DESIGN4RETAIL • DESIGN4RETAIL •

Ideas made possible.

subvert / conform

DESIGN IN THE AGE OF POLARISATION
FEBRUARY 2024

introduction

At Design4Retail, shifting currents in society inspire our creative vision.

We see emerging themes reflected in design choices, shaping the future of 2D brand design, and 3D environment design.

II

2D TREND

III

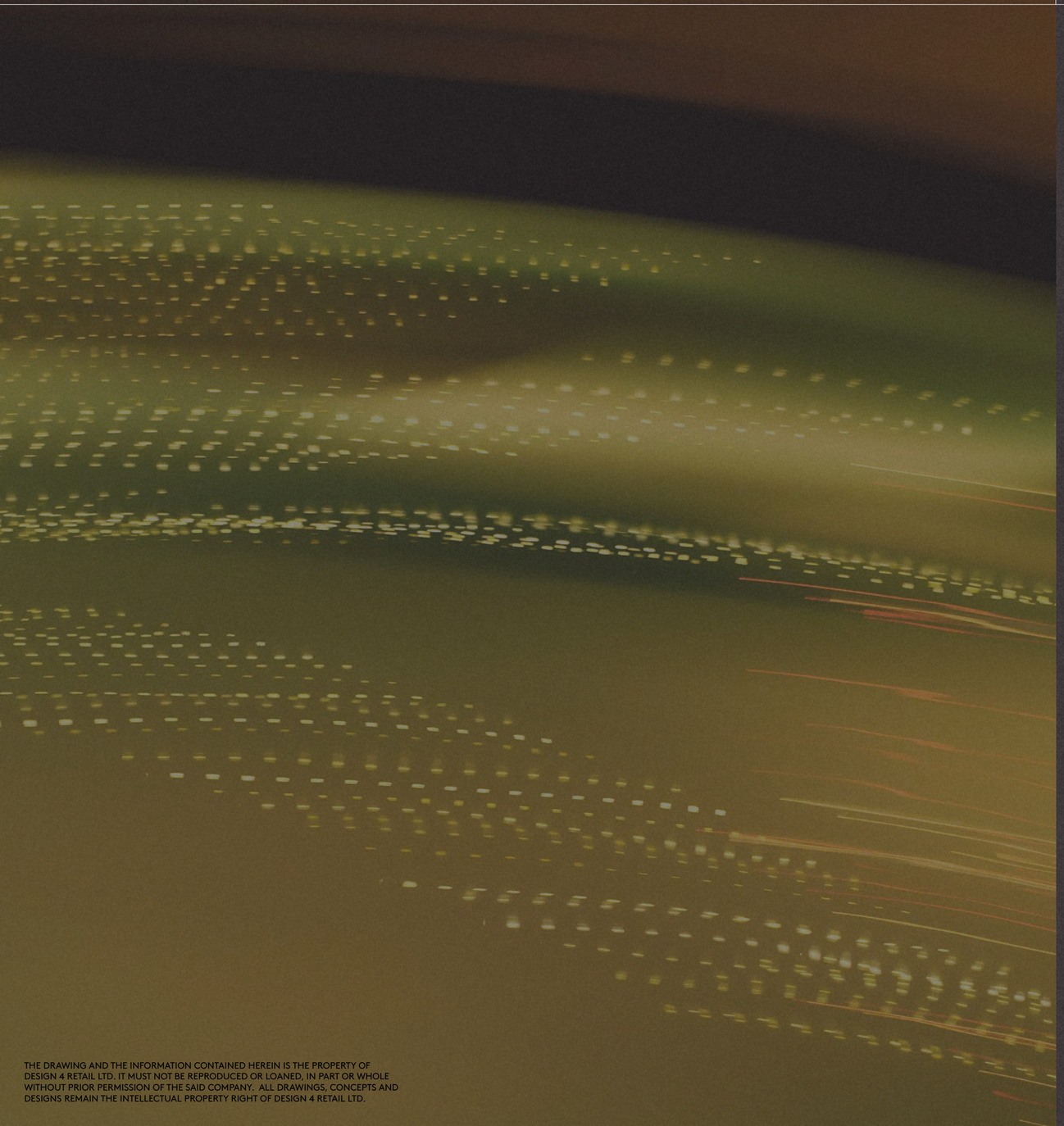
3D TREND



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societal drivers

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01

generational shift

TRANSFER OF MONEY / POWER / INFLUENCE

As Millennials and Gen-Z anticipate inheritance within the next few decades, there will be a great transfer of wealth from The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers and Gen-X to Millennial and Gen-Z's. Over the next 20 years US Gen-Z and Millennials are due to be passed down an astonishing £42 trillion (Modern Affluence Summit).

With that transfer of wealth will come a generational shift in values, therefore brands will need to align themselves with the environmental, social and ethical concerns of the younger generations. Being a brand that practices sustainability and supports marginalised communities will no longer be a selling point, it will be necessitous.

As cancel culture becomes engrained, and consumer expectations of authenticity grow, brands will no longer succeed via virtue signalling, they will need to prove they are genuine and aligned in their value beliefs. This is not done by telling, but by doing. No longer able to hide behind marketing and tag lines of how much they care; brands require accreditations and tangible proof of virtue in order to live up to the values of Gen-Z and Millennials.

H&M, Zara and Uniqlo et cetera should take learnings from Aesop, Chloé and Patagonia; B-Corp Certified brands that are genuinely working to improve the world we live in.

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ascendant youth

unabashed age

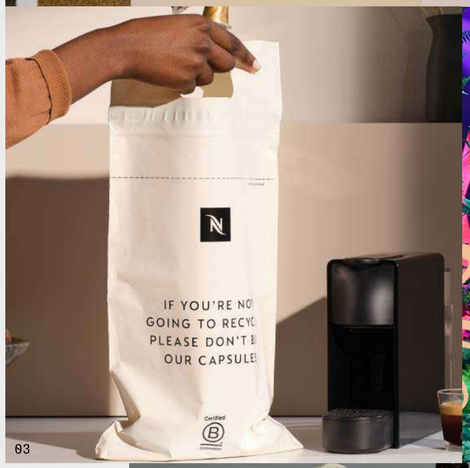
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01



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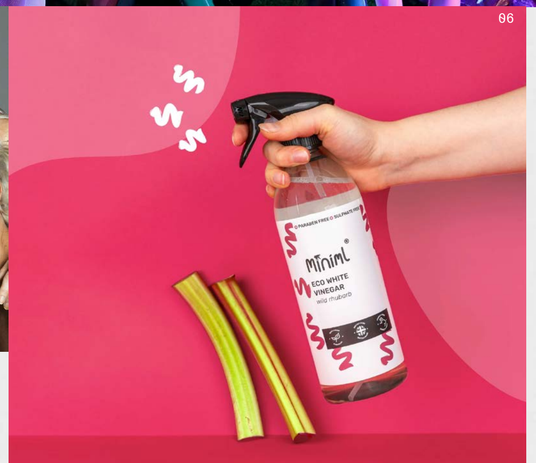
03



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05



06

ascendant youth

Forget flashy logos and empty promises. Gen Z and Millennials wield their wallets with a powerful social conscience. Their values fuel every purchase decision, demanding real action, not performative gestures.

Virtue signalling is out. Sustainability champion Nespresso's bold statement on their recycling bags – "If you're not going to recycle, please don't buy our capsules" – exemplifies this shift. It's a direct challenge, demanding genuine commitment, not lip service.

Inclusivity is another battleground. Celebrity brands like Haus Labs and Savage X Fenty, helmed by pop-culture icons Lady Gaga and Rihanna respectively, prioritise diversity across race, body type, gender, and ability. Their success hinges on authenticity, as "cancel culture" lurks, ready to expose hypocrisy.

These brands are their founders' legacies, built on genuine values, not tokenism.

Subscriptions like Wild Deodorant and Miniml household goods flourish on their commitment to both personal and planetary well-being. Natural ingredients, waste-free packaging, and reusable solutions resonate with consumers seeking purpose in their purchases.

The message is clear: brands, align with Gen Z and Millennial values or be left behind. This isn't a trend; it's a cultural shift. Ditch the greenwashing; embrace authenticity, transparency, and inclusivity. The future belongs to those who truly stand for something, beyond the bottom line.

01: Wolf & Badger, B-Corp Certified fashion retailer. **02:** Wild Deodorant, natural deodorant that use re-usable packaging. **03:** Nespresso, celebrating their B-Corp Certification. **04:** Savage X Fenty, recognised for their fashion shows that champion all types of inclusivity. **05:** Haus Labs, celebrity make up brand that prioritises inclusion and sustainability. **06:** Miniml, re-fillable cleaning product brand.

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unabashed age

In opposition to the rise of the younger generations, the ageing generation are shouting "don't forget about us!".

Gen X and Millenials are starting to age, and in doing so, they are making sure they are not forgotten about.

Although many brands are choosing to focus on marketing towards younger generations, they must not forget about their older customers.

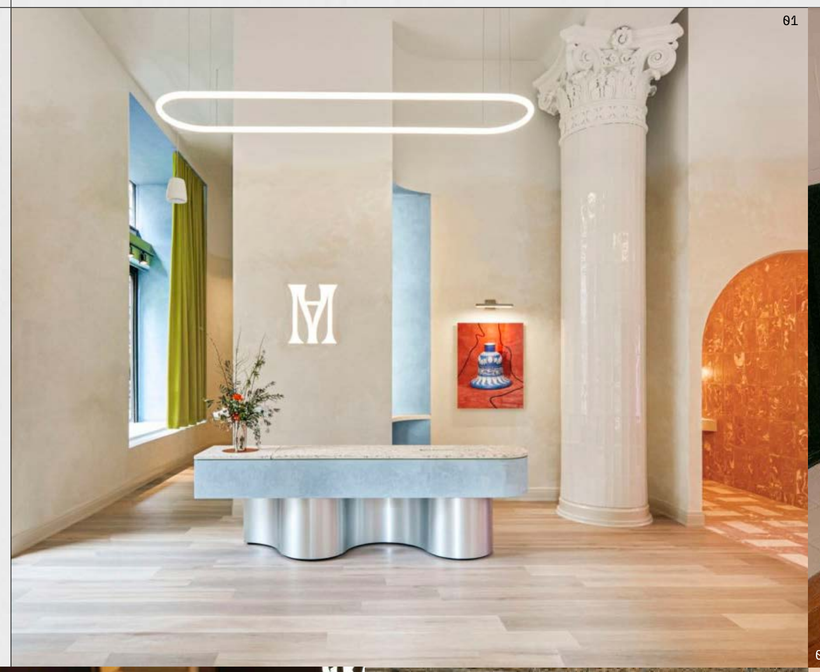
Brands such as Neal's Yard have reached out to older women recently with their 'The Age Well Revolution' campaign, promoting their Age-Defying range.

Boomers and Gen-X are celebrating their age, allowing themselves to look older rather than covering up the effects of ageing.

Stars such as Pamela Anderson, renowned for heavy make up, have surprised fans by showing off her no make-up looks to advocate for her new skin care brand Sonsie Skin.

Alongside this, older generations have been breaking the mold of what is expected of people of their age. Rather than choosing to slow down, many people are living their lives as they prefer and not conforming to the societal norms of their age.

Grece Ghanem is a 56 year old social media star, known for her love of fashion and rejecting the expectations of the way she should dress.













01: Modern Age Clinic, care that slows down ageing on the inside and out. **02:** Pamela Anderson goes make-up free to promote skin care crand Sonsie Skin. **03:** Grece Ghanem, 56 yr old social media star known for celebrating her age. **04:** Vivienne Westwood Autumn-Winter 2023/24 Campaign. **05:** Rageism Beauty, Make Up for Mature Skin. **06:** Neal's Yard, Age Well Campaign.

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02

wealth divide

DISPARITY DYNAMICS

The disparity in wealth distribution, commonly referred to as the 'wealth gap,' has emerged as a pressing global challenge. It is evident that there is a stark imbalance in the ownership of assets, including property, investments, and savings.

Globally, the top 1% hold over 50% of the world's wealth, while the bottom 50% possess a mere 2.6%. This imbalance is further amplified by the accelerating rate at which the wealthiest accumulate wealth, outpacing the middle class and leaving the poorer strata stagnant. The consequences of this disparity extend far beyond economic metrics, impacting access to education, healthcare, housing, and social mobility on a fundamental level.

Several factors contribute to this growing chasm. Ineffective tax systems that favour the affluent while burdening the middle class and poor exacerbate the imbalance. Globalisation, while fostering economic growth, has disproportionately benefited the wealthy, with corporations and the elite capitalising on low-wage labour and favourable trade deals.

Automation, while promoting technological advancement, displaces low-skilled workers, further widening the economic divide. Additionally, wealth inheritance perpetuates privilege, creating a vicious cycle where economic advantages disproportionately flow to future generations of the well-off.

reckless abandon



thoughtful caution

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reckless abandon

CHASING IMMEDIATE JOY

The pandemic's enforced isolation and disruption of daily routines instilled a profound sense of lost time. This translates into a heightened appreciation for life's brevity and an urgent desire to seize the day.

Simultaneously, societal instability has triggered a fear of unforeseen disruptions, leading to a "live for today" mentality as individuals seek to maximise enjoyment before potential obstacles arise.

Additionally, recent challenges have contested pre-existing societal norms, causing 'YOLO hedonists' to re-evaluate priorities and place greater emphasis on experiential wealth over material possessions and career status.

The consequences of these motivational forces are readily apparent in consumer behaviours. The travel industry has witnessed a pronounced surge in post-pandemic 'revenge travel', with travellers actively seeking out exotic destinations, immersive cultural experiences, and luxury getaways.

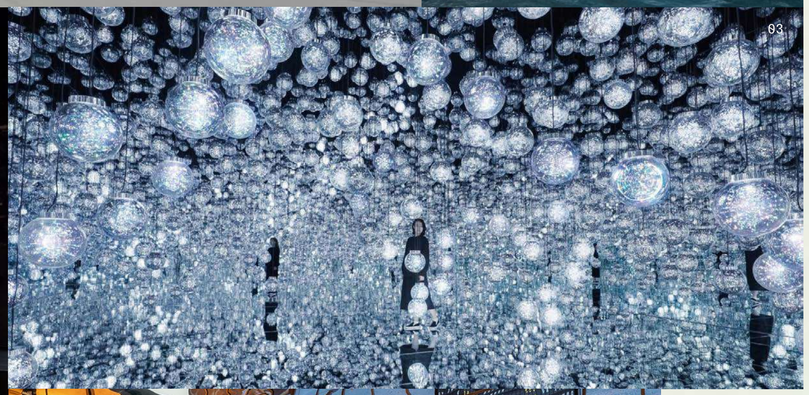
This extends beyond tourism, as the demand for unique and enriching experiences across various domains has soared. From adrenaline-pumping adventure activities to gourmet culinary journeys and opulent spa retreats, experience-seekers are actively curating unforgettable moments to fill their lives.

Influencer culture plays a critical role, with meticulously crafted feeds showcasing travel adventures, extravagant dining experiences, and glamorous lifestyles, further fuelling the desire to replicate these experiences. However, this pursuit of immediate gratification can come at a cost. Consumers may be more willing to take on financial risks, potentially accumulating debt or jeopardising long-term financial stability through unrestrained spending.











01: The North Face's latest print campaign leverages the 'expedition'
02: Revenge travel 03: TeamLAB experience
04: Maison Margiela's First Class Lounge Pop Up
05: Culinary cult hit 'The Menu'

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thoughtful caution

~~GREED IS GOOD~~ FRUGALITY IS *FUN*

The pandemic's economic anxieties have etched a sense of caution and resilience onto the psyches of the thoughtful 'rebuilders'.

This is only exacerbated by ongoing cost of living pressures that affect all consumers, with food prices rising 27% in the last two years alone. These cautious thinkers have taken to humourising their reality, with phrases such as 'cozzy livs' providing a friendly façade to adverse economic conditions.

Those who are not wholly invested in a frugal lifestyle can be influenced by the philosophy too, seen in the growing movement of monetised down-time. In a post financial crash, post pandemic, stagnant economy, even our hobbies need to be monetarily justified.

As in wider society, 'loud budgeting' is also being reflected on social media; the hashtag #nospendchallenge having amassed over 180 million views on Gen-Z favourite, TikTok.

This perhaps reflective of almost half of 16-24 year olds being in severely unsecure paid work compared to just 17% of 25-65 year olds (source: The Work Foundation's Insecure Work Index 2022.) This generation also see self-enforced frugality as a form of wellness, a way to realign and ground themselves, free from econimic distraction.

Unfortunately for those on lower incomes, no amount of scrimping and saving has been enough to offset the spiking inflation rate. Strikingly, in March 2022, frugal figurehead Martin Lewis said that he was "out of tools" to help the people struggling the most with the cost of living crisis. "It's not something money management can fix, it's not something that for those on the lowest incomes telling them to cut their belts will work. We need political intervention,".

01



02



03



30 DAY NO SPEND CHALLENGE 💸🛍️ building better habits, realigning myself & what I actually love

431K views • 7 months ago

Apple Cheeks

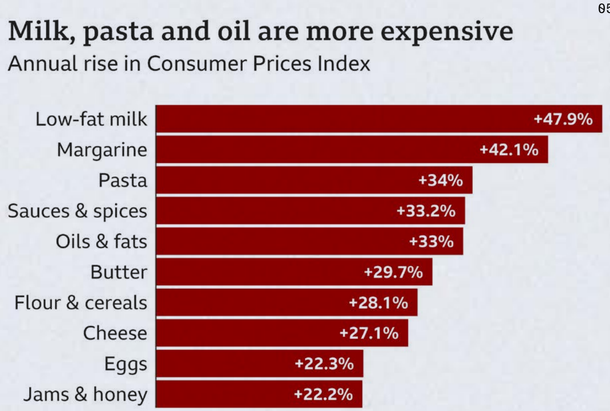
〰 hello~✱ I noticed a bad habit that started at the beginning of the year when I was feeling really down: impulsive shopping.

4K

04



05



01: Etsy advertisement 02: Klarna advertisement
03: Youtube video 04: 'Money Saving Expert' Martin Lewis 05: BBC inflation figures

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polarised design

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design dualities

Our economic and societal divides are mirrored in design.

In volatile economic times, brands must work harder than ever to gain the attention, affinity and spend of their consumers.

Light fights dark, minimalist sparseness battles maximalist abundance – not just aesthetics, but anxieties made visible. Delving into these dualities is not merely about style; it's decoding the unspoken conversations of fractured communities, seeking pathways for bridge building through the forms that reflect our division.

In essence, many of the trends we have witnessed emerging have an opposite, a counterpart that is its antithesis.

Within this section we explore these 'design dualities' via second and third dimension examples.



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let in
the light

dark
mode

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let in the light

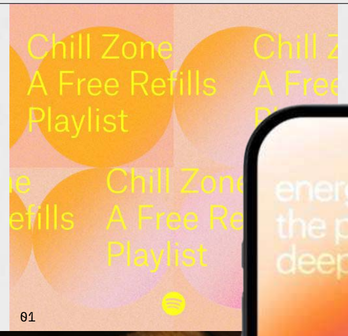
2D TREND

3D TREND

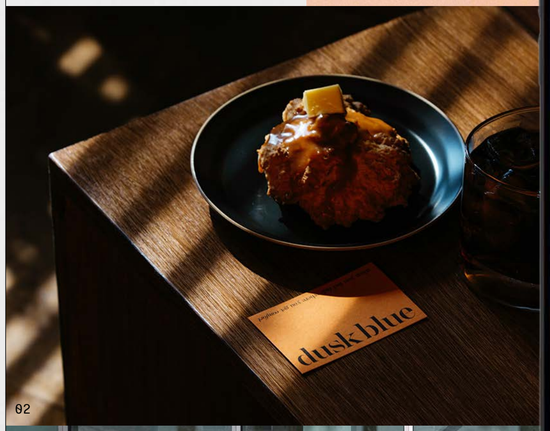
Personal wellness has become front of mind for the majority of consumers, a response to the many stressors and permacrises which have people searching for relief.

From boutiques that prioritise respite over experience to avoid over-stimulation, to cafés that feature soft sunset illumination to provide comfort and a space to slow down and savour the moment.

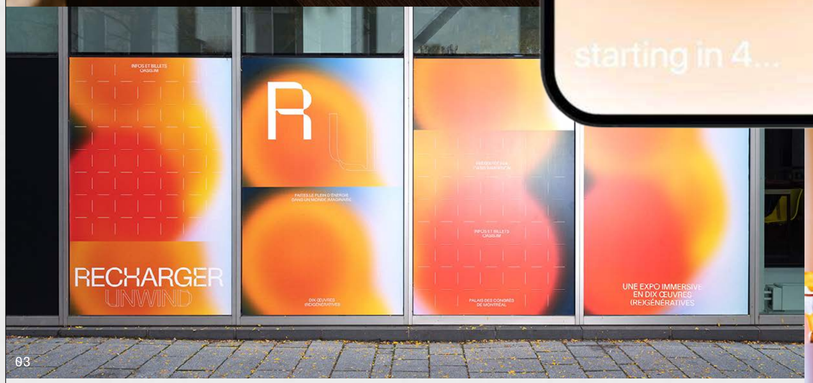
We see that brands are striving to create a sense of hope, a soft glow to uplift, be it graphically through the resurgence of gradients, or through inherently slower and gentler experiences, manifesting a positive outlook.



01



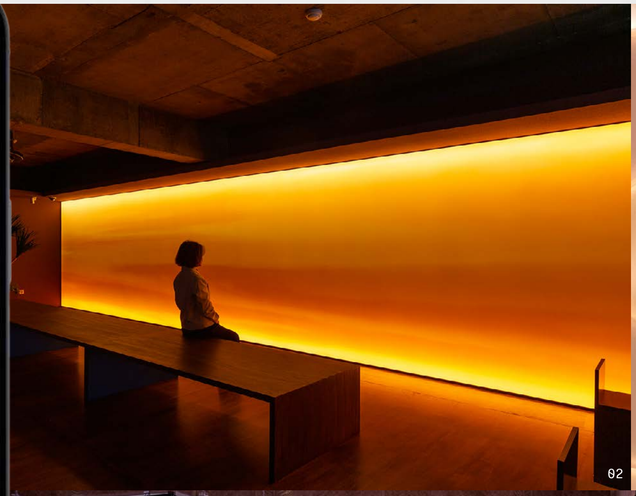
02



03



04


02


06



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01: Spotify - Chillzone. **02:** Dusk Blue Café, Seoul. **03:** Recharger Unwind. **04:** Breath tracker app - Artem Tarasov. **05:** Veuve Cliquot - Solaire Culture experience. **06:** Breathing Light - A+N Studio.

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trend toolkit

SUNSET LAMPS



GOLDEN HOUR SELFIE MOMENTS



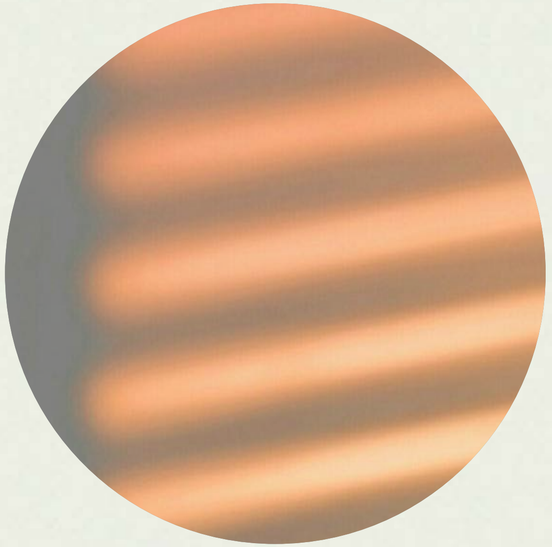
SOLAR GRADIENTS



ORANGE AND PINK



SHUTTERED LIGHT



RESPITE PAUSES



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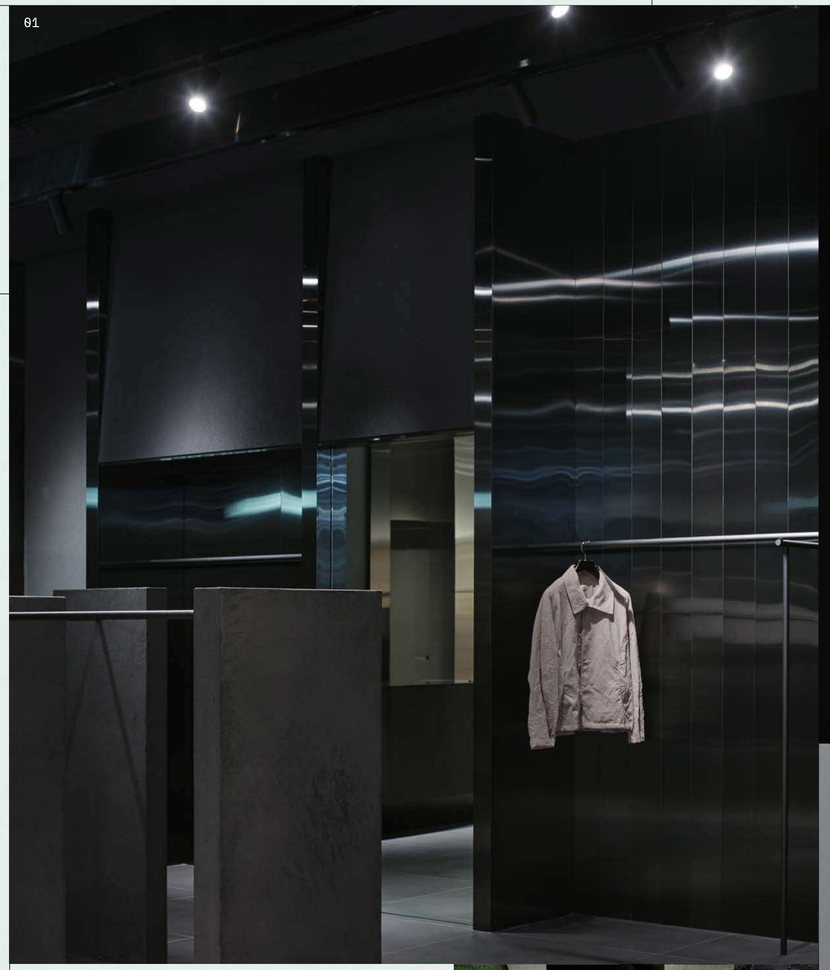
dark mode

II III

2D TREND 3D TREND

Boldly replacing the ubiquitous white space of recent years, darker schemes are emerging across 2D design and immersive environments.

Driven by a desire for depth and sophistication, designers are embracing the drama of low-light spaces and the stark beauty of limited hues. We see this in retail/hospitality interiors of controlled charcoal hues to 2D creations that maximise black. Perhaps a cynical acceptance of societal permacrises, there's a deliberate move away from blinding optimism towards a more introspective palette.

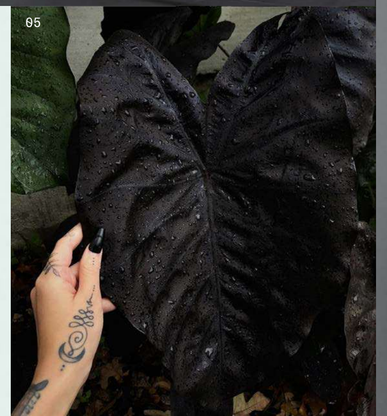

01


02


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01: Insilence Seognam, South Korea – dark space.
02: Sutimoon Restaurant, Seoul, South Korea.
03: Reskate studio, photo-luminescent murals come to life at night. 04: The Hunter Lab, luxury skincare.
05: Goth Garden: @soundofstars on instagram

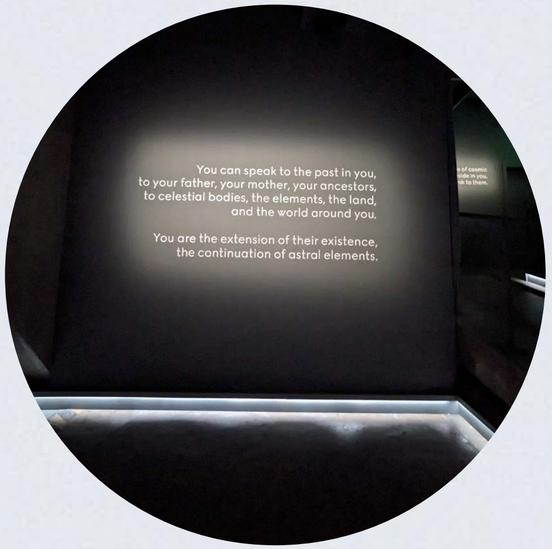
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trend toolkit

BLACK ON BLACK



SELECTIVE ILLUMINATION



LUNAR LAMPS



BLACK PLANTS



DARK ILLUSTRATION



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frame work

neo surrealism

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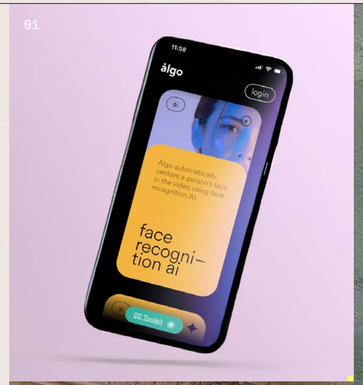
frame work

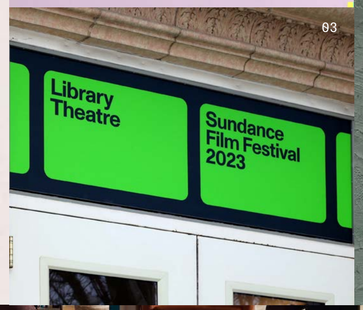
2D TREND

3D TREND

Structure is omni-present in 2D and interior design, covering packaging, branding, retail and popup design. The force behind this shift is the 'frame work', a deliberate embrace of grids and compartments to organize information and enhance user engagement.

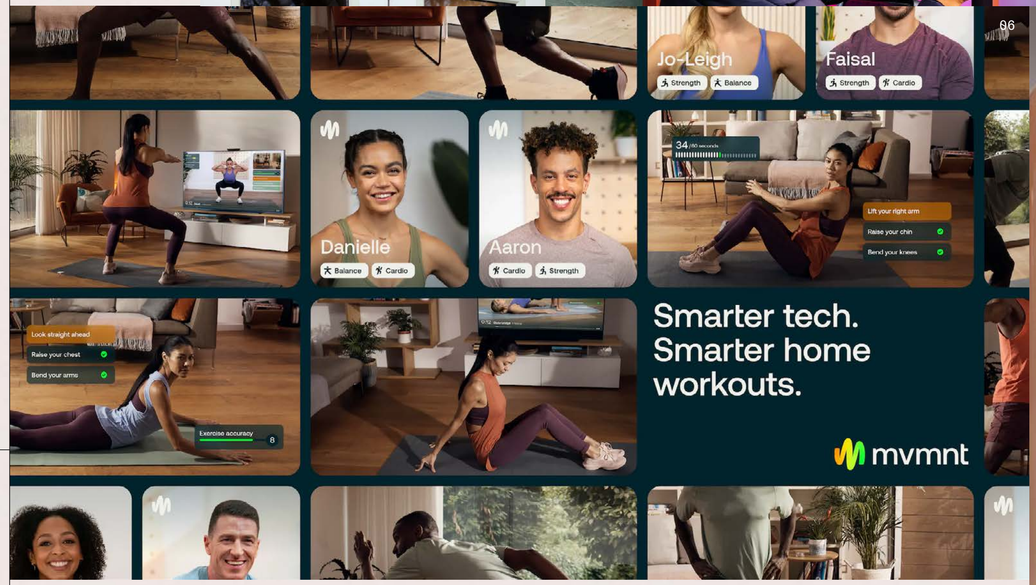
The appeal of this structured approach lies in its ability to tame complexity. In our world overflowing with visual stimuli, consumers crave order. These softened alcoves offer a visual hierarchy, making information or product discovery digestible and intuitive.













01: Algo: dynamic web and app design.
02 & 03: Sundance Film Festival identity, 2023.
04: Max Mara celebrates 10 years of the teddy coat: travelling popup. **05:** Skims popup.
06: mvmnt, smart wellbeing platform.

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trend toolkit

ROUNDED CORNERS



SANS SERIFS



ALCOVED PRODUCT



INTERNAL GLOW



REPETITION



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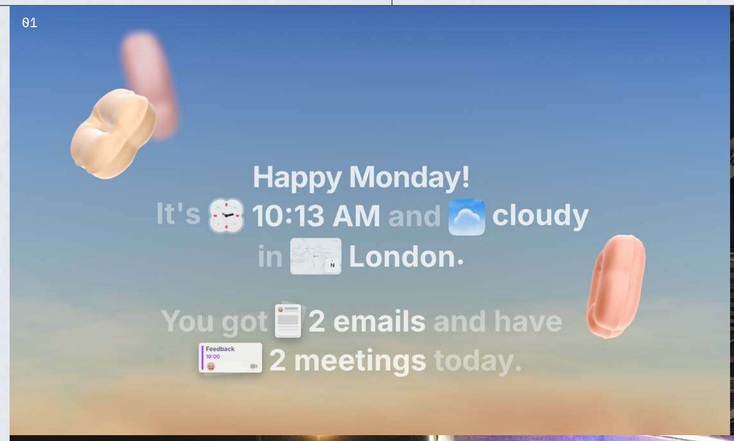
neo surrealism

2D TREND 3D TREND

Emerging from the intersection of meticulous detail and unbridled imagination, Neo-Surrealism is redefining hyperrealism through a psychedelic lens. This trend embraces swooping lines and gravity-defying perspectives, creating dreamlike landscapes where the familiar bleeds into the fantastical.

Meticulous renderings of everyday environments morphed into impossible dreamscapes. Each detail is a purposeful portal to a hidden dimension, amplifying the strangeness inherent in everyday life.

01



02



03



05



04



06



01: Amie, AI personal assistant. 02: Valentines day posters, Selfridges. 03: Ana María Hernando's tulle installations in Madison Square Park.
04: Louis Vuitton Golden 'Pont Neuf' pop up, LA.
05 & 06: La Nouvelle Vague, concert hall Saint-Malo.

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pureseoul, westfield white city

OUR WORK, 2023

PURESEOUL approached us to craft their latest store concept that we delivered in Westfield White City at the very end of 2023.

Through our usual staged approach, we worked with the brand to create a destination for K-Beauty within the UK that would stand out amongst a busy beauty sector.

We set out to design a haven of expressive neo-surrealism: blue sky and clouds were integrated via a continuous wall to ceiling application, curved tabletops added to the effect, as did playful wall alcoves and fluid lighting.











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trend toolkit

SKY-GAZING



ORGANIC CURVES



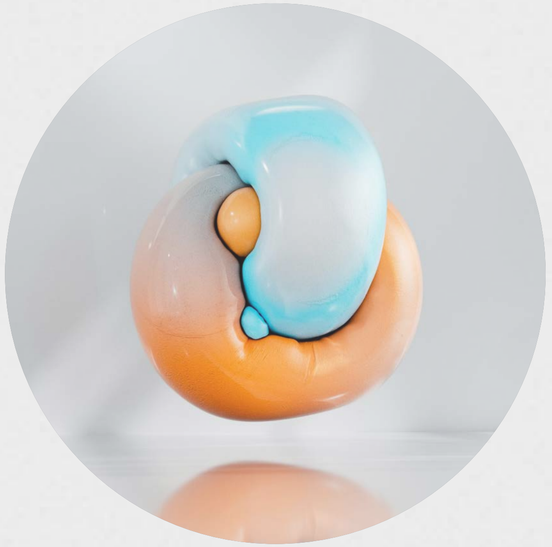
PSYCHEDELIC TYPOGRAPHY



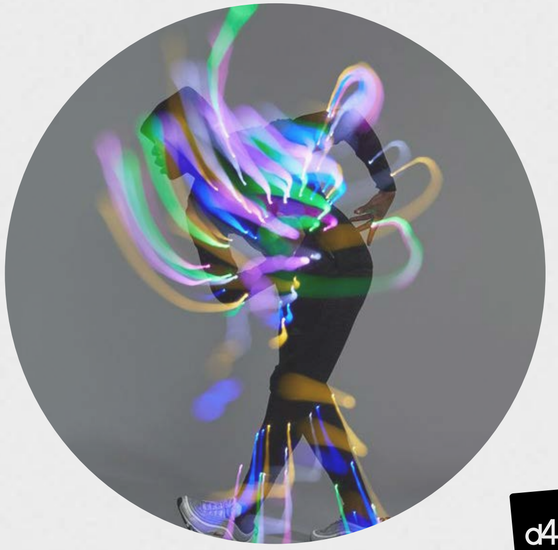
ECCLECTIC COLLECTING



SUSPENSION/FLOATING



LIGHT TRAILS



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doomscroll

too cute

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doomscroll

2D TREND 3D TREND

Emerging from the anxieties of permacrises, 'Doomscroll' reimagines Mad Max chic through a commercial lens. Palettes shift from optimistic pastels to the earth's darker hues, echoing a world scarred yet resilient. Weathered leather and repurposed concrete become canvases for creativity, a defiant exploration of decay.

Subversive humour threads through, mocking the absurdity via visceral packaging design, interiors and fashions. 'Doomscroll' isn't escapism; it's a confrontation, a testament to human ingenuity that thrives even in the face of seemingly endless crises.

01



02



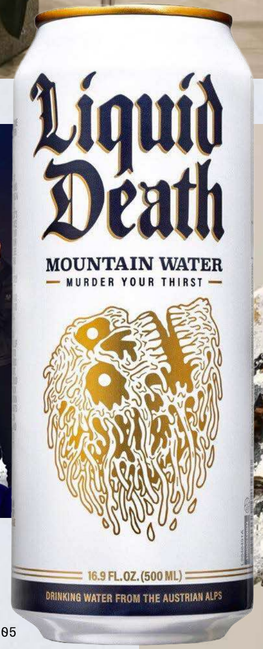
03



06



05



04



01: Brutalist interior: Pervert, Moscow.
02: DEMOBAZA; end of the world couture.
03: Obituary, death themed boardgame.
04: AUKI skin care.**05:** Liquid Death, water packaging. **06:** Elon Musk unveils the Cybertruck.

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trend toolkit

WORN CONCRETE



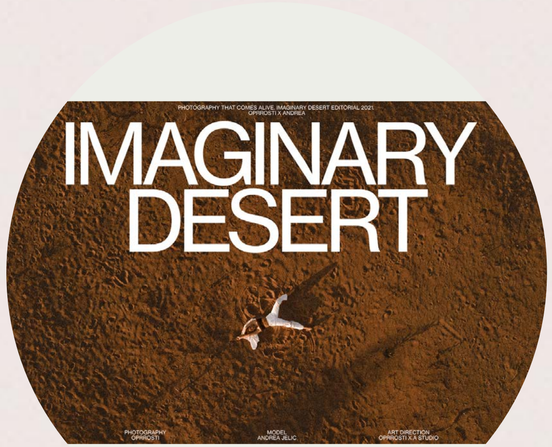
BLACKLETTER



BARBED WIRE



DESERT TEXTURES



DARK HUMOUR



PREPPER STYLE



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too cute

II 2D TREND

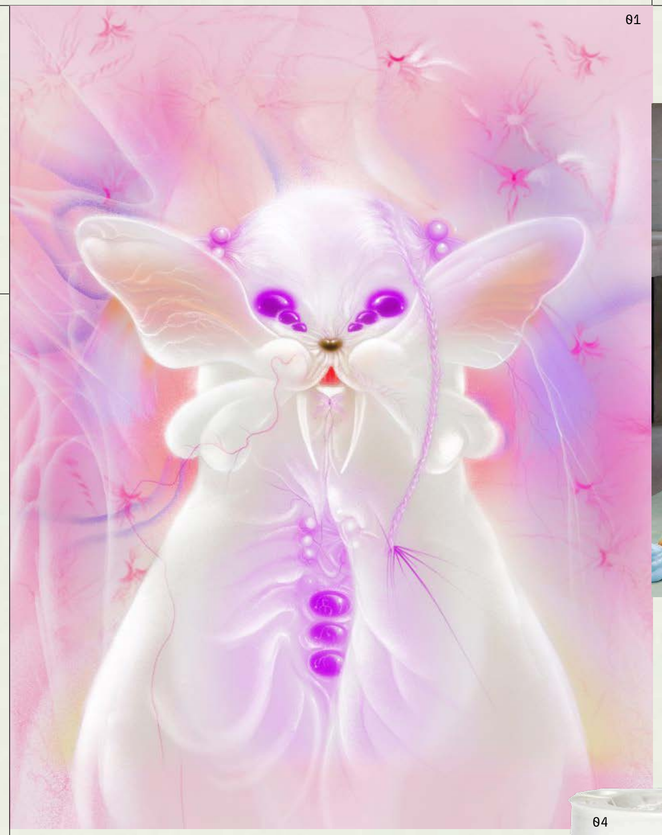
III 3D TREND

In a world with a constant cycle of depressing news, the 'too cute' or 'kidcore' trend has been developing as a form of escapism.

Featuring joyful illustrations, bright, soft colours and playful characters, this style boasts a cheeky and fun look that is guaranteed to make you smile.

The trend has also been present within retail already in 2024. We saw both Gentle Monster and Dior create playful displays in January featuring cute and friendly characters.

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01: Save our souls, Ram Han. 02: Gentle Monster's Jelly Pop-Up, Seoul. 03: Dessert Rain Frog, Conscious Comics. 04: Pistacio Tea, Lung-Hao. 05: Dior Window, Paris, Kim Jones & Otani Workshop.

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trend toolkit

SICKLY SWEET COLOURS



JOYFUL SHAPES



CHARACTERS



CHILDLIKE ILLUSTRATION



SMILES ALL AROUND



BUBBLE FONTS



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soft
mystic

utopian
tech

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soft mystic

2D TREND 3D TREND

Gen z and millenials are more likely to embrace holistic well-being and mystical influence than their predecessors. Celestial motifs adorning brands, nods to micelial networks and retail fascias evoking rich religious history – design is more welcoming than ever to spirituality's influence.

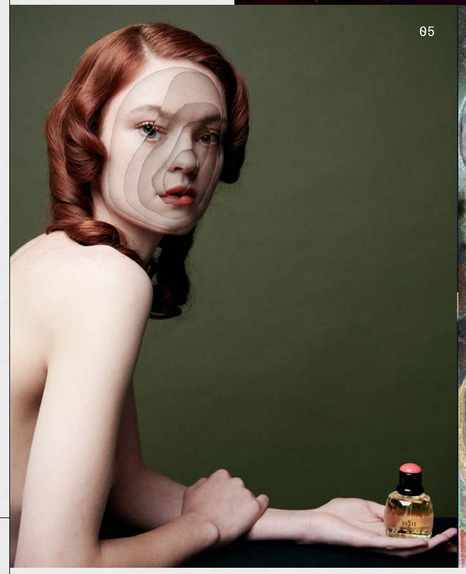
It's not overt, but a mindful nod to the unseen, offering solace and connection beyond the material. 'Soft mystic' reflects a societal shift, a yearning for deeper meaning. In a world seeking purpose, design that's anchored in the sacred and interconnected finds fertile ground, offering a gentle, primal comfort.

01: After Hours Workshop: Micelia.
02: Koyoi, non alcoholic 'healing' cocktails.
03: Louis Vuitton, Shanghai 'Year of the Dragon' popup. 04: Evelyn Tan, Illustration.
05: Bangal Dawson, product photography





The Healing Craft Cocktail







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trend toolkit

SPIRITUAL ICONS



RITUALISTIC FOCAL POINTS



ZEN-SPIRATION



ETHEREAL GLOW



TALISMANS



PRISMATIC LIGHTING



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utopian tech

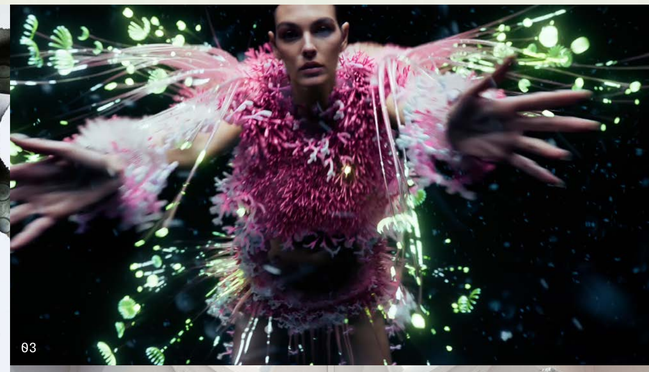
2D TREND 3D TREND

Humanity's 'best' outcome, visualised. 'Utopian tech' marries biology and biophilia with science fiction level advances, although critics of such futures worry of a loss of intrinsic humanity.

Arthur C. Clarke's much quoted 1962 third law prophesised: 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic' and this is an emotively apt description for the 'utopian tech' trend. Hyper technical compositions meet robot aesthetics, with Grimes becoming a kind of 'Manic Pixie Cyborg' mascot. The Nothing Phone realises this trend real-time, encouraging lighting gestures above traditional notifications.


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01: Themepark of the future, artist's impression: NEOM, Saudi Arabia. **02:** Nothing Phone 2. **03:** IoDF x H&M Metaverse. **04:** Grimes' cover for CYBR magazine.**05:** Sik Mul Sung, Vertical Farm Cafe: Seoul. **06:** Gentle Monster, Kuala Lumpur. **07:** Hyebird web design.

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your system is a garden, too

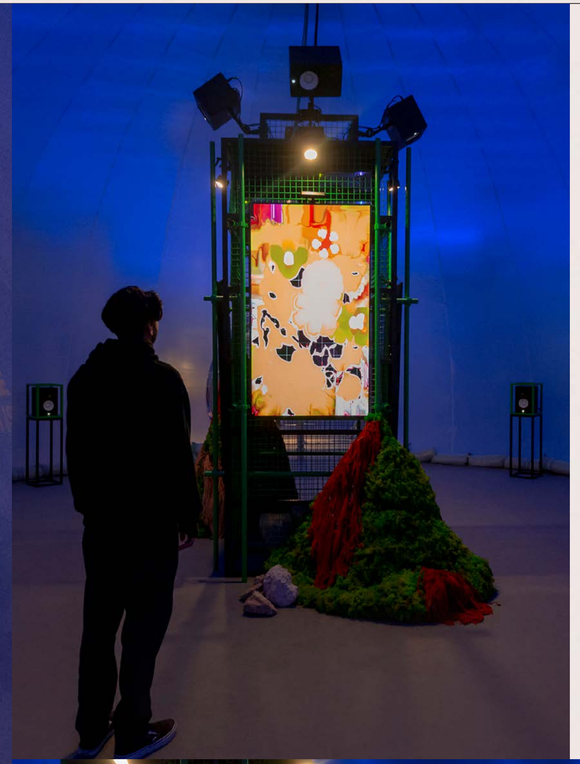
FUTUREDELUXE, 2023

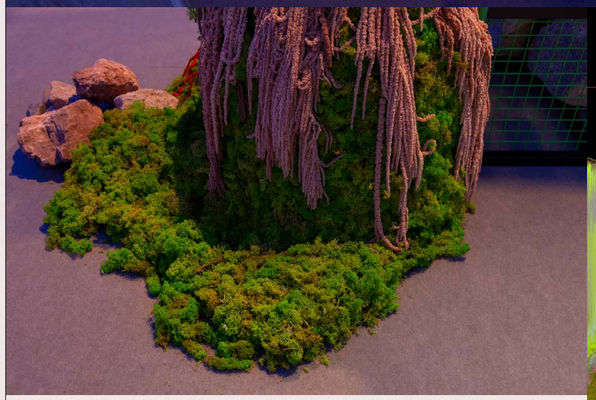
At Digital Impact, "Your System is a Garden, Too" captivated onlookers with its shy, generative beauty.

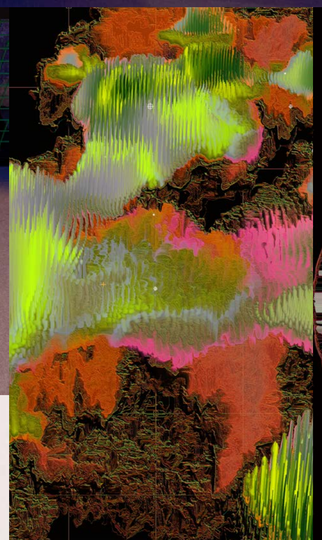
Stepping into the Barcelona installation, visitors became part of a dynamic ecosystem, their stillness nurturing its growth.

Four vibrant, real-time visuals pulsed alongside eight interwoven audio channels, while living flora by Manuela Sosa further blurred the lines between technology and nature. This anti-interactive experience fostered introspection, urging contemplation upon the delicate balance between action and stillness within complex systems.

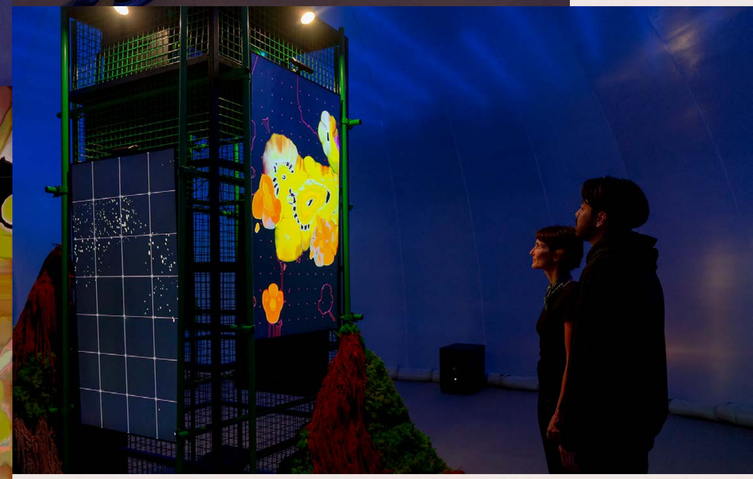












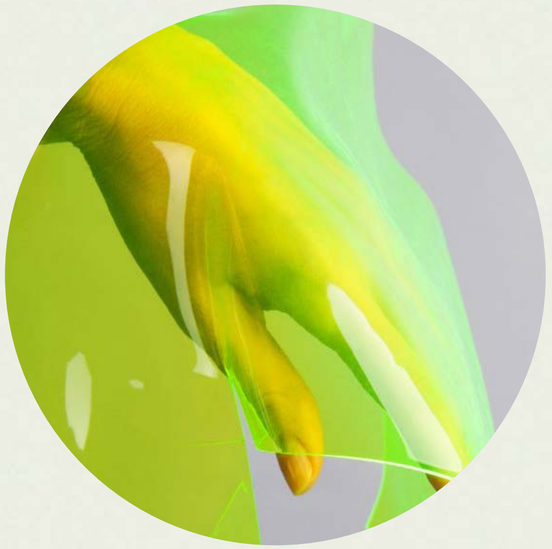
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trend toolkit

PIXELATED TYPE



LIME GREEN



CYBIOPHILIA



GESTURAL LIGHTING



AI AESTHETIC



LAYERED DIGITAL



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craft
core

realer
than real

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craft core

2D TREND

3D TREND

A trend that is a direct rebellion to the world of AI, artists and designers are enjoying digital-free, analogue methods of creating.

In a market saturated with hyper-realistic 3D renders and neatly designed products made by 3D printers, consumers want to know consideration, craft and quality materials have been used to create their products and they also welcome a contrast from the superficial digital world.

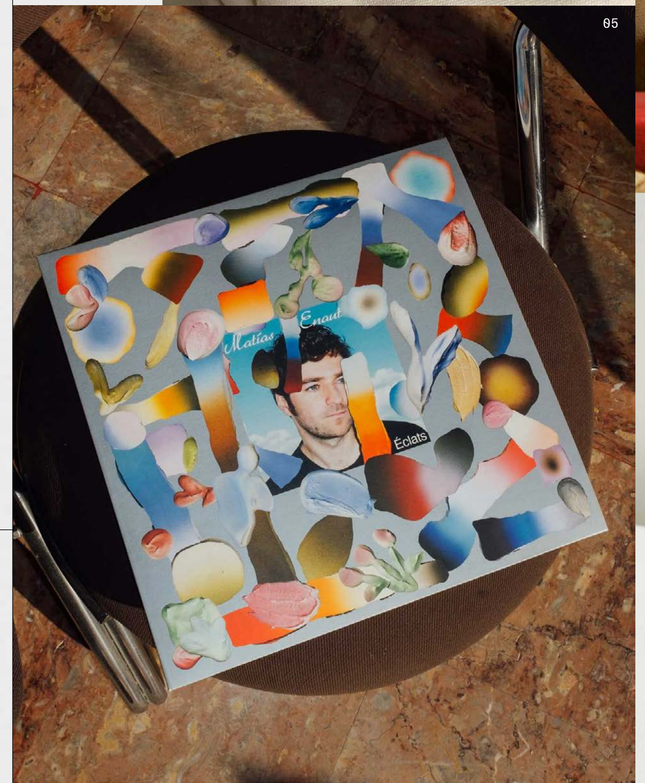
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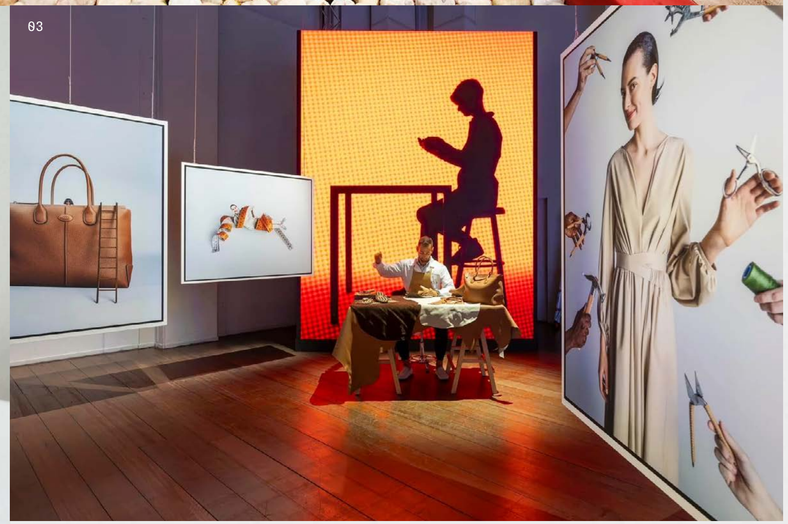
05



04



03



01: Maison Margiela, frayed label. **02:** Ferragamo Pousada Estrela D'Agua Takeover, Trancoso Bahia Brazil. **03:** Tod's The Art of Craftsmanship Pop-Up Store and Event Space, Singapore. **04:** Recycled Martini Glass, Completedworks. **05:** Matías Enaut - Éclats album cover by Alexis Jamet

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trend toolkit

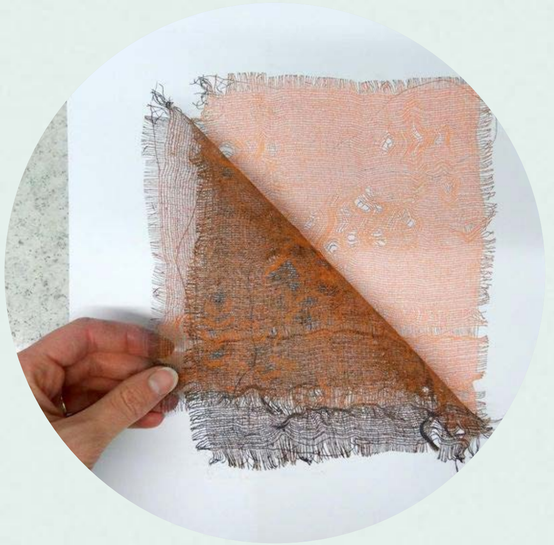
CRAFT AS PERFORMANCE



SERENDIPITOUS IMPERFECTION



PROCESS TEXTURES



BESPOKE GIVEAWAYS



PATCHWORK INSPO



MARKETRY



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realer than real

2D TREND 3D TREND

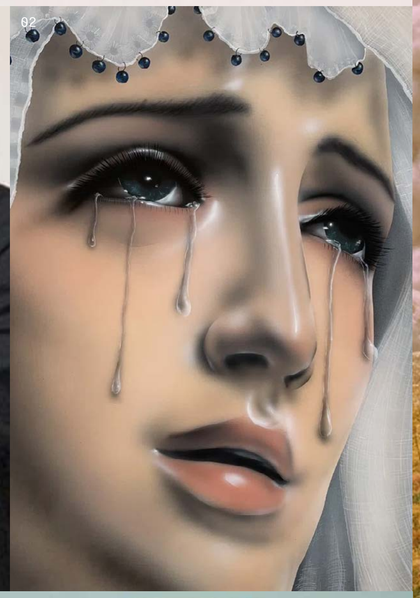
While craft core is a trend that rebels against the rise in AI, a 'realer than real' style has developed in harmony with the advancement of AI.

Whether created using AI or not, the trend features hyper realistic textures and shapes, to create 'not quite right' look, similar to the 'Uncanny Valley' effect. The images look perfect, but too perfect therefore giving it a futurist, dystopian feel.

Indeed a lot of this artwork is created using AI, however artists have been creating that same AI style with analogue methods.



02



03



06



05



04



01: Katy Perry & Orlando Bloom, alient looks.
02: Grazie, Filippo Cergani. **03:** Altopia, Selina Yau.
04: BEING, Rashaad Newsome **05:** Roaring Reverie, Is She Hungry. **06:** Corp, Luke Nugent.

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trend toolkit

AUGMENTED REALITY



CHAT-BOT FRIENDSHIPS



PROSTHETIC MAKEUP



PHOTOREALISM



VIRTUAL FASHION SHOWS



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femergy

work
work work

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femergy

2D TREND

3D TREND

After the huge successes of last year's Barbie film and Taylor Swifts Eras Tour, it has become apparent that design for women is a rather large, underserved market.

As well as seeing already established brands tapping into their feminine side, we are likely to come across an array of brands created by women for women taking matters into their own hands and providing services the female population have been seeking for years.

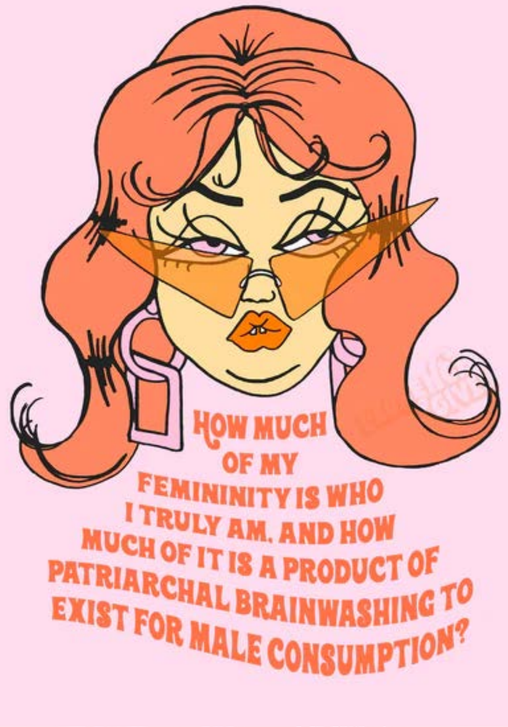
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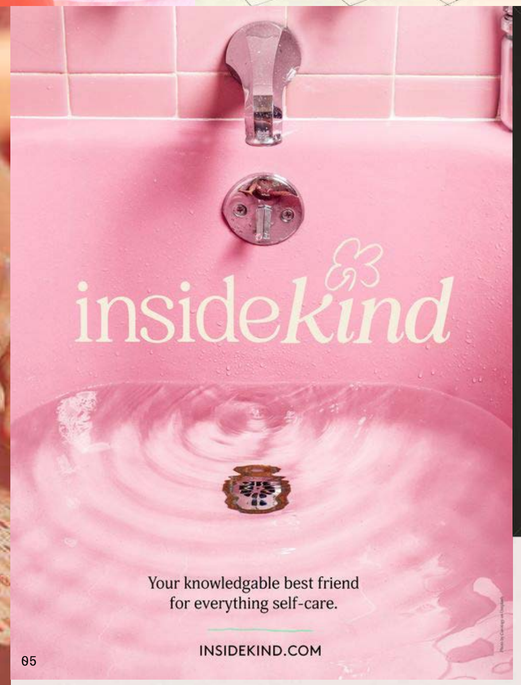
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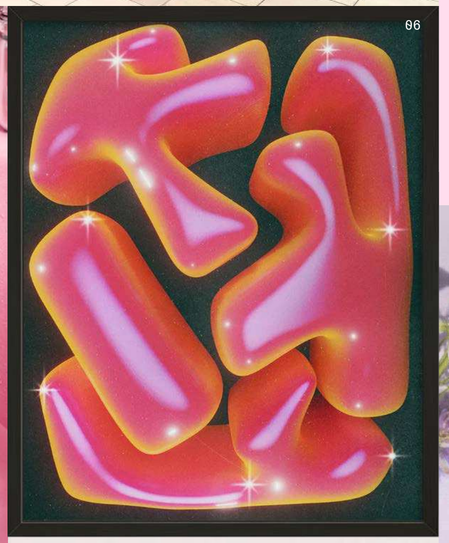




04



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06



07

01: PurPur, Polina Zagumenova. 02: Valentine Garavani Merry Market The Stage Pop-Up, Tokyo. 03: Patriarchal Brainwashing, Florence Given. 04: Love Burger, Lush. 05: insidekind, Lucy Elliot. 06: IFHY, Jasmin Chavez. 06: Louminology, Heavy.

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trend toolkit

BOWS ON EVERYTHING



TUILE



SWEET GIVEAWAYS



FLORISTRY



TINTED ACRYLIC



FOSTERING COMMUNITY



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work
work work

2D TREND

Forget the relentless grind, empty promises of endless overtime, and the girl-boss aesthetic. Gen-Z and Millennials are rewriting the script with "Corp-lore," a tongue-in-cheek term for their audacious approach to work that prioritises well-being and personal boundaries above all else.

Ironically, this manifests visually as 'big-girl-job' cosplay, an adoption of office tropes. Think fax machines and copiers, Y2K, neutral pencil skirts and smart pressed shirts, a satirical critique of outdated office culture.

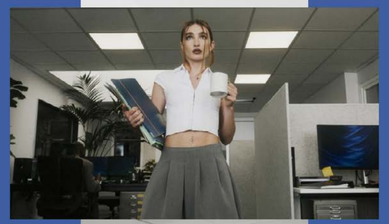
01



CORPLORE









06

02



03



05



04



01: Dior product photography.
02 & 03: Ventura Foreman 2024 identity.
04: Cotton Bros office photoshoot.**05:** The Gund (gallery) at Kenyon College, Ohio. **06:** Corplore trend exploration, Death to Stock.

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trend toolkit

MONO FONTS



'PC TOWER' CREAM



OFFICE LIGHTING



PHOTOCOPIER ARTEFACTS



EXAGGERATED TAILORING



NEGATIVE/DARK HUMOUR



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HOW CAN YOUR BRAND
LEVERAGE DESIGN DUALITIES?

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