Desire Path

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The Courtauldian

EDITOR'S NOTE

When enough people take the same shortcut through a park, a dirt path becomes visible in the grass. Manufactured asphalt, concrete, or even brick alternatives may exist, but these are longer and inefficient. It makes more sense to take the desire path straight to your destination.

This issue is about access. Access from A to B, but also to aid, to language, to culture, to art, to music. Opportunity is hard to come by for anyone in the art world, but especially for those who have not had their route carved out for them.

Please keep on the grass whilst you form your own path.

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By Rahel Jung

A Glimpse Into Enchantment

On Pepperminta (Pipilotti Rist, CH/AT 2009)

To set out on new paths, all the ballast of the past must be shaken off – without forgetting it though – and through political imagination, a fabulated future can be brought into the present. *Pepperminta* shows us how; the anarchic and playful protagonist in Pipilotti Rist's 2009 film of the same name subverts every convention in her mission to free the world from the disease of fear. With an unshakable sense of confidence and self-assurance she lives queerly in all kinds of ways, and it is precisely within the realm of the non-conforming that things become exciting.

“If you think you are emancipated, you might consider the idea of tasting your menstrual blood – if it makes you sick, you’ve a long way to go, baby,” says Germaine Greer. It would seem that *Pepperminta* has already travelled that long road, for with sparkling eyes she dips her finger into the holy grail filled with menstrual blood accumulated over generations and licks it off with delight. On her journey she first meets Werwen, who initially suffers from an epigenetic total allergy, then Edna, unique in their own way, and later more and more people who – enchanted by colour – join her mission. They form a *queer kinship* (freely following Haraway), and connect through love, support, and excitement. This network of relations extends to plants and animals – in short: the entire world becomes re-enchanted and bound together in harmony. Rigid boundaries, built up over millennia by Western, capitalist-patriarchal society, are playfully dissolved, and conventions such as shame or control cease to exist. Under water, everyone is free: binary gender orders, race or class are suspended as they merge with nature. Is this naïve? Ignorant? Or perhaps visionary?

The pleasure principle she follows is in itself deeply political. *Pepperminta* tells of unconditional solidarity, and, through the means of imagination, colour, and sensuality, sketches a performative manifesto for another way of living and dying. She follows her instinct and tramples out the desire path for all of us, so that we might follow her into a more just future.

Pleasure is deeply political… Still from *Pepperminta*, Pipilotti Rist, 2009

Cut with a Kitchen Knife: Collage as a Desire Path

By Zuzanna Chojnowska

Something has always pulled me toward the act of cutting, ever since I was a kid. The kitchen scissors I used to sneak into my room were charged with subversive power, their deliberateness new to the innocence of a childhood bedroom. I would cut off bits of my hair, scraps of paper, but never proper images or photographs. There was something that was holding me back from altering reality. I thought the way things were was fixed. Luckily, many women artists did not share my hesitation. Where I paused, they made the cut. And today, artists like Fiyin Oluokun continue to explore that ferocious gesture, using it to reimagine the contours of modern, complex identities.

I first became enchanted by collage through the online *Rookie Magazine*. Young Tavi Gevinson's online altar for teenage girls in the early 2010s had a tab simply titled Collage Kit. There, dozens of downloadable PDFs offered not newspaper clippings or advertisements, but flowerbeds, solar systems, photographs of feminist icons, both historical and contemporary. These readily available constellations encouraged young women to shape their visual sensibilities. Looking back, *Rookie* felt like a digital desire path itself. Everything seemed colorful and hopeful, there was no man in sight.

However, that was not always the case for female creators. Hannah Höch's russet photomontage *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, created an alternative view of reality not through softness and dreamy imagery but through its acerbic, audacious rearrangement. Her iconic work mocks the nonsense of patriarchy, its male political figures congealed in their complacency amid the socio-political chaos. Höch's eponymous kitchen knife trespassed into the fabric of reality, revealing how collage can assert agency over images that seek to define womanhood.

That legacy continues among many contemporary women artists, as collage enjoys a revival. Recent exhibitions centering female creators elevate collage's DIY associations into a means of reshaping representation. Fiyin, based just outside of Dublin, recently held their first exhibition titled *Family Trees Hang Over Property Lines* reflecting on cultural identity. After meeting for the first time a couple of years ago in a college pub, I recently spoke with Fiyin about their creative process. Our conversation explored how collage constructs new ways of seeing, interrupting the outlines and rhythms of conventional representation.

Q: There's a quote I think of a lot when it comes to collage, from David Banash, who wrote: "The cutting gesture is one of subversion and critique, an assault on accepted perceptions and representations, violently rearranging the media consensus." Do you perceive your own artistic process as a challenge to how the Nigerian diaspora is usually perceived or represented in Ireland, or perhaps even globally?

A: I guess yes in a roundabout way. There's an artist, Evita Tezeno, who depicts Black people just existing, they aren't concerned with how they are perceived. While I am making deeply personal art about identity, it feels like I'm in on the joke, I'm not dissecting the frog. I want to make work that shows the Nigerian diaspora being unconcerned with how they are perceived. I think perception is already so entangled in any minority experience and I'm aware that this in itself is another representation of the diaspora.

Q: What I find captivating in your work is how you bring together so many aspects of Black identity. There's an honesty in that that feels very contemporary. Do you think of collage as a unique medium in the way it allows you to unite all the different aspects of your experience?

A: Definitely. Collage can often feel more like discovering than constructing. It's peeling back layers and finding what it is you are trying to convey. It reminds me of sampling in music where you are exploring, cutting up different sounds and pasting them together. You're in constant reference to other artists through this process and I think by delving into this world, you're referencing your own identity and experience. It's funny as well, the more specific I try to be with moments I'm capturing in my art, the more it resonates with the Nigerian - Irish community as a whole.

Q: I've been reflecting on how the lived experience of the artist can intersect with their medium. What I am wondering is whether the act of arranging different pieces into something new and whole reflects your own experience of being born in Ireland but rooted in Nigerian heritage? And do you think this reflects the experience of many young people in Nigerian diaspora today?

A: When I'm looking through archives, photographs, fabrics etc. I am confronted by different parts of myself and community and through the process of stitching and gluing I'm discovering a new narrative. I think this generation of Nigerians living in Ireland are a lot freer in our exploration of identity. I don't think we are as burdened by the need to assimilate and conform like our parents were, and at the same time, we are more "Irish." It's a kind of push and pull, and it makes for compelling art.

Illustrator: Danae Gionleka

Q: The theme of this issue is desire path, does that idea resonate with your personal collaging process? And, at the risk of sounding banal, do you ever think about the "destination" of your collages? What do you desire for yourself as an artist and for your work?

A: I make very loose sketches before making collages. They're usually gestural and incomprehensible! But collage as a medium makes it difficult for my sketches to be prescriptive, and I love that. So, while I do have a general direction or theme that I want to explore, it is just that; an exploration. As an artist, I want to be a better observer. Nina Simone talks about how an artist's duty is to "reflect the times." and I think in order to do that, I need to be able to see things and document them.

Fiyin's reflections reaffirm collage's latent tension with modern realities. It offers artists and amateurs alike a rare sense of agency in a world that can feel like a labyrinth of stock representations. Through material gestures, collage forges desire paths, cutting as resistance and pasting as creation.

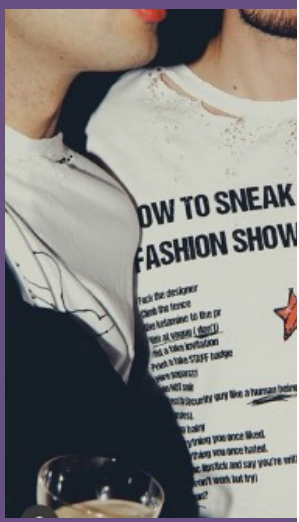
I am confronted by different parts of myself and community and through the process of stitching and gluing I'm discovering a new narrative... Fiyin Oluokun, Plastic Soldiers, courtesy of the artist

Collage can often feel more like discovering than constructing. It's peeling back layers and finding what it is you are trying to convey… Personal gestures in Plaster of Paris, Fiyin Oluokun, courtesy of the artist

How to Sneak into a Fashion Show

By Lexie Patterson

Forget the guest list, we're all invited. Lyas, a twenty-something-year-old fashion commentator and influencer has possibly changed the fashion world forever with his revolutionary live-streaming of high-fashion shows.



How to Sneak into a Fashion S
(Photo credit: @lawatchparty, I

In the heart of Milan in the thick of Fashion Week 2025, a colossal, larger-than-life laptop live-streams a high-fashion runway in real time. Around it the current 'it-boy' of fashion, Lyas, gathers a riotous crowd of fashion fanatics who chant with fevered unity: 'We are young / We set the world on fire'. And they are. And they do. It's long overdue. It is a moment in which the doors of the fashion world, long defined by velvet ropes, open up.

Lyas' creation, *La Watch Party*, is a social media sensation that has shaken up the traditional hierarchy of Fashion Week. His free events, complete with free drinks and cheap t-shirts, bring together thousands to watch live-streamed runway shows in venues across Paris, London and Milan. No dress code, no guest list, no bouncer.

While Kylie Jenner and Central Cee stare guilelessly from the front row of the runway droning through their usual staged interviews, real energy crackles where Lyas and his fashion friends are.

Lyas is a twenty-something French influencer, commentator and creator who found his way into the industry by pretending to belong. He began by slipping un-invited into runway shows and after-parties, insinuating himself into the orbit of fashion's inner circles. And now he has nestled himself well into the scene. Lyas refuses to believe in fashion as a closed and locked world, and by following him you too can be a believer. Trademarked by his iconic red lipstick, Lyas operates outside the traditional fashion houses (Louis

Vuitton, Chanel, Prada et al) and insists on his independence from them. He has built a reputation for unfiltered honesty and sharp, often humorous, critique of the shows, cultivating a loyal and adoring following on both TikTok and Instagram.

This October, two thousand people showed up to his Dior Watch Party after he announced: 'If you're in Paris for Fashion Week, but you're not invited to fashion shows, there's one place you gotta go'. He reclaims access itself, handing out t-shirts printed with tongue-in-cheek slogans such as 'Print a fake invitation', and 'Be a Nepo Baby'. Lyas insists that it's a non-profit enter prise, selling t-shirts that are hand-distressed by his mate, model and dancer, Kirill. There's something DIY, homespun and spontaneous about it all. A charm that feels deliciously anti-establishment.

ion Show T-Shirt; instructions included
arty, Instagramm)

The t-shirts' scathing slogans capture the revolutionary mood: 'Climb the fence', 'F*** the designer', 'Work at Vogue (don't)', 'Treat the security guard like a human being (no one does)'. Lyas mocks fashion's brutal exclusivity and its unfair privileges.

La Watch Party was born out of frustration. In June 2025, after he hadn't been invited to the Dior show, an enraged Lyas decided to host his own version. He invited his followers to a Parisian bar, switched off the football, and streamed the Dior runway instead. The moment went viral. In that instant, fashion became about community, not status. 'When I say I like fashion,' he explains on TikTok, 'it's not just the clothes. It's every little detail that makes up that world'. The Watch Partiers love the clothes, but they love the invitation into this world just as much and the high-energy of having gate-crashed the event. It's a concert or a football game. It's a festival.

At each of his Watch Parties, new stunts unfold: ashtrays in which guests vote for their favourite designer by stubbing out a cigarette for Galliano or McQueen, a security guard strutting down the gangway, or a giant bag of popcorn bursting above the heads of the crowd. No one ever knows what to expect and the spectacle is all part of the compelling nature of Lyas' show. It's performance art.

It all seems just a little too good to be true. Free drinks are backed by big-name sponsors: Joe and the Juice is handing out matcha, and MAC is giving away red lipstick. When one fan asks if there is a dress code, Lyas replies, 'No --- but there's one condition: you have to wear red lipstick.' Well, of course, Lyas, because MAC wants their moment too. At each event, Lyas randomly hands out a single golden ticket to the actual runway. Just one person in the crowd gets to go. Wait… only one? Despite Lyas' efforts to create a democratising event that rebels against the high-end fashion

Lyas with the Crowd- The Party never Ends! (Photo Credit: @lyas, Instagram)

shows, he hypocritically encourages the sense of artificial exclusivity promoted by the brands hosting their own runways. Thought we were all in this together? Guess even the revolution still has a guest list.

On the back of his t-shirt, Lyas tells the crowd to attend his Watch Party if they don't want to jump through the hoops of sneaking into fashion shows and playing the exclusivity game, yet he goes to the runway himself. The cameras capture him on his way, sporting a motorcycle helmet inscribed with '*La Watch Party*'. Yes, he's live streaming to the crowd but there's an unmistakable sense that he can't help but love his own VIP status.

'Bonjour La Watch Party!' exclaims Charli XCX, livestreamed from the Yves Saint Laurent show to the rapt audience of fashion devotees watching back at the bar. Behind her, the Eiffel Tower glitters; her blacked-out sunglasses catch the reflection of Lyas filming her. A few seconds earlier, he was filming Central Cee on the front row. 'Very chic', he teases. Even while mocking fashion's inner circle, he can't help ingratiating himself with its players.

Lyas wants to be one of us, but he's not. His best friends are supermodels, Alex Consani and Loli Bahia, whom he invites to stroll straight from the Chanel runway into *La Watch Party*. For the crowd, it's a fleeting and surreal moment of glamour that feels almost tangible. In one recent video, Lyas is on a balcony twith pop artist Kim Petras, looking down on the audience like runway royalty. A fully inclusive, no-celebrity zone, they said? Clearly, Lyas didn't get his own memo. He's one of them. Not one of us.

You can catch Lyas out for failing to fulfil his promise of authenticity as many times as you like, but despite the popularity of the *La Watch Party* t-shirt, it's not all about the merch. People are in it for a feeling, a

sense of belonging they've not had before. It's not a perfect model, but it certainly tries, and the light it gives off is real: a space to make friends, connect, and be part of fashion as a community.

Will *La Watch Party* spread beyond fashion's capitals? Or will its success swallow it whole, turning inclusivity back into exclusivity?

After the whirlwind of Fashion Week, Lyas turned to TikTok, asking his Watch Party attendees to rate their experience of the shows. The comments are filled with outstanding reviews:

> 'It was my first time having access to the fashion world, I was flabbergasted by the idea and the fact that you gave me the chance to speak about Johnathon Anderson's Dior show'.
>
> Another: 'It was so fun having […] people singing together and everything, it was so accessible and there was no feeling of hierarchy and fake exclusivity. The whole thing felt inclusive because it was'.

Anna Wintour, long-reigning queen of fashion, once declared, 'You either know fashion, or you don't'; that is, you're either in or you're out. It's time to take off your crown, Wintour. Lyas has hailed in a new revolution, capturing the spirit of the moment, standing at the bridge between being those who are 'in' and those who want in, but are out. One comment on his recent post from a *La Watch Party* attendee crowns him 'King Lyas'. He has done what fashion so often forgets to do: he puts real people with real passion front and centre, reminding us of what the industry is truly all about.

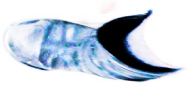
At *La Watch Party*, for a fleeting moment, exclusively gave way to inclusivity, and fashion finally felt about the people. With or without Lyas, watch parties are surely here to stay, bringing high fashion as an art form to all, promoting fashion literacy and enabling informed sartorial discernment. Once, the fashion show was the preserve of the industry's elite, but now the runway event is being truly democratised. And who knows, when it connects directly to the people on the street, maybe the industry itself will be changed forever.

Never mind Anna Wintour, keep your invitation. *La Watch Party* is here, and everyone's invited!

The Valentino Show: one giant laptop, a thousand front rows.
(Photo Credit: @ly.as, Instagram)

The Way Out

By Alejandra Kikidis Roman



“The city overwhelms me”

The continuous drift through streets, tunnels, and shops, slipping between tight scaffolding and sudden pockets of emptiness. Alejandra Kikidis captures this rhythm through her 1 minute captivating video artwork.

The camera never settles, constantly moving, tracking, lagging, stuttering. Its uneven frame rate casts a hypnotic haze over each scene. Familiar spaces appear slightly off, as if seen through someone else’s half-remembered dream. Every frame feels both vivid and unstable. Flickering light, ghostly figures, and glitchy pacing pull the viewer into a trance.

Inside the shops, fluorescent bulbs hum and flash with a sickly glow. Their flicker feels almost physical—like the pulse of a migraine or the static before sleep. Snippets of footsteps, traffic, and distant voices blur into one continuous noise. The soundscape traps you in the city’s relentless sensory loop: dizzying, dazzling, and impossible to escape.

Then, slowly, the rhythm begins to breathe. The noise thins out. The camera finds a path through green space—soft, indistinct, and still. The pace drops, the light opens up, and the film exhales. It evokes a longing for quiet landscapes and untouched nature, a return to something slower, softer, and steeped in nostalgia.

The Way Out is both a portrait of exhaustion and a dream of escape.

‘Gigs with no Soul!’ The Promoters Choking London’s Independent Music Scene

By Tien Albert, Editor-in-Chief

In London’s oversaturated music scene, small independent artists are often taken advantage of through predatory pricing schemes and exclusivity clauses.

Dani Muñoz would like to get paid. On the 19th of September 2025, he and his band, The Eeps, headlined a gig at The Old Dispensary, an infamous Irish boozer and live music venue in Camberwell. Whilst the venue has hosted established acts like Fat White Family, Sleaze, and Black Bordello in the past, this particular show was not put on by the venue, but by an independent promoter called City Sound Session. Tickets were sold for £10 online, and Dani was initially promised at least 50% of each sale. But when the day of the show came, the promoter, Robert, was nowhere to be found. ‘I called out for his name on stage’, says Dani. ‘That’s when the sound guy yelled across the venue: “He was here for five minutes, but he’s gone!”’

None of the bands playing that night were paid for their appearances. When Dani tried to contact Robert later on Instagram to receive payment, he was told they had not fulfilled a ten-ticket minimum sale condition, and therefore wouldn’t be paid. They were then quickly blocked, as was The Old Dispensary’s handle.

The Courtauldian’s investigation found that The Eeps had only been told about the ten-ticket minimum almost a month after initially agreeing to play for a 50-65% split in their favour. Robert of City Sound Session said the ten-ticket minimum had been a policy for years. ‘The reason we have this requirement is to cover venue hire and, more importantly, production costs such as contracts, staff, and all other related expenses which are usually for £300-500.’

Yet, not all of these expenses were applicable on the 19th of September. Patrick, who runs The Old Dispensary, told The Courtauldian he wanted profits to go ‘straight to the bands.’ ‘I asked for nothing, just the bar. And I paid for the sound person.’ Moreover, Robert was the only staff member present at The Old Dispensary, and the only person The Courtauld-

ian and The Eeps heard from. ‘At the end of the days is very easy [sic] to attack the promoter that work hours [sic] often for free due to false informations [sic] provided by the bands.’, Robert wrote to us.

Stories of theft are commonplace in the independent music scene. More often promoters and venues are simply abusing the naivety of young bands. Spike, bassist in post-punk/hardcore band Skunkworm, remembers a recent gig in Guildford. ‘It was pretty packed’, he says, but ‘we hadn’t discussed payment beforehand… When we approached them after the show the venue got weird and passive aggressive and blamed it on us for never asking.’ Tickets cost £10, and Skunkworm were never paid.

Perhaps more concerningly, even when bands aren’t overtly stolen from, the terms imposed onto them by major promoters are often unfair or even predatory. Last year, emerging pop singer Flo Wilkes won a competition with major London promoter Hot Vox to perform at Isle of Wight Festival. In order to win, Wilkes passed through three live rounds, winning via industry vote each time. For each round, another band also passes via audience vote, ‘which is basically who sells the most tickets.’

For each £12 ticket sold attributed to Wilkes through a personalised link, she received only £2, a sixth of the turnover. The sold-out semi-final, which was held in the 410 capacity 93 Feet East therefore generated around £4920 in revenue (not including bar spend). Yet, Wilkes and her band sold 75 tickets and made just £150

Speedial soundcheck at The Windmill, Brixton… Photo: Lexie Patterson

to share between the five of them.

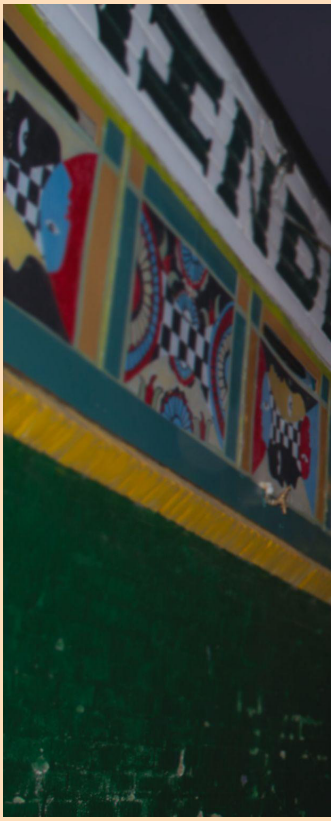
'It's awful', says Wilkes. 'When I run my own headline shows, I get to pay my band [a four-piece backing] like £150 each, and that's because I wasn't giving money to a promoter.'

Live music is an integral part of London's cultural capital. Last year, its grassroots music scene contributed £313m to the economy, hosting performances by more than 328,000 artists, according to the London Assembly. It's clear that actors across the scene are suffering economically. According to the Night Time Industries Association (NTIA), one in four late-night venues in the UK have closed since 2020.

A contract obtained by The Courtauldian from major promoter Inpop and major booking agent More Live reveals an even more dire pricing scheme for artists. For each £11.75 ticket attributed to them, acts make a measly £1.17. Once the act has sold over 19 tickets, the payment structure is bracketed in a way that means that each ticket sold now brings £2.34. This is a common strategy used by promoters to force bands to bring a higher number of 'fans' (read friends) to their shows.

The pressure is real. The same contract warns that artists will receive sales feedback from an agent every week. 'The promoter needs to see a steady flow of ticket sales [...]. If this cannot be seen, it may be necessary to postpone the artist's performance', it reads. This kind of pressure, frequently pushed on artists who are minors, is emblematic of the corporatisation of a field of art typically seen as easy-going. 'I got a text from a friend saying "Sorry but can you come to a gig tomorrow, the promoter is being really pushy with ticket sales"', says Wilkes.

When asked about Inpop, Patrick laughs. As well as running The Old Dispensary, now blocked on Instagram by City Sound Session, he also drums in alt-rock two-piece Two Thieves: 'They sent me, I think it was an 80-90 page legal document. I got dizzy trying to read it, and I basically just said no.'



At this grassroots level, most, if not all artists are not playing for the money. Bands simply want to play as often as possible in as many places as possible, to get their music and name heard in the scene. Unfortunately, even this aspiration is being impeded by promoters.

The same contract leaked to The Courtauldian, which was for a show scheduled the 1st of August 2025, demanded an exclusivity period starting the 16th of May 2025 and ending three weeks after the show in late August. At this rate, an artist could perform a maximum of four shows in a year.

Wilkes reads from a contract for one of her upcoming shows: 'No shows to be played in this city four weeks either side of the show date unless agreed by us.

This is to help you!' 'I don't think they quite understand how I ball', she says of the 'patronising' contract.

For Millie Kirby, bass player in emerging post-punk bands Speedial, The Orchestra (For Now), and Big Red, 'The problem is that the exclusivity is just to do with the venue making money. It doesn't help the bands, it helps the promoters.' 'There's no guarantee of a good gig either', adds Serena Garrod of Speedial. 'It's like "Oh you can't do a gig for a month surrounding it", but it also might not even be worth that'... Doing two shit gigs is better than doing one shit gig!'

Speedial pose outside of The Windmill in Brixton...
Photo: Lexie Patterson

The gigs put on by these major promoters are, indeed, often shit. 'You promise the promoter a lot without them really reciprocating much', says Millie. Publicity for gigs doesn't usually go beyond sharing a generic poster - it is obvious from a quick look at any of the promotional companies mentioned in this piece that they all use the same template for each of their shows. In short, promoters are not really promoting. For Wilkes, exclusivity clauses stem from a place of insecurity for promoters, who know they are putting on low-quality nights and want to guarantee a high attendance. But at the end of the day, 'If it's a show that's worth selling tickets for, then I'll sell those fucking tickets, don't you worry mate.'

Some venues are infamous for churning out low-quality shows, organised by major promoters: 'it's always at The Amersham Arms [in New Cross], and it's always the worst poster you've ever seen, and you have to sell a certain amount of tickets to play. It's just a complete shitshow', says Spike.

The same criticisms come up again and again for all the artists The Courtauldian interviewed. ‘There’s no coherency in the lineups,’ says Joe Killick of Speedial and Wing!, ‘It doesn’t work, they don’t all fit together,’ continues Speedial bandmate Monarch Vavrechka. ‘If you don’t put on bands that fit well together, the people just aren’t going to bother to stick around.’, says Kirby. ‘The people are there to see their mates, and after they’ve seen their mates, they’ll leave’, finishes Vavrechka.

This is the crux of the issue for many artists signed on for gigs with major promoters. Even if a gig in a 200 capacity venue has sold out, fans only stay for one artist, often a friend of theirs, so bands end up playing to an empty room whilst promoters still maximise ticket sales. Full lineups for gigs hosted by Inpop aren’t announced until all performers have sold their minimum quota for tickets. This means that most fans do not know the lineups before attending. And since releasing the full lineup isn’t a priority, promoters are at liberty to continue to put on incoherent, unbalanced lineups.

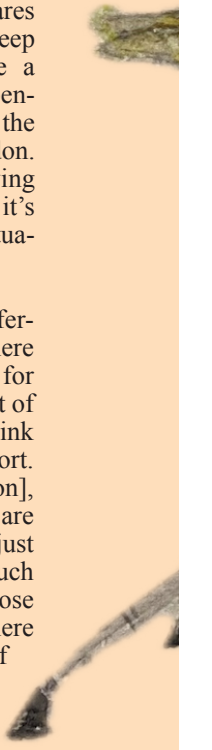
‘They’re just mashing a load of bands together and saying “There you go, you can come to that if you want.”, says Kirby. ‘People want to go for a reason, and I feel like a lot of promoters aren’t giving a reason.’ Killick continues: ‘Whenever I see an Underground Sound [another major London promoter] gig poster, I’m just like, that has no soul!’

In a business where the chance of long-term financial success is slimmer than ever, soul and authenticity remain the most important factors for artists. On Halloween 2025, Spike’s DYI collective, The Shovel, put on a free show underneath a bridge on the M25, powered by a generator. ‘We are going to lose money from doing this sort of stuff’, he says. The bands’ only profits depended on donations and the possibility of punters buying their merch. Yet, this arrangement is preferred by the bands performing, rather than play for a major promoter like Underground Sound.

‘I like to think it’s quite obvious that we’re doing it because we love it and we want to be doing it and it’s bands that we like. Because I’ve seen Rampressure [who played alongside Spike on Halloween] before and they absolutely blew my mind. And I’ve seen Gegenpress [who also played] and they were just unreal’, says Spike. ‘They know that we’re doing it because we’re coming at it from a genuine love of live music.’

Patrick, from The Old Dispensary, shares a similar story: ‘Usually we try to keep gigs free, we want to give people a chance to perform.’ As a fellow independent artist, Patrick empathises with the struggle of those playing live in London. ‘I don’t plan to make any money playing music. I love playing music. I think it’s very off-putting to get trapped in situations like this with promoters.’

For Spike, the solution to the suffering live music scene is simple: ‘There should be more government funding for these grassroots spaces… There’s a lot of venues that do still pay bands, and I think those are the ones that need that support. Venues like The Windmill [in Brixton], The George Tavern and all those that are well-respected and well-regarded just need to be more vocal about how much of a struggle it is to keep open those venues.’ As for major promoters, ‘There should be some sort of boycott of Underground Sound and all that lot.



But, that's quite a hard thing to organise with bands that are just starting off.'

Putting on your own gig is a financial burden that many bands can't afford. 'Young bands, even A-level students, don't have the money to put on to book the venues themselves.', says Vavrechka. 'The cheapest is The Troubadour [in Earl's court], I think that's like 60 quid.'

£60 may seem a lot for a young band, but it shouldn't for a government scheme. It's misleading to say that all that is needed for grassroots success is a small financial push. However, it's important to note that the super bands of tomorrow are not infinitely separated from major success, or from a successful start in the scene. It may be that they are just £60 away.

Underground Sound and Hot Vox did not reply to a request for comment. Whilst contact was made with Inpop, they did not follow up on a request for comment from The Courtauldian.

Illustrator: Jemima Beadman

Patrick behind the bar at The Old Dispensary... Photo: Gus Donald


Maker's Mark

By Maya Shinder

Forbidden Fruit:

Can Feminine Desire Exist in a Male Realm

What happens to feminine desire when men control the frame? In 1973, Playboy published a version of Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market illustrated by Kinuko Y. Craft.

The magazine, entrenched in the male gaze, alters our perception of Craft's paintings. What may have once been perceived as a poetic exploration of feminine desire becomes, through the act of publication, objectively determined as sexually erotic—a transition from the semiotic to the symbolic.

Philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva, in her 1974 Revolution in Poetic Language, situates the semiotic as maternal, distinguishing it from the paternal while still emphasising their interdependence. Craft illustrates the sisters' long, flowing hair and sinuous forms as reminiscent of the swirling, sensuous elements often seen in Art Nouveau, portraying the sisters' desire as semiotic and thereby feminine. However, through publication, Craft's illustrations are framed within the symbolic authority of Playboy, establishing them within the realm of masculine consumption.

Moreover, in her 1982 Powers of Horror, Kristeva defined the 'abject' which she determines as 'having only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I'. Craft's depiction of Laura is supine and odalisque-esque. She is surrounded by priapic fruit whilst being consumed by grotesque goblin men—an image redolent of the fall from grace. Craft's Laura serves as both the subject and object of desire. Her intangibility due to her being solely a representation renders her both a forbidden fruit as well as the one who tastes it.

Without the validation of the male gaze, their desire risks being unseen, misinterpreted or deemed illicit. In this sense, the male gaze prevents the desires of the sisters from falling away into abjection, so their desire is only legitimised through the media of male spectatorship.

The sisters' long, flowing hair and sinuous forms as reminiscent of the swirling, sensuous elements often seen in Art Nouveau…

Goblin Market: Ribald Classic, Playboy Magazine, 1973

Craft's work places the sisters in an act of pursuing their desires. The feminine figures are portrayed reaching, grasping and also consuming. It is not sustenance that appeals to them. It is the exploration of the experience of their journey.

Since these illustrations were commissioned by Playboy, we must ask whether male pleasure can be sustained through feminine desire that is not being subordinated?

However, the paradox remains: Playboy is anchored in the male gaze and perpetuated by consumerism. This gaze both legitimises and threatens feminine desire. In this sense, the semiotic feminine must pass through the symbolic masculine, supported by the male gaze, in order to be recognised. Craft's images serve as a catalyst from the semiotic to the symbolic as well as from abjection to legitimacy. They find a foothold for feminine desire to exist and assert itself within structures designed to suppress or contain it.

Pour it Forward

By Honor Cockroft

The Ancient Greeks watered down their wine.

With only barbarians drinking it neat, wine was mixed with water to prevent over intoxication during the wine-fuelled symposiums we see depicted on Greek Attic pottery.

Served warm to guests at Salvador Dali's parties, or painted to signify consumerism in late 20th century Paris, wine has flowed and remained a marker of taste, culture and indulgence over time.

But whilst a glass of chablis may remain a staple of the French worker's breakfast, our wine is no longer watered down. In fact, we barely drink wine at all.

The 'Great Wine Decline'

Over the last few years global wine consumption has hit its lowest level since 1996, according to the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV)'s, with Gen Z ranking the driest of generations.

High inflation has increased industry costs, whilst simultaneously reducing consumer purchasing power, leading to a not-so-whet appetite.

As wallets have weakened, wine has fallen down the priority list. The result: 800 million fewer bottles of wine being uncorked each year.

But the 'great wine decline' is yet to prove its tenure. To many, this lull is merely a hangover from the pandemic-era boom, and represents another natural evolution in the market's cyclical movement of wine.

To the Goed Wine Collective this market correction presents an opportunity. Prices are relatively low, and for the first time since its peak in 2018, wine is once again a buyers market.

Heading up young events for prestigious fine wine merchant Goedhuis Waddesdon, Tilly Wine is alive. The way it evolves and changes in your glass - there's nothing quite like it."

So why are the young turning away from the grape?

Wine has always been represented as a mature drink, with young people pipped

to not have the money, palate or sensibilities for wine.

The wine market is set among a new alcohol landscape. Celebrity-backed spirit brands regularly outperform the broader market, low-alc seltzers have made the journey from our more abstinent friends across the Atlantic, and beer reigns in British pubs.

Whilst the average pub offers an array of craft beer, Guinness' parent company Diageo has seen some its best years yet, whilst even the 'Schooner Scorer' devoted an entire month of content to popular 0% beers like Lucky Saint.
With the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaring all alcohol consumption unsafe, moderation is of course recommended to avoid tumbling like Rodin's Bacchus or rendering one's own version of Cy Twombly's series of the same name.

The power of wine: Cy Twombly's Untitled (Bacchus) © Tate

But putting public health aside, and with the ever-present cost of living crisis, it seems our health-conscious generation is drinking less. Of everything.

Cue natural wine.

Unassuming, these often fresh, often funky, wines appeal to those who have long been skeptical of the traditional wine industry, who often think they're cheaper, and cooler. (Think glou glou, or skin contact wine).

These natural fermentation, low intervention, no additive wines have found their place on the menus of London's burgeoning wine bar scene, like Shoreditch's Oranj.
Starting out as an online shop for natural wine, Oranj has evolved to feature a Shoreditch wine bar as well as a wine subscription service, toggled to your tastes or curated for you, and largely under £20.

It's known not just for its natural wine (their go-to wine is a cement-aged Cab Franc blend), but for collaborations with artists like Babek Ganjej, and a curated residency programme that has seen a rotation of fresh chefs on the pans.

To founder Jasper Delamothe, Oranj sits at an intersection of food, art and culture: "Our guests don't necessarily come from a 'wine background'. They're people who are curious and culturally engaged.

"It's less about age than mindset. We're proof that the next generation still loves wine, it just wants to experience it differently."

Wine subscriptions are one of the many new shortcuts into wine, along with new zines inspired by the famed Noble Rot, and wine tastings.

Wine tastings, like visual analysis, seem

to require a learned lexicon of language and a level of understanding that takes time to build.

So do we need clarity?

Described as a fresh take on wine with ‘no snobbery and no fluff’, Clarity is a new events platform taking on the traditional world of wine’s ‘fancy jargon and stiff tasting rooms’.

20-year-old founder, Matt Tilbury, whose appetite for wine was spiked in the ‘new world’ vineyards of Australia’s Margaret River, wants to create an on-ramp to get young people into wine.

Tilbury believes that Gen Z are still drinking, they just don’t know what wines to choose, whether it’s out on a date or cooking at home.

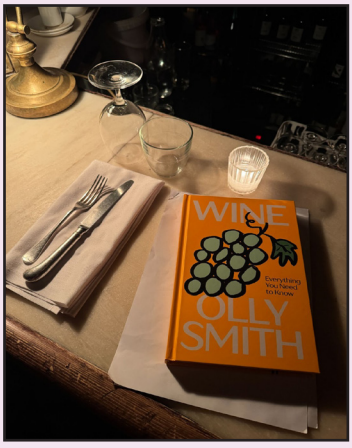
He said: “Wine’s best days are behind it. That’s not a drinking problem, it’s a marketing problem. We need merchants and producers to come together and admit that this structure isn’t working. No more long tables and discussing Cab Sauvignons with 50 year olds.

“We have to preempt the change and create curiosity now. That’s how we’re going to build connoisseurship.”

There is not one clear route into wine. More likely it’s a meandering stumble from £1 boxed wine, to finding your favourite producers, with some supermarket-shelf-induced panic somewhere in the middle.

Like newspapers, wine is too tactile, too habitual, too addictive to go anywhere, anytime too soon. We’ll be holding on. And raising a glass.

Dumb it down:
The writings of well-loved wine critics are a path into wine
© Honor Cockroft



Shrine to the vine:
The Noble Rot zine covers all things wines and vines
© Honor Cockroft

Would you like a drink?
Caravaggio's (Bacchus)
© Uffizi Gallery

‘Those Horse French’: Reflections from a Woodlands on Fashioning Future Journeys

By Mason McBreairty

If the slap of a mere stick can silence a people and their language, what gestures dictate how and where we are permitted to belong in the artworld?

“Northern Maine ‘Valley French’ is old French with a little English thrown in….and it was only up ‘til age five that I was fluent,” my grandmother says. “Me and the other students in my class, over half of whom came from French families, all talked with each other in French. That was when our teacher, Mrs. Fletcher, with no warning, slapped her long ruler on my desk, scaring the absolute wits out of all of us! Forbidding us from speaking in our mother tongue, Mrs. Fletcher joined other teachers who didn’t like us speaking like that at all. They would never even say our names correctly, especially our last names. Whether you were a Thibodeau, a Theriault, a Perrault, or a Charette like me, the teachers made up their own names to call us by and would only refer to us by those names, despite our nascent correction.” Curious, I asked, “Why would they do such a thing? Didn’t that create a kind of inner conflict, a feeling of self-ambivalence?” My grandmother replied,

"We all talked in Valley French… we were, ya know, those 'horse French.' We spoke differently, and they couldn't speak it or understand it. That's why they didn't like it, so that's why we couldn't speak it. That ruler slap, especially, was it for me; no more would I, or many of my school friends, speak the language in public or private [settings]. This never seemed to faze our parents because we were in school, a place for improvement. But I remember my own nana would continue speaking to me in French. Not long before she passed, I told her, 'Nana, I don't speak French anymore,' to which she replied, 'Oh mon dieu!' The older I've become, the more this has troubled me. Even when "proper" French classes became a taught subject in school—Parisian French—I preferred to stay out of it and chose a different subject—algebra. I chose a subject I knew I could pass: arithmetic, not French."

These accounts my grandmother shares challenge a prevailing notion. The French language, by and large I have found, is conceptually regarded or generally assumed by both speakers and non-speakers as uniform in its entirety, as if the regularities the Académie Française establishes to ensure the formality and "purity" of its grammar and vocabulary prevail globally and are taken up by every existent French-speaking locality. The inaccuracy of such conceptions could not be more demonstrable when witnessing those of Paris and Montréal intermingle, or when witnessing those from Rivière-du-Loup and the Saint John Valley, Maine's northern borderland, intermingle—the latter two separated only by a mere hour's drive.

I accentuate this not simply out of linguistic curiosity, but to signify that depth exists at smaller, more localised levels and contexts. I call upon emerging scholars and practitioners within the art historical discipline and its adjacent sister fields (e.g., curatorship, archival and material culture studies) to devote greater recognition to this. For those in art history, there often persist narratives and an underlying degree of incomprehensible pressure to chart one's course only within prestigious, well-connected institutions that operate at the macro-level. It seems as though any stray or deviation from such a track will utterly diminish one's future success and credibility, if not thwart it altogether. This notion can lead to self-consuming distorted thoughts and feelings of inadequacy, leading to unhealthy spirals of doubt and even perhaps self-sabotaging ways of behaving. I am unashamed to admit I found myself in such states of being at one time or another; such conditions are not signifiers of inherent personal weakness(es), but are natural by-products of striving in a system(s) and culture of academic and professional perfectionism, where prestige, intellect, and composure are idealised to a measure that leaves no room for

[intrinsic] human vulnerability.

Yet, the pursuit of professional development within more micro- to meso-level institutions and contexts must not be relegated or dismissed. These "peripheral" sites are not insignificant: they are fertile grounds for revealing and engaging with untapped archives, under-recognised histories, and conducting original scholarship. They lead to opportunities never before considered and can even construct ones wholly new. Nearly a year ago, motivated by deep interests in and familial connections to Acadian and Québécois customs, I reconnected with a former lecturer who serves as the director of the Musée culturel du Mont-Carmel. The Musée is an institution in the northern Maine village of Lille devoted to preserving and fostering the rich traditions and visual histories of the Francophone communities of the Saint John Valley, a terrain encompassing the woodland landscapes traversing northern Maine and a southern share of Canada's province of New Brunswick.

The institution's longstanding aims is preventing the complete cultural erasure of the Valley's "horse French"—a disparaging label that has, within recent decades especially, come to denote the French peoples and their traditions of the Saint John merely given their usage of an old and distinct dialect of the French language. This resonated strongly with me. I expressed my interest in contributing to the institution in ways I felt strongly, particularly through social media management, exhibition conceptualisation and writing, and critical object interrogation. Listening to my grandmother share recollections of how she and others like her—whose first language was "Valley French"—endured the assimilatory pressures of Americanization, whose imposition of the English language intentionally sought to efface the language and culture of the Saint John Valley's Francophone communities, further deepened my resolve to become involved in the Musée.

I have since helped to transform and refashion the institution's online presence, recommended and implemented more appropriate collection care practices, and devised new and reoriented existing educational programming. What began as voluntary contributions and a path of personal enrichment has evolved into my official appointment within the museum's advancement and curatorial teams. I now sit alongside my former lecturer on the institution's board of directors, establishing and ensuring the fulfilment of institutional objectives while deepening my studies of the French cultures and histories spanning northern New England and across Canada's provinces of Québec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (Acadie).

While it has been my aim to urge exploratory encounters with(in) more localised artworlds, it would be disingenuous not to underscore

some of the obstacles and challenges one may encounter, as I have, within such realms. As in larger artworlds and more well-established institutions, I have found that access to opportunities within more micro- meso-level spheres can also depend less on merit and more on personal connections; who you know becomes equally, if not more, important than what you know. A willingness to devote any and all available time with little to no expectation of compensation is also essential. Institutions like the Musée operate under severe constraints compared to their macro-level counterparts, entailing not only chronic underfunding and skeletal staffing but most especially an entrenched reliance on outdated practices and modes of professional conduct hindering growth that is pivotal to their flourishing. A flagrant lack of proper object labelling, of wide-ranging age-appropriate educational programming, and static and unattractive dioramas—all of which have been distinguished at the Musée, results in a combined effect of passive viewing and an overall dampening degree of audience interaction. These are exemplary outdated modes.

Smaller institutions and their associated communities may also resist a broader degree of visibility and public engagement—whether to protect what they consider to be uniquely theirs, from long histories of systemic inequality(s), lack of resources, or otherwise. Resistance to change is prevalent. Additional complications develop around outdated object provenance and collecting prac-

tices, further complicating the work of the institution by demanding yet more reflection on its overall operations. Acquisitional records and documentation for varying areas of the Musée's collections are missing or fragmentary, for instance. Among these include its holdings of hard pine regional furniture and finely handwoven fabrics and textiles [e.g., tablecloths, towelettes, bed linens], the latter having once composed the trousseau of a bride-to-be within French families in the Saint John Valley. Even its rich *Rameau tressé* assortments (braided Easter palms), which echo rich local traditions of weaving and religious life, are similarly undocumented. Such absences in record-keeping, which arose in tandem with early informal and, thus, unregulated collecting practices, accentuate the need for greater institutional reflection. Most particularly concerning, however, is the Musée's collection of Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik basketry. Despite expressed positive affirmations regarding their acquisition and authenticity, the presence of indigenous artefacts within institutional settings, likened to those of the Musée, demands serious interrogation and necessitates extensive engagement with the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik, indigenous nations who continue to inhabit their unceded ancestral lands encompassing the Saint John Valley.

It is not my intention to dissuade emerging art historical scholars from pursuing professional journeys within more established institutions, but rather to emphasise that, despite the challenges the environments may pose, meaningful paths do exist within more localised worlds. These areas must not be overshadowed or rendered obscure by the pursuit of 'the big leagues.' Depth and complexity prevail within localised levels, as my grandmothers' testimonies and memories confirm. The study of moments and histories that lie beyond dominant narratives and paradigms merits serious attention, for such work invites engagement with noncanonical modalities such as oral histories and folk traditions. Through funding and partnerships with the Maine humanities councils, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Québec-Labrador Foundation (QLF), the Musée served as a paramount contributor to the *Voici the Valley Cultureway* project, an international assessment encompassing extensive consultation and interviewing with Francophone families throughout the Saint John Valley, which resulted in highly informative booklets and documentary CDs. This project engaged precisely with noncanonical modalities, fostering scholarship rooted in social activism and community agency by integrating untold stories into established narratives of North American history, thereby complicating those narratives entirely.

Illustrator: Yella Straub

Carving Your Own Route

This photographic series explores the routes carved by those who live and love outside the norm. Through collage, portraiture, and fragments of the city, it traces how queer and subcultural communities have claimed vibrant spaces of self-expression, creating pockets of belonging within London's vast and shifting landscape.

Documenting moments from costume-filled club nights, the work celebrates the creativity born from exclusion. Each photograph becomes a record of self-made visibility, where identity is performed, concealed, and reclaimed in equal measure. It invites viewers into the hidden infrastructures of connection that sustain queer life, revealing the beauty that emerges when people shape their own way through the world.

PATHS OUTSIDE THE NORM

OUTSIDERS

By Jo Leuenberger

Spectatorship and the Global Sumud Flotilla

In late September, the Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) announced that it had sailed within 250 nautical miles of Gaza. As the flotilla neared its destination, fear of interception from the Israeli military—which has intercepted every flotilla to Gaza since 2010—loomed overhead. Turning to the public, the GSF requested that civilians monitor the flotilla's progress via an online tracker, claiming that 'Witness provides protection' (Global Sumud Flotilla, 2025). The following week, thousands of viewers surveilled the tracker at any one time, with even more watching updates via Instagram. Spectatorship became not only a practical means of ensuring the safety and viability of the flotilla, but also a rallying action towards global allyship with Palestine.

Though the tracker and livestreams were eventually halted to avoid detection, cameras continued to film the decks up to the moment of interception. By October 3rd, Israel had intercepted the final boat. The GSF responded to each interception by uploading videos of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) boarding each vessel to their Instagram, alongside the names and nationalities of detained activists. The GSF also challenged Israel, noting 'Your crimes are being recorded' (Global Sumud Flotilla, 2025). As such, spectators became co-conspirators. Their observation was posed as constituting not only publicity, but collective safety. As of October 27th, the GSF has three million Instagram followers, most gained during and immediately after the mission.

The flotilla is only the latest example of Palestinian liberation being mobilised through observation. Much of pro-Palestine activism has been a battle between the seen and unseen: Palestinian suffering and resistance, or Zionist claims that Palestinians and their supporters are antisemitic or Hamas-aligned. Social media has proven a viable outlet for both positions, especially for young Palestinian journalists hoping to describe

their situation online without obscuration from foreign press. Israel has interpreted this visibility as threatening. Attempts to thwart Palestinian journalism have manifested in assassinations and press suppression by Israel, in which American tech companies have been complicit. For example, the Instagram page of slain journalist Saleh Aljafarawi, which had over 4.5 million followers, was removed by Meta days after his murder (Baleegh, 2025).

In the core Anglosphere, pro-Palestine activism has targeted homegrown institutions, including boycotts of Israel-affiliated corporations and protests against local governments and cultural institutions, which in turn became spectacles. In instances where practices of art, academia, and activism are intertwined, expression and exhibition are integral to effective allyship with Palestine. Populist support has proven powerful in combatting censorship from cultural institutions. Creative Australia's decision to rescind the contracts of Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino to represent Australia at the 2026 Venice Biennale was countered by widespread outrage, causing the organisation to reinstate their contracts months later. Creative Australia board member Lindy Lee publicly resigned in protest of this rescindment, stating 'I could not live with the level of violation I felt against one of my core values - that the artist's voice must never be silenced' (Lee, 2025).

Faced with institutional censorship, Palestinian and pro-Palestine artists have located other ways to gain public favour. In February 2024, eight artists featured in the Bay Area Now 9 (BAN 9) exhibition at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) in San Francisco altered or covered their exhibited artworks in protest of alleged Zionist suppression by the YBCA. In an open letter (Asgary, 2024) written following several public exchanges with the institution, the artists urged them to support a ceasefire and to 'Stop censoring artists' language, work, and programming that involves and centers Palestinian liberation.' They characterised their protest as 'a rational response to the censorship, mistreatment, and unjust refusal to allow us to explore the creative avenues of expression YBCA claims to support'.

The protest was a cause célèbre in San Francisco's arts scene, earning attention through pro-Palestinian groups' social media and local and national journalism. YBCA CEO Sara Fenske Bahat accused the artists of using the 'YBCA as a political cudgel' before resigning due to public backlash (Bravo, 2024). The BAN 9 exhibition was reopened and made free to the public shortly thereafter. Despite earlier threats to remove the altered artworks, they were ultimately displayed upon the exhibition's reopening.

February 2024 was a breakout month for the Bay Area's pro-Palestine activism. The day before the BAN 9 protest, protestors blocked the Golden Gate Bridge during the morning rush, halting traffic

for four hours. An hour's drive south, the first pro-Palestine encampment at Stanford University began. For Stanford's activists, art and social media became core components of their organising because of the opportunity for spectatorship. Joanna Baker (personal communication, 16 October 2025), former president of Jewish Voices for Peace's Stanford chapter, spoke of protest art as 'one of the most meaningful ways to advance the movement on campus,' and cited its replicability, having seen her own banners and signs reproduced in news outlets and on social media.

Another activist at Stanford, Brian Liu (personal communication, 15 October 2025), co-founder of Tech for Liberation, viewed their organising in tandem with other Bay Area organisers. 'Stanford, as a school, tries to make itself a bubble,' they said. 'But we should think of ourselves as something larger.' Liu highlighted spectatorship's central strength: its unifying effect. For both organisers and passive supporters, spectatorship sets allies in dialogue with Palestinians and the wider strata of liberation. More than street or university protests, social media has become the central venue to express and produce allyship.

Importantly, spectatorship allows allies to consider their own relationship to the genocide. Broadcasts from Palestine evidence the extent of famine and violence while photos of homefront protestors bring resistance into familiar contexts. The GSF constituted symbolic value for the international movement towards Palestinian liberation and for Baker, the flotilla's publicity offered the opportunity for reflection, especially in its concurrence with Yom Kippur. 'This felt really relevant in considering how the members of the flotilla put their bodies on the line for this cause,' she said, 'and for myself, I was thinking about how I used my physical capabilities and time to make art to contribute to the messaging and visibility of this movement.' In this vein, spectatorship didn't amount to awareness or performative action, it provided reflexive introspection, providing new ways to forge a path forward.

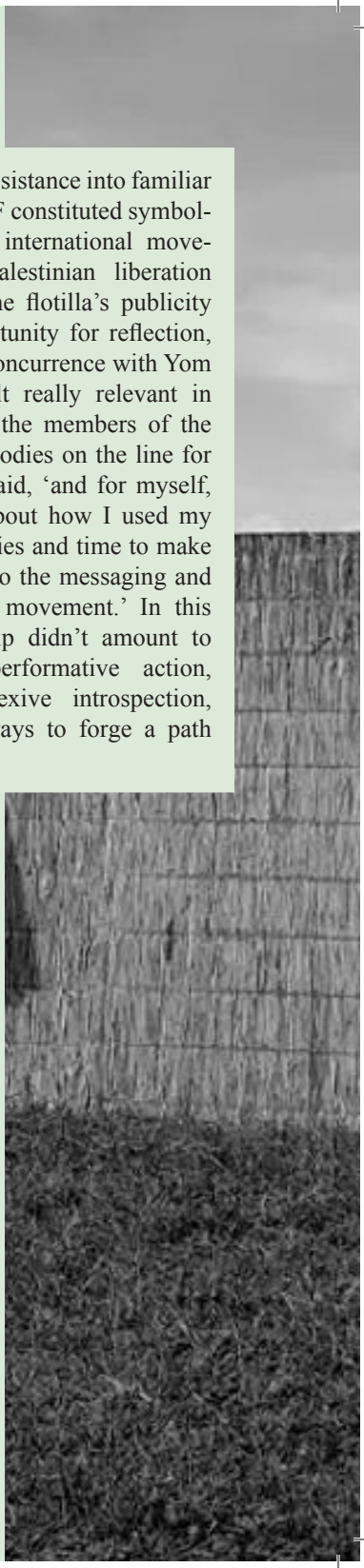


Photo from:
https://www.pinterest.com/pin/372532200441505758/

The Garden at the Edge of Silence

By Juliana Montoya

I woke to a quiet world. Not silent, but a strangely tempered one. A world where the air itself had learned to listen. It spoke to me with the drip of water from a low stone fountain, the rustle of leaves brushing against one another, the soft scratch of soil under fading footsteps. Its voice reached me with clarity. I opened my mouth to respond, greeting the morning with the warmth of a hug from a beloved friend. I felt the words forming like glass in my throat, in their perfect and familiar shape. I could hear them, solid and whole, but the garden received nothing but the whisper of wind and shadow.

I rose and stepped into the garden. The path was carved in pale stones, winding between mossed terraces, gentle inclines, and low stone bridges spanning narrow streams. I could hear the murmur of a waterfall coming from the far corner, where the sunlight broke into a thousand fragments that danced like scattered letters as it

was caught by the gentle stream. I traced the curves of the path with my eyes, feeling its quiet logic: a labyrinth full of intention and possibility. Each step carried me further from comprehension, yet the garden remained faithful, ordered, and generous, as if it waited for me to arrive.

I spoke to the stones, whispered at the streams. Even if my voice returned to me with correct and rounded syllables, the air outside my lips could only bear hollow echoes. I tried calling to the water as it slid over the stones, to the wind that turned the petals of the lotus, and to the moss that clung to every terrace. Nothing answered, but the garden still seemed to hold onto my words, folding them into its paths, its bridges, its quiet inclines.

As the days began to fold into one another, I traced my steps along the garden path. When did my words lose all their meaning?

I passed at each rise to leave marks. I drew circles and spirals in the soft soil beside the water. I scratched tiny constellations on the flat stones of the bridges. I pressed my fingers in the moss to form glyphs that vanished slowly, absorbed by the green. Perhaps the garden would speak for me, as it seemed I no longer could.

Time slowed. The garden's breath sang me to sleep. I began to dream in shapes rather than words, waking with the memory of spirals and lines pressed against the palms of my hands. My thoughts, which I once heard as clear sounds, now flowed in patterns, delicate and precise.

For days, I had felt the garden's quiet gaze. I could almost sense, yet never fully see, how it closely followed my movements and attempts at regaining that part of me that I had lost.

One morning, along the winding path, I noticed a subtle shift: a ripple across the water that could not have been mine, a shadow stretching over a terrace where the sunlight should have fallen unbroken.

I paused, listening attentively to the soft, almost imperceptible, sound of sandals brushing against stone and the rustle of a coat's hem that stirred the bamboo grove faintly and deliberately. I moved closer, tracing the path with careful steps, until I finally saw a figure crouched near the spirals I had drawn in the soil. Their fingers hovered just above the lines, tracing them with reverence, without disturbing a single mark.

I spoke with softness and care, trying not to scare the meaning away from my words. My voice fractured into the shards I had come to know, only this time the garden seemed to catch them. The figure gathered the tremors my speech left behind, leaning closer and continuing to trace my scratches with careful precision. As our gazes met, a bridge formed across the emptiness. It was delicate and trembling, yet unmistakable.

For a long while, we spoke in gestures and traces, through mere currents of intentions. The figure pressed their finger into the soil beside mine, leaving a new spiral that echoed their recognition. I mirrored their movement, tracing circles beside theirs, hoping our patterns could converse.

When they finally rose and stepped back, I understood I had to continue along the path. As I walked slowly, I could feel their attention like a second breath following my own. Our traces remained as small proofs of presence, where a fragile dialogue wove into the stones, the soil, and the curves of the water.

I wandered further up, where the path divided into a plateau of checkered stones. A line of diagonal squares led to a narrow bridge, where the wood spanned a hidden stream. It gave me a sense of clarity, something about it gave me the sense that the world was patient and generous.

I realized, as I moved along the monoliths and terraces, that language had not abandoned me entirely. My words transformed into texture; sound became pattern; meaning became presence and drifted beyond reach. Even if my voice fractured into shards the moment it left my lips, the wind, water, and moss in the garden held a piece of understanding, as though their different way of listening could bridge the distance. I began to leave more deliberate signs: stones arranged in spirals, letters etched into the wood of low benches, deliberate scratches across the surface of the pond's edge. Each gesture held a whisper, a proof that I had not disappeared entirely. In the traces I found a quiet certainty: even in silence, my presence could endure, and the world would answer in its own way.

Inosculation in trees

By Lasmina Virgoe

" When I look closely, I often see trees that, in their desire to grow, begin to devour one another and their surrounding environment. This phenomenon is known as inosculation (Latin for 'trees-that-kiss') or love-trees. This can appear above ground, with tree limbs and trunks melting into one another, or beneath the earth, with root systems intertwining and sharing minerals.

However, I am especially fascinated when this becomes a transgression of human-imposed barriers, like fences and signposts. Their devouring is a small act of defiance against the borderlines delineated by humans over the years onto the land, and a small reminder that these ideas of human ownership are entirely arbitrary.

These photographs were taken over the course of a year using my Olympus OM2 and the films Lady Grey and Kodak Ultramax. I think analogue photography adds a particular textural quality to the images. I tried to focus on the strong forms of the trees, the way they move and their sculpturality. They document a quietly persistent ability to trespass and survive.

An interesting artist's investigation into inosculation is Guiseppe Penone's *Maritime Alps*, 1967, in which the artist created a series of casts of his body and placed them among trees, for them to 'flow' eventually around the casts. This created final outcomes that were the sum of both the artist's and the forest's contributions. However, I am sure that by now, every trace of these sculptures has been entirely consumed by the trees. "

By Harry Laventure

Digitised Destinations

The Danger of Walking Aimlessly into Art's Online Ecosystems

Online connection has revolutionised our approaches to the image, in and beyond art. Every day we wander between the parahelia of celebrity runway shots and the detritus of reels at such a degree of saturation as to easily confuse it with a new reality. By simple investment of hours, one can make the argument that as much is already the case. Art, that most chimeric of beasts, must always play gadfly to its contemporary audiences. Through digitisation of vast collections, NFTs, online auctions, and forays into the metaverse, there is an inescapable increase in accessibility. And yet, despite the ostensible benefits – accessibility, transparency of transaction, fixing a flag in new digital ground - it behoves us to consider the caveats. To stroll aimlessly into territories of new abstraction, in a sphere traditionally melded to in-person, tangible experiences, is potentially a costly exercise of a freedom for its own sake. Desire to push exploration and innovation is innate to us. But calculating if we actually should is a task that, whilst risking a fart in the figurative pub, is a matter of more pressing gravity. Considering online developments of paths to selling, buying, and public access more generally, let us perambulate the globe's latest art pastures.

The auction side of the art world, as is its right and curse, has desperately tried to grab the coattails of tech's burgeoning omnipresence. Catalysed by the first tremors of a great wealth transfer into hands that prefer experience over artefact, and amplified by the pandemic's enforced in-person hiatus, auction houses and dealerships alike have looked to upload their appeal to the cloud. In October 2021, Sotheby's fired the starting gun by unveiling its metaverse. What began as a virtual Sotheby's building on the platform Decentraland mutated into a fully-fledged department. The slight

gimmick of an imagined, neon-yellow ape to welcome you at the digital door symbolised invested heft there behind. Looking to 'jumpstart conversations', the auction house's early NFT sales featured collaborations with footballers, K-Pop stars, and artists both native and external to the non-fungible realm. In its first year, sales summed to a cool $120 million. Thereafter, 2023 harboured the highlight of the GRAILS auction, which became the largest of its kind having culminated at $11 million. Their successes were not isolated. Phillips' first NFT, Mad Dog Jones' *REPLICATOR*, rose from a starting point of $100 to $4.3 million over two weeks of bidding. Participation was global, and only more stimulated by the fact that the artwork had the built-in capability to generate new, unique NFTs from itself every 28 days. In form, sales method, and bidding experience, these forays were widely without precedent.

Dealerships great and small have also answered the (synthesized) bugle. HENI began early in representing Damien Hirst's *The Currency*, a novel approach to the relationship between in-person art and NFTs. 10,000 individual works were created as 'twins', copies of each both in hard and digital form. After initial purchase, collectors had a year to decide whether they would rather keep the digitised or physical iteration – the other was destroyed. Suffice it to say that, in spite of a scandal that suggested many of the works were deliberately misdated, the sum of their value immediately after sale was close to $500 million. The digital realm, however, is as much a matter of location as medium. The Dutch Masters Argento Gallery, for example, now has an entirely virtual, interactive space, where any internet punter can 'trundle' around and observe high detail scans on each imagined wall. Argento, to the best of my knowledge, no longer has a real gallery. What was the effect of this simulated walkaround in its place? Well, as far as I was concerned, indifference. Destroying the physicality of the experience for the novelty of online interactions is a hazardous path. These are not, after all, digital artworks. Synchronicity of expectation towards that which we can never smell, hold, or see in three dimensions risks a jeopardy of apathy with the real thing. The symmetry of value and worth in art relies on buyer confidence, above all – in which tangibility has always played a principal role. Perhaps this is inherent in digital art's volatility or, at time of writing, NFTs' relative collapse post-pandemic. Christie's grabbed headlines when it recently decided to let go of the majority of its digital art team. The Christie's block-chain is still up and running, as is its ostensible commitment to selling NFTs here and there, but this must be symptomatic of some crisis in conviction. Such is the bitter dead-end of a path not yet coded.

The buy side, likewise, has undergone recalibration. Virtual ownership is not limited to virtual art. Between fractionalisation and other art equity projects, it has never been easier to 'possess' a masterpiece without the bother or priv-

ilege of needing the spare wall space. Through companies like Masterworks, Particle, and Winston Artory, buyers are able to invest in paintings that they will never come into contact with. By taking a Basquiat or Warhol and securitising it to divide the painting into affordable, democratised 'stocks', such projects entirely amputate the prospective purchaser from any sort of in-person encounter therewith. Initiatives like Yieldstreet's Art Equity Funds go further still, where people can own a percentage of a diverse collection of works, housed as one financial entity. Whether these are fiscal Potemkin villages is not for me to say. Moreover, reinforcing art's worth in a cultural climate that values asset classes like luxury goods with more generosity is not necessarily a fruitless enterprise. Yet this is not a culture conducive to connoisseurs; it is solely about investment.

However cynical the art market has become, there must be retained a degree of sincere emotion behind a purchase, or at the very least a glimmer of instinctive taste. To treat the contemporary, blue-chip leviathans as assets to flip at the opportune moment is to transform a currency of cultural sanctity into that of capricious hype. In this model, only the future loses. For as a close friend remarked to me recently, the art bubble cannot burst, but it can shrink. I am not so naïve to suggest that this process is a new one – on the contrary, no one has profited more over the last 70 years from this shift in purchasing attitudes than the megadealers themselves, and occasionally an artist or two. However, tech is a catalyst of novel and profound acceleration. Locking one's eyes behind a VR headset is all well and good until the system starts to glitch. The death of the collector in the physical realm bleeds fiscal stability both online and otherwise. Such market-induced, tech-inflamed numbness to taste is a crisis of humanity as much as it is commerce – that the two are so soluble is the rare privilege and potential failure of art as asset.

Finally, outside of this speculative trespassing, let us review the public domain of technological art developments. Museums across the globe have made monumental efforts to upload and digitise vast swathes of their collections online. Whether the Met or the Rijksmuseum, the titans of cultural fora have curated fantastic complementary ecosystems for their collections on display. The accessibility this confers is a sensational resource for the scholars and the curious alike. Far from desensitising one to the art, it cultivates desire to visit, whilst temporarily satisfying those who cannot immediately make the trip. Such endeavours are only bolstered by the deluge of imaging and storytelling platforms online, such as Google Arts & Culture. To my mind, these are the rare online biomes that move to humanise the art, capitalising on technology's capacity to open rather than exploit its audience. Perhaps one unforgivable mutation of these digital conditions, however, is the exhibition without art or artist. I am here referring to the touring, projected constellations of Van Gogh and

their ilk. Images of artworks inflated to cover all wall space, with minimal historical contact, the immersive documentary without narrative. This TikTok bait is an aberration of art-tech's spawn. They offer the affiliation with culture without the substance, and vacuous visual bric-a-brac for the budding influencer. There are exceptions: Hockney's *Bigger and Closer (not smaller and further away)* for example, was an utter delight, precisely because the experience enhanced his art, digital and physical. The privilege of a living artist narrating his life's work as it unfolds in front of you is a uniquely valuable performance. Likewise, to watch his iPad paintings develop stroke by stroke is a perfect harmony of technology and art. Though it retained its stylishness, and culture by association, it would be a tall task to walk away from the exhibition without learning a thing or two. These successes address the online condition of their audience's climate without wholly pandering to it.

Indeed, this is the very understanding we must galvanize if we are to find the true areas of confluence between art and technology. The great paradox of our time is the gargantuan influx of accessibility for the public only to elicit equally broad apathy. We are not as visually literate as the exponentially ballooning exposure to imagery asks of us, and it shows. Whether in body dysmorphia or deepfake conspiracies, pandora's jar did not come with terms and conditions. With each development of our online spaces, we find new aspects which we must learn to react positively to afterwards, often once damage has been done. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the over-saturation can only breed a kind of numbness. Vittoria Colonna, the great pen-pal of Michelangelo, once tested the potence of a crucifixion he had drawn for her by viewing it in a mirror. The predicate was that a powerful enough image could survive amputation from its object. It is so often the case at present that the image predates the object; we cannot guarantee that the real thing still holds greater magnetism. Are those who are first exposed to digital replications of real art literate enough to discern one experience from the other, or do we risk compromising both?

So, what to make of this whirlwind tour? To catalogue panaceas for each one of the tribulations listed above would perhaps push the (ever-cherished) charity of my editors' wordcount allocations. More generally, then? Well, it is oft suggested that when one is lost in jungle it is wise to walk in the general direction of the river. Ignoring the NFTs for the lack of surrounding infrastructure therefor (or, to extend the image, the Google maps app that has run out of scanned coverage in the undergrowth), we must move to the art itself. In whatever manifestation, with whatever rudimentary or technologically advanced assistance at our disposal, we must be in service to sanctity of the physical art we have. We must not drag art, kicking and screaming, towards digitised destinations that are unknown even (or especially) to us. If the paying public now desires experience over artefact, make

the artefact the experience. Bring in the projectors I so denigrated by the bucket if in the run up to witnessing the real thing. Make it as interactive as possible, in the most tangibly imaginative of manners. If the Cité du Vin day-tripper can traverse multiple floors and exhibits for hours before a humble glass of red at the very end, we can bring live horses to a Stubbs show. Interactive AI avatars of the artists based on their diary entries? Projected simulations of paintings, layer by layer? A culinary recreation of Toulouse-Lautrec's rather indulgent habits regarding steak? There are limits, I suppose – however, they are yet to be pushed.

Progress is addictive, but it is not a glacier carving the path of least resistance. Technological advancement can be a tint, a shade, a tone, but not yet a hue. I do not here call to retrace steps or regress - I think we may risk running out of armchairs for commentators who bemoan the good old days. Yet, that which we do not know we desire, is direction. The sincere gravity of a sunset above a great plain. There are many paths thereto, and never has there been such liberty to play - the future waits for us all the same. Maybe it'd be quicker to Uber some of the way.

A Winding Path to Recognition:

Tracing the Longevity of the Glasgow Girls

By Flora Gilchrist

Scottish Art is often seen in conjunction with British Art, struggling to establish its own independent label in a sea of more studied and arguably more influential western European nations. In order to construct a strong national identity, much of mainstream Scottish Art has heavily relied on stereotypical representations, particularly during the twentieth century. One of the most prevalent stereotypes was the quintessential rugged Highland landscapes, as seen in Edwin Landseer's painting, The Monarch of the Glen. Displayed as the jewel of the Scottish Art section in the National Gallery, Landseer was rather ironically an English painter. Albeit an important part of Scottish national identity, the deeply rooted prioritisation of highland landscape paintings has seeped its way into the curatorial process of these major institutions. Consequently, many groups of avant-garde Scottish artists, including the Glasgow Girls, have been left in the dust, mere afterthoughts in the twentieth century construction of the Scottish gallery space.

As a bustling city, art galleries and museums line the streets of Edinburgh, ranging from the Museum of Childhood, known for being one of the smaller pockets of history and nostalgia, to the well-known National Museum of Scotland. The most renowned institution is undoubtedly the network of galleries known as the National Galleries of Scotland, which encompasses two modern art galleries: the National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery of Scotland. Located on the busiest street of Scotland's capital, the National Gallery of Scotland is the self-proclaimed home of Scottish Art. However, do their various displays successfully showcase the diversity and fluidity of Scottish Art?

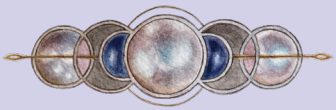
The gallery's most recent curatorial transformation from earlier this year includes the addition of a small section focusing on the overlooked group of Scottish women artists: the Glasgow Girls. The Glasgow Girls were an all-women avant-garde group active at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of these artists lived in the shadows of their male companions, known as the Glasgow Boys. Both gendered groups attended the Glasgow School of Art, a progressive art school which first admitted budding women artists in 1890 due to Fra New-

bery, the school's director. The Glasgow Girls, including Jessie King, Jessie Newbury, Frances Macdonald, Margaret Macdonald, Annie French, and Ann Macbeth, formed close friendships and a loose communal artistic style, similar to the Art Nouveau and Celtic Revival. Some of these women went on to forge noteworthy artistic careers, and others became political activists, like Ann Macbeth, who was imprisoned for her commitment to the Suffragette Movement.

Many of the artists explored their own subjugated positions within a patriarchal society through their artworks. For example, Frances Macdonald, along with her sister Margaret, used decorative, stylised aesthetics connected with the occult, Art Nouveau, and continental symbolism to question women's position in late Scottish Victorian society. However, MacDonald's work was overlooked in comparison to that of her husband, artist Herbert MacNair, and brother-in-law, architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Their works remain highly understudied, and many sit gathering dust in the archives at the Scottish Modern Gallery. One of Frances MacDonald's lesser-known works, Tis a Long path Which Wanders to Desire, 1909, depicts a bleak composition of a confused woman faced with multiple life paths. This stark visual vocabulary not only signals an important shift in the modernisation of Scottish Art but also serves as a visual symbol for the pervading institutional barriers and difficulties faced by women artists in a male dominated field.

Despite the contribution of the Glasgow Girls towards the construction of 'Scottish Art' and women's rights, the Scottish section of the National Gallery is crowded by works from the Glasgow Boys. The Glasgow Boys were indeed immensely important to the development and modernisation of 'Scottish Art', using distinct Scottish subject matters such as James Guthrie's A Hind's Daughter, 1883, which depicts the Scottish mode of farming with a hind, a skilled farm worker. However, the addition of a permanent section in the gallery which focuses on the Glasgow Girls represents a long overdue shift in focus to encompass this highly progressive group of artists. This addition includes a small wall spotlighting the work of Jessie King, Annie French, and Bessie MacNicol, and displays their sketches, illustrations, and watercolours.

The addition of the Glasgow Girls into a mainstream institutional space, despite setbacks and marginalisation, illuminates a hopeful trajectory for future artists. However, I must admit that the profound works of these women who grapple with prevailing issues such as belonging, womanhood and institutional barriers, remain greatly underappreciated in the white cube space.



Illustrations by Anna Hannola.

By Ella Newberry

Ding Wenqing:

At the Wedding of Tradition and Contemporary Surrealism

In conversation with pioneering contemporary Chinese artist Ding Wenqing

"The landscapes we once cherished have been banished to distant realms. What remains, perhaps, are only spiritual vestiges. I have always believed landscapes embody the Chinese spirit. Yet the tangible landscapes of reality no longer exist, and tourist-swarmed scenic spots clearly cannot sustain their spiritual legacy. These landscapes here are beyond my grasp. Thus, I am compelled to seek them elsewhere." Ding Wenqing 丁文卿

Drawing inspiration from Dong Yuan and the Great Masters of the Song Dynasty, artist Ding Wenqing seeks to capture the spiritual traces of meditated traditional landscape painting in his work. Whilst traversing China's renowned mountains, sketching each in rapid succession, the artist concluded that the dynastical masters' brushstrokes were not expressive, but rather representational distillations of the myriad lines they observed. Unable to contain the vastness of nature, each stroke must instead encapsulate the spirit of what they beheld.

After twenty-five years of studying traditional Chinese landscape painting, Ding suddenly felt lost: "I wish to shed the external forms of real mountains and waters, to forget every stroke and structure I once learned, and in that spiritual 'other realm,' rediscover my own landscape." Thus, dreams, sketches of life, fleeting visual impressions and resonances evoked by others' work, began to shape Ding's ink-on-paper masterpieces, manifesting within them his personal experiences and identity.

Whilst travelling internationally as an art editor, photographer, designer and advertising executive, Ding was often flown back and forth between home and abroad for meetings, proposals, filming, and photo shoots. Pulled from the academic environment in which he was immersed, a plethora of Western influences were sewn into the threads of his subconscious.

(傳)董源 蒼嵐柱杖圖 Attributed to Dong Yuan. Ink Landscape, ink on paper, hanging scroll. Poetry hall by Dong Qichang (1555-1636), annotations by Wang Feng (1319-1388) and Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799). 101 x 33 cm. Sotheby's Hong Kong.

Although eventually returning to his roots, Ding was for a time influenced in particular by American artist Andy Warhol, whose "colour, composition and deconstruction of subjects" underpin many of his paintings. In conversation with Ding, the artist reflects that his work also echoes Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró, falling into ephemeral affairs with modern surrealism and expressionism, yet maintains that along with the genre defining his work, "painting need not be overthought".

> "There's no need to dwell on defining one's artistic style, ponder the distinctions between contemporary and classical, or aspire for one's work to carry profound meaning. Painting is fundamentally the artist's own expression of experience and emotion; the rest is the domain of critics and curators."

Although Ding outlines the purely emotive foundation of his work, a critic might notice the swathing, delicately brushed clouds served on Warhol's pop art palette, alongside the imbuement of references to Chinese and Western cultural iconography in his painting. It could be said that, in this way, Ding weds tradition and contemporary surrealism, creating a dreamscape of the artist's identity within a modern, cross-cultural sphere that escapes from the bell jar of classical painting.

Whilst Paradise NO.3-1 substitutes the homage to Chinese architecture suspended in the neverland of Tranquil Lake for a playful blend of Western iconography, a salient theme shared by

DING Wenqing 丁文卿, Towering NO.7, 2024. Chinese Ink & Colour on Paper, 136 × 68 cm.
Suomei M50 Gallery.

these two works and present throughout much of Ding's oeuvre is the recurrence of geometric motifs. Whilst the incorporation of geometric shapes in Miró's paintings offers a historically traceable explanation to these colourful shapes drifting across Ding's landscapes, their significance in fact hails back to classical Chinese painting conventions.

In his short essay "The Aesthetics of Misunderstanding" [误读的美感], Ding recounts his misreading of traditional Chinese seals (see below). Under the impression throughout his childhood that seals signified the value and success of a painting, when in fact they merely recorded the work's passage through successive collectors, he was then reluctant to let this truth mould his perception of these forms. Instead, he redefined them as abstract geometric motifs, creating a stamp of his own on his works.

"When I examine my works, I can almost see those marks dancing across the canvas. So, I decided not to ignore them anymore, I gave them colour, transformed them from illusion into reality, making them a part of my painting: a new abstract form, born from a spontaneous act of my own as a painter, filling the void in my imagination."

In the carving of his own path, stamped with his very own seal, Ding Wenqing reshapes his classical training, birthing a liminal space in which tradition and contemporary surrealism touch lips. The ink artist's delicate blend of colour, traditional reverence for landscape and scattered elements of modern life carefully dresses Chinese cultural heritage in a contemporary dreamscape of emotion, personal experience and imagination, forging his own unique vision.

DING Wenqing 丁文卿, Tranquil Lake 明瑟, 2017. Colour on paper 纸本设色105 × 148.5 cm

Left: Couple aux têtes pleines de nuages, Salvador Dalí, 1936, oil on plywood panel, Male figure: 92.5 × 69.5 cm. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Right: Shot Sage Blue Marilyn, Andy Warhol, 1964, acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen, 101.6 x 101.6 cm. Sold by Christie's in 2022.

UP TOWN:

This performance piece explores the excitement of going 'uptown' and escaping the drab uniformity of suburbia. Having lived in suburbia my whole life, the bright lights of London have always seemed to represent everything the suburbs are not with their promise of excitement and escape. For many, the train ride is an event in itself, with people buying canned drinks and sweets, gearing up for their big night out.

A Desirous Pathway from Suburbia

By Lexie Patterson

It's a real treat, and on the train you can feel the anticipation and energy radiating from groups heading into the city. It's common to hear the question 'Are you going uptown?' - I find a touching emotionality in the way suburbanites engage with the journey to the city.In this series, I explore the desirability of the great escape by dressing in an outfit that reflects the glamour and extravagance associated with going 'uptown' while also acknowledging the duality of excitement and fearful trepidation. The city can be intimidating; far from home, the experience is both thrilling and daunting. When the train stops, it stops, and you are momentarily stranded, a long way from familiarity and in a world full of new possibilities.

I chose to dress myself up to perform the emotions I have felt and observed in others, the mix of electrifying excitement, anticipation, and subtle anxiety that comes with venturing from suburbia to the bright, pulsing heart of London.

This performance is an homage to all the women who have escaped suburbia, even if it's for one night only.

9pm

10:14pm

12:02 am

1:45 am

Phyllida Barlow. unscripted: the space and time of friendship.

By Lauren Gray

At the very beginning of this year, I visited Hauser & Wirth Somerset's (H&W) extensive show of the work of British sculptor Phyllida Barlow (1944-2023). 'Phyllida Barlow. unscripted', (May 2024-January 2025), curated by Frances Morris, was the first exhibition of Barlow's work since her death in 2023 and marks the first decade of the Somerset gallery's life, which was inaugurated in 2014 with her solo exhibition 'GIG'.

H&W is in the Somerset parish of Bruton, and I was able to see this exhibition as one of my closest friends, Miranda, and her partner live only a short drive from the gallery. When thinking through the concept of the 'desire path', I returned repeatedly to this experience, to my long-distance friendships, and to Barlow's work.

To forge a desire path, an unmarked route must be travelled repeatedly–and collaborative care and effort must be invested in these processes of moving and creating. As I conceive of it, there are numerous tensions at play in the conception of a desire path. These tensions will guide the ideas that this article will explore, beginning with the repetitive, active and dynamic gestures that appear similarly in acts of friendship, curation, and making and viewing art. Time and space will be discussed as simultaneously fixed and malleable, which invites thinking on the dialectics of invitation and barrier, and ephemerality and permanence. In this discussion of Barlow's work and my trip to the gallery, I will address two questions: 'What does it mean to curate a social life?' and 'How can desires be made present, seen, or felt?'.

It is useful to acknowledge the versatility of the word desire, and to specify how it is being used in relation to Barlow's work. The root of desire's meaning lies in a sense of longing or being in want of. Without shutting down the abstract-erotic (to borrow art historian and curator Jo Applin's term) potential of desire in Barlow's work, I am interested less in the romantic sense of desire and more in its practical, processual

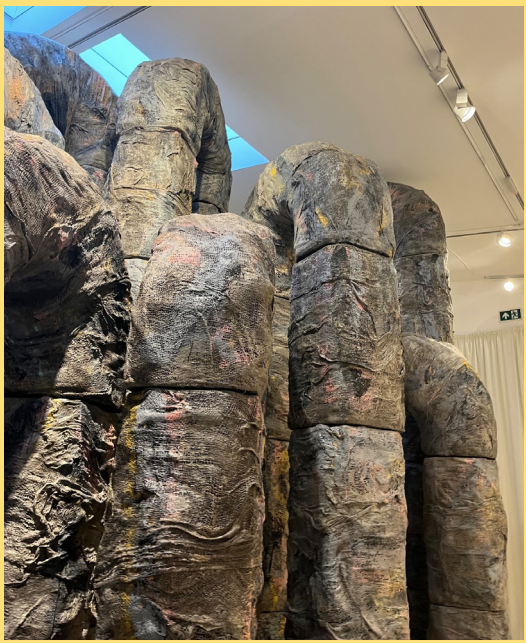
nature. Taking desire as a force that motivates how wants are actually felt and satisfied, reveals where it operates within space and time. What needs to be done to achieve something, how to do it, and where?

I am thinking about friendship and the experience of being in the gallery under similarly practical terms. Both involve travelling through space, an experience of visitation and spending time doing certain things. Barlow's thinking on the concepts of time and space, transcribed from a 2023 podcast, is particularly interesting.

> "Space to me is as dense, and as thick, and as sentient as materials. Whereas time is something, for me, to do with process and to do with memory, to do with remembering, and forgetting, as much as it is to do with a clock ticking". (Barlow, 2023)

This spatial interaction between absence and presence and the temporal concepts of process and doing play out in the experience of being in the gallery, particularly in the kind of viewing that Barlow's work demands. To comprehend Barlow's objects and to satisfy the desire to look and understand, one must move around the sculpture, bend, crane and twist to see more.

Barlow transmuted her materials into fantastic, large and small-scale objects, situating and arranging them within the gallery to create an environment that distinctly activated the experience of movement and space. A 'kinaesthetic viewing', to borrow art historian and theorist of sculpture Alex Potts's description for the way that the viewer moves through space around and before a sculpture, is required to fully make sense of objects like *untitled: 21 arches* (2012) (Potts, 2000).



Close up of 21 arches. Photo: Author.

This structure was first featured in Barlow's 2012 exhibition at the New Museum in New York and was the largest sculpture in H&W's show. It is a large, almost monumental mass of sculpture that closes a large area of the gallery's floor space off to the viewer. The closure of space

was noticeable at H&W where much of the space was filled with sculpture, with only a narrow path left for visitors to travel on. A crowd of arches extend outwards from a central huddle. The staggered legs of the chunky, segmented arches with their gauzy, painted hessian scrim surface, step forward into the viewers' path and reveal a closed-up, occupied core. The arch form encourages an immersing imaginary. It is easy to imagine entering the archway, being both under and inside it. However, in Barlow's work there is both an opening and a closing off, a play between the occupation and vacation of space.

This thought, about the occupation of space, and barriers and resistances to be crossed and worked around, is where I would like to return to the theme of friendship. When I ask what it means to curate a social life, I hope it is understood that I am not viewing this as a simple process of selection and arrangement. Much like a curatorial project, more is at play than simply choosing one object over another. There are many practical, artistic and visual barriers to be worked around and adapted to. I am not suggesting that friendship is exactly like sculpting, painting or curating, but I am suggesting that all of these activities are productive practices.

Untitled: tapecoils 2 (2011) explores how desires can be manifested physically and how novel forms can be created through repeated actions. It stands at nearly three metres tall and consists of a steel bracket, protruding from the wall, and draped with long 'tubes' or 'coils' of black, brown, yellow, and red tape. Instantly, this system of individual objects, each baring the trace of its own materialisation, can be linked to the idea of the desire path. Gestures have been repeated here, tape has been wrapped around and around itself and arranged in a semi-legible clump, but there is also a directionality to these tangled tubes. There are numerous paths to follow in the multiple lines, crossing, twisting and knotting together. These individual paths are unintelligible alone but evidence an act repeated, and the iterative and variable, but still connected, possibilities that can arise. Barlow's repeated gestures manifest a new form, something new is born out of repetition. Like a desire path, they evidence a desire to make, a desire to transform material, but also to enact physical processes, like wrapping, tying and sticking, that can grow into material presence.

Though individual actions or gestures are ephemeral and fleeting, finished once they have been performed, in ways of working such as Barlow's, there is often a lasting or permanent trace left behind. I think it is this exchange between ephemerality and permanence, that might separate the concepts of the exhibition and the friendship but also keep them loosely hinged together. I visited 'Phyllida Barlow. unscripted' on the penultimate day of its run. Just days later, the exhibition was closed to the public and would cease to exist physically, surviving in memories and in its paper and documentary traces.

My friendship with Miranda, which has been something we have practiced over the past 12 years, hopefully holds more of a sense of permanence, and is evidenced in years worth of paper and mnemonic traces. Yet, the day after we visited the exhibition together, we were separated by a large swathe of space again, there is a sense of interruption in the long-distance friendship, an 'until next time' that signals a break, but also a continuation.

Close-up of tapecoils 2. Photo: Author.

A similar dynamic happens between the viewer and the artwork as a mobile and portable object. Whilst *tapecoils* and *21 arches* will head back to storage, or to a shipping container to be transported to their next location, there is always a sense of 'until next time', a small hope that one day the objects can be revisited and the connection can be continued, in a new architectural or geographical setting. This encounter will look and probably feel different to the last one, but it will be a continuation nonetheless.

In the way that repeated actions visualise the forms of Barlow's sculpture, repeated actions come to constitute a friendship. The long-distance friendship requires the manipulation of space and time, as that which initially circulated around a close radius of space expands to cover a much larger one. When the space this friendship spans is expanded, new forms of care and collaboration must be devised. The process of making desires visible or present has been addressed with Barlow's work more technically, but to offer an answer to the question of what it means to curate a social life, I would hover about these more abstract ideas of visitation, movement and care. Curating a social life means investing materials and energy in a range of people and places, doing various activities and overcoming physical and imagined barriers, sustained over space and time.

The word 'curate' often holds a connotation of temporariness, relating to the production of a time-specific event. There is an interesting tension between this connotation and the etymology of curate, which comes from the Latin cura, with more permanent meanings of care and governance. In thinking about the long-term curation, or study, of objects there are resonances of repetition, revisitation, desire and care that are present in the experience and maintenance of friendships as well. This line of thinking can extend in so many directions. Addressing art, artists and their critical reception alongside this process of building familiarity and relationships through repeated encounters could be a productive path to follow in future.

Madeleine Moments: Paths into Desire at Union Pacific

By Sofia Stefani

To find Union Pacific's Madeleine Moments (03 October - 08 November), I turn narrow street corners in a spiral, walk beneath empty scaffolding stretching up brick walls, until I arrive at an unassuming door. Stepping over its threshold I fall into liminal space: a bright white foyer shields the gallery's art from view and demands exploration. Tucked down a corridor, Union Pacific's exhibition features ten strong works by six artists. The theme of the exhibition roots itself in its titular reference to Marcel Proust's sudden reckoning with a warm, resurgent childhood memory, sometimes known as a 'precious fragment', upon biting into a madeleine. Works in the show speak to desire and to wayfinding mired in nostalgia—a mix of both the experience of desire for the past as it resurfaces sometimes unexpectedly into the present, and to tracing paths that help recover those moments of desire.

What first arrests me, however, is the entrance to the show—its sparse white walls, guestbook, and a stack of small cards that sit at the edge of a long table. I discover that these cards are street maps, black-and-white graphics showing a circuit of eight galleries speckled across one square mile. Even without immediately recognizing all the galleries indicated on the card, the familiarity of the map format makes a visit to any of the galleries inviting. With a plan set before me, the desire to follow its paths towards new galleries unfolds into a sense of possibility.

To follow the paths between the galleries as illustrated on the map makes tangible otherwise hypothetical connections between them. I know because I've walked them. Passing the street sign for Theobalds Road and feeling uneven London pavement under the soles of my shoes, I step sometimes uncertainly through less conspicuous doorways and connect abstract gallery names to physical places. After walking between art spaces, returning to the map consolidates the process of traversing London's city side streets. Where before the map was simply an open invitation, it now becomes a mnemonic for real paths. Visualizing paths on paper prescribes the eventual retracing of already-established routes. Once included on a map, paths gain importance—an otherwise aimless walk through the city becomes an art hop, made significant by its existence on paper. Any feelings associated with walking the path become

preserved in the abstract lines of a map on a page. A map transforms a meander, one mode of discovery, into something with direction.

If the map at Union Pacific encourages the forging of a nexus between galleries through the act of walking, then individual artworks become important nodes along these paths. Artworks constitute the intersection of path and desire. They become enticements to pause along one's walk. Encountering an artwork creates an opportunity to experience an intimate moment or even

a glimpse into the past—a depiction of desire, a desirable experience—simply by stopping to encounter the work.

Diana Cepleanu, The Sofa Series, 2024, oil on canvas, 65 x 65 cm

Mohammed Adel's Untitled (2025, charcoal on linen), one of two of the artist's works at the Union Pacific show, invites one such falling: into the depths of a darkly pigmented surface. The space of this painting is mediated and muddled through the framing device of a mirror, which reflects the interior space at the core of the work. Thematically, the work inclines towards an evocation of now-distant memories of Adel's childhood in East London. The soft charcoal of Untitled makes the piece particularly inviting. Adel's hazy strokes suggest the veiling of memory by temporal distance while encouraging closer looking into the depths of the work. Tonal layers break up the doorframe—a threshold surrounding the deep space at the centre of the picture—into telescopic registers, pulling the viewer further into the drawing. Observing the work, my eyes tunnel into increasingly heavy space. I find myself enveloped in the growing darkness of memories inscribed in the piece, entering the zone where 'what once seemed hidden or strange emerges through sustained looking'. The work of art, one point within one gallery along a mapped-out path, becomes an opportunity to penetrate the veil of time and look towards a desired moment now passed.

At the same time, Adel's brushing and blending of charcoal in the lighter areas of his work exposes the grain of the linen substrate. Paler areas where the artwork's material surface is made visible prevent total immersion in the past. The barrier of the picture plane speaks to the irretrievability of reminisced experience, yet reinforces the object's identity as a representation of an unattainable past. Adel's evocative object thus becomes desirable in its own right. The 'madeleine mo-

ment' of the exhibition's title—the point of acute nostalgic desire reverberating through Proust's life—can be represented both visually as an artwork's subject, and hinted at through the idea of an artwork as an object with latent potential to encapsulate memories.

The darkness of Adel's work, present in Untitled and intensified in his second painting, Before a Brick Wall (2025, oil on canvas), suggests that nostalgic desire or memory can take on a consuming quality. However, other works at Union Pacific encapsulate desire in other hues: Mia Kokkoni's playful figure dances invitingly below a distant crescent moon in Blue Man (2025, oil on canvas), Sebastian Espejo's still lifes Villarrica (2024-25, oil, oil pastes on cotton canvas) and Almagest (2024-25, oil, oil pastels and wax on wood) open out into ambiguous landscapes to suggest tantalizing ventures beyond the picture plane. Though not connected to childhood memory as explicitly as Adel's works, a yearning for memory, connection, self-discovery, or belonging—common themes across art history—permeates the work at Union Pacific.

The network laid out by Union Pacific's map illustrates the travelled path leading to individual artworks that act as opportunities to fall into memory and desire. This association constitutes a microcosmic version of larger paths throughout life, punctuated by moments of desire. The embodied experience of walking a prescribed path, especially one focused on connecting galleries, enables increasingly intentional encounters with one's own desire, mediated by works of art.

Madeleine Moments, 2025, exhibition view, Union Pacific, London.
Photos: courtesy the artist and Union Pacific, London

A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night

By Pipit Johnson

In her 2014 feature film debut, A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night, Iranian director Ana Lily Amirpour explores themes of isolation, otherness and longing for connection in a stylised vampire western. Through striking black-and-white cinematography and a thoughtfully curated soundtrack, the film follows the story of Arash, a charming yet disillusioned young man, and The Girl, a mysterious vampire. Placing these two visually distinctive protagonists against the ominous, shadowy backdrop of Bad City, a fictional Iranian setting, Amirpour constructs a film that is narratively intriguing. It invites viewers to contemplate the fragility of connection and how it can emerge in the most unexpected places.

The film opens to scenes of industrial abandonment, empty streets and looming power stations. Bad City's inhabitants exist in a stagnant state of apathy, the city itself draining the life out of them. Against the backdrop of this liminal and desolate setting, we meet Arash, living with his drug-addicted father in a rundown home. Amirpour presents him as an outsider, vulnerable to becoming entangled in the city's sinister and violent side.

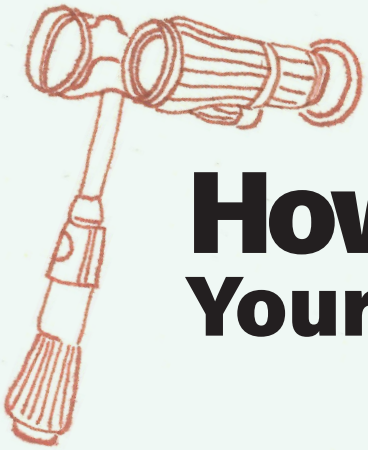
A similar duality surrounds The Girl. Our first sight of her, in a car park at night, draped in her signature flowing black cape and striped top, establishes her as both striking and spectral. As the film's title suggests, The Girl frequently walks, or skateboards, alone at night, a recurring motif that accentuates her isolation and independence. She observes others from afar, knowing but remaining unknown, while we, as viewers, become the only witnesses to her true vampiric identity. Her rare intersection with others is through moments of violence, such as her first attack on Saeed, a notorious drug dealer. Despite this, she remains an enigmatic presence, merging danger with allure.

Amirpour creates a parallel between Arash and The Girl — two isolated figures unknowingly traversing the same city. Across two consecutive scenes, their lives are irrevocably intertwined. A dichotomy between isolation and

connection is explored as they are drawn together in a shared, uneasy intimacy.
After a costume party, the two first meet. Lost in a drug-induced haze and dressed as Dracula, Arash drifts through the city, his disguise unknowingly mirroring The Girl's obscured identity. On a dark, deserted street, he reassures her, 'Don't worry, I won't hurt you,' unaware that she, in a moment of supposed female vulnerability, is in fact the one who could harm him. There, in the stillness of an unknown street, their lives converge, drawn together by chance and initiating a charged atmosphere for their unfolding connection.

Following this is one of the film's most striking moments, when The Girl invites Arash into her room, a space distinctly hers, the walls collaged in posters. For the first time, The Girl momentarily abandons her privacy, side-stepping her isolation by allowing Arash to lie on her bed, to be in her space. The Girl stands in profile as she plays a record, selecting 'Death' by White Lies. At the song's opening notes, Arash arises from the bed. In a moment of impulsivity, he reaches up to spin a mirror ball hanging from the ceiling, creating a mesmerising blur of light. Fear overhangs the scene as the spectator wonders if he will shortly become her next victim.
Amirpour's choice of soundtrack in this scene is particularly effective. The lyrics of 'Death' by White Lies, 'I love the quiet of the night time' and 'everything's got to be love or death' align beautifully with the film's themes and emotional landscape. As the song builds, the scene seems to fall into slow motion – Arash approaches The Girl from behind, who remains motionless, paused before the record player as the song repeats the lyric 'this fear's got a hold on me'. Strikingly, no words are exchanged, their actions alone conveying the intimacy between them. As The Girl turns to face Arash they become posed between desire and danger.
Whilst both embody the archetype of outsider, an imbalance defines their relationship – Arash knows nothing of The Girl's true nature, not even her name. This leaves us questioning whether their connection can endure if honesty and vulnerability are not at play.
Amirpour constructs a hauntingly beautiful portrayal of loneliness and connection, drawing us deep into the fragile yet intimate relationship between Arash and The Girl. Perhaps what is most compelling about A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night is how it balances restraint and quietness with moments of darkness, horror and violence. It reframes the idea of vampirism – destabilising the usual portrayal of bloodlust and villainy to present it as a metaphor for human connection. By observing the world around us, we too take pieces of what we see and those we meet to enrich our own existence.

Illustrator: Max Spendlove



How To Art: Your Own Way

By Eliza Pritchett

For the Global Director of Art at Soho House and author of How to Art, Kate Bryan, art isn't about what you know, but how you feel.

Art.

It's intimidating. It has the power to make the loudest people in the room crumble. These rooms are painstakingly assembled, and the language used can be confusing, yet people seem to know 'How to Art'.

How the fuck do you even look at art? Seriously. Do you stare? Do you nod thoughtfully? What do you wear or say? WHY IS EVERYONE SO DAMN QUIET IN A GALLERY? Do you pretend to understand, whilst secretly asking AI to summarise the wall label? Can you take photos of the art? Am I allowed to say, 'my child could have made this'?

Kate Bryan's How To Art should be required reading (even if your grandfather owns the largest Picasso collection, or your dad is Damien Hirst). It's an anti-manual to handle the art world: funny, messy and deeply human.

Bryan, global director of art for Soho House, didn't grow up around art. She had never set foot in a gallery, never known art history was a subject you could study, let alone a career. Bryan had no family connections, no map, no secret password to the art world. She did, however, have deep appreciation, curiosity, and nerve.

She now oversees one of the biggest contemporary collections of its kind: more than ten thousand works on display by living artists throughout each Soho House location (nearly 50 per cent of which are by women artists). Her path was completely self-made, a perfect desire path.

When I interviewed her, I told her how much that meant to me as I come from

a background almost identical to hers: a family who didn't talk about art. I had no connections, no roadmap, just fascination and enthusiasm, and just like the book, our interview was refreshingly REAL.

Her advice on how to face art was breathtakingly simple: 'I just look,' she said, 'at the size, the colour, the pattern, the texture. It sounds basic, but it's the best way to feel close to the work.'

That line hit me. Maybe the secret isn't to "understand" art at all; it's to see and observe with attention.

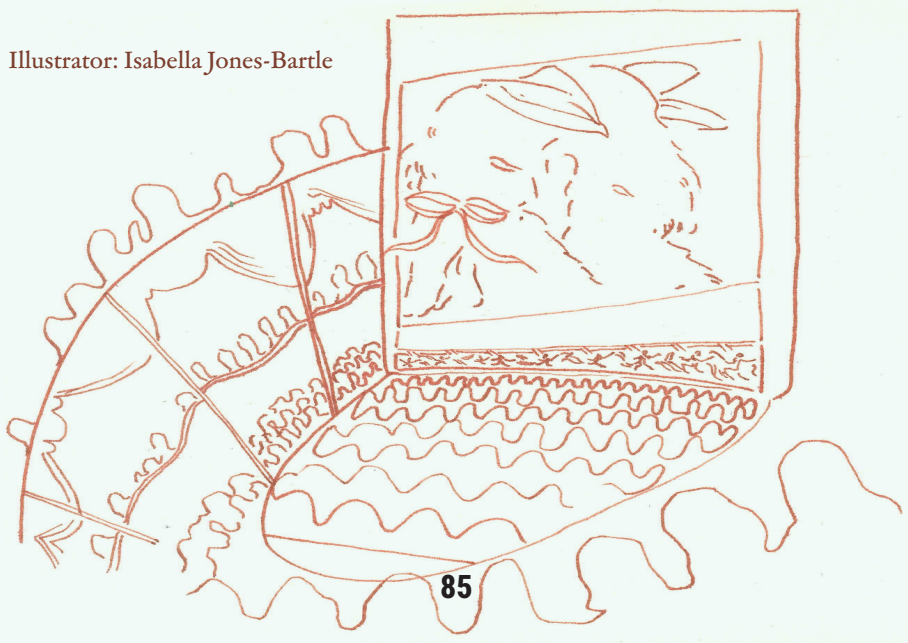
How To Art gives people permission. Permission to just simply feel art, before the analysis, the jargon and the critical reviews. To just dislike something, to not get it. Or to ADORE it and not know why. To say 'this piece bores me' or 'this one makes me cry' without apology. Just let yourself.

How To Art gives language to the feeling many of us still carry: intimidation. I admitted to Bryan that during a recent class at The Institute of Contemporary Arts, I caught myself saying I wasn't 'educated enough' to understand the exhibition. She told me to think of it like food. 'Two people can taste the same dish…one finds it too sour, another loves it. That doesn't make either person wrong. Taste should be celebrated.'

'You don't need a degree to strongly say you dislike Coldplay, or love to dance, so why do we treat art differently?' Art isn't elite. It's human.

'I think language is one of the biggest barriers,' Bryan says. We keep treating it like a competition: who knows the most theory, who's been to the most openings, who can pronounce 'chiaroscuro' correctly. The gatekeeping is exhausting. Simply think of it like this… if art helps someone feel seen

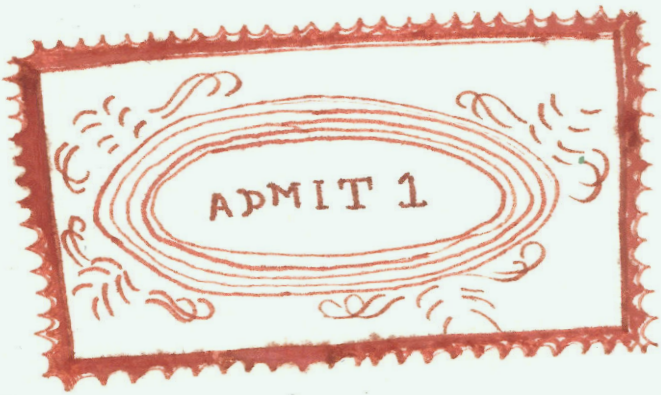
Illustrator: Isabella Jones-Bartle

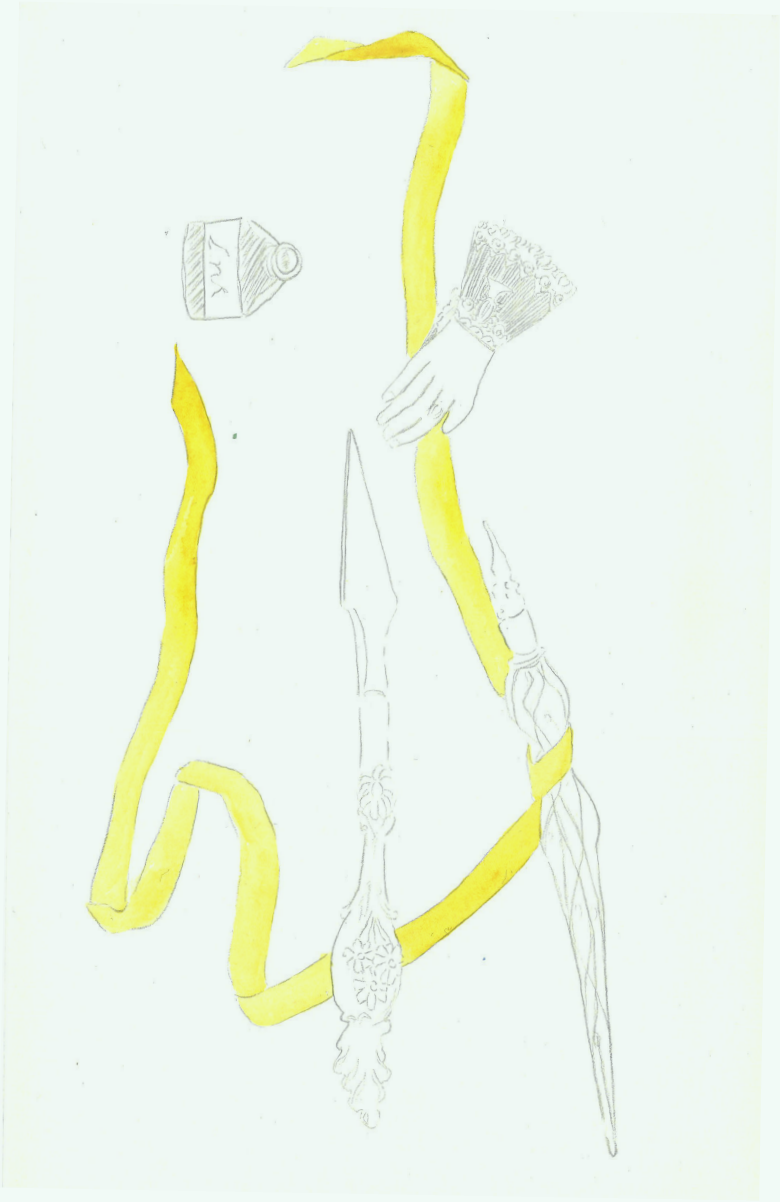


or intrigued, then it's doing its job. Maybe that's what this whole conversation is about: curiosity. Not expertise, not status, but the bravery to look, to actually see.

You can even start at the very bottom. Bryan's How To Art reminds you that everyone's entry point into art is valid. What matters isn't where you start, but that you look.

Everyone can feel like an imposter. Imposter syndrome doesn't vanish when you get a high-end job, it just changes outfit. We all want permission to belong, and How To Art provides this. It's both a handbook and a hug. It reminds us that there's no 'right' way–just your way: your own messy, beautiful desire path through the world of art.





Fungal Desire and Public Transportation

By Hale Roberts

You find yourself in Tokyo, and it is not immediately clear how you'll get to where you plan to spend the night. Cabs dart around like those in London and New York, you have the Uber app on your phone, and 158 different rail lines collectively transport 40 million passengers a day. At the connecting stations, signs and announcements appear in both Japanese and English. Google Maps leads you to the right station and tells you when the train will come and on what platform, where to change and how much it will all cost. After five days it becomes easy, after two weeks it becomes routine, and after a couple of months you begin to resent it.

Two years later and settled into London you now inhabit the abstracted geography of the tube map you find on station walls and the piece of paper folded up in your pocket. People describe their habitats as nodes on the map, the distance it takes to walk to them and the number of stops between them. In this geometrized landscape, distances are conveniently extended or suspended, the meandering flow of the Thames is corralled into clean, legible angles, and the whole city feels within reasonable reach as soon as you tap your card and enter the underground matrix. To move along a train line is to move as a vessel in one of the map's many coloured veins. Your own routes: the way to a friend's, to school or to work, comprise their own multicoloured networks. The potential of this monstrosity excites you, but as soon as you travel above the surface on foot it feels alien, protracted, and false. You pass by landmarks that mark the way, and each area evokes a certain feeling. Still, long distances present time constraints, and your romantic desire for a sense of place only goes so far.

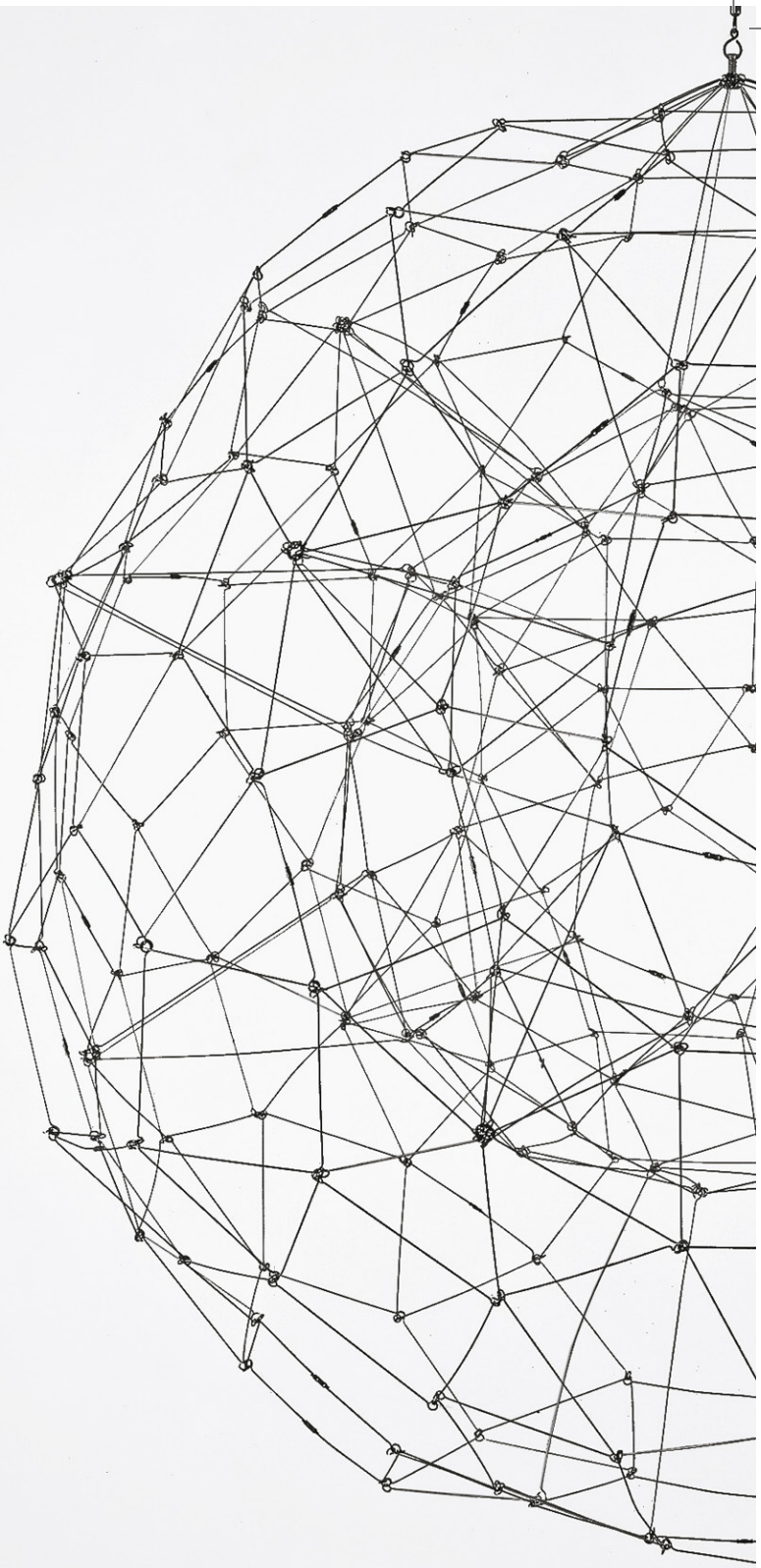
In the North Carolina suburbs there is no public transportation to speak of. You are 16 years old, with a car and a driver's license and a vast collection of overpasses, beltlines, interstates and exits to move across with unbridled volition. This isn't

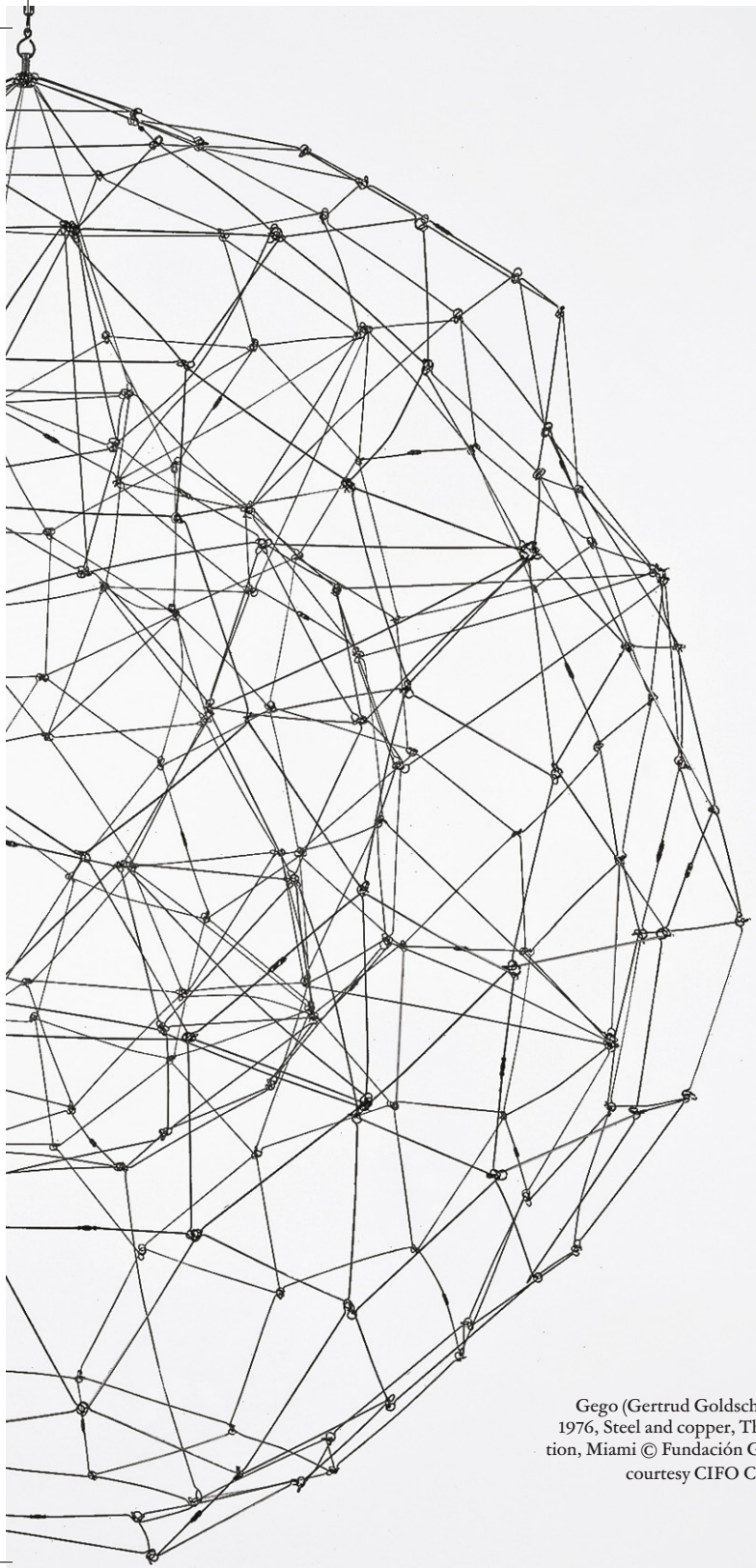
a network, it's an assemblage of byways, constructed and maintained independently of one another, and nobody moves around it the same way. It would be impossible to map this space, impossible to give it borders. Each random impulse could mark a change in direction at eighty miles an hour with as little effort as it takes to change the song blasting through your speakers. On these roads your path is not set, but there's nowhere to go. Soon you exhaust the supply of Indian restaurants, strip malls, and the houses of old friends; the roads become narrower and dissipate towards Appalachia and the Atlantic.

Fifteen years ago, a group of researchers from Oxford and the University of Hokkaido placed oat flakes on a large-scale map of the Tokyo Metropolitan area clustered around the city's population hubs. After a few days, as expected, they began to grow mold. Eventually, their mycelial tentacles developed into a shape on the map almost identical to that of the Tokyo Subway System, with its 158 lines and 2.3 billion dollar construction budget. Brainlessly, with only the meekest of self-sustaining impulses afforded to invertebrates, this fungus had created the same complex and adaptable system that Japan's most intelligent engineers had spent years designing and constructing.

Indeed, you sometimes felt like a slime mold. You walked onto the platform at Kamikitazawa Station and boarded the train at exactly the same time each day with many of the same people. You held on to a strap, changed trains at Shimo-Takaido, got into another identical car, filed out with your fellow fungi, and then returned seven hours later to travel the same path in reverse.

As a human organism it sometimes seems that your paths are drawn for you, your movement an intractable, automatic function of the body of humans you find yourself in. Your own agency might be one or several degrees removed from your place, your space, where you want to move now or in fifteen sacred minutes. But the cradle of engineered solutions beckons, presents both problems and resolutions, maps and territories alike. What good is the project of science, of infrastructure, if not to accelerate you above or beneath the pavement, between nodes, across the situations you find yourself? Why fret when this is all in your hands? It would seem the oat flakes got something right. Not placed randomly, they accelerated towards closer concentrations of being, of life and cellular production. In the city you may not move well, efficiently, in accordance with their prescribed destination, but you move where others go, where others settle, where cells sustain and fungus germinates.

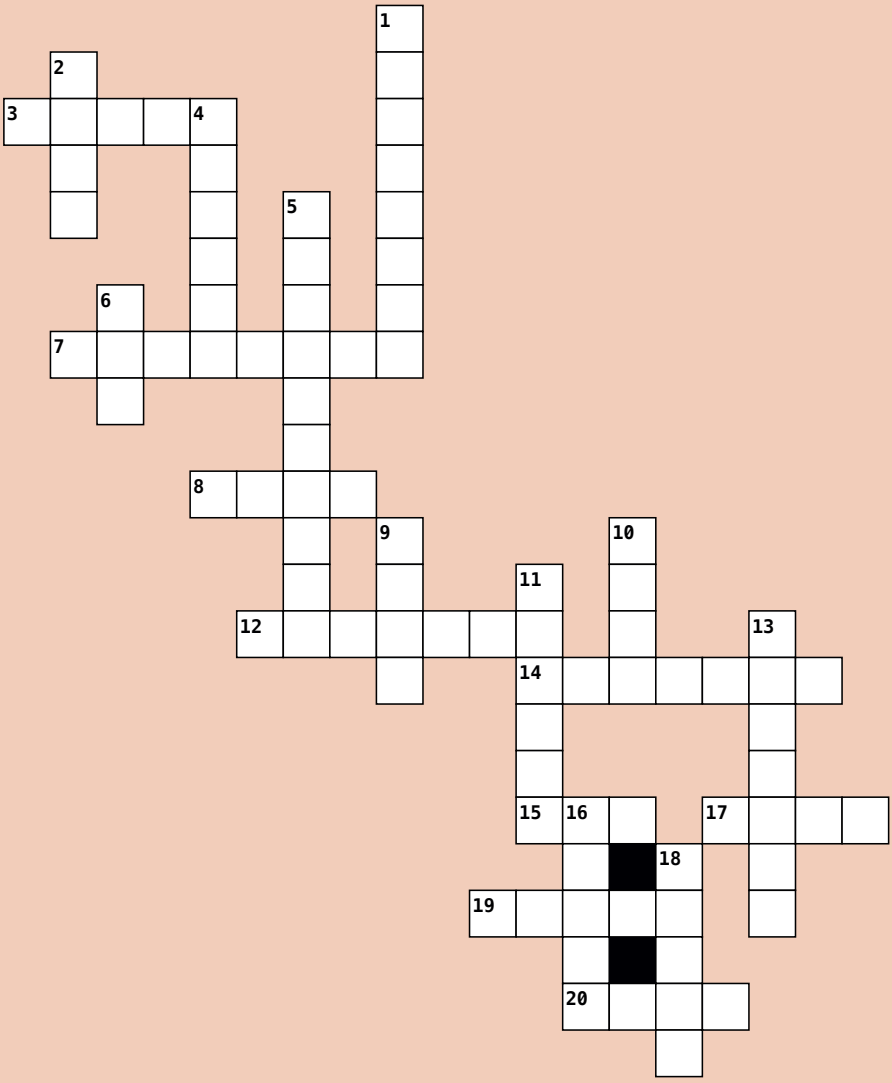




Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt), Esfera no 4 (Sphere No. 4), 1976, Steel and copper, The Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, Miami © Fundación Gego, 2025. Image: Oriol Tarridas, courtesy CIFO Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation.

Cutting Corners Crossword

Violet Cable



Across

3. A vegetable with direction (5)
7. Harness your Hopes, or Cut your Hair (8)
8. Sit a while is a grassy spot (4)
12. Is a lane (anag.) (7)
14. Theatrical background, or a view in the country (7)
15. Greek letter; Pilot announcement, shortened; itinerary (3)
17. Not a lazy morning, not a big cat, just a dash (4)
19. A windy plan (5)
20. Guide the way; Pb (4)

Down

1. Trim, touch up the routes (8)
2. Which runner, and Wile. E. Coyote? (4)
4. The Pina Colada song; Top left on your keyboard (7)
5. Walking is boring (10)
6. Method (3)
9. Dirt (4)
10. “Get lost! Beat it! Take one of these!” (4)
11. Long for (6)
13. Wear away (7)
16. Snack mix (5)
18. Alley cat wanders off the path (6)

Distribution

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