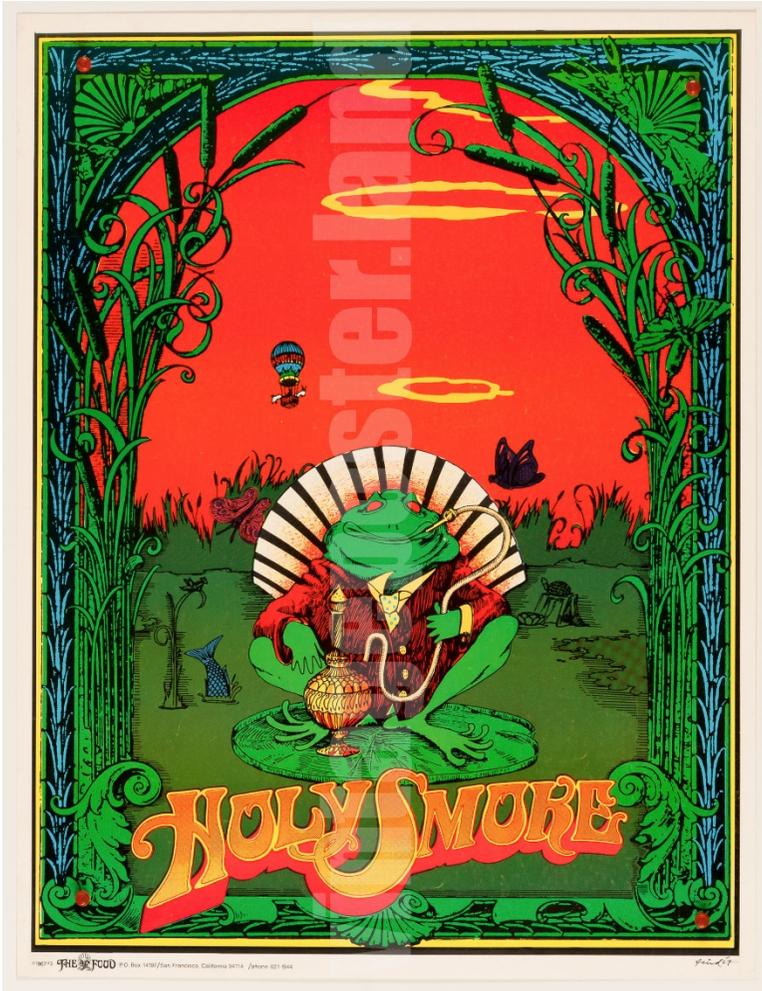
High Mass is Coming

And we have the simply gorgeous pieces like the famous (and rare) "Orange Groove."



The Orange Groove

In addition, Fried did a number of pieces that were intended for the hippie community, and were just pretty pieces, things like "Holy Smoke."



"Holy Smoke"

And of course, we have the run of posters Fried did for the Family Dog, which should be looked at, and are a part of a separate article.

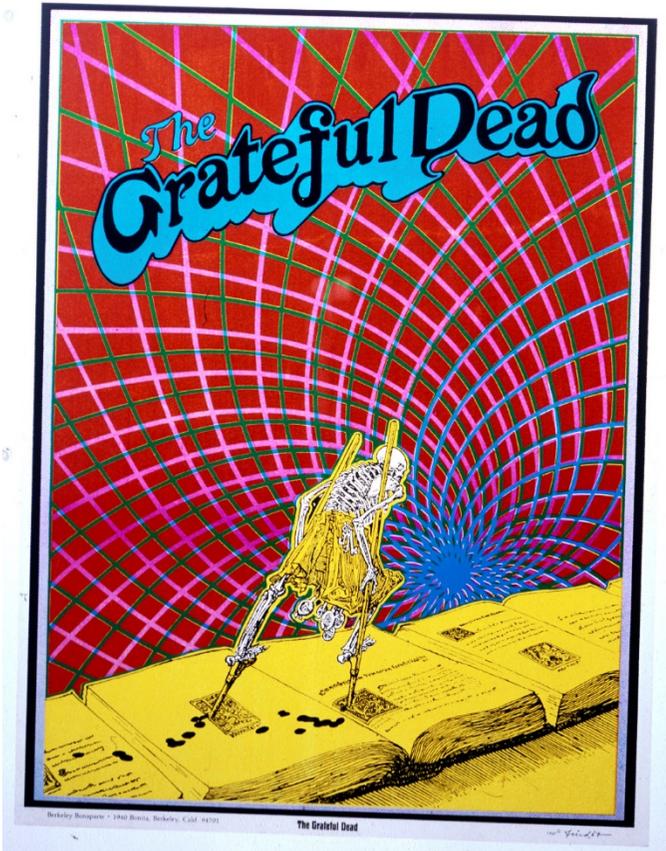
In closing this very brief article about Bob Fried, let's look at what I feel are three of his most profound pieces, in my opinion.

The first is one of two designs Fried did for full-sized billboards. This one he called "Beyond the Beyond" is available in a somewhat large limited edition print. This is a very striking piece.



"Beyond the Beyond"

In this reviewer's mind, the best and perhaps most important Fried piece is the translucent poster he did for the {Grateful Dead}. This poster was produced on sheets of plastic, so that it could be placed against the light, like in windows. The only problem was that the inks did not hold up well to light and thus the poster quickly fades is reduced to a faded remnant. What copies still exist are very expensive and must be kept away from light. Putting that aside, this is an incredible illustration and concept.



"Grateful Dead by Bob Fried"

Bob Fried produced some of the finest examples of the poster art of the San Francisco scene. He was a skilled technician with a wonderful mind that could put very abstract concepts into graphic form. In closing, here is my personal favorite Bob Fried piece, the poster he did for the {Youngbloods} at {Euphoria} poster. I have no idea what it means, but it tweaks my mind in a perfect way. It, like so much of the work of Bob Fried, is just elegant.

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"Youngbloods at Euphoria by Bob Fried"