

Design Firm	Chase Design Group
Client	Madonna
Project	DROWNED WORLD TOUR



In the regular dog-eat-dog corporate world, an identity is crafted so that it is evergreen. It should last for the lifetime of the company, with only minor tweaking required now and then to update it. But in the entertainment world, although identity is just as important, it is an ephemeral thing, so it has to make a significant impact because it's there only for the briefest moment. Chase Design Group's 2001 assignment to create the identity and collateral materials for Madonna's Drowned World Tour was a case in point, and it presented significant additional challenges as well.

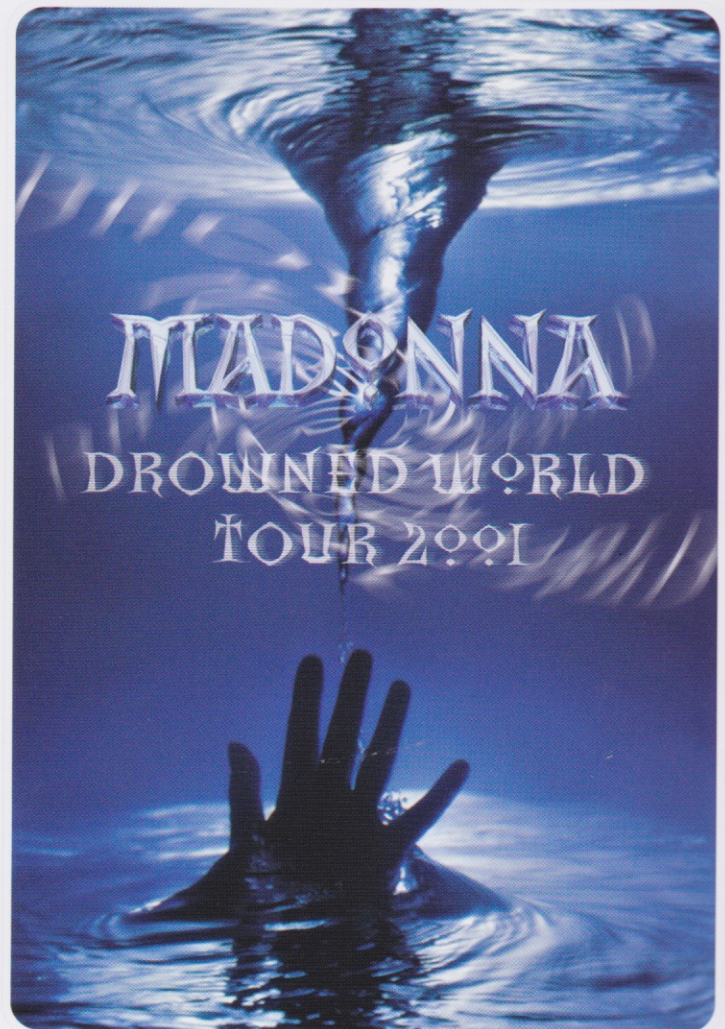
"A tour is a product, like Disneyland or any other experience," says principal Margo Chase. "You are branding an experience. The brand has to have all of the same things any logo must have to work on TV, in newspapers, on T-shirts. It's not very different from a corporate logo when you get into applications. But entertainment clients want something trendy, not permanent."

"They look at our portfolio and see Madonna and think we don't know how to do corporate. That is an issue for us."

Chase has worked with Madonna and her management company before on major projects such as the artist's *Like a Prayer* album and Girlie Show tour. But this project proved to be a particular challenge: The logo had to be completed in two weeks and had to include cultural references to everything from the Wild West to Eastern religion.

"The show was kind of an Asian-Cuban-Latino-disco-cowgirl thing. From a design standpoint, we were all wondering how we could get all of this to go together," the designer recalls.

Round one of the logo design was a whirlwind. Chase was leaving for a week's vacation in Paris when she got the original call. She wanted to turn it down, but eventually she agreed to take



The finished tour poster with the new logo in place.



Promotional T-shirts use the logo in different ways.

The final tour book and an example of type that the Chase Design Group created for song titles.

In the entertainment world, identity is important, but it is a more ephemeral thing. It's there for only the briefest moment.

These logos were part of what the Chase Design Group proposed to Madonna and her managers in the first round of logo development. The designers had been given a “global techno” direction, as well as sketches of the proposed stage design and Madonna’s song list for the tour. Here, they explored types with Asian and Middle-Eastern influences as well as techno styles.

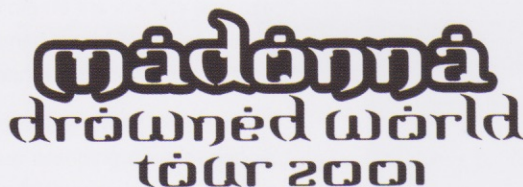
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her computer with her. For a solid day, she sat in her Parisian hotel room and generated page after page of logos.

Chase said her trials were based on the “global techno” direction provided by Madonna’s staff, the artist’s very diverse song list, and sketches from the set designer that were more like science fiction than anything else.

Although her work was well received, Chase discovered upon returning to her Los Angeles studio that the concept for the tour had been redirected: It would explore the Kabbalah as a life influence instead. Madonna is an avid student of the ancient Judaic philosophical system.

With research, Chase was able to reference many Kabbalistic symbols in the second round of designs, including the Ten Sfirot, a diagram of circles representing the ten realms of the upper worlds that are reached through prayer, spiritual transformation, and meditation.

The title of the tour, Drowned World, is another reference to the Kabbalah. It says that the harder you struggle for material things, the faster you will sink, as opposed to reaching the higher realms by being spiritual and relaxed.

“Madonna is a Kabbalah scholar, but I am a scholar of iconography. I knew right away what she wanted, how to show the religion’s meaning through symbolism,” says Chase. In the final designs, for instance, out

of the M in Madonna emerged the Tree of Life, another powerful symbol connoting the three levels of the cosmos—the Underworld, the Earth, and the Heavens. Crosses, orbs, and fountains also found their way into the second set of trials.

Chase continued to push the global-techno angle through the line styles and letterforms she created, but in the end, a historically inspired, Gothic design was selected. This disappointed the designer for two reasons: First, she felt that other designs she had presented were more appropriate for the tour, and second, she works hard to avoid being known as “that Gothic designer,” and many of the rejected logos were more of a stylistic stretch for her.

In addition to the rushed schedules and temporal nature of entertainment identities, Chase notes that this type of work presents other challenges.

“It’s not difficult for [my studio] to switch tracks from entertainment to corporate work, but it is difficult to explain that to other clients. They look at our portfolio and see Madonna and think we don’t know how to do corporate. That is an issue for us,” Chase says. “Sometimes we leave our entertainment work out of the portfolio when we are presenting to corporate clients.”

After the first round of logos was presented, the Chase designers were asked to redirect the concept to the Kabbalah, which Madonna has studied. The diagram of circles behind many of these logos represents the ten realms known as the Ten Sfirot—the Upper Worlds that can be reached through prayer, spiritual transformation, and meditation. The icons are based on the Tree of Life, another powerful Kabbalistic symbol.

The two logos below were selected to go to color, and after the color round, the one on the right was selected. “I was disappointed because I preferred the other one,” Margo Chase says. “I think that it was more interesting and it was certainly more of a stretch for me stylistically.”

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DROWNED WORLD
TOUR 2001

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