



D & A Trend Report 2025

produced with



INTRODUCTION

IN BRIEF

The D&AD Awards invites more than 300 of the best designers, advertising minds and creatives to judge over 30,000 pieces of work, submitted from 86 countries around the world.

The aim is to seek out and celebrate the very best in global commercial creativity today.

We saw a record number of entrants in 2025 and the most geographically diverse submission pool in D&AD history.

But it's not just about awarding Pencils.

Inside this report, get the scoop on the wave-making trends across the D&AD winners with the six emerging themes we analysed this year, where thumb-stopping, heart-pounding business and world-changing work stood out.

This report captures the insights from the jury rooms and the work, underscored by the patterns of change in the wider world — taking a crystal ball view of the future and capturing a set of insights and takeaways defining what it all means for the creative industry and its ever-expanding community.

2025 saw a total of
665 Pencils awarded.

The highest accolade, the **Black Pencil**, was awarded to three entrants:

Iconoclast LA's
A\$AP Rocky - Taylor Swift

FCB New York's
Spreadbeats

W Conran Design's
Designing Paris 2024

FCB New York won
Advertising Agency of the Year

Serviceplan Design took
Design Agency of the Year

DIVISION is
Production Company of the Year

Apple is
Client of the Year

Serviceplan took
Independent Network of the Year

FCB is
Network of the Year



THE 6 TRENDS IN BRIEF

Sea Change Design

In 2025, our jurors didn't just hone in on brilliant visual ideas and exceptional craft. They looked for the impact design delivered for business growth, transformation and behavioural change. Design may be viewed by many as an aesthetic discipline, but the role of the designer stretches far beyond. "Craft is very important, but the designer also needs to think like a CEO," said **Pum Lefebure**, D&AD Graphic Design Jury President and Chief Creative Officer, Design Army. "Design has to change how people think, act, and see the world".

Unmistakably Human

Building on 2024's trend, The Human Toolkit, this year's standout ideas were those that embraced what it truly means to be human: irrational, absurd, weird, wacky and always emotional. There was a rebellious return to the handmade, with work that felt unmistakably human in both concept and execution, putting the person back into personality. The message was clear: in a landscape filled with bland and automated creative, it's human feeling, impeccable craft, and offbeat thinking — the stuff a machine could never conceive — that rises to the top.

The Emotive Screen

Once playing on the sidelines of culture, gaming has quickly become a popular cultural pursuit, drawing in 3.4 billion players worldwide. In 2025 we saw a lucid shift towards gaming with purpose, tackling real-world issues head-on. Among the Pencil winners, work changed perceptions, challenged biases and increased inclusion, while resonating on a visceral emotional level. We saw real-world scenarios and culture embedded into game mechanics, as people's digital and physical lives entwine, in real-time.

Brand DNA

If cultural relevance and distinctiveness are essentials for brand identity in 2025, this year's Pencil winners showed how diving deep into brand DNA can create distinctive branding that resonates in an increasingly homogenous landscape. Rather than leaning on trends, or established design codes, Pencil winners connected brand heritage and modernity and boldly experimented with form. In the new Brand Identity Refresh category we saw work that reinvigorated existing identities while staying true to the essence, which Jury President **Frederico Gelli**, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Tátil Design described as the connection between "originality and origin".

Full Service Creator

The titans of social are coming of age, and as their influence grows, it's rewriting the marketing rulebook, as D&AD's new Creator Content category winners clearly showed. The influencer of yesteryear, who partnered with brands through simple transactional collabs, is quickly being replaced by the full-service creator. Now architects of entire brand campaigns — from brief, to script, to production — they are controlling the narrative, led by their communities. So from brands, to talent agencies, to creators themselves, how are partnerships being redefined?

Radical Candour

It's telling that brands are now held in higher regard than governments and even NGOs. Misinformation and fake news are rife. Trust is hard currency and the brands that show themselves to be irrefutably transparent and real are winning loyalty. In this year's entries we saw honesty used as a brand strategy. Brand purpose expanded its definition to include unfiltered truth-telling. These truths showed up in campaigns that underlined everyday realities — often of taboo subjects — but more than that, honesty became the most compelling proof point a brand could provide.



A.I.

AI might be the fastest growing technology in history.

But it hasn't shown up big in the Pencil-winning work...yet. Creativity is about storytelling, insight, and emotional resonance, qualities that still require a human touch. D&AD is proof of that.

Yes, the D&AD juries unanimously agreed AI is going to disrupt and upend the industry, but there was a surprising lack of AI-led creative work among this year's entrants. In 2024, 9.3% of Shortlisted and Pencil-winning work self-referenced using AI, this dropped to 7.6% in 2025. We heard jurors' concerns around IP rights, infringement and legal action.

The WFA recently identified that 66% of brands state that legal challenges continue to be the main barrier to GenAI adoption, with 77% claiming they are most concerned about intellectual property (IP) and copyright risks **[WFA, 2024]**. Consumers also have an issue, perceiving AI-generated ads as less engaging and more "annoying," "boring," and "confusing" than traditional ads **[NielsenIQ, 2024]**.

Among the work that took home Pencils, AI was selectively utilised to create immersive worlds, to streamline processes and to tweak and improve certain aspects of craft. The most interesting insights came from how and why AI is deployed and where it's headed next.

"We're past the point where using AI is impressive. Everyone's doing that. The real shift is in how well it's being used, and whether it actually makes the work any better. Look at this year's winners, when AI showed up meaningfully, it wasn't the headline. It was invisible infrastructure powering something bigger, world-building, emotional pull, and cultural urgency. The work still won because of what only humans can bring: perspective, taste, storytelling, risk," explains **Ben Cooper**, Global Executive Director, AI Products, R/GA



A.I. – STANDOUT PENCIL WINNERS

A.I.

In **Space Trash Signs**, which took home Pencils in Impact and Data Visualisation, an AI model was used to scan millions of debris data points to identify constellations, based on the shapes, source objects, and locations. Space Trash Signs sought to show how the over 160 million pieces of human-made space debris, threatens infrastructure critical to life on Earth. But people don't understand the urgency because debris is not visible. It was brought to life through a web-based virtual observatory and an immersive experience in planetariums and AR stargazing apps.

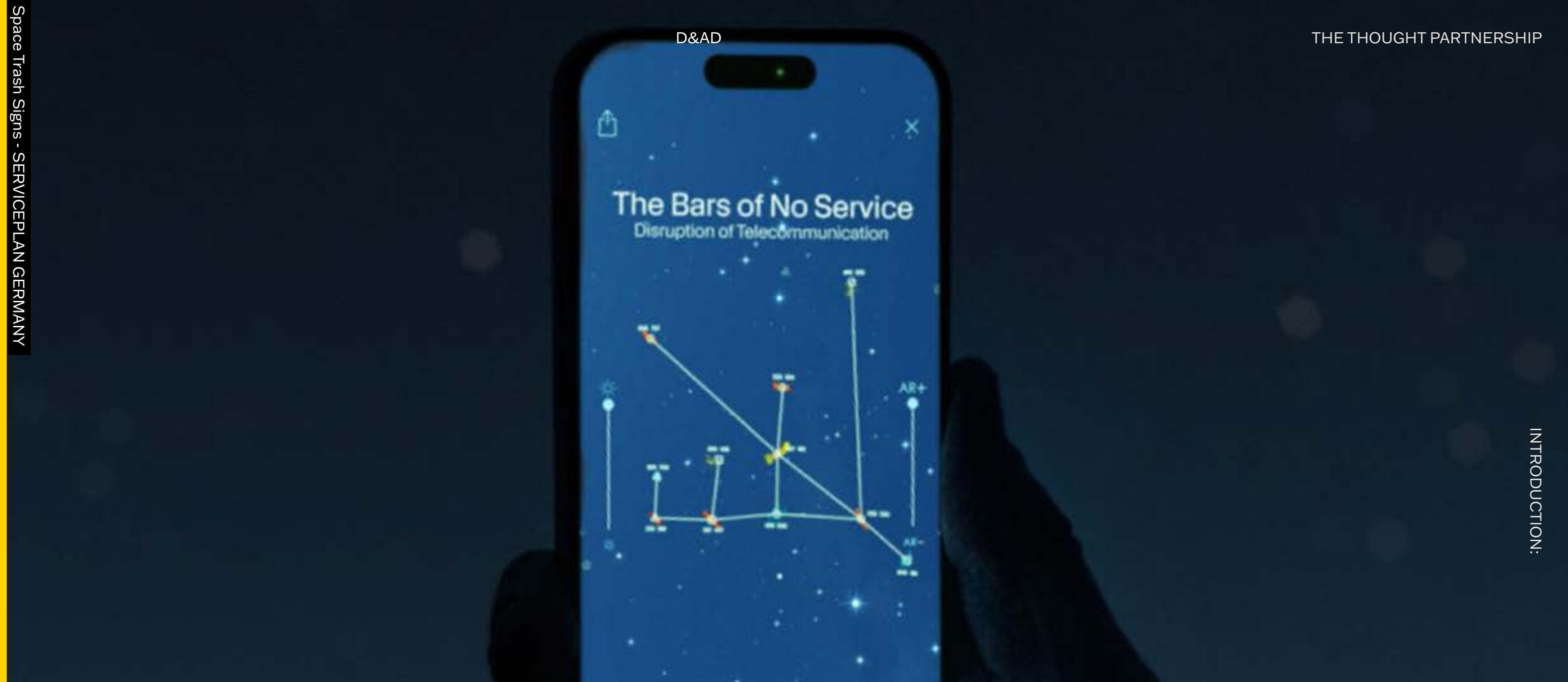
“Space Trash Signs couldn't exist without AI, but it wouldn't matter without human imagination guiding it. The same will be true for what's coming next. AI is no longer just a tool for speed or exploration, it's becoming a medium in its own right. And like any medium, it only sings in the hands of someone who knows what they're doing,” adds **Ben Cooper**.

For Michelob Ultra's **Lap of Legends** which took home a staggering clutch of awards, the team at FCB New York used groundbreaking technologies like AI, AR, and machine learning to create the first real-vs.-virtual F1 race. AI was used to create digital personas of the six racing icons, and ran deep analytics on the combined 720+ races that they drove on. These insights helped FCB program 198 unique attributes to make sure they captured each racer's patented racing style. For both of these works, AI was used in combination with AR, to make the work experientially flawless and provides a glimpse into possibilities for the future. “We also saw a noticeable increase in works that incorporated AI technology in the production process, whether in visuals, sound, or narration. Rather than relying entirely on AI, most appeared to use it selectively as a tool to improve efficiency in terms of time and cost.”

Hyunjung Park, Editing Juror and Creative Director, Cheil

Space Trash Signs - SERVICEPLAN GERMANY

Lap of Legends - FCB NEW YORK



INTRODUCTION:

A.I.



RAILING AGAINST A.I.

A.I.

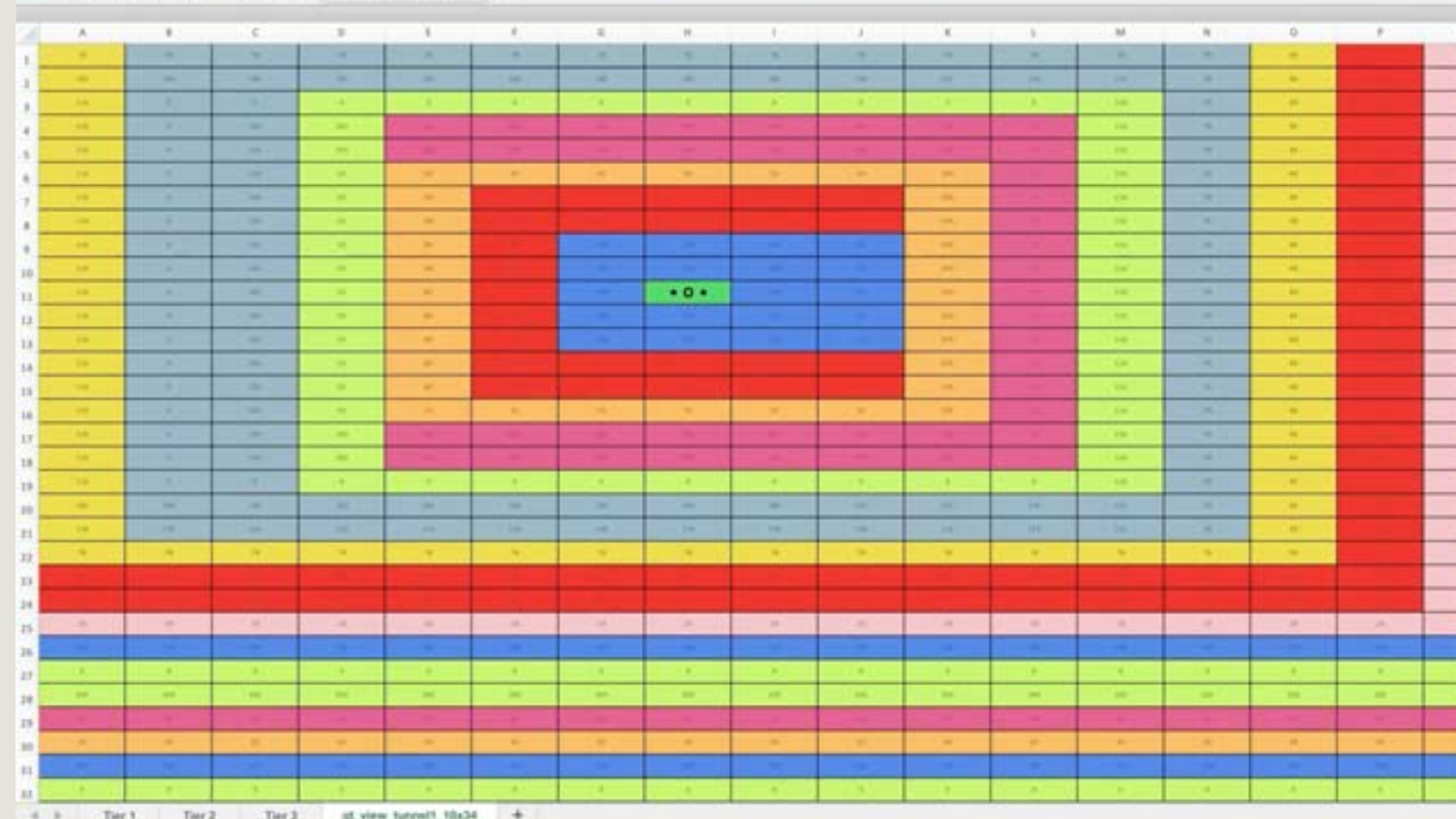
“There was a lot of work that used gen AI (to be expected) but that alone didn’t make it better. It may have helped teams work faster or more efficiently, but what made the best work stand out was still the thinking, the originality, and the craft. The tools were secondary to the idea.” **Johanna Roca Martinez**, New Brand Identity Jury President and Executive Creative Director, Accept & Proceed

Jurors this year were looking for leftfield ideas that could not have logically been created by machines, with many saying this was a lens through which they awarded work.

Spreadbeats for Spotify by FCB New York was one notable winner in this vein, taking more Pencils than any other piece of work. Mixing multiple technologies and media in a four minute music video, which were embedded into the Excel spreadsheets Spotify’s salesforce sends to its media planning clients, it gained attention for Spotify as a visual medium, not just audio. Millions of data points transformed into a striking music video, turning rows and columns into a canvas that sprang to life when the file was opened. And they built a custom algorithm to sync it to the visuals. All of this for a B2B campaign - a category not normally known for impressive creativity.

Spotlighting the immensity of physical experiential work, **The Flame That Wasn’t A Flame** provided a real-life magical moment for many, and is stunning in its simplicity. For this activation, EDF, the world leader of low-carbon electricity and the first renewable energy producer in Europe, surprised the whole world during the opening ceremony. One billion people discovered a magnificent object rising in the sky: a gold balloon and its carbon free flame. A flame without fuel, made of water and light, that doesn’t burn but illuminates. It captivated millions of people who came to see it rise every night in the Tuileries Gardens.

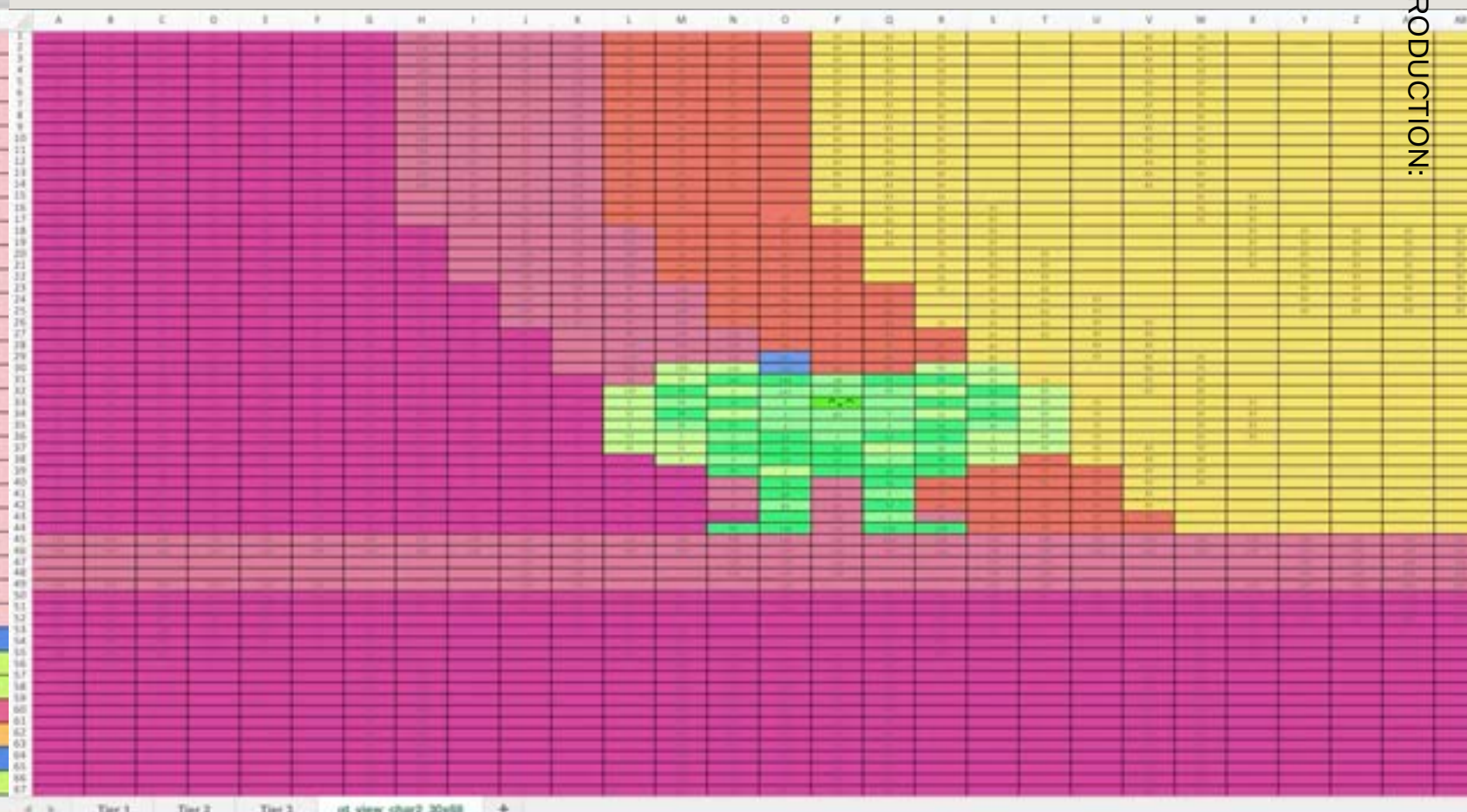
INTRODUCTION:



“We awarded the Yellow Pencil to ‘Spreadbeats’ - because if you’d prompted AI to solve the problem they needed to solve, there is absolutely no way it ever would have come up with that solution. It’s cheeky, beautiful, deeply surprising and a total labour of love.”

Katrina Alvarez-Jarratt
Illustration Juror and ECD, TBWA

INTRODUCTION:



RAILING AGAINST A.I.

A.I.

Spotlighting the immensity of physical experiential work, **The Flame That Wasn't A Flame** provided a real-life magical moment for many, and is stunning in its simplicity. For this activation, EDF, the world leader of low-carbon electricity and the first renewable energy producer in Europe, surprised the whole world during the opening ceremony. One billion people discovered a magnificent object rising in the sky: a gold balloon and its carbon free flame. A flame without fuel, made of water and light, that doesn't burn but illuminates. It captivated millions of people who came to see it rise every night in the Tuileries Gardens.

The Flame That Wasn't a Flame - BETC PARIS



“I was honestly surprised that ‘FLAME,’ which won a Yellow Pencil, gained such high recognition at first—it wasn’t initially expected to be a top contender. But as the judging progressed, it became clear that everyone was drawn to its unique power. It was the ultimate experience—something AI could never replicate—and a truly unforgettable brand activation that only this particular company could have executed. I feel fortunate that we were able to recognize and celebrate such an extraordinary piece of work.”

Kazuhiro Shimura

Experiential: Activation & Participation Juror and Group Creative Director, Dentsu

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FUTURE TRAJECTORY

A.I.

INTRODUCTION:



AI is growing at such an exponential rate, like no other technology we've seen before. Searches for "AI advertising" have grown by 557% over the past two years **[Exploding Trends 2025]**.

Rodrigo Sobral, Global Chief Creative Officer at OLIVER Agency & INSIDE IDEAS and an AI proponent believes that the way creatives use AI will shift exponentially, in line with how the tech develops. So much is changing on a week to week basis, let alone year to year. "Now things are moving so fast. We've never seen a pace like it; with upgrades and disruption happening on a weekly basis and these updates are advancing everything so much... it's such an exciting time. Now, because the moving image has finally caught up, you finally can start doing stuff that is decent," he says. Sobral believes that these new technologies will make craft an even bigger imperative, because what really matters is the storytelling and the ability to grip and hold people enraptured in an ad for 30 seconds, which is where the human artistry comes in. As we pour more and more content out into the world, what will stick is the beautifully human, emotional stories.

172 jurors responded to a D&AD survey asking for their view on whether AI would spell the death knell of the creative industries as we know them (a question asked in response to Mark Zuckerberg's declaration that his automation tech would kill advertising). Nearly all creative leaders remain confident. There was a general sense that it will redefine and reshape creativity but will never replace the human connection or the depth of creative ideas that we see in the D&AD jury rooms. Most see AI as a powerful tool and extension to what we can already offer as humans.

INTRODUCTION:

A.I.



“As a creative, I see AI not as the death knell of creativity, but as a powerful extension of it. The industry is changing. Roles are evolving. Yes, some tasks—particularly lower-level production work—may become automated. But instead of eliminating creativity, I believe AI will push us toward higher-level conceptual thinking, curation, and strategic design. Creativity is about storytelling, insight, and emotional resonance—qualities that still require a human touch. D&AD is proof of that. The level of discernment required to judge truly great work - not data - is, for now, something only humans can do. It’s less about resisting the technology, and more about learning how to steer it in culturally meaningful directions.”

Muriel Schildknecht

Brand Identity Refresh Juror and
Executive Creative Director at
Lonsdale Design

“If AI is reshaping the craft, why are we still judging it with old standards? Some of the scepticism isn’t about the work, it’s about the gap in understanding. The tools are evolving faster than the language we use to judge them. We need to shape a new way to recognise, critique and celebrate what this new craft demands, not just fluency, but taste. Not just AI in the work, but what it makes possible.”

Ben Cooper



Sea Change Design



SEA CHANGE DESIGN: THE STATS

McKinsey tracked 300 companies, finding that those with top design scores achieved 32% average revenue growth and 56% higher returns to shareholders

[McKinsey, 2022]

84% percent of companies that improve customer experience see an increase in revenue

[Forbes, 2019]

75% of Website Credibility is Dependent on its Design

[Made by Shape, 2024]

Nearly half of graphic professionals across the UK, US, France and Germany said new design tools, including AI, were adding to their professional obligations rather than reducing them, and 34 percent of organisations reported actively trying to upskill their design team to keep up with these mounting pressures

[CHILI publish report, 2024]

“As someone who came into this industry through art, not ads, I believe creativity will survive—as long as we keep our work human. Our role might shift, but our value lies in the why, not the how. AI can assist, but it can’t replace instinct, context, and the boldness to tell truths that matter.”

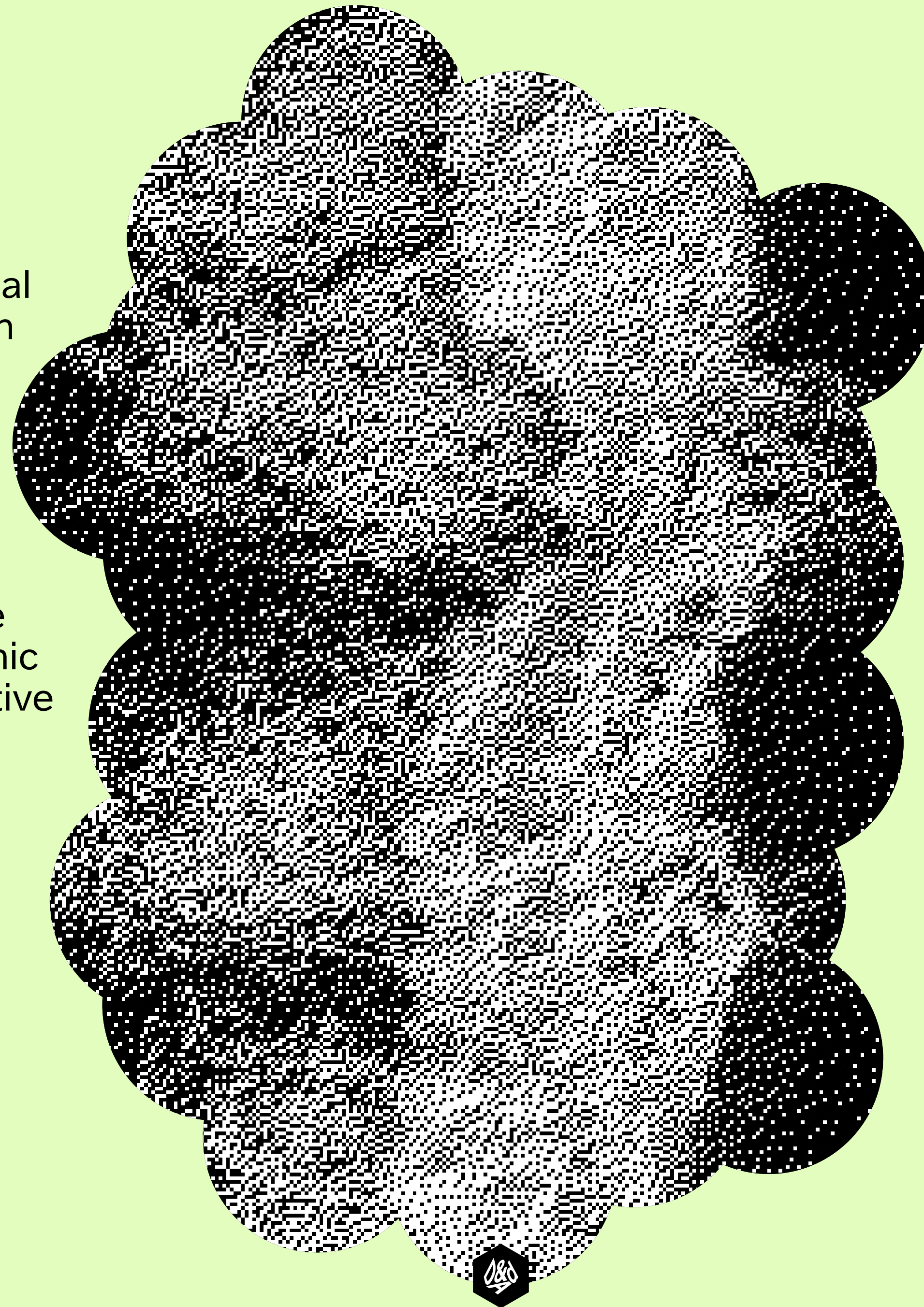
Defri Dwipaputra

PR Juror and Executive Creative Director, Dentsu Creative

BEYOND AESTHETICS

SEA CHANGE DESIGN

In 2025, our jurors didn't just hone in on brilliant, visual ideas and exceptional craft, they looked for the impact design delivered for business growth, transformation and behavioural change. Design may be viewed by many as an aesthetic discipline, but the role of the designer stretches far beyond the craft. "Design has to change how people think, act, and see the world," says **Pum Lefebure**, Graphic Design Jury President and Chief Creative Officer, Design Army. "Craft is very important, but the designer also needs to think like a CEO".



In today's turbulent climate, the best work delivers meaningful results in the long-term. And it has to be effective across a greater number of physical and digital mediums that interact and coexist. D&AD winning cases brought a human-centred approach, where design-thinking was clearly at the heart of it. "Designers face pressure from all sides with advancing technologies, new roles and visual trends sweeping through culture at breakneck speed. These are not just industry shifts; they are forces seeping into and disrupting the daily work of designers," the **New Rules Design Report by We Present** explains.

THE TREND:

SEA CHANGE DESIGN

THE TREND:

CRAFT EXCELLENCE MEETS ROI

Aesthetic appeal and tangible business impact coexisted in standout, winning cases. The work focused on the business challenge, applying creative processes that clearly understood client needs and helped brands forge deeper connections with the communities they serve, delivering impact felt far beyond the initial launch. This was exemplified in the multi-Yellow-Pencil-winning **Price Packs**. It uses a design concept that boldly places price front-and-centre to attract consumers during a cost of living crisis, resulting in sell out products for the brand, in record time.

“As a strategic idea and commitment from a brand, Price Packs is brilliant. Set against a backdrop of huge inflation and people looking for stability, the idea was strategically brilliant. During the wreckage of the pandemic, design was all about the “blanding” and how fast you could get brands out into the world...it was almost like an automatic skin that every brand was being given. I think what’s happened post-pandemic, everybody is trying to get to what their core essence is and being more expressive to own who they are.”

Lisa Smith

D&AD Trustee and Global Chief Design Officer,
Uncommon Creative Studio



DESIGNING FOR PLACE

SEA CHANGE DESIGN

In 2025, work stood out that responded to culture, connected people to place, and drove behavioural change through beautifully executed design systems. Pencil winners didn't just lean on visual references found in the usual places online, the work took cues from the brand's environmental setting, and the communities surrounding it. **New York City FC** developed an identity that embodies NY's hustle and eclectic spirit with a mosaic graphic system built from the city's topography. The rebrand aims to build confidence and aspiration, propelling the football club to greater heights of competition. And Black Pencil-winning **Designing Paris 2024** for the Paris Olympics is inspired by the Paris streetscape. The design - that was adapted seamlessly to every venue, street, and touchpoint - blended heritage and sport in a unified identity.



New York City FC - GRETEL



Designing Paris 2024 - W. CONRAN DESIGN

“It's a new approach to Olympic branding that's unique, distinctive, artistic, tasteful and modern and it's a very inclusive design. It's so iconic because the graphic design team turned the city of Paris into an arena that did not just represent sport and nations, but the entire city. It's a very thoughtful design system, used across both the Olympics and Paralympics that works across digital, motion graphics and print, exemplifying the best example of our design industry, of how design can transform the whole entire city of Paris to project to the world.”

Pum Lefebure
Graphic Design Jury President and Chief Creative Officer, Design Army

THE TREND:

SEA CHANGE DESIGN

THE TREND:

THE ENGINE OF ESSENCE

SEA CHANGE DESIGN

Pencil winners used design systems for social impact, too. **Sightwalks** is a tactile signage system, helping visually impaired people to find nearby services by tapping the sidewalk with their cane. Following a universal pattern, horizontal bars on the sidewalk indicate tiles with vertical lines representing different businesses. Or **Fit my Feet** that delivered a cost-effective design solution with large scale distribution to provide clubfoot sufferers with shoes. By leveraging India's vast network of street cobblers, McCann Worldgroup India developed a flip-flop kit that's now available through 4.5K+ cobblers, bringing accessibility and impact at scale.

“In 2025, we saw work where design solves, not just sells. When design starts with a strong insight, even the smallest surface becomes a canvas for change.”

Neha Tulsian
Packaging Design Jury President and
Founder & Executive Creative Director, NH1Design

THE TREND:



THE TREND:

SEA CHANGE DESIGN



THE WORK

SEA CHANGE DESIGN



Designing Paris 2024

'Designing Paris 2024' turned the city into a huge immersive experience, from monumental billboards to street-level activations. Inspired by the pavés, Paris's most iconic streetscape, the design blended heritage and sport, adapting seamlessly to every venue, street, and touchpoint. Each element was carefully crafted to blend into the urban fabric, while enhancing its vibrancy, ensuring that Paris itself became the Games' most iconic visual statement. From stadiums to airports, fan zones to volunteers' uniforms, this was Paris in motion.

+ IMPACT

- + The adaptive design system empowered local stakeholders, leading to record participation from host cities and partners.
- + It redefined how design interacts with an Olympic city, setting a new precedent for future editions.

Price Packs

Products flew off the shelves in record time, as people battled a cost of living crisis, with some products temporarily selling out during launch week. That was the impact of 'Price Packs' for PENNY, that was achieved through a design concept that put price boldly front-and-centre. Placed next to competitors, the packaging design helped consumers immediately spot the best prices on the shelves, promoted by an OOH campaign as striking as the packaging.

+ IMPACT

- + Public perception of PENNY as the #1 price-stable discounter rose by 2200%
- + Price Packs received incredible reviews, earning \$190 million in free media across traditional and social channels



THE TREND:

SEA CHANGE DESIGN



THE WORK

Space Trash Signs

To visualise the consequences of space pollution, Space Trash Signs was the first constellations made from space debris, showcasing the next generation of digital design. The concept was brought to life in a highly crafted way across multiple forms and disciplines, from motion design to typography. An AI model scanned millions of data points based on shape, source object, and location.

+ IMPACT

- + Gained 400 million impressions, creating brand awareness and long-term growth.
- + The project improved public engagement in the sector.
- + It increased sign-ups for the ESA Zero Debris Charter by 2300%, in time for a critical UN meeting on space pollution.



THE TREND:

SEA CHANGE DESIGN

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ON THE HORIZON

SEA CHANGE DESIGN

Just how human can the design community be? How hard can it listen to clients and consumers to solve challenges for business and society? In an AI-driven, automated world, where design processes are democratized and design tools are accessible to all, standard work will be ubiquitous, and originality rarer. So the role of designers will evolve to elevate design to problem-solve for clients at the core.

Designers will also be curators, shaping styles and tastes, but most importantly they will be emotional transmitters who put feelings at the heart of the work. “I think the future will be design with empathy that is human first, that hits people emotionally to the gut, and to the heart,” believes **Pum Lefebure**, D&AD Graphic Design Jury President and Chief Creative Officer, Design Army.

THE TREND:

“AI is already here so we are all going to use it, and it’s going to get to the point that everyone can design using AI. So as a designer, you will have to force yourself to be more human than ever before”.

Human craft, too, will be elevated in a landscape of automated creative, while handmade elements may well be the antidote to AI generated sameness. “Think of Disney 100 years ago with its hand drawn animation, there’s a sensitivity and a human involvement to the work,” Pum added. “I think craft, the stuff that’s handmade, will stand out and come back in the future”.

THE TREND:

SEA CHANGE DESIGN



For Designers:

1. Lean into emotional responses.

Consider design elements that can trigger emotional responses and evoke feelings in the audience.

2. Universal design elements.

Develop universal design elements that work across different contexts and mediums to engage physical and digital spaces.

3. Engage the handmade.

Handcrafted elements will be increasingly valuable to add a unique, human touch that AI just can't replicate.

For Brands:

1. Consider the challenge.

Before approaching the design, consider the business or social problem, or behavioural change, you are trying to solve and research it intently.

2. Maintain consistency.

When design systems now have to work across multiple platforms and mediums, how do you maintain consistency and a cohesive design language that brings audiences along emotionally on the brand journey?



THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

The Emotive Screen

THE TREND:

WILL REFINO

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

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THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

The gaming industry draws less than 5% of global ad spend, despite 3.4 billion players highlighting a huge opportunity for brands.

[Dentsu Gaming report, 2025]

When Duolingo, the most popular learning app, turned to gamification, it saw a 40% increase in seven-day retention for new learners

[StriveCloud]

70% of gamers say games help them connect with others and 36% of people watch gaming content to learn, laugh, and belong

[Dentsu Gaming report, 2025]

“Across all platforms, we saw work using technology to give marginalised and underrepresented communities a more equal footing to play and be seen just like everyone else.”

Joey David Tiempo

Gaming & Virtual Worlds Jury President and
Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Octopus&Whale



GAMING GAINS GROUND

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

Once playing on the sidelines of culture, gaming has quickly gone mainstream, now engaging 3.4 billion players worldwide **[Dentsu Gaming report, 2025]**. This is driven, in part, by the rise in mobile games, interactive platforms like Twitch, and virtual reality's growing capabilities - see Apple Vision Pro's Pencil winning film, **Submerged**, as a case in point. The screens in our pockets are windows to the world, and it's changing how we live, interact, learn and communicate. Among the Pencil-winners, we saw a shift towards gaming with purpose that tackled real-world issues head-on. Work changed perceptions, challenged biases, and increased inclusion, resonating emotionally to make people think, feel and empathise in new ways. Real-world scenarios and culture were embedded into game mechanics, as people's digital and physical lives entwine, in real-time.

THE TREND:

Advertisers' slow adoption of gaming is partly due to perception about who plays, and why. But gamers are far broader than just teenagers in their bedrooms. 40% of players are aged 25-44, including parents and professionals **[Mediapost]**, and 46% are women – that's over 1 billion players worldwide **[Bryter, 2024]**. Gaming thrives through its committed fandoms, who meet in and around their favourite games, and VR experiences and esports are also bringing players together virtually, and it's just as well. Feelings of isolation are rising everywhere, and 1 in 6 people worldwide are now affected by loneliness, bringing significant impacts on health and well-being **[WHO, 2025]**.



THE TREND

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

GAMING FOR ALL

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

Standout Pencil winners unlocked the gaming space for unrepresented communities, breaking down barriers to inclusion and challenging biases. **Interface of Humanity Powered by NTT** is the world's first interface allowing bedridden people to become players, share experiences, and communicate seamlessly with non-disabled gamers. Meanwhile, **Code my Crown** equipped coders to create inclusive gaming experiences that reflected Black gamers' identities, through its guide to coding Black hairstyles. This was driven by the insight that 85% of Black gamers feel underrepresented in video games, specifically when it comes to the depiction of their hair textures.

“Code My Crown is a beautifully executed step toward greater Black representation in gaming. It reflects a meaningful shift, where brands are investing in inclusive storytelling and creative collaboration, rather than relying on opportunistic hacks or token efforts that skim the surface of gaming culture.”

Joey David Tiempo

THE TREND:

Code My Crown - EDELMAN UK



THE TREND:

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN



REAL AND VIRTUAL WORLDS COLLIDE

As everyday realities become increasingly digital, driven by mobile devices, physical lives are blending and interacting. It's no wonder we saw realities merge in this year's Pencil-winning work. Multiple-Pencil-winning **The Final Exam** challenged the false narrative that video games cause gun violence by educating the gaming community on life-saving gun legislation and holding elected officials accountable in the real world. In **The Co-Worker**, for IKEA, a new store was opened on **Roblox** where anyone could experience what it's like to work at the store and earn a real salary. Or **The Everyday Tactician** that directly addressed gamers' dreams of doing the things they do in game, in real life, by giving a Football Manager fan the chance to start a career as a tactician for Bromley FC.

"We loved it for many reasons, I think primarily for me, it is the crossover of the online / offline world, of these two universes; the digital universe in which we play video games and the real world, and how they converge,"

Jorge Calleja

Gaming & Virtual Worlds Juror and Global Head of Creative, Meta & Reality Labs, Meta

The Co-Worker - MOTHER LONDON



The Everyday Tactician - MCCANN LONDON



THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

THE TREND:

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

EMOTION MEETS ENTERTAINMENT

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

Whether in school, or at a football match, work that resonated with our jurors was visceral and emotionally charged. In **Haaland Payback Time**, Clash of Clans turned football star Erling Haaland's haters into players, by letting them raid his in-game village. By fueling rivalry and offering revenge, the campaign used rage to engage. And **Cat God Helpline** for The Battle Cats, added a comedic twist with the in-game 'Cat God' offering advice via LINE, a platform popular with gamers.

THE TREND:

Haaland Payback Time - DAVID NEW YORK
 Cat God Helpline - R/GA JAPAN

THE TREND:

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN



THE WORK

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN



The Final Exam

‘The Final Exam’ drops players into a harrowing school shooting scenario, where survival depends on finding real-life gun control bills hidden throughout the game. Created by non-profit Change the Ref and WebCore Games, it confronts the gaming community with a stark reality, and a call to action. By turning gameplay into activism, players can tag politicians on social media, demanding real change. With over 190 million gamers in the U.S., this powerful experience challenges the false narrative that games cause violence and instead uses the community to drive gun reform.

“The Final Exam gamifies a powerful social message, using interactivity to evoke empathy for victims of school shootings in the U.S. It speaks to an audience that’s grown numb to passive messaging – one that now demands agency, involvement, and emotional stakes in the narrative.”

Joey David Tiempo

Graphite Pencil / PR / Digital & Social
 Graphite Pencil / Impact / Campaign Communications
 Wood Pencil / Digital Marketing / Storytelling
 Wood Pencil / Experiential: Activation & Participation / Virtual Activations
 Wood Pencil / PR / Public Affairs
 Wood Pencil / Entertainment / Experiential
 Wood Pencil / Health & Wellbeing / Gaming & Virtual Worlds
 Wood Pencil / Health & Wellbeing / Experiential

THE TREND:



THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

THE TREND:



THE WORK

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN



we developed an interface that allows free control of avatar movement without physical motion.

Interface of Humanity Powered by NTT

Marking the first steps towards a future where everyone can participate, NTT launched 'Interface of Humanity', an initiative aiming to address the social limitations faced by individuals with physical disabilities, empowering them to connect, create, and dream bigger through innovative technology and gaming. This campaign enabled bedridden individuals, including children, to participate in playing games and competing in eSports by utilising electromyography (EMG) interface technology to read electrical signals from muscles.

THE TREND:

“Accessibility remains a key theme in gaming because play should be for everyone, including those with limited mobility. The 'Interface of Humanity' initiative gestures toward that ideal, aiming to break down barriers so all players can participate, compete, and win,” says **Joey David Tiempo**.

Wood Pencil / Health & Wellbeing / Gaming & Virtual Worlds / 2025
Wood Pencil / Health & Wellbeing / Experiential
Wood Pencil / Health & Wellbeing / Innovation
Wood Pencil / Experiential: Activation & Participation / Use of Emerging Technology
Shortlist / Gaming & Virtual Worlds / Esports



THE TREND:

Code My Crown

For digital natives, representation in gaming is as crucial as representation in real life, and research showed that 74% of developers would play a role in promoting better representation of textured hair in video games - if they knew how. Partnering with Black 3D artists, animators & programmers, Dove and Edelman UK created 'Code My Crown' a 200-page guide to coding textured Black hairstyles. This equipped coders to create inclusive gaming experiences, reflecting Black gamers' identities. Major gaming studios have adopted the guide, reaching 34K employees and serving 229M gamers.

Wood Pencil / Gaming & Virtual Worlds / Use of Avatars / 2025

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

ON THE HORIZON

THE EMOTIVE SCREEN

“Gaming for good is necessary because gamers still face real issues: toxicity, lack of representation, gatekeeping, and more. That’s why we’ll keep seeing attempts to address these problems through “goodvertising.” But gamers deserve better. They deserve real solutions, not surface-level ideas designed to win awards, but experiences that actually change the way we play and belong.”

Joey David Tiempo

THE TREND:



ON THE HORIZON

Our virtual future is becoming a concrete reality. As VR progresses and access is democratised, it will likely take gaming to the next level of immersion as Web3, the 3D decentralised version of the internet, grows. “2026 will be the year Web3 goes mainstream,” said blockchain developer Sarah Lee. “We’re solving the key challenges that have held back mass adoption.” As 2025’s Pencil winners clearly showed, gaming has the power and potential to bring real-world issues to the front of our collective consciousness - and there is further it can go. NGOs have been experimenting in the gaming space for some time. In 2022, Greenpeace turned the most popular online game, Grand Theft Auto, into an immersive climate change simulator, leading to a 40% increase in Greenpeace donations.

On the D&AD Festival stage, Gaming & Virtual Worlds Jurors, **Claudio Lima**, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, DRUID CREATIVE GAMING, and **Jorge Calleja**, Global Head of Creative, Meta & Reality Labs, Meta, discussed the need for greater diversity in gaming to engage the next generation of players, as well as the slow integration of brands into gaming partnerships. “It still feels like people are buying their way into the game. But I think we’re going to start to see more branding inside video games,” Claudio explained. Standout examples from 2025’s Pencil winners include **Burger to King**, where for the first time, a brand turned in-game audio commentary into a new media channel by tricking the in-game commentary technology to say ‘Burger’ ‘King’ over and over again. Or Michelob ULTRA’s multiPencil winning **Lap of Legends** that utilised ground breaking technologies like AI, AR, and machine learning to create the first real vs. virtual F1 race.



THE TAKEAWAYS

For Brands:**1. Readdress the gender balance.**

Nearly 50% of gamers in the US are female [**Statista**], yet games are still predominantly designed for and by men. So how can marketers and gaming companies create products that speak to underrepresented gaming communities?

2. Think in-game collaborations.

As gaming goes mainstream, now is the time to consider gaming as an advertising channel. Think beyond simple sponsorship opportunities, into deep, culturally embedded collaborations.

3. Never disrupt the gameplay.

Marketers must think about how to embed themselves into gaming in ways that feels authentic without interrupting the game play - the thing players hate the most.

For Gaming Companies:**1. Make gaming a purpose-led pursuit.**

How can gaming companies ensure more games are purpose-led to actively make change in the world and engage diverse player communities?

2. Increase access.

How can you think creatively about how to use gaming to reach new audiences and increase access to grow the gaming community.

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

Full Service Creator

THE TREND



FULL SERVICE CREATOR

61% of consumers say they trust recommendations from creators more than they trust brand advertising

[Sprout Social research, 2025]

Creators are predicted to overtake traditional media in ad revenue in 2025

[WPP data, The Guardian, 2025]

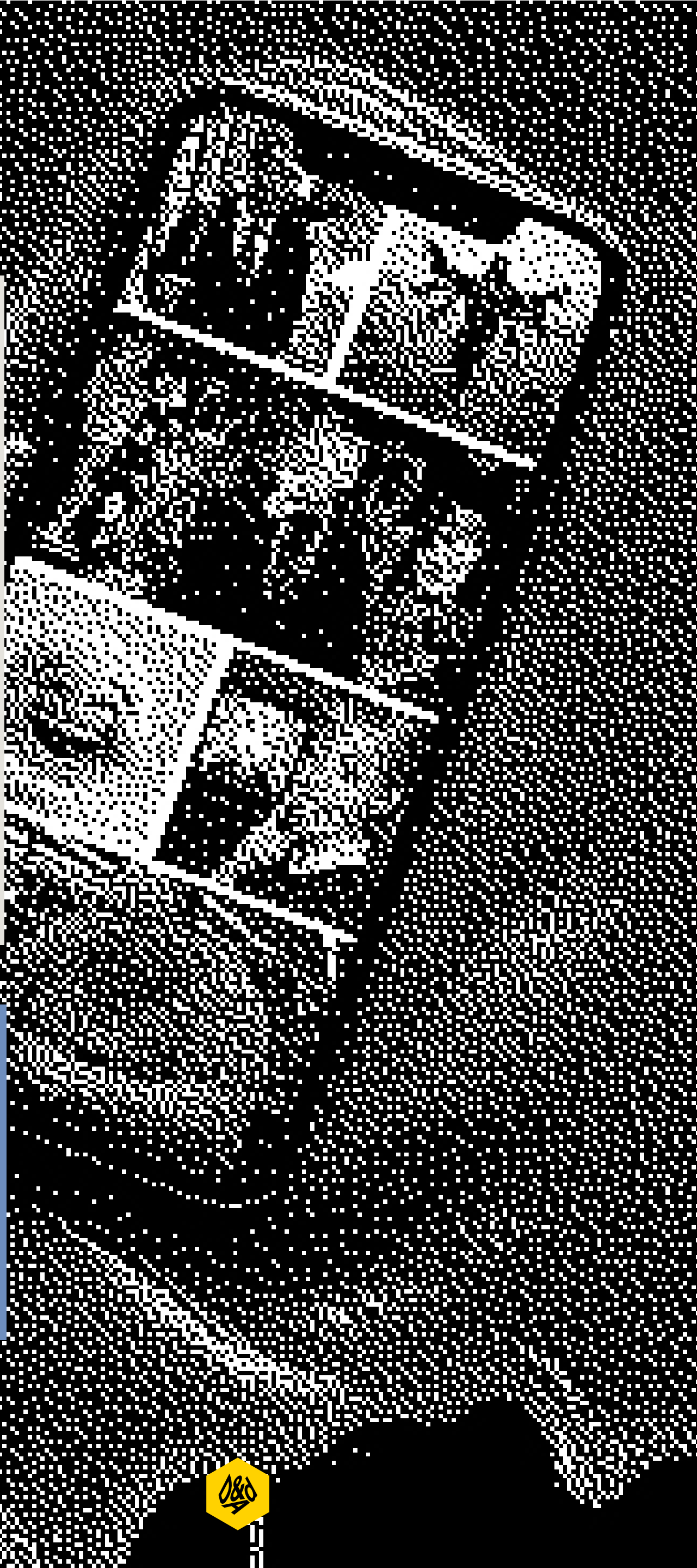
53% of creator ads don't have a brand in the first 3 seconds. But only 14% are watched past the first 3 seconds

[WARC and CreativeX research, 2025]

“A lot of brands are now trusting creators to work with them collaboratively, with their brand, and also add their voice into it. I think that’s what makes really strong collaborations”.

Sydney Bautista

Creator Content Juror and Talent Manager, SHFT



The New Era of Influence

So you think you understand creators? Think again. The titans of social are coming of age, and as their influence grows, it’s rewriting the marketing rulebook, as D&AD’s new Creator Content category winners clearly showed. The influencer of yesteryear, who partnered with brands through simple, transactional collaborations, is quickly being replaced by the full-service creator.

Now architects of entire brand campaigns - from brief, to script, to production - they control the narrative, led by their fans. Now, people are finding their communities across online platforms, where “internet lore” is the storytelling form they gravitate to. It’s harder for brands to penetrate this new world order - the natural domain of creators - so it’s no surprise that Unilever announced it was about to spend half its ad budget on social, as part of a new “influencer-first” strategy. To compete, brands and agencies have to embrace the creator economy as the next big marketing evolution.

THE TREND:

FULL SERVICE CREATOR



WHO ARE THE CREATORS?

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

The Gravy Race - AMV BBDO



THE TREND:



Malekus. The Last 600. - HAVAS COSTA RICA/BETC HAVAS



D&AD 2025 showed how definitions of influencers are changing. Who creates, and why, is no longer clear-cut. Enter Hiqui, the indigenous influencer in the Graphite Pencil-winning **Malekus. The Last 600**, battling to keep her culture alive through her content. Beauty brand The Rainforest Lab created five products alongside Hiqui, based on the Maleku's ancestral techniques, and presenting her as the campaign's face. Or Pencil-winner **The Gravy Race** that pitted the biggest cat influencers against each other, like Little Puff with 32.7M TikTok fans, that proved influencers are even moving beyond the human.

“ I think The Gravy Race showed us that creators don't have to be human, so long as they're relevant, authentic and just super fun to look at. So who could have imagined that two cats racing to lick off the last bit of gravy could actually enrapture and capture the imagination of 1000s of people, not just on social, but across billboards. That's amazing.”

Pei Ling Ho

Creator Content Juror and Executive Creative Director, Publicis Chemistry

THE TREND:

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY

UNTITLED
CASE

In the end, people count on people. So when trust, authenticity and aligned values are the currency brands must exchange with their audiences, it's no surprise companies are collaborating with creators to provide a personal voice, trusted by their communities. Due to their rising influence on consumer behaviour, creators are now an important component in building brand allegiance, engaging new audiences, and even tackling societal issues. In **The Ordinary Life Hearing Test** the Foundation for the Deaf partnered with over 30 popular Thai content creators to tackle a growing epidemic of hearing loss, by turning everyday content into simple hearing tests.

คลิปไม่ได้เสีย
แต่ทำมาเพื่อให้คุณ "เช็กการได้ยิน" ได้

This video isn't broken, but it's made for you to "check your hearing"



THE ENGINE OF ESSENCE

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

The Techno Train - DSB / ACCENTURE SONG NORDICS



THE TREND:

The Techno Train - DSB / ACCENTURE SONG NORDICS



THE TREND:

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

Award-winning work showed that creators are now a cultural force, and their communities are helping brands integrate into culture and break through the deluge of content across the many platforms influencers dominate, from Instagram to TikTok. Pencil winning **The Techno Train** transformed the cultural relevance of DSB train company, by bringing TikTok train conductor Simone Sørensen, and DJ Rune Rask together to run a techno rave on a moving train. And **Amazon Money Can't Buy Experiences** was designed around Belgium's unique culture, co-creating with three of Belgium's top creators to cut through.

The best work felt native to the platform, not forced. What stood out were campaigns that leaned into the creator's natural tone, audience, and storytelling style.

Neha Tulsian

Packaging Design Jury President and Founder & Executive Creative Director, NH1Design



THE WORK

Amazon – Money Can't Buy Experiences

Amazon offered exclusive, money-can't-buy IRL experiences co-created with three of Belgium's top creators: The first ever Prime Turbo Triathlon with Average Rob, an exclusive one man show by Pablo Andres, and the first-ever rave party in an Amazon warehouse with Amber Broos. These IRL experiences were shared and amplified by creators on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube in an approach that disrupted audiences' expectations of Amazon messaging.

By shifting away from product-focused messages to focus on emotional connections, the campaign helped Amazon stand out from competitors.

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

THE TREND:

Amazon Money Can't Buy Experiences - BEINFLUENCE EUROPEEVA KRUSE



THE TREND:

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

THE WORK

Yellow Pencil / Graphic Design / Integrated / Yellow Pencil / Media / Retail
 Graphite Pencil / Brand Identity Refresh / Brand Strategy / Wood Pencil / Art Direction / Experiential

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

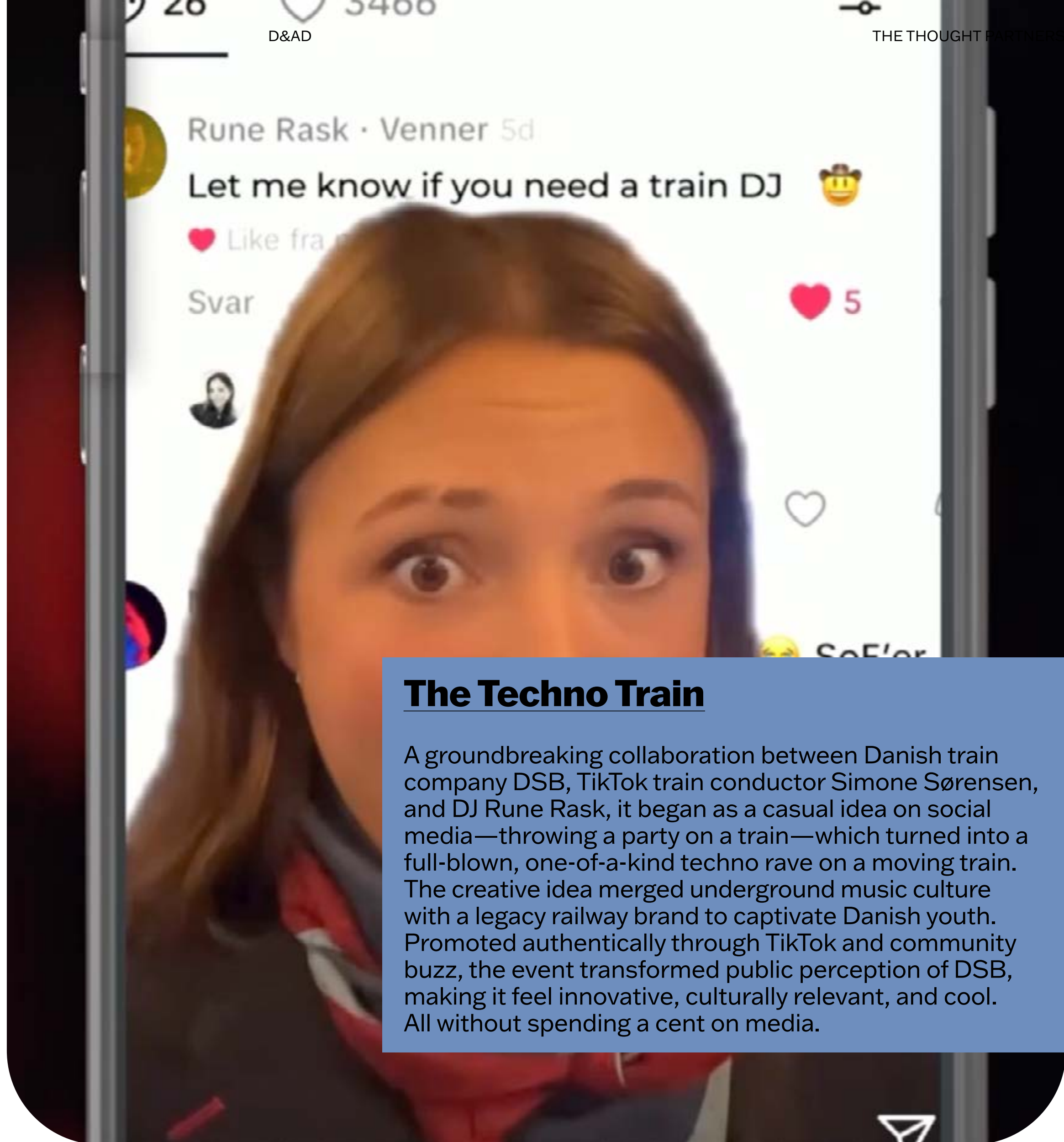


Malekus. The Last 600

Malekus, the smallest indigenous tribe in Costa Rica, has been endangered for over 10 years. Hiqui, a Maleku influencer, battles to keep their culture alive through her content, showing their ancestral way of life and inviting people to visit them. Beauty brand, The Rainforest Lab, worked with Hiqui to create five products based on the Maleku's ancestral techniques, inviting others to know their culture and visit their tribe. Hiqui also became the campaign's face, ensuring it didn't feel like cultural appropriation, but as a platform for Malekus to spread their culture.

"Typically we see creators as people creating short form content to talk about themselves and what they're passionate about. But what made The Last 600 truly stand up is the fact that The Rainforest Lab was able to collaborate with the creator, Hiqui, to actually preserve the Costa Rican culture and prevent it from extinction."

THE TREND:



The Techno Train

A groundbreaking collaboration between Danish train company DSB, TikTok train conductor Simone Sørensen, and DJ Rune Rask, it began as a casual idea on social media—throwing a party on a train—which turned into a full-blown, one-of-a-kind techno rave on a moving train. The creative idea merged underground music culture with a legacy railway brand to captivate Danish youth. Promoted authentically through TikTok and community buzz, the event transformed public perception of DSB, making it feel innovative, culturally relevant, and cool. All without spending a cent on media.

THE TREND:

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

Wood Pencil / Creator Content / Co-Creation / 2025

ON THE HORIZON

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

The tables are turning. As people's consumption habits change, user-generated content is expected to surpass advertising income from professional media in 2025 **[Guardian]**. Get ready for a monumental shift that will challenge existing marketing structures as we know them. It's no wonder that alongside Unilever's 'influencer-first' strategy announcement, agencies such as VCCP are also changing their internal operations to prepare for a creator-first future.

"The creator economy is both maturing and multiplying. It's an economic engine," **Emma Harman**, Co-CEO at social and creator agency Whalar, explains. "We're talking millions of jobs, global revenue streams and a new kind of entrepreneurship rooted in creativity and identity. The term 'creator' will evolve because it will no longer be a subset of marketing — it will be central to how brands communicate, build communities and grow. But it won't be centralised. Brands will need to evolve their organisational structures, tech stacks and mindsets to truly operationalise in a decentralised creator-first world.

THE TREND:

The power dynamic is also shifting. Brand deals used to be the only path to success. Now, as creators lean into entertainment, build subscription models and monetise through ad revenue and owned products, they gain independence."

YouTube — where influencers launch careers — has become the number one TV streaming channel for younger generations **[Ofcom annual report, 2025]**, helping to grow the creator economy to greater heights. What's more, the growth in social commerce — expected to reach \$2.9 trillion by 2026 **[Statista]** — will put increasing control in creators' hands, helping brands to expand into social commerce as trusted, relevant voices.



THE TREND:

FULL SERVICE CREATOR

38

For Creators:

1. Explore long-form.

Explore opportunities for scripted and longer-form content to offer engaging content beyond short form.

2. Shape content around your passions.

Continue to develop formats for your community and the brand's audiences linked to your interests and passions.

3. Fuel the cultural conversation.

Understand your role in fueling the cultural conversation and partner with brands that truly share your values.

For Agencies:

1. Be the bridge.

Build collaborations where there is a meaningful synergy between the brand, the creators, and their communities.

2. Manage the creative dynamic.

Facilitate the dynamic between creators who need the freedom to create and brands who have to give up some control while maintaining brand reputation.

3. Focus on well-being.

The life of a creator can be challenging and many have been hit by burnout, [the Guardian reported](#), as the pace and churn of content creation takes its toll. As demand grows, how can agencies both promote and protect creators.

For brands

Whalar's **Emma Harman** gives her advice for brands on partnering with creators.

"There are multiple ways. Creator partnerships can be scaled micro-influencer programmes driving retail, deep community plays building cultural relevance, always-on content machines powering your paid strategy, or even full-blown co-creators of product and brand IP. There's no single model, but there are some non-negotiables:"

1. Start with a clear strategy.

Random gifting and last-minute briefs aren't it

3. Pay creators properly.

They're not media placements, they're businesses and people.

4. Prioritise diversity.

Not just in face, but in voice, audience, and lived experience.

5. Treat creators as creative partners.

They know their audience better than you ever will.

6. Play the long game.

Short-term, transactional campaigns don't build trust or equity.



UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

Unmistakably Human

THE TREND:



UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

Emotionally engaging, clearly branded, and consistently run campaigns generate significantly higher profits
[System 1 Creative Dividend, 2025]

The success rate of emotional marketing campaigns stands at 31%. Ads portraying above-average emotional responses have a 23% potential sales increase
[Nielsen 2022]

A brand with 5% market share airing Non-dull ads would see annualised gains of 1.3 points of share each year. That same brand making that same high investment into Extremely Dull ads – the lowest quartile – would see only 0.1 points of share gain each year. In total, to get the same predicted results as the Non-dull ads, brands showing Extremely Dull ads would need to invest a staggering \$109bn extra.
[System 2024]

THE TREND:



“As someone who came into this industry through art, not ads, I believe creativity will survive—as long as we keep our work human. Our role might shift, but our value lies in the why, not the how. AI can assist, but it can’t replace instinct, context, and the boldness to tell truths that matter.”
Defri Dwipaputra
PR Juror and Executive Creative Director, Dentsu Creative

THE TREND:

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN



UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

Building on 2024's trend, The Human Toolkit, this year's standout ideas were those that embraced what it truly means to be human: irrational, absurd, weird, wacky, and always emotional. There was a rebellious resurgence of the handmade, and the work was distinctively human in idea and execution, putting the person into personality. The message was clear: in a landscape filled with bland and automated creative, it's human feeling, impeccable craft, and offbeat thinking - the stuff a machine could never conceive - that rises to the top.

“In part, this is a counterpoint to the surge of AI made work, but they’re not always mutually exclusive. This trend boldly underlines, with the human hand, that the work that’s unmistakably conceived and made by humans (flaws and all) resonates the most with audiences. “Creativity is about storytelling, insight, and emotional resonance—qualities that still require a human touch,”

Muriel Schildknecht
 Brand Identity Refresh Juror and
 Executive Creative Director, Lonsdale Design

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

THE TREND

THE TREND



UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN



Among the Pencil winners, the full range and depth of emotions were clearly on display, showing us just what it means to be human in 2025. In **Someday**, Apple showed how music and thoughtful design can re-shape our emotional landscape. While **The Observer Magazine - Anxious?** used an image of chewed pencils to evoke tension and anxiety in its visceral cover. We also saw funny ideas shine through again this year, as brands wake up again to humour as an effectiveness multiplier and memory magnifier - 90% of consumers are more likely to remember an ad if it's funny and 80% of people are more likely to do business with a funny brand again **[Oracle 2024]**

Other Hand - GOODBY SILVERSTEIN & PARTNERS SAN FRANCISCO/EA Somoeday - TBWA MEDIA ARTS LAB LOS ANGELES



THE TREND:

In **Other Hand**, Cheetos cleverly highlighted the humorous challenges fans face when their dominant hand is occupied eating the snack, leaving them to navigate daily life with their non-dominant hand, and **Twix - Second Screen Stare-down** took a human behaviour, people staring at their phones instead of paying attention, and exaggerated it to absurd, hilarious extremes.

“I was happy to see the use of humour in the submitted work. In chasing trends, awards, and self-referential brilliance, we risk losing touch with what actually resonates with people outside our bubble. If we don't recalibrate towards work that connects meaningfully—whether it's funny, useful, moving, or disruptive—we'll continue speaking mostly to ourselves.”

Cristiano Pinheiro
Radio and Audio Juror and Creative Partner at PUNCH Audio

The Observer Magazine - Anxious? - THE GUARDIAN Twix - Second Screen Stare-down - ADAM&EVEDDB

Anxious? You might be addicted. Meet the psychotherapist who argues it's time to break the habit

THE TREND:



UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN



Emotional resonance

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

“I was happy to see the use of humour in the submitted work. In chasing trends, awards, and self-referential brilliance, we risk losing touch with what actually resonates with people outside our bubble. If we don’t recalibrate towards work that connects meaningfully—whether it’s funny, useful, moving, or disruptive—we’ll continue speaking mostly to ourselves.”

Cristiano Pinheiro

Radio and Audio Juror and
Creative Partner at PUNCH Audio

THE TREND:

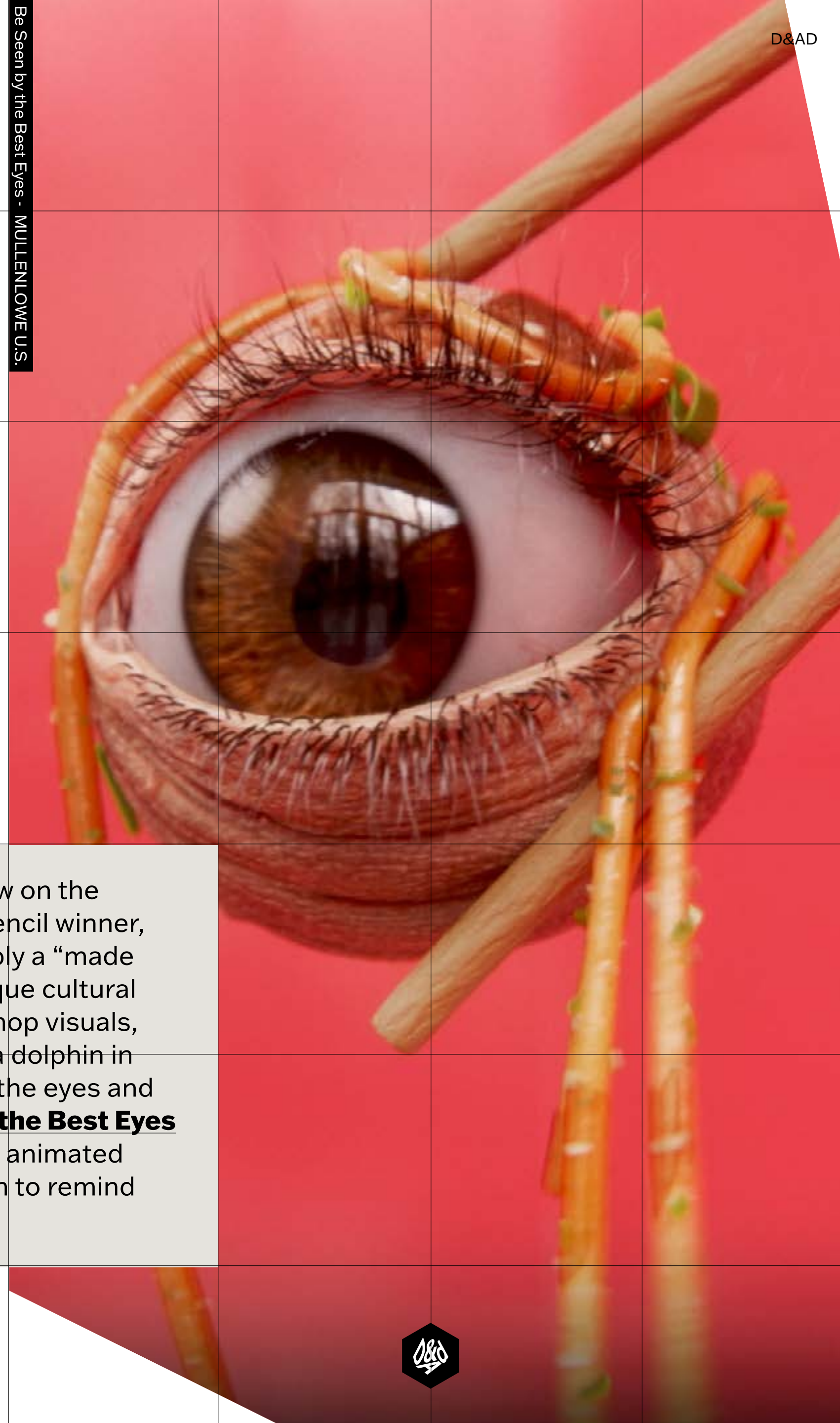
THE TREND:

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN



ALL IN THE IMAGINATION

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN



Be Seen by the Best Eyes - MULLENLOWE U.S.

A\$AP Rocky - Tailor Swif - ICONOCLAST

THE TREND:

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

THE TREND:

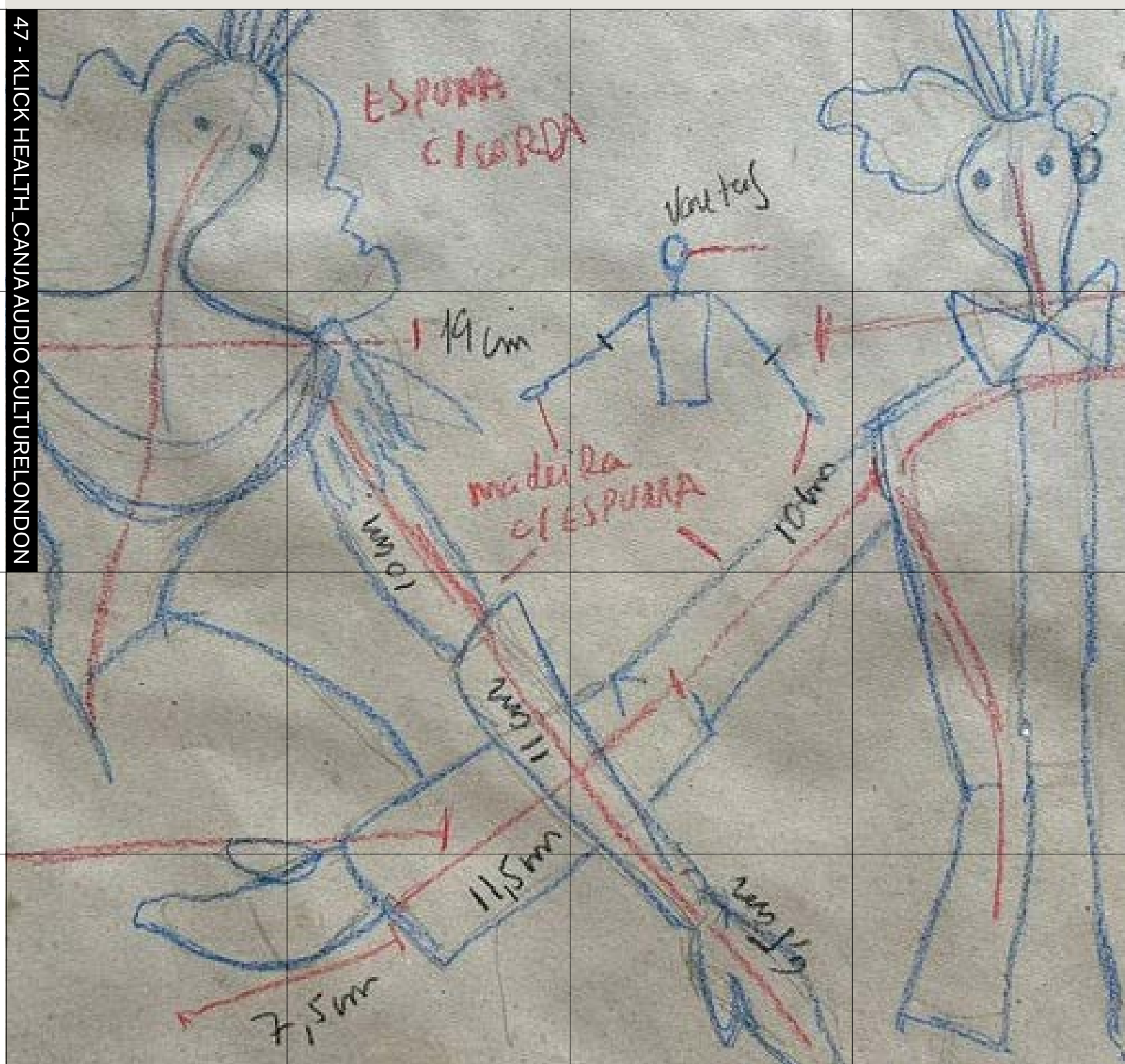
Jurors in 2025 looked for leftfield ideas that drew on the distinctly human power of imagination. Black Pencil winner, **Taylor Swif** with its kinetic energy is unmistakably a “made by humans” creation. Set in Ukraine, with a unique cultural texture, the video challenges conventional hip-hop visuals, featuring surreal imagery—a dog driving a car, a dolphin in a puddle—that provides a 3.15 minute feast for the eyes and ears. While multiple Pencil winning **Be Seen by the Best Eyes** for the ADC Annual Awards is a series of surreal animated shorts using humour, absurdity, and bold design to remind today’s creators why real recognition matters.



IMPERFECTLY CRAFTED

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

We also saw more intentional DIY, scrappy and lo-fi work. But make no mistake, there was no lack of artistry; in fact it was the opposite. We saw a clear tip towards the traditional crafts: stop-motion animation, graphic design, set design, and long-form copywriting. **Port Magazine** drew on the messy reality of hand-drawn signatures to reflect the personalities of its cover stars, and **47** delved into the power of resilience in a hand-made, animated stop-motion film created for and by the Down syndrome community. In the Jury Insights. Less polish, less perfection, more impact.



47 - KLICK HEALTH CANVA AUDIO CULTURE LONDON

THE TREND:



Port Magazine - UNCOMMON CREATIVE STUDIO

THE TREND:

“One surprise trend was how many entries used deliberately lo-fi or “anti-design” aesthetics, messy, raw, and unpolished, but in a really intentional way. It felt like a rejection of slick perfection in favour of personality and punch.”

Fabiana Xavier
 Art Direction Juror & Creative Director,
 Head of Brand and Content, FABS

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN



THE WORK

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

THE TREND:

THE TREND:

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

A\$AP Rocky - Taylor Swift

The “Taylor Swift” music video is a visually captivating narrative that fuses surreal imagery with urban culture. Set against the backdrop of Kyiv, Ukraine, the video features a series of avant-garde and meme-inspired scenes designed to challenge traditional music video aesthetics and engage a digitally savvy audience.

“We saw a music video with a real concept—which, trust me, is something we rarely see anymore. This year has been full of narrative-driven films and short cinematic pieces where music is no longer the central character. Only a few videos, like this one, embody what I believe is the true definition of a music video idea. Shot in Kyiv, Ukraine, just before the war, it captures the visual—and even political—chaos of our times: the overdose, the gluttony of the Internet, and a reflection on the AI-fueled madness of today’s zeitgeist. It’s innovative in its narrative flow, and groundbreaking in its construction. A total work of art—from direction, art direction, and concept to editing—with invisible visual effects that seamlessly serve the story rather than distract from it. That’s why my jury and I have nominated it for a Black Pencil in Direction, as it brings together all of these elements into one powerful whole.”

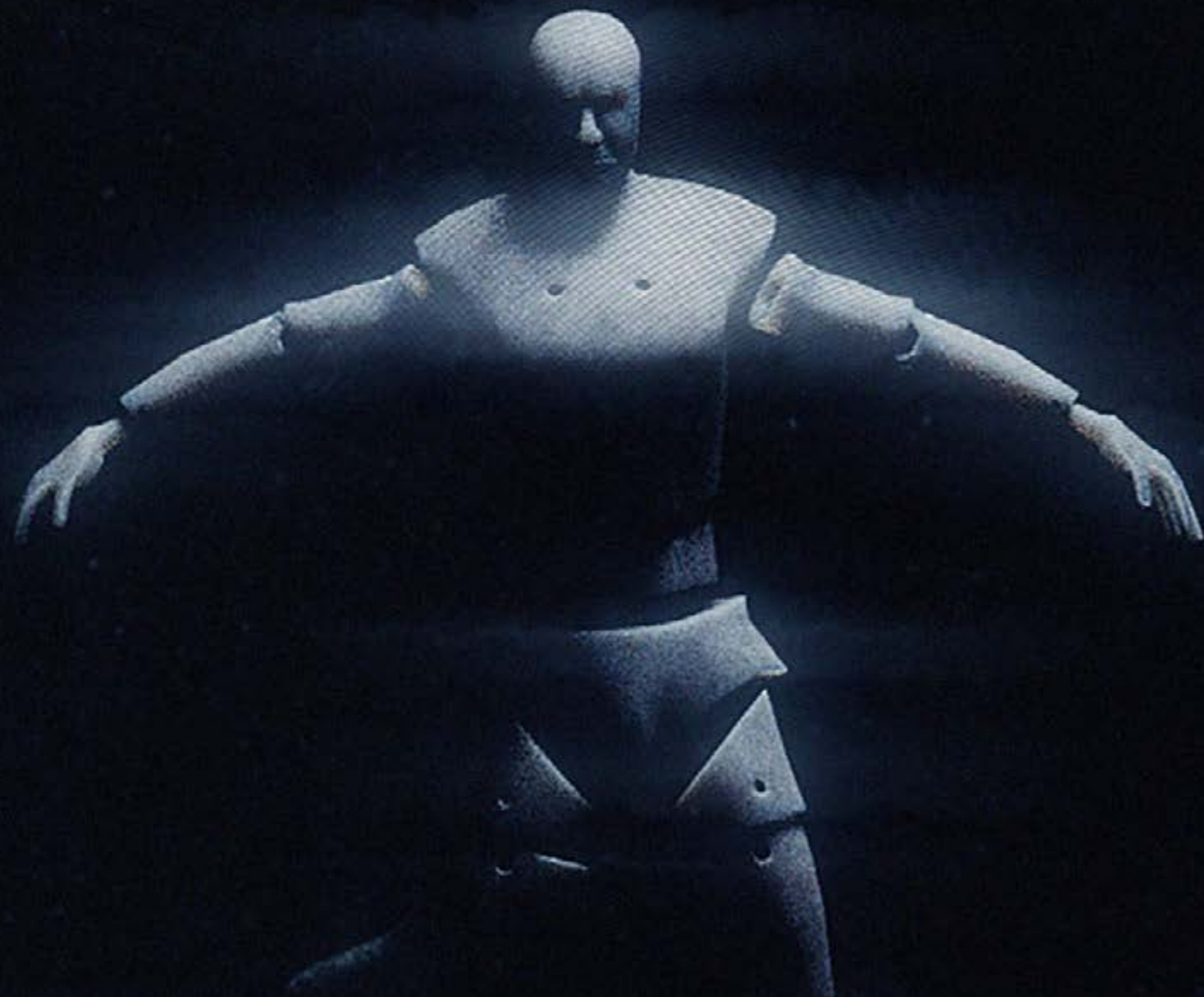
François Rousselet

Music Videos Jury President and Director, DIVISION

Black Pencil / Music Videos / Direction / 2025
 Yellow Pencil / Music Videos / Art Direction
 Graphite Pencil / Music Videos / Concept
 Graphite Pencil / Music Videos / Visual Effects
 Shortlist / Music Videos / Cinematography



THE WORK



Diary of a Head Injury

Blending nuanced media and a powerful script, the story follows Nick after his motorcycle crash and sheds light on the many challenges that go with a traumatic brain injury. At its core, the film explores the idea that the accident created ‘two Nicks’—one he was only beginning to understand. It concludes with a powerful message: ‘take hold of the hand’—a poignant reminder that help is out there, if you know where to reach for it.

Yellow Pencil / Animation / Mixed Media / 2025
Wood Pencil / Casting / Voice
Shortlist / Sound Design & Use of Music / Sound Design



Port Magazine

Port Magazine has always been a publication centred around telling people’s stories. The new cover design centres around the talent hand-writing their own title on their respective covers. Each drew their own version of the Port logo with no prompts, ensuring each cover design felt unique and reflective of the person’s character. Port’s A/W24 issue featured six coverstars: Andrew Garfield, Sebastian Stan, Mustafa the Poet, Barry Keoghan, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Colman Domingo.

“I’ve noticed an interesting trend toward more handmade, gestural, and expressive processes—embracing imperfection and noise, with work that borders on the artistic. In my view, it’s a reaction to the current intense wave of AI usage.”

Clayton Caetano

New Brand Identity Juror and Head of Branding and Design, Itaú

Yellow Pencil / Animation / Mixed Media / 2025
Wood Pencil / Casting / Voice
Shortlist / Sound Design & Use of Music / Sound Design



ON THE HORIZON

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

As AI content becomes cheap and ubiquitous, and User Generated Content dominates our screens, it will be the work that really leans into what makes us human that will truly stand out in the future, and even carry a premium. Work that brings real emotion and human understanding will be rarer, riskier, and more valuable. It's what consumers are looking for.

In the lockdown years and after, we saw a sea of sameness in creative output, from “blanding” to multiple piano laments accompanying sad montages; there's no doubt that the pandemic hangover lasted too long. Optimistically, we may now be out the other side. \$198bn is the cost of producing dull media, according to research by **Dr Karen Nelson Field and Adam Morgan**. What's the opposite of that? Interesting, edgy, emotional, risky, fun and funny media.

THE TREND:

Advertisers can't be oblivious to the power of raw, authentic emotion and humour. Inextricably linked to the ambient mood of society and the world at large, marketers need to decide if they are there to reflect the mood around them, or offer a new perspective to the world. No brand wants to miss the mark emotionally, or be tone deaf to the world around us (or they risk watching their share price plummet).

UNMISTAKABLY HUMAN

THE TREND:



THE TAKEAWAYS

For Brands:**1. Take a creative leap of faith.**

These ideas often take a dose of brand bravery, but first you need the buy-in. Find and share case studies of creatively effective work that pushes boundaries and delivers results. D&AD can help here.

2. Lean into imperfection.

The odd flaw, or tiny imperfection won't matter if the work is emotionally resonant, authentic and real. In fact, imperfection can make the work more original and relatable.

3. Bring something algorithms can't.

Real emotion, vision, and understanding of the human condition will make work stand out.

For Agencies and Partners:**1. Human ingenuity needs unlocking.**

What problem are you trying to solve? Look at lateral thinking exercises and other kickstarters as a team to get ideas flowing.

2. See AI as your collaborator and friend.

There is a plethora of new tools and upgrades that you need to stay on-top of to enhance your creative output.

3. Challenge and inspire your clients.

Demonstrate the kind of craftsmanship and ingenuity that drives business results and highlight the cost of blandness.

Brand DNA



DECODING THE DNA

BRAND DNA

94% of the world's population recognises the Coca-Cola logo

[Brandemic, 2024]

Only 5% of brands are considered unique by consumers

[Brand Aperture]

JKR Global and Ipsos found that only 15% of all brand assets they tested were truly distinctive

[Ipsos, 2024]

The top 100 brands in the world are worth a combined \$22.2 trillion

[Interbrand Study, 2024]

If cultural relevance and distinctiveness are essentials for brand identity in 2025, this year's Pencil winners showed how diving deep into brand DNA can create distinctive branding that resonates - in an increasingly homogenous landscape. This trend builds on 2023's Ownable Iconicity, where design distilled the iconic element of a brand's DNA and reimaged it through a new lens.

Rather than leaning on established design codes, this year work connected brand heritage and modernity, boldly experimenting and playing with form and meaning. Why does it matter? Well cutting through to new and existing audiences is harder than ever, against the avalanche of content-clutter.

Winning work in the new Brand Identity Refresh category reinvigorated existing brand identities, while staying true to the essence, which Jury President **Frederico Gelli**, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Tátil Design described as the connection between "originality and origin".

This was beautifully articulated in D&AD's 2025 awards design refresh, by JKR, that took the instantly recognisable Pencil, and reimaged it in a new identity, celebrating creativity in motion with a suite of interactive graphics and a custom typeface: Pencil Gothic.

THE TREND:

BRAND DNA



POWER IS IN THE HACK

BRAND DNA



THE TREND:

Thanks For Coke-Creating - VML NEW YORK



THE TREND:

BRAND DNA

In 2025, we saw world-famous brands hacking their deeply established identity to evolve, and engage their audiences. Pencil winners underscored that brands that understand their core DNA can experiment more freely. At the core of the identity for **Nike Run** was a new mark with a storied history: the RUNSWOOSH. Taking inspiration from an iconic Nike lockup, dating back to the 1980s, the brand name was replaced in the original with a simple and declarative “RUN”. Meanwhile, Coca Cola - **Thanks for Coke Creating** relinquished control of its 139- year-old logo, allowing audiences to reinvent it. When everyone now has the tools, and the platforms, to share and create, can brands really hold on to their identities with the same vigour?

“It’s interesting, because Coca-Cola completely breaks the rules of brand guidelines, really embracing these new expressions and the different ways people can write Coca Cola on cans. This shows us that guidelines are something we need to rethink, because when the brand is alive, they need to reestablish a relationship with people all the time”.

Frederico Gelli

Jury President and Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Tátil Design

A HARK BACK TO HERITAGE

Pencil winners used local heritage and brand history as visual stimuli to create new aesthetic meaning. For instance, the new brand identity for **Heaven Fish** seamlessly integrates local heritage with a modern brand aesthetic, promoting economic progress and sustainable practices within Honduras's Yoro indigenous community. And in **Bellissimo**, the brand identity refresh for Fila, reconnects the brand with its heritage by reintroducing the iconic 1973 logo and its "F box" as a core element, using its clean lines and circular form to create a cohesive, adaptable system. Lastly, **Zhaoping General Mountain** for General Mountain tea in Zhaoping, highlighted the region's tea heritage with a design that evoked the image of tea fields. For the packaging, they recreated the font using traditional embroidery made locally, generating sales while boosting local employment rates.

GRIT & GRACE

Heaven Fish - OGILVY HONDURAS

Bellissimo - SID LEE MONTREAL

Zhaoping General Mountain - L3 BRANDING

THE TREND:

BRAND DNA

THE WORK

BRAND DNA

**Nike Run**

As the first to bring the running shoe to the masses, Nike began to lag in the category they pioneered. Tasked with helping to make Nike the run brand once again through a robust visual identity, PORTO ROCHA devised a solution to recharge 'Nike Run' by going back to its roots. At the core of the identity is a new mark with a storied history: the RUNSWOOSH. Taking inspiration from an iconic Nike lockup dating back to the 1980s, it replaces the brand name in the original with a simple and declarative "RUN." Referencing the past but oriented toward Nike's future, the lockup is a bold call to action with logo, type, and color as simple yet powerful anchor points.

"Nike has a business challenge. Everybody knows they have moved far from the category they invented and this very brave idea to switch the Nike logo type to "run" in the same typography with the same colors and the same identity, I think reconnects the brand with its target audience and community."

Frederico Gelli

Yellow Pencil / Brand Identity Refresh / Enterprise 50,000+ / 2025

**Building The Full LEGO Set**

The new LEGO system was created to build cohesion globally and empower creative play for those designing brand experiences, as much as the people who enjoy them. The full LEGO brand identity established cohesion and recognition for the brand by fundamentally honouring the product, allowing creativity to flourish in display as well as in play. Each piece was painstakingly designed to work as part of a wider system, including a new global Brand Typeface, LEGO Typewell™, available in 120 languages.

"It was really nice to see the journey of a big brand like Lego, using the main block as a source of inspiration for the entire design language. The branding is completely connected with the product and with the essence of this amazing company."

Frederico Gelli

Graphite Pencil / Brand Identity Refresh / Enterprise 1000+ / 2025

THE TREND:

BRAND DNA

THE WORK

TIROLER
FESTSPIELE
ERL



Yellow Pencil / Sound Design & Use of Music / Adapted Music / 2025
Graphite Pencil / Entertainment / Scripted Short Form
Wood Pencil / Sound Design & Use of Music / Audio Composition

TIROLER
FESTSPIELE
ERL



Tiroler Festspiele Brand Design

The new brand design for Tiroler Festspiele Erl opera festival draws from the 400-year-old passion play tradition, reflected in the crown of thorns in the municipal coat of arms and in the architecture of the Festival Hall to inspire the core element of the design: thorns. The idea breaks with the elitist codes of classical festivals by placing cows — symbols of rural Tyrol — front-and-center. Surprising, humorous, and hyper-local, the work blends modern architecture and bold graphic elements in dialogue with its countryside setting. The rebranding delivered measurable success. The Winter 2024/25 season achieved a record-breaking 94% capacity, vs. 80% in Winter 2023/24.

“You could see that the people behind this project had a lot of fun. The jury room was just joyful talking about this, everyone was smiling. So there’s something that we must say about the feeling of a piece of work. Featuring the buildings and the cows in a campaign is a bold move, because usually (in opera) you feature the big events. It gets to a level of craft that I personally love. I’m really keen to see what they do next and how they evolve it”

Johanna Roca

New Brand Identity Jury President and Creative Venture Partner, Accept & Proceed

THE TREND:

BRAND DNA

ON THE HORIZON

In the future, brand identity is likely to shift more towards immersive brand experiences, and digital outputs that go far beyond a simple website or app. Emerging technologies - AR, VR - and sonic branding, will sit side by side with static assets. This means branding will need to be more adaptive, to seamlessly tie to the many mediums and platforms in a brand's cannon. **Creative Boom** predicts that "motion is the future of brand identity" where static identities are brought to life on screen, both highly interactive and interchangeable.

In a lesson from Coca-Cola, it will be harder for brands, perhaps, to clutch so tightly to clearly defined guidelines and control logo use when user generated content becomes increasingly ubiquitous. Brands may need to manage copycats and adaptations while remaining distinctive and recognisable.

As AI and generative design tools become the branding norm, and a daily part of the designer's toolbox, understanding brand DNA will be evermore crucial. The challenge - as this trend sets out - is how to anchor branding in meaning, and evolving in ways that will chime with new audiences, while always staying connected to the brand's core. As brands evolve, **Frederico Gelli** believes, "The next step is to find different ways and resources to guarantee this connection - making this invitation in a more original way".



THE TAKEAWAYS

BRAND DNA

“The quest for brand difference and distinctiveness is not merely a strategic imperative but a fundamental driver of commercial success in today’s competitive landscape.”

[Kantar, 2025]

For Designers:

1. Support brands to harness their essence.

Designers can use the original brand story as a foundation for visual and communication design, and heritage can help to shape where an identity goes next.

2. Don’t stay static.

As our visual lives grow increasingly digital, think about how branding can be adapted with motion, without losing its essence.

3. Think about flexible design systems.

Adapt design to local culture and language, that even allows for co-creation with audiences.

For Brands:

1. Look inwards toward your brand DNA.

What do you stand for as a brand, and what unique value do you bring to people in the world?

2. Be consistent.

Build a consistent branding and communications language across your entire business to increase recognition.

3. Rule-break as a rule.

Global brands can consider how experimentation and rule-breaking can move away from rigid brand guidelines when co-creation is becoming the norm.

THE TREND:



BRAND DNA

Radical Candour



REACTIONARY TRUTH TELLING

RADICAL CANDOUR

80% of people trust brands they use, which is more than those who trust in business, media, government, NGOs, and their employer

[Edelman Trust Barometer, 2025]

61% of people globally have a moderate or high sense of grievance. People around the world feel betrayed by leaders and left behind by the societal institutions meant to support and serve the public

[Edelman Trust Barometer, 2025]

94% of consumers are more likely to be loyal to a brand that's completely transparent

[Forbes 2024]

THE TREND:

It's a telling development that brands are now held in higher regard than governments and even NGOs. Misinformation and fake news is rife. Trust is hard currency and the brands that show themselves to be irrefutably transparent build loyalty. We have entered the era of radical candour, where to win over world-weary consumers brands are wearing their truth and spreading honest positivity.

Among this year's Pencil winners we noticed brand purpose (a perennial theme) expand its definition to include unfiltered truth-telling. These truths showed up in campaigns that underlined everyday realism - often of taboo subjects - but more than that, honesty became the most compelling proof point a brand could provide. At a time when up to 8 million audio and video deep fakes are flooding the internet **[Context News]**, truth now feels like more of a discretionary choice than a given. So brands that prioritise it will win the trust of consumers.

Juliana Cobb, Commerce Juror and Head of Creative at 72andSunny New York believes we're underestimating truth at our own peril:

“The power of human truth and human inventiveness are the key ingredients to memorable work that stands the test of time. There's a reason we can go back to the Guardian Three Little Pigs film or the Got Milk campaign and it feels as resonant today as it ever did.”

THE TREND:

RADICAL CANDOUR



WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

RADICAL CANDOUR



ARRIVED AT 17:35

BURGER
KING

Bundles of Joy - BBH LONDON

The best work often breaks taboos and opens up conversations that are subject to social stigma. This year's Pencil-winners did just that. Insight-rich work that tapped into universal human truths, like Burger King's **Bundles of Joy** and Essity's **Never Just a Period**, showed how campaigns that depict real-life at its most messy, muddled and raw, earn the most attention. For BBH London, who created Bundles of Joy, the insight that post-partum women often crave a giant burger drove the idea. For Essity, the truth is that women experience surreal frustration about their bodies due to centuries of inadequate education. Yes, every piece of work should be based on an insight, but insights that pave the way to brave, breakthrough creativity are held in high regard.

"Bundles of Joy was a really special piece of work. I remember, those of us in the jury room who were parents couldn't help but smile at this piece and connect it to our own emotions after the delivery of our children. And that was powerful - the ability of an ad to make us relate to an emotion of craving. It's power to take us on a trip down memory lane. And the pure cheekiness of the brand to somehow manage to now establish itself as a great craving in that moment. It sold us on the brand and its functional aspects like delivery while convincing us to buy into its higher equity. We loved it and we wanted to award it unanimously. And that's often the stuff that most great, award-winning work is made of."

Kalpesh Patankar

Press & Outdoor Jury President and
Group Chief Creative Officer; VML India

THE TREND:

RADICAL CANDOUR

THE TREND:

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

RADICAL CANDOUR

We saw brands taking nostalgic cues to create straightforward packaging where products were exactly what they said they were. Particularly when it came to food and drink packaging, design was truthfully simple; a reaction against rampant over-complication and unfair pricing. For **Price Packs**, its packaging is literally the message. Emblazoned boldly with its price as the focal point, the design shows consumers exactly what they're getting and for how much. When you print your prices front-and-centre, no one can question your transparency. Apple consistently does an excellent job of showing what's possible when you use its products - evidencing the power of its features in producing the very work that consumers see. The multiple Pencil-winning **Submerged** not only demonstrates the promise of Vision Pro, but showcases Apple Immersive Video as the next frontier in filmmaking.

“The Apple ‘Vision Pro’ movie experience truly impressed me. If this is the future of movie-watching and gaming, it has the potential to dominate the industry.”

Lili Jiang

Experiential Activation & Participation Juror and
Executive Creative Director, Cheil Hong Kong

THE TREND:

Price Packs - SERVICEPLAN GERMANY



Submerged - APPLE MARCOM_TBWA MEDIA ARTS LAB LOS ANGELES



THE TREND:

RADICAL CANDOUR



BOLD CONFRONTATIONS

RADICAL CANDOUR

Speaking truth to power has always been a motif in art and culture, but it's getting more sophisticated, enabled by social media and tech hacking. This year, we saw winning work playfully take on scammers, social media giants, healthcare and even the algorithm. **The Loss of Freedom Is Never Obvious at First** was awarded for the beautiful simplicity of the idea and execution, contrasting with immersive work, like **The Sound of Violence**. A hard-hitting campaign for Save the Children Hong Kong, it saw the latest Dolby Atmos 7.1 Surround Sound technology play out the sound of violence, to illustrate the reality that it is all around us, before screenings of Hong Kong director and screenwriter Nick Cheuk's directorial debut, Time Still Turns the Pages.

THE TREND:



THE TREND:

RADICAL CANDOUR

The gap
between
autocrat's
beautiful
first words

and the
crackdown
they soon
imposed on
free press.



THE WORK

RADICAL CANDOUR

**Bundles of Joy**

The food women eat straight after birth can often be one of the most amazing and unforgettable meals of all time. With many mothers turning to Burger King for their first postpartum meal, 'Bundles of Joy' was a campaign born from that insight. The divisive work sparked an international debate about motherhood, misogyny and female representation in advertising. Launched on September 26th, the day most babies are born in the UK, the campaign helped celebrate the ultimate feeling of food satisfaction through OOH, film and a bespoke hotline that provided free Whoppers to new mums.

Graphite Pencil / Casting / Print
Wood Pencil / Integrated / Large Enterprise
Wood Pencil / Press & Outdoor / Poster Campaigns
Shortlist / Casting / Film

**Never Just a Period**

This moving spot highlights how Libresse continues to build on its long-running platform, tackling education gaps, taboos and fears with raw honesty. It critiques centuries of inadequate education, insufficient research, and the widespread dismissal of women's health concerns. The film employs comedy and exaggerated mixed media to humorously explore the surreal and often frustrating experience of inhabiting a body without the essential knowledge to fully understand it.

Yellow Pencil / Sound Design & Use of Music / Adapted Music / 2025
Graphite Pencil / Entertainment / Scripted Short Form
Wood Pencil / Sound Design & Use of Music / Audio Composition

**Shot on iPhone - ¡Suerte**

¡Suerte! is a 13-minute film shot on iPhone, following the fantastical journey of a young Hispanic artist that overcomes creative block through an intense connection with his roots. Blending surrealism with deep emotion, the film brings to life characters inspired by Mexico's iconic game of Lotería, guiding our hero—rising star of Música Mexicana,—along the way. The result is an unexpected musical and cinematic collaboration, crafted for Mexican and Hispanic American Gen Z, and elevated by the latest camera innovations of the iPhone 15 Pro.

Graphite Pencil / Direction / Long Form / 2025
Graphite Pencil / Sound Design & Use of Music / Artist & Brand Collaboration
Wood Pencil / Production Design / Long Form
Wood Pencil / Sound Design & Use of Music / Original Composition

RADICAL CANDOUR

Truth-telling and transparency should really be table-stakes for brands - and as trust wanes in traditional institutions in an increasingly complex world, it must remain a priority. Brands are now more trusted than governments - so companies must build on this by looking at other ways to enrich people's lives: whether it's joy, convenience, or utility. For many consumers, what matters most is the personal benefit that brands bring, so how can products and services make their life richer and more rewarding and what role can design and craft play in achieving this?

As truth-telling becomes ubiquitous, brands must transform honesty into something truly useful for people. Acknowledging the truth (uncomfortable as it might be) and providing useful solutions is where the boldest brands are headed. We saw glimpses of this in winning work where brands proved their utility, like **LG Brasil's Menopause Mode** which helps pump out a refreshing breeze to menopausal women. Or in Yellow Pencil Winning **Transition Body Lotion**, which helps address the unique skin issues transgender women face during gender reassignment therapy.



For Brands:

1. Keep it simple.

Don't try too hard and think about how your brand can lean into human truths without jumping on the bandwagon of new ideas.

2. Embed brand truth internally.

Before communicating externally, embed the brand truth internally. If you want to highlight your transparency you need to be unimpeachable. Taking a political/ societal stand can provoke negative backlash when it's done insensitively.

For Agencies and Partners:

1. Gently challenge your clients.

Challenge until you are able to distill down what their product/ service truths are. How can you simplify them to not overwhelm consumers?

2. Focus on differentiation.

Challenge whether these features and brand promises are truly unique and differentiated, to the extent that they are ownable to your client.

3. Show what the brand truly stands for.

Interrogate the best way to show and evidence what the brand does and stands for - in a way that is joyful to people's lives. Thinking about how I can make people's lives better, easier, richer.



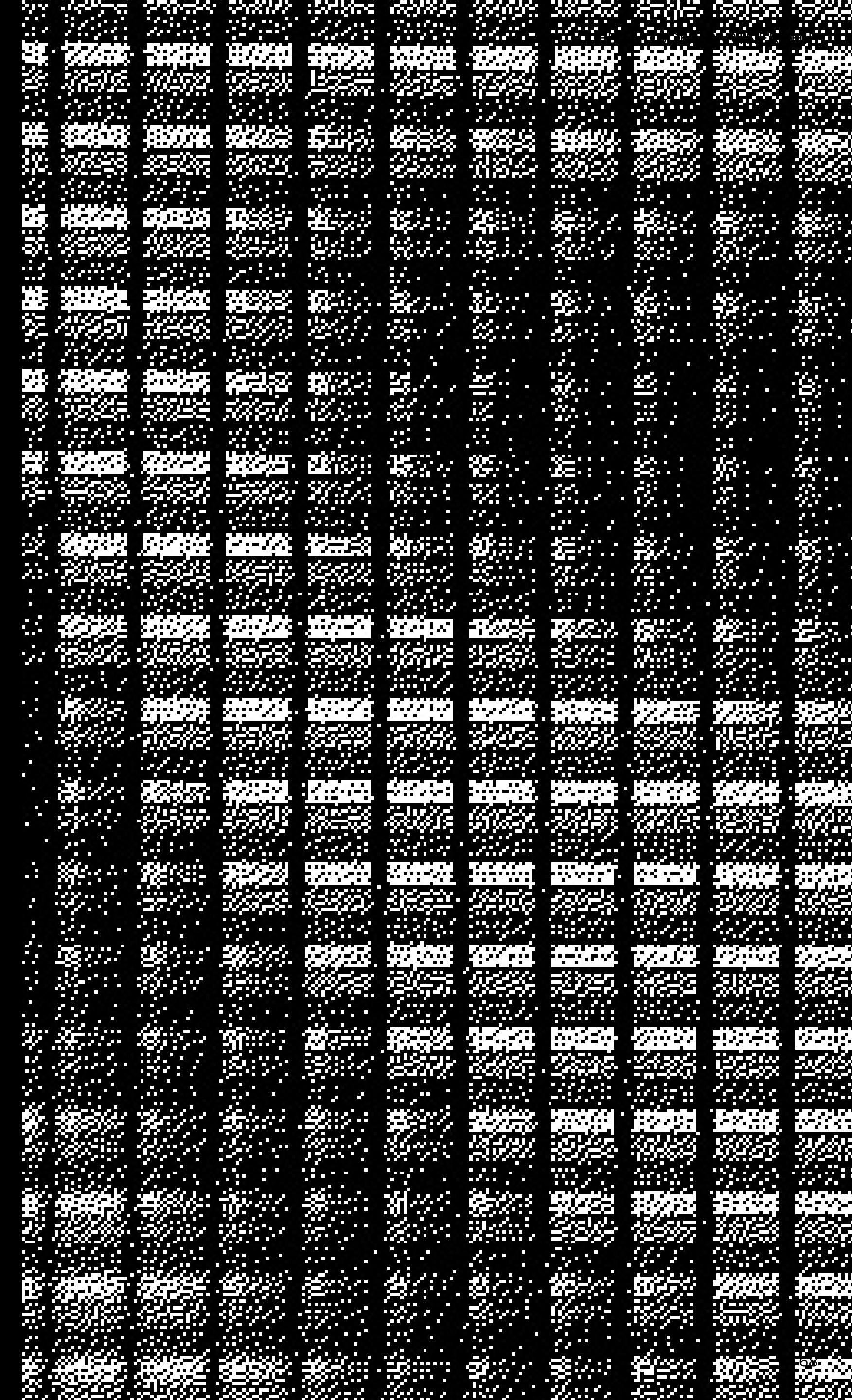
FINAL THOUGHTS

In 2025, the creative landscape shifted in response to a deepening desire for connection.

As platforms and channels proliferate and our lives become increasingly digital, the work that resonated most this year built emotional bridges: Tapping into communities and shared cultural touchpoints, and bringing people together through unifying experiences, from immersive VR to large-scale experiential work - the brush was broad.

The rise in AI is democratising creativity, placing powerful tools in the hands of everyone, and inviting a new era of co-creation between brands, audiences, and technology. This will undoubtedly upend old systems, and this year's D&AD showed how the industry is rising to the challenge through creating deeper, more human interaction.

The trends signal a renewed focus on crafting work that creates long-term emotional impact in an increasingly fragmented world. While the tools and canvases evolve, the central challenge remains the same: enable audiences to feel deeply and move them to action.



WHAT IS D&AD?

D&AD exists to celebrate, stimulate and enable excellence in design and commercial creativity.

We do this through world-class awards, masterclasses, inspirational content, new talent programs and events.

The D&AD Awards showcase the best commercial creative work in design, advertising, production and craft to raise the benchmark for excellence each year, and inspire and connect the global creative community.

D&AD Masterclasses deliver unrivalled professional development to help creative people at every stage of their working life acquire the skills and mindset to achieve creative excellence.



As a not-for-profit, D&AD provides new talent programs such as New Blood and Shift that bridge the gap between education and industry, helping aspiring creatives hone their skills and establish careers.

Learn more about D&AD and how you can get involved at dandad.org.

