

# POPS

Having created imagery for pop groups and fashion houses, football teams and cities, art director and graphic designer Peter Saville CBE is always seeking new challenges

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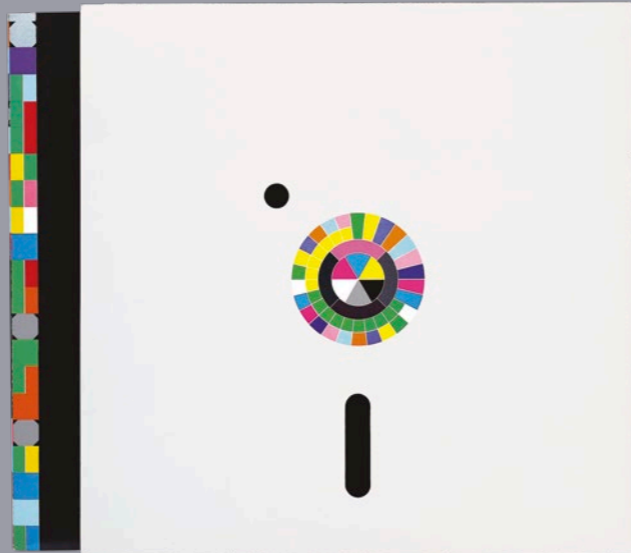




Saville co-founded the legendary Factory Records in 1978 and designed album covers for its stable of cult bands, including The Durutti Column and Joy Division. Seen here is the front and back cover of Saville's design for New Order's famed 1983 album *Power, Corruption & Lies*. The front features 'A Basket of Roses' by Henri Fantin-Latour, 1890 (Courtesy of National Gallery, London).



OPPOSITE The Factory Poster, 1978. Design by Peter Saville



Even if you're not familiar with the name Peter Saville, chances are you've seen his work. An enigmatic image-maker who frequently confounds expectations, Saville's career has spanned everything from creating record sleeves for rock bands to reimagining the creative identities of some of the world's most prolific luxury names — not to mention attempting to brand the entire city of Manchester. Similarly, his work refuses to fit into any neat category, sitting somewhere on the blurred boundaries between art and design.

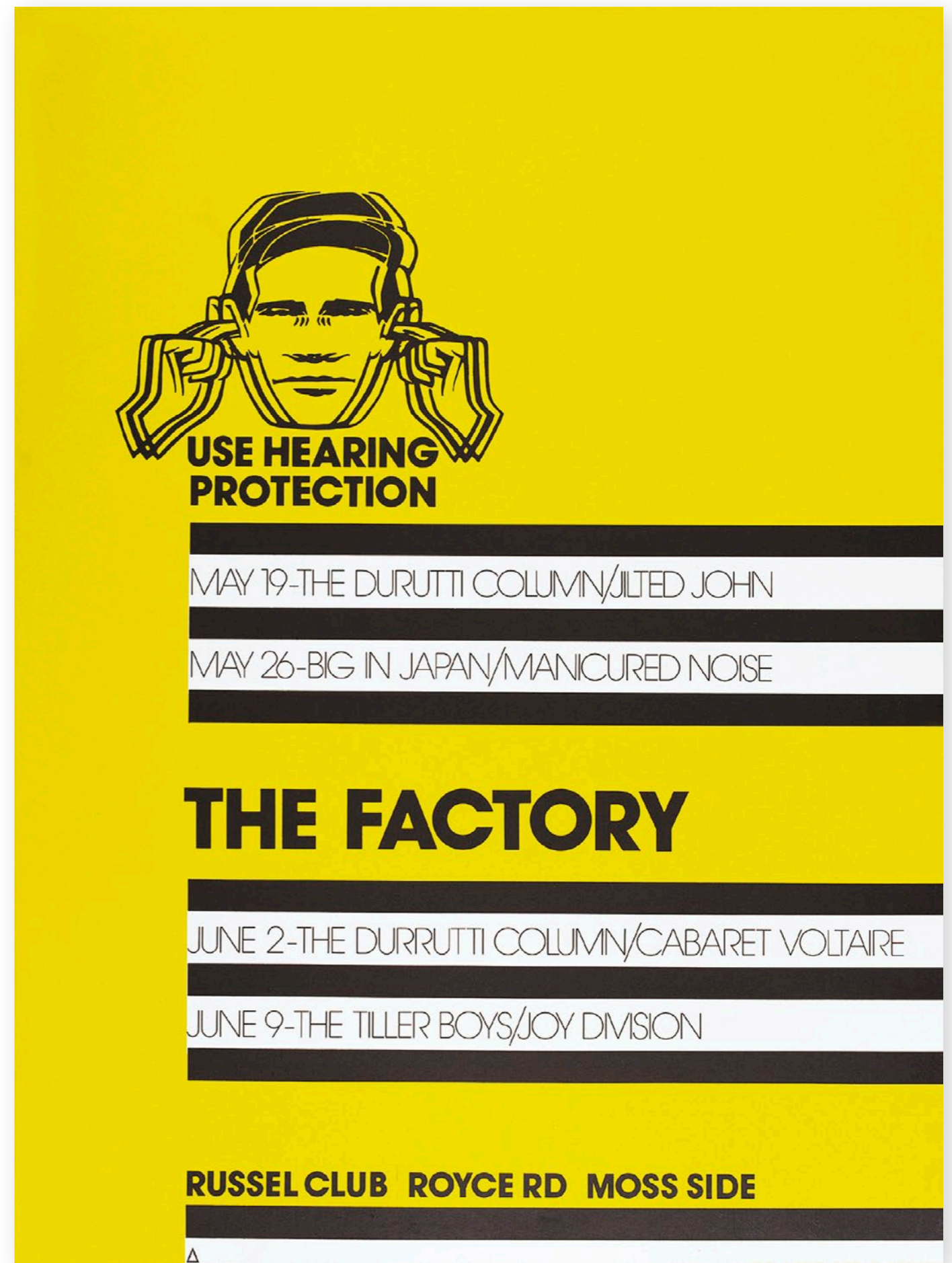
In 1978, Saville co-founded legendary label Factory Records alongside Tony Wilson, Martin Hannett and Alan Erasmus. As art director, he

designed album covers for many of the cult indie bands of the 1970s and 1980s, including Joy Division, New Order, Happy Mondays and The Durutti Column. A number of Saville's early designs — such as the graphic black-and-white visualisation of pulsar signals on Joy Division's 1979 album, *Unknown Pleasures* — have become so well-known as to become standalone visual icons, recognisable even to those ignorant of their musical origins.

"I always thought of them as works in their own right, as visual objects that existed independently," Saville muses. "To varying degrees, they are about themselves relative to the canon of art and design — as I knew it — rather than about the music that

initiated them. Inevitably though, the degree of iconic status is intrinsically determined by the success of the music that garnered a receptive audience in the first place." He pauses. "A fact that my musician friends like to remind me of..."

His portfolio is nothing if not diverse. Although Factory Records went under in 1992, Saville continued to work with various artists — Pulp, Suede and Roxy Music among them — on music-based commissions and in 2000 founded fashion film platform SHOWStudio alongside long-time collaborator Nick Knight. An eponymous retrospective was staged at London's Design Museum in 2003, before an invitation came to redesign





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Saville has a long and distinguished client list that includes Stella McCartney and Dior, while other brands have commissioned him to lead re-branding projects. Shown here is the recently revamped Burberry identity, which Saville worked on as creative director for Riccardo Tisci in 2018, while above is ‘Game Over’, a piece art directed by Saville for Yohji Yamamoto’s AW91-92 collection.

# BURBERRY

## LONDON ENGLAND

the England football team’s home kit in 2010. In 2013, US rapper Kanye West enlisted him to design a new visual identity. However, out of all of his projects, Saville counts his decade-long tenure as the consultant creative director of Manchester as the most challenging by far.

“[I was tasked with] divining a ‘brand ethos’ for the city as it looked to define itself for the 21st century. A common vision and inherent identity — acknowledging provenance while simultaneously inspiring purpose — was sought as a route map for the transition of the world’s first industrial city towards its post-industrial future,” he explains.

“Formulating this ethos was akin to social engineering and the gravitas of that was daunting, but nevertheless intellectually testing — and as Manchester is my home city, emotionally innervating. My proposition of Manchester as ‘the original modern city’ was as much a challenge as it was a claim. It was intended to inspire the innovation that is a prerequisite of the ‘world class’

status now universally aspired to by all civic authorities.”

These days, having been commissioned by some designer fashion and high-end lifestyle’s most forefront names, Saville’s client list reads like a who’s who of the luxury industry. Givenchy, Hennessy, Stella McCartney and Dior are among his former clients, to name a few, while iconic brands such as Calvin Klein and Burberry recently commissioned him to lead major re-branding projects.

On his creative process, he says — in typically oblique fashion — “I remember my close friend and colleague, photographer Trevor Key, once saying to me, ‘We only really learn when we make mistakes, don’t we?’ The service aspect of graphic design is the mobility it affords one to engage with new and different issues in sync with the path of one’s life and interests.”

This engagement with the novel, remaining ever-sensitive to the beating pulse of visual culture, is what makes Saville’s graphic designs so hard to pin down. His work is informed by a remarkable range of references, which

he zealously collects as part of a vast, ever-growing archive. “What I find out about the world informs my work and thankfully — but also regrettably — that never stops, does it? There is a constantly evolving spectrum of understanding. Consequently, the meaning we attribute to things seems to be permanently in flux, which is in itself interesting. Lately, confronting this quantum nature of the now, where values and meanings are in different places simultaneously, I welcome the clarity of a given problem.” Does he ever feel creatively constrained by a client brief? “Creativity is not an end in itself. It has to have a point. The issue is, whose point?”

A notorious perfectionist, Saville is reluctant to reveal exactly what he is working on at the moment: “I always imagine that the work I take on will be enjoyable, but the pursuit of better never is until it’s done — and if it isn’t difficult, you fear you are probably not trying hard enough.”

No doubt his next project will be that one few saw coming.  
*petersaville.com*