Luis Gispert and Jeff Reed first began collaborating on films and photographs around 2002. Their Stereomongrel project premiered at the Whitney Museum of American Art and has been exhibited or screened Internationally. Both work as artists and filmmakers on their respective coasts: Gispert in Brooklyn, New York, and Reed in Venice, California.
What's the backstory of your cover image?

Luis Gispert: The cover image "BB Matrix" was part of a larger project called Stereomongrel that debuted at the Whitney Museum. It was basically a ten-minute film and a suite of large-format photographs that captured scenes and characters that were not seen in the film. These weren't outtakes, but actual set pieces designed to be their own photographs. We imagined them to be moments within the narrative orbit of the film that took place elsewhere and simultaneously.

How did music influence or inspire this project?

Jeff Reed: Luis and I had been talking about this thing "portamento," which is a musical term. It comes from classical music and fretless string instruments, but then became the basis of a lot of synth music in the 60s and 70s as analog synthesis flourished and subsequently found its way onto a lot of rap records in the 80s and beyond. Think Dr. Dre, NWA, Snoop... It's that effect of gliding smoothly and seamlessly up or down a musical interval without stopping on any of the discrete notes.

Gispert: We thought of the film and photographs as separate tones that are bound together within the same aesthetic world but that can be experienced seamlessly as a whole.

Reed: I had a studio in LA at the time, and we would spend days just playing music against our film, working with producers, writing, scoring.... It was a great time to create, and everything we were doing can be seen in the final product. It's a testament to the music we were consuming and creating, the huge influence it had on the film's soundtrack and the photos.

What were you guys listening to?

Gispert: The project took two years to complete, so we're talking 2003 to 2005. Mashups had just started getting big. There was plenty of hip-hop playing in the background. Mobb Deep, Ghostface Killah's "Supreme Cliental," was pretty much on endless loop. We got really into this amazing Italian prog rock band called Goblin.

Where did the shoot take place?

Reed: At the time, we were really focused on fabricated subcultures or gangs. We were looking around Miami's Overtown neighborhood, near North Miami Avenue, which was then one of the most dangerous areas in the city. The crack epidemic had really destroyed everything. This was long before Art Basel had ushered in the gentrification. Having grown up in Miami, Luis was familiar with the area—his father's shop was in the neighborhood, and he knew many of the local residents.

Gispert: We came across a guy wandering around in full construction garb—even a dust mask—but we knew there was no construction site for miles. He was holding a machete. After striking up a conversation, he told us that everyone had to have a "look." His "look" helped him: It was camouflage, so the cops wouldn't harass him.

Reed: He said he had a crew in the area that might want to be in our photos for a few bucks. He guided us around to a really sketchy and grimy back alley, which seemed like a super logical place to hang out with a guy holding a machete, especially when you're two skinny guys walking around with expensive cameras and cash. He introduced us to his cohorts: a pimp, a few prostitutes, lots of crackheads. All-around hustlers. They were all game to join in on the photo. We had a flatbed truck, a Toshiba boombox, and a toolbox full of costume gold. After huffing crack out of a paper bags, they wandered the yard like zombies with boomboxes in tow. A pied-piper archetype showed up with a flatbed truck and collected all the boom boxes to be transported and passed on to other gangs inhabiting this Stereomongrelized world.

Can you let us in on the connection between the cover photo and the inset photos?

Gispert: Well, we've talked about the cover story. Every photo had a unique backstory but was also rooted in the Stereomongrel universe. The photograph of the gang of bruised-up red-headed, heavily flossing urban cheerleaders strolling down Great Jones Street in Manhattan ties directly to the cover image. The Ghettoblasters were like torches being passed from the inhabitants of the flatbed truck world to the cheerleader squad in another urban fantasy space.

Reed: "Cold Storage" was shot in Los Angeles and was based on a pair of black market speaker salesman we encountered. We transformed their story into a duo of college-aged girls hustling speakers out of their middle-class Mar Vista kitchen. We
realized that you can use completely factual aspects of a story—and we really got to know the guys and their whole operation, from sourcing to theft to fencing to evasion of authority—but by changing the faces, locations, and their attendant class connotations, you're left with an image that feels surreal and imagined but is essentially a documentary.

**What projects are you working on now?**
Apart from our own directing and art projects, we are excited to be in talks to collaborate once again.
Since a lot of our recent covers have been still lifes, we wanted to do something a little different this time. We don’t typically put artists or celebrities on our cover, so we chose an image with a lot of movement and an immersive backstory that we felt encapsulated music in an unlikely way. The images above were alternate cover options.
This photo comes from 'Stereomongrel,' a series of large-format images Luis Gispert made with Jeff Reed to accompany their film.