

Pandora CURATED

September 2024



Political Pandora

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About Pandora Curated

Explore the collage of global culture, lifestyle, media and politics through the lens of Pandora Curated, Political Pandora's bimestrial magazine where we delve into the latest and greatest in art, literature, music, fashion, film, and a lot more!

Through social analysis, unique narratives, expert interviews, and striking graphics, we uncover the stories and politics behind creativity.

At Venice This Year

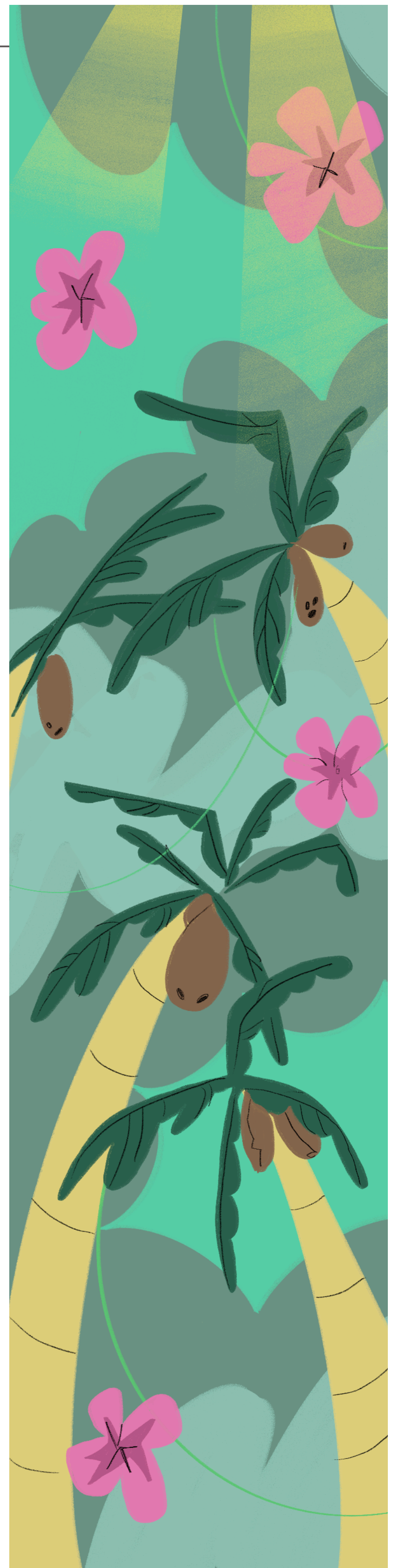
Auteurs, Glamour, and Politics

Anish Paranjape

For nearly two weeks in the early fall, the eyes of the media and cinematic worlds remain transfixed on the Venice Lido, as stars take the stage and monumental achievements in the arts are platformed and recognised. The Venice Film Festival, organised by La Biennale di Venezia, has long been a bastion of cinematic, cultural and political discourse. First held in Venice in 1932, the Festival stands as one of the most prestigious and influential film festivals globally, if not the foremost.

Officially part of the Venice Biennale, a cultural exhibition of the arts, the Venice Film Festival is the oldest of the 'big five' — Venice, Cannes, Berlin, Sundance, and TIFF. Held annually between late August and early September, at the scenic Venice Lido, the festival is a popular destination for the film elite to attend and premiere their films owing to its location and tradition.

Initially held under the Italian fascist regime of the early twentieth century, the event was previously known as the Esposizione d'Arte Cinematografica (Exhibition of Cinematographic Arts).



Pioneered by senior Italian National Fascist Party minister Giuseppe Volpi, the festival emerged during the prevalence of 20th century Italian Fascism. Subsequently, the 1940s saw the beginning of the most turbulent time in the history of the festival with fascist propaganda films being screened and awarded. The period also saw the festival be renamed the Italian-German Film Festival (Manifestazione Cinematografica Italo-Germanica).

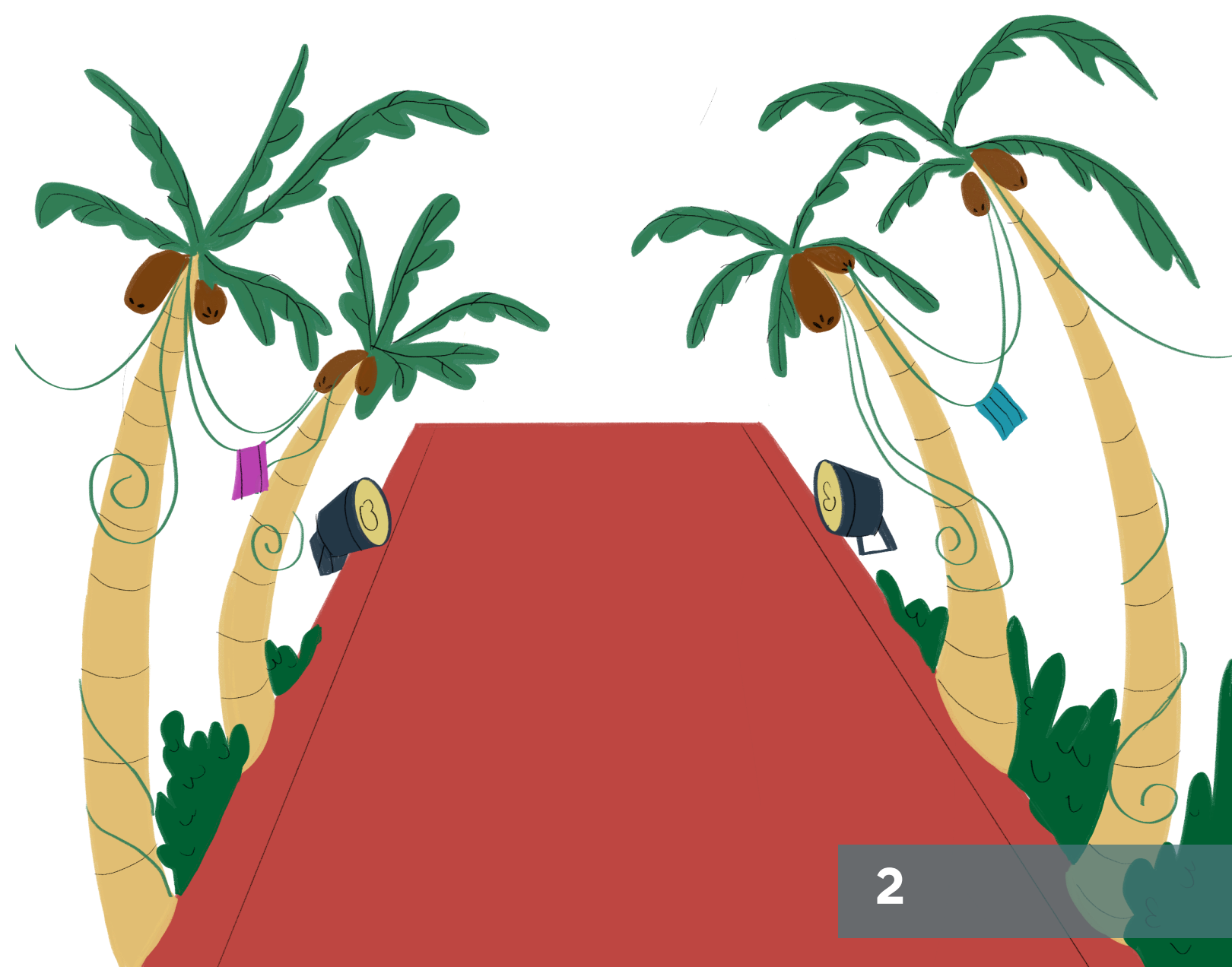
The 1940-42 editions of the festival are often considered void due to the war when the festival did not take place at the Lido. Fast forwarding a few decades, the Venice Biennale now screens over 150 films a year, boasting an average attendance of a staggering 50,000 from within the industry and outside of it. It has played a key role in shaping various trends within cinema.

Lineup: Films That Defined the Festival

This year's lineup was stacked, hosting returning greats to modern auteurs and the emergence of new creatives with a distinct style and unique substance. The nearly two-week-long festival provided us with a vast array of new works in film that helped showcase the brilliance and pertinent need of the art form.

An instant standout was modern maestro Luca Guadagnino's latest feature, 'Queer', a reimagining of William Burroughs's autobiographical novel. Led by a freshly out-of-commission 007, Daniel Craig plays a Burroughs avatar William Lee alongside 'Outer Banks' Drew Starkey.

One critic said of the film — 'the film — mounted in lavish trompe l'oeil style — becomes ever more boldly wayward'. Guadagnino's incredible run of films that began with 2017's 'Call Me By Your Name' has seen him muse on queerness, eroticism and human psychology, themes sure to be laced throughout 'Queer'.



Another charged festival entry was Halina Reijn's audacious erotic drama, 'Babygirl', starring Nicole Kidman and Harris Dickinson. The film follows Kidman, playing a tech CEO in a forbidden relationship with an intern, with her outstanding performance earning rave reviews.

As uncomfortable as the film may be, it's clear that Reijn loves and respects her damaged characters, even if they're not sure of how they feel about themselves', a critic noted. Another mentioned how 'the film feels too sleekly deliberate an invitation to debate sexual power relations'.

Other highlights from the lineup included Pablo Larrain's 'Maria', his third in a trilogy centred around well-known women and the darker side of their lives and fame. 'Maria' invites its viewers into the last days of the opera deity Maria Callas, played by a returning Angelina Jolie whose performance generated much discourse with some hailing it a tour de force while others were of the opinion that it was 'too self-consciously a fine performance', as if Larrain had instructed her: "Just be iconic, darling".

Tilda Swinton and Julianne Moore seemed to bring the festival to a standstill with their turns in Pedro Almodóvar's English language feature, 'The Room Next Door'. A tale of two friends reconnecting over one woman's terminal illness, the film was perhaps the most lauded at Venice this year. "The film wears its erudition and cultural seriousness a touch heavily, but displays Almodóvar's typical grace, insight and visual elegance", a critic said of the film.

in other news

Brazil Celebrates Return of Sacred Cloak After 300 Years

A sacred cloak made from scarlet ibis feathers, taken from Brazil's Tupinambá people during the colonial era, has been returned after spending 300 years in a Danish museum. Marked by a ceremony in Rio de Janeiro, its return emphasised Indigenous efforts to preserve cultural heritage and ancestral lands.

Other Takeaways

This was another solid year for documentaries too. Documentaries at Venice this year helped underline the socio-political climate of this year's festival. Asif Kapadia's *2073*, a dystopian doc, invites audiences to look back at what went wrong, going through 9/11, Trump, Brexit, Elon Musk and surveillance tech with a warning of catastrophe that fills you with disempowering panic.

More focused is Petra Costa's *'Apocalypse in the Tropics'*, which was a fascinating examination of Brazil's evangelical preachers who contributed to the rise of Former President Jair Bolsonaro. Concurrently, Michael Premo's revealing *Homegrown* chronicles Trump supporters and Proud Boys — even literally following one of them into the storming of the Capitol.

Much like Cannes this year, Venice had a noticeably slow start with its screenings and premieres. This gave way to spotlight television projects like Venice veteran Alfonso Cuarón's new limited series *'Disclaimer'*, produced by Apple TV+. The show appeared to be a standout work in the festival's early days.

The drama, starring Cate Blanchett and Kevin Kline, revolves around a documentarian whose unsettling past resurfaces when a novel portrays her in an unflattering light. The mostly positive reception at Venice reaffirmed the fact that TV was here to stay at festivals highlighting the increasing convergence between the worlds of film and television.

Another noted undercurrent was the length of projects screened with filmmakers and festivals supporting longer movies and features. Audience reception of the same though, is still up in the air. This is best evidenced by Brady Corbet's arrival with 300 pounds of film in 26 canisters for the world premiere of *'The Brutalist'*, a 215-minute odyssey.

At the film's press conference, Corbet shrugged off criticism of its arduous runtime, urging viewers to move past it. Following a last-minute, sold-out screening at the TIFF, A24's acquisition of the film signals a commitment to presenting *'The Brutalist'* as originally envisioned.

Politics: A Festival in a Divided World

Venice, like many, had a simmering political undertone to its proceedings. The festival this year takes place in the context of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the war in Ukraine and the upcoming American Presidential election.

Aside from musing on the goings-on of the world, cinema at Venice also presented an avenue to tackle innate political dynamics and machinations present in everyday life with projects tackling queer rights, sexual politics and much more.

The Venice Awards ceremony also had a political edge as multiple winners used their acceptance speeches as platforms to express sympathy for the Palestinian people and condemn Israel for committing genocide in Gaza.

‘As a Jewish American artist working in a time-based medium, I must note, I’m accepting this award on the 336th day of Israel’s genocide in Gaza and 76th year of occupation’, said American director Sarah Friedland accepting the Luigi de Laurentiis prize for best first film for ‘Familiar Touch’.

She went on to add, ‘I believe it is our responsibility as filmmakers to use the institutional platforms through which we work to redress Israel’s impunity on the global stage. I stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine and their liberation struggle.’ Friedland’s comments received a rousing ovation in the room.

Palestinian filmmaker Scandar Copti went on to echo Friedland’s sentiments as he accepted the best screenplay prize in the Horizons section for ‘Happy Holidays’, a film about four characters living in the Israeli city of Haifa, going about their different generational and cultural experiences.

‘I stand here deeply honoured, yet profoundly affected by the difficult times we’re living through over the past 11 months, our shared humanity and moral compass have been tested as we witness the ongoing genocide in Gaza’, he said.

Another incredibly contentious issue surrounding the festival this year came from the tension between the Italian government and festival organisers and participants. Italy's far-right government, led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, has, over its term, made a habit of targeting and undermining the nation's cultural institutions, of which Venice is a major one, raising concerns and tensions that the festival may be targeted next.

Meloni's administration aims to 'liberate' these sectors from what she perceives as left-wing dominance and has industry insiders worried about the future.

In May 2023, just shy of a year into her term, Meloni spoke at a rally in Catania addressing her supporters while framing the Italian cultural sector as one of the last remaining institutions of 'left-wing influence'.

Her words underlined her goal to challenge and actively combat the existing political influence in the film, television, and arts industries, signalling a potential shift in how cultural institutions are run.

Leading Italian directors and creatives like Luca Guadagnino, Paolo Sorrentino, and Alice Rohrwacher have expressed alarm regarding the same, going so far as to sign a petition last year against Meloni's attempted takeover of Rome's Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, one of the world's oldest film schools. Critics fear that voices opposing the government's agenda may be increasingly silenced.

Awards: Celebrating Excellence

Finally, we arrive at the awards for Venice 2024. Being one of the most prestigious festivals in the world, Venice Awards are considered the gold standard in filmmaking (alongside Cannes).

In contemporary times, the festival awards the Leone d'Oro (Golden Lion) as the best film in competition. Winners include Satyajit Ray's 'Aparajito' (1957), Ang Lee's 'Brokeback Mountain' (2005), Alfonso Cuarón's 'Roma' and Akira Kurosawa's 'Rashomon' (1950).

This year, the festival awards went as follows:

- **Golden Lion:** "The Room Next Door" (Pedro Almodóvar)
- **Silver Lion Grand Jury Prize:** "Vermiglio" (Maura Delpero)
- **Silver Lion for Best Director:** Brady Corbet, "The Brutalist"
- **Special Jury Prize:** "April" (Déa Kulumbegashvili)
- **Best Screenplay:** Murilo Hauser and Heitor Lorega, "I'm Still Here"
- **Best Actress:** Nicole Kidman, "Babygirl"
- **Best Actor:** Vincent Lindon, "The Quiet Son"
- **Marcello Mastroianni Best Young Actor Award:** Paul Kirscher, "And Their Children After Them"

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Shogun - Hulu/FX (2024)

Industry - HBO (2020)

Megalopolis dir. Francis Ford Coppola (2024)

The Substance dir. Coralie Fargeat (2024)

Alien: Romulus dir. Fede Alvarez (2024)

Speak No Evil dir. James Watkins (2024)

Civil War dir. Alex Garland (2024)

Kinds of Kindness dir. Yorgos Lanthimos (2024)

Asteroid City dir. Wes Anderson (2023)

Bilingualism in the Globe

An Old Play, Seen Anew

Partha M Bharadwaj

Shakespeare is the single most quoted playwright in the English language. He tactfully controls the flow of his verses with witty new words that are now commonplace. Shakespeare's success has endured since the Elizabethan age due to his ability to capture universal emotions—love, tragedy, comedy, and betrayal—through vivid characters and universal plots exploring the intricacies of the human psyche.

It was only a matter of time before he became a symbol of British literary excellence, and his works were forced upon all of its colonies. Despite its imperial undertones, studying Shakespeare's work remains a revered reference for aspiring writers and actors. The pinnacle of this legacy is the Globe Theatre in London, where some of Shakespeare's first plays were staged in 1599. Consequently, it was renamed "Shakespeare's Globe" in 1997 to immortalise the long-standing relation between the playstage and the poet.

In the summer of 2024, the Globe staged a bilingual production of *Antony and Cleopatra* in both English and British Sign Language (BSL) directed by Blanche McIntyre, known for the emotional depth she brings in her works such as in *Oresteia* (2015) and *Titus Andronicus* (2017). This aimed to enhance the accessibility of the play for the deaf community, particularly through the inclusion of both hearing and deaf actors.

The brilliant cast featured talented actors such as John Hollingworth playing Mark Antony, and Nadia Nadarajah portraying Queen Cleopatra. They put on a spectacular performance, capturing the emotional complexities of the couple and bringing a fresh dynamic to the classic story.



The use of BSL in production further elevated the production quality, receiving widespread appreciation. While many consider sign language to be little more than a non-verbal version of spoken language, it is an entirely different and fully developed language with its own grammar, syntax and semantic codes. Thus, the incorporation of BSL was not viewed as a hindrance but as an opportunity to show Shakespeare in an entirely new light, as the scope for exploring the production's nuances went beyond traditional dimensions.

The conventional rhythm of the play's dialogues was maintained in the paced signs that follow the tempo similarly. BSL makes use of sign space, body cues and facial expressions—all key elements of its grammar. While the physical aspects of sign languages lend well to the animated characters in the play, they were ingenious in the way they maintained the subtlety of the original dialogues.

Actors also used eye contact and personal space to enhance the intensity of their lines and bring focus to non-verbal aspects of their performance. To further improve accessibility, screens were hung above the stage with subtitles.

This innovative production not only garners new interest from all Shakespeare fans but also invites those who are hard of hearing. There was also a near-even split between the hearing and deaf actors, crew, and creative leads, reflecting meaningful inclusivity and representation. As the associate director, Charlotte Arrowsmith, remarks, the collaboration between deaf and hearing creatives “can enrich any story”.

Every new translation adds new layers to the media, leading to new interpretations and understanding. Further, the ability of sign languages to condense information to its core elements without losing any of the nuances has allowed the integrity of Shakespeare's work to be uncompromised. The inclusion of sign language was not just an add-on—it was integral to the experience and offered a version of Shakespeare's plays never seen before.

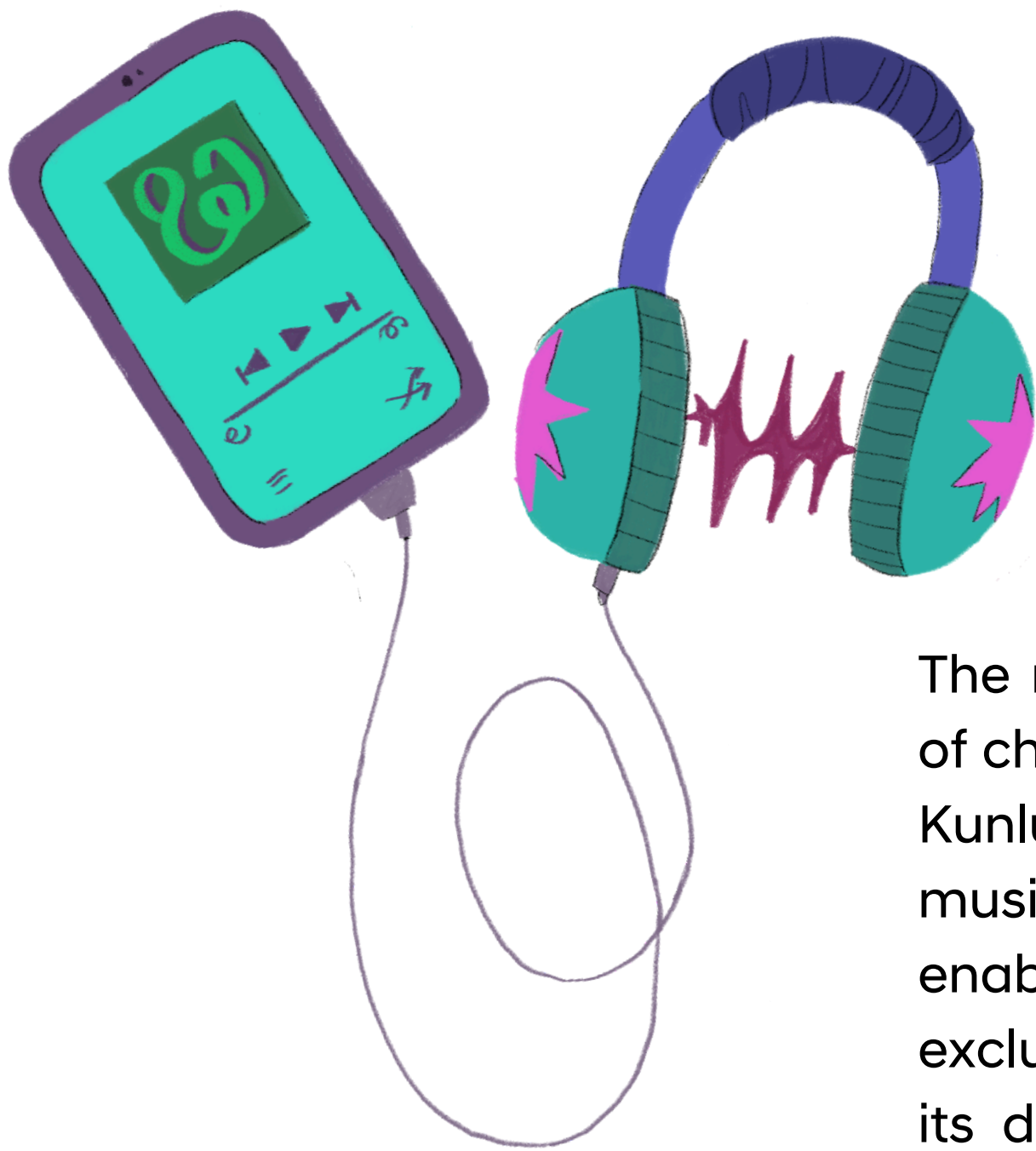
in other news

New Mozart Composition Discovered

A previously unknown piece composed by the legendary Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart during his teenage years has been uncovered in a Leipzig library. The 12-minute work, dating back to the mid-1760s, consists of seven miniature movements for a string trio. The remarkable discovery offers a new glimpse into the early work of Mozart as he honed his talents as a child prodigy.

CHINA'S AI-GENERATED MUSIC REVOLUTION

Eshal Zahur



The music streaming market is undergoing a metamorphosis of change in China through the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Kunlun Tech Co. Ltd. has unveiled one of the first fully AI-driven music experiences in the world, Melodio. This new platform enables users to stream songs generated and created exclusively by artificial intelligence, making it one of the first in its domain. This development is influential in propelling the world of music forward.

Melodio aims to allow users to tailor the experience of streaming, making it more personal. It enables users to type in a prompt that describes their mood, inclinations, or a scenario, letting the AI create a customised music list within seconds. The algorithms in Melodio can analyse hundreds of thousands of permutations of information regarding structure, type, and previous listening or preference history.

The music platform uses natural language processing (NLP) techniques. The app is powered by the AI model SkyMusic 2.0, which incorporates large language models (LLMs) for processing user inputs such as moods and scenarios. Additionally, Melodio integrates innovative machine-learning techniques like audio analysis and music generation, helping users create music using reference tracks and other audio input. It then uses this information to create an original song or track to suit a person's specific reading.

Listeners can also change the prompts or parameters of each "song" in real time. The saving and sharing of musical moments and favoured songs is an additional feature of the platform. The creation of Melodio represents a critical nexus point in the convergence of technology and music.

AI platforms like this have immense potential to revolutionise the music space. New genres, styles, and songs can be created that were unthinkable before. It even enables users to modify lyrics and switch between music styles. For the sake of comparison, apps like Beatoven.ai, also AI-driven, focus on assisting users in composing instrumental music, whereas Melodio offers a broader interactive experience with customizable lyrics.

The platform can also create and infinitely scale up to generate millions of songs; all artistically produced by AI. This results in an experience that can be personalised. Every user's listening experience can fit one's mood and preference with AI technology.

Consequently, however, as AI-developed music gains momentum, musicians and composers face existential challenges in competition against an unlimited supply of AI-generated music. Conversely, an emerging opportunity also emerges for new revenue streams for artists and producers, with the harnessing of AI into the music-making process.

Furthermore, artists can also partner with AI to create a sound that is a mix of human and AI-created compositions, resulting in new sounds with yet unexplored harmonics. This would be a starkly competitive advantage in the marketplace.

In addition to its usual streaming offerings, Kunlun has also given music creators an online tool for making songs. Creators can suggest ideas for lyrics, pick the genre they like, and create the final song by providing cues for tweaking different portions of the sonic makeup of the music. Interestingly, using Melodio's marketplace, music creators can also sell their AI-assisted songs to monetise future projects.

This has, however, raised questions about appropriation, given the possibility of using copyrighted material as a source. Other similar AI apps have also drawn harsh criticism pertaining to the issue of copyright ownership. Furthermore, with so many independent artists putting out their original music on an already overcrowded, overstimulated platform, why produce more AI-generated music in an already cluttered world of music creation? The answer remains elusive.

These streaming services excel in defining tracks based on their key features and finding matches for listeners who may not fit into conventional consumer-oriented categories. However, what is interesting is how little emphasis is put on the diverse talent pool we have at our disposal as opposed to tech gurus producing algorithm-generated music. As the matter is further debated and cases for copyright infringement are filed in court, it is pertinent to realise AI is here to stay, whether the industry likes it or not.

in other news

New Zealand Crowns 27-Year-Old as New Māori Queen

Ngā Wai hono i te pō has been crowned New Zealand's eighth Māori monarch, becoming only the second Māori queen in history. Selected by Māori chiefs after her father's passing, she continues her family's royal legacy in a historic North Island ceremony amidst an ongoing reversal of Māori rights reforms.

READS FOR SEPTEMBER

1. Doumani, Beshara. Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900. University of California Press, 1995.

2. Aoyama, Nane. A Perfect Day to Be Alone. Maclehose Press, 2024.
(Translated)

- As 20-year-old Chizu and 71-year-old Ginko become roommates in a small Tokyo home, the two of them establish a unique alliance, helping each other navigate the world through four seasons.

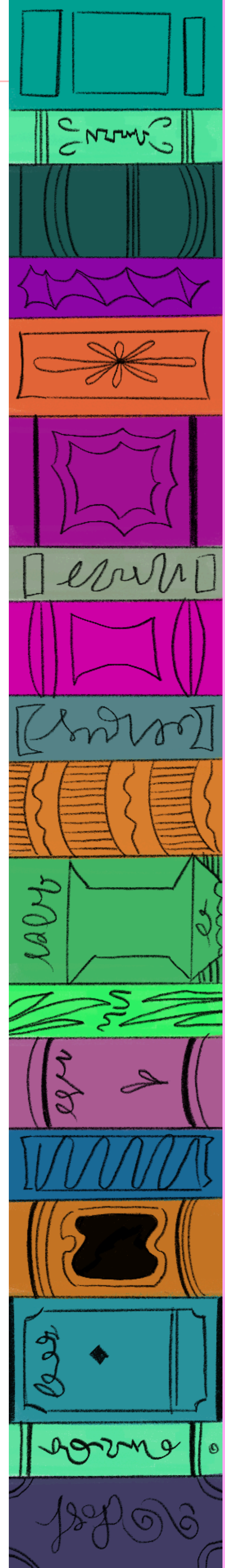
3. Henn, Carsten. The Door-to-Door Bookstore. MANILLA Press, 2024.
(Translated)

- Carl, known as the town’s bookwalker, delivers carefully curated selections of books to his loyal customers. Once joined by Schascha, his daily routine takes a turn as he enters a world of creativity, imagination, and friendship, all while aiming to preserve the art of reading.

4. Ahmad, Jamil. The Wandering Falcon. Penguin Books, 2011.

- Wandering through the region where Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan converge, Tor Baz, more popularly known as the black falcon, takes on a journey to defy his fate. Surviving all odds, this tale brings to light the innately traditional, honour-bound culture, and a young boy’s quest to find its true meaning.

5. Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East. Ed. Edmund Burke III and David Yaghoubian. University of California Press, 1993.



READS FOR SEPTEMBER

6. Adiga, Ranjan. *Leech, and Other Stories*. Penguin Random House India, 2024.

- *Leech* is a fascinating collection of stories exploring the lives of Nepalis in the modern world. Uncovering their contemporary challenges, the stories lead the characters and readers to encounter the frailties of the world, describing the comparisons between Kathmandu and the US.

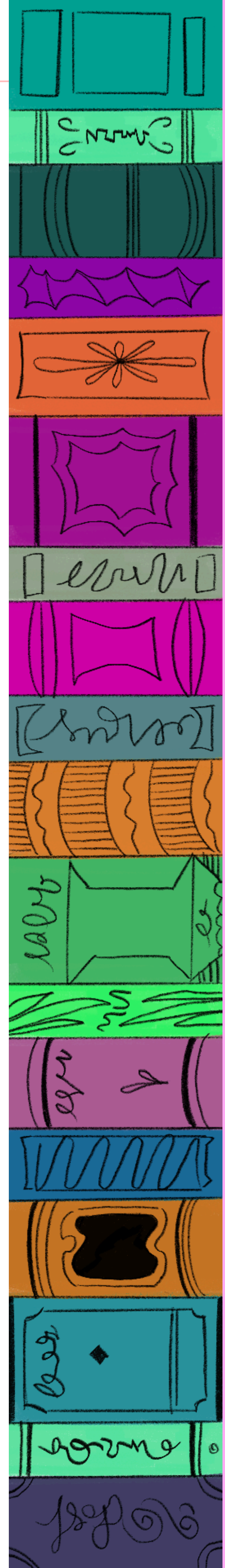
7. Kassir, Samir. *Beirut*. University of California Press, 2010. (Translated)

8. Fatland, Erika. *The Border*. Maclehose Press, 2020.

9. Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*. Pantheon, 2003.

- Set against the backdrop of the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s, Marjane's unique comic-style biography is an insight into her childhood as she witnessed the intertwining of radicalism, marxism and liberalism all in her home country. From having to comply with strict rules at school, to moving to Europe to live a more liberal life, Satrapi recounts the contradictions between the public and private, a concern still prevalent today.

10. Said, Edward W. *The Question of Palestine*. Vintage, 1992.



September, the Month of Fashion

Anish Paranjape

An evening at the Guggenheim with Alaïa, an afternoon at the Grand Palais with Chanel, or a starry night under the Eiffel Tower with Yves Saint Laurent, all with a side of fashion's most ingenious and revered names and the work that makes them so. From the strikingly minimalist to the audaciously avant-garde, these runways are sure to have all this and more. The month of Fashion is upon us.

September holds an extremely unique place in the global fashion world, commonly referred to as Fashion Month. September is a time when all sections of the industry from publications to houses to stylists, all show off their creative, technical and aesthetic chops.

The month witnessed the most talked about and highly anticipated runway shows, magazine covers and campaigns. Primarily, the month features fashion weeks, with runway shows and presentations in the four “fashion capitals of the world”, New York, London, Milan, and Paris, in that order.

Houses and designers typically present their spring-summer collections for the coming year (SS25), setting the tone for the kind of fashion that will frame emerging trends. The month-long event is a critical juncture for houses, buyers, editors, publishers, influencers and managers allowing them to not only have a glimpse at what styles are to come but also strategise and dictate the commercial and cultural direction of fashion.



With all this talk of the significance of September, one must naturally wonder, why September? What's so special? The answer lies in the intricate workings of the fashion world, harkening to the commercial rhythm and calendar of the industry. With summer in the rearview, many begin to transition their wardrobes to fit the changing weather.

The industry thus aligns itself with this notion presenting new directions in styles for the coming year. Importantly, September also holds a crucial place in the retail cycle with stores and marketplaces preparing for the busy shopping seasons of the fall and winter.

When the lights are at their brightest, September captures the moment where ideas transform into concrete movements, and in the process, shape the tastes and wardrobes of millions. The month and its significance also help us understand the more pragmatic machinations of the presumptively frivolous fashion world. Global trends are thus selected, as Miranda Priestly so eloquently puts it —“from a pile of ‘stuff’”. Here are some of this month's highlights:



The Robert Wun 10th Anniversary Show

Hong Kong-based designer, extraordinaire, and the talk of the fashion world, Robert Wun, celebrated the 10th anniversary of his eponymous brand with a spectacular presentation. A love letter to his family and hometown of Hong Kong, the show was a triumphant homecoming for Wun who has moved in recent years to present in London. The collection, shown at the Hong Kong Palace Museum was described as “a mesmerising fusion of personal memories, cultural references, and pure, unfiltered artistry”.

The collection featured his signature jaw-dropping statement pieces with capes, gowns, and ingenious silhouettes, coupled with nods to Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy. One of the presentation’s most cathartic moments came through a deep blue gown adorned with sculptural arms cradling a baby, drapes covering the arms, creating a beautiful silhouette.

The design, a tribute to Wun’s late grandmother who died from COVID-19 in 2021, was incredibly touching. “It served as a visual metaphor for love that transcends time, a nod to the woman who shaped Wun’s life in many ways,” Marie Claire wrote.

Wun’s other designs echoed grace and power, seemingly channelling strength and resilience. Among the standouts was Wun’s iconic “bloody bride,” with a twist. A look inspired by his sister’s surgery, Wun rethought the concept as this season’s iteration saw blood-red tones blended with ethereal whites, creating a stark yet delicate contrast that embodied the connection and dichotomy between beauty and art. Wun also paid homage to thrifting in Hong Kong with a selection of grandma shirts with his signature pleated dresses.

Wun’s homecoming came full circle. In doing so it became so much more than a commemoration of a decade in fashion—it became a celebration of a designer who has remained firmly rooted in his craft and the meaning it holds.

Designer Exits and Appointments – Givenchy, Tom Ford, Y Project

A major thread this month was the slew of new creative director appointments after what felt like a major creative director departure earlier this year. The mass exodus of creative directors from their prominent houses has been a key happening in fashion this year, raising eyebrows owing to its seemingly unassuming yet elusive cause.

Most notable amongst these this month was the appointment of Haider Ackermann as the new Creative Director of Tom Ford.

“It is with tremendous pride that I will seek to honour the legacy of Tom Ford, a man I have long admired and have the utmost respect for,” said Ackermann in a statement by The Estée Lauder Companies Inc. (ELC), Tom Ford’s parent company.

Tom Ford, who founded his eponymous brand in 2005 after his incredible work and departure from Gucci, stepped down as creative director of the house in 2023 following the sale of the brand to ELC for an estimated US\$2.8 billion in 2022. His exit was followed by the brief tenure of Peter Hawkings, a veteran who’d worked under Ford for decades, who exited earlier this year. A publication said of the appointment—“the merging of Ackermann’s design with the codes of its founder represents an intriguing fashion prospect: Both designers have respectively developed their aesthetic dialects that, while highly distinct, also overlap”.

Another major movement this month was the appointment of Sarah Burton as the new creative director at Givenchy following whispers about her next role. This comes on the heels of her departure as the creative head at the legendary Alexander McQueen’s eponymous label, after spending her entire career at the brand, serving the last thirteen as its creative director.

Burton is set to begin her work this week at the ateliers in Paris and will be working on both the menswear and womenswear. Her first collection for Givenchy will be shown in Paris in March 2025. Burton, ironically, will be following in the footsteps of her late friend and mentor Lee McQueen who served as Creative Director of Givenchy for 5 years.

Curiously, Burton was originally hired at the McQueen label full-time while the founder was dividing his time between the two houses. Givenchy has recently experienced a decline in relevance owing to a revolving door of creative directors it has gone through with Matthew Williams being the latest exit. Burton's appointment seems to be aimed at countering the same.

A major departure this month was that of Glenn Martens from Y/Project. Martens stepped down after eleven years at the top of the Paris-based label. A statement shared reads, "Glenn Martens thanks Y/PROJECT and Gilles Elalouf, the late CEO of the brand who tragically passed away last June, for giving him the support and freedom to express his vision while expanding on the creative artistry that the label established".

Following his appointment in 2013, Martens pushed the boundaries of conventional notions of design and form, creating his unique avant-garde style. Y/Project underwent major expansion as his vision and disruptive design language became striking to consumers. Martens' genius lay in "taking the codes built by founders Gilles Elalouf and Yohan Serfaty and reinterpreting them for a new generation". It is currently unclear if Martens will present at Paris this year but here's hoping for a show.

in other news

Drag Gains Prominence in France Despite Backlash from Right-Wingers

Drag Race France Live, a theatrical adaptation of Drag Race France, was staged in one of the world's oldest and most renowned cabaret music halls in Paris. It is helping expand the Drag scene in France with its host, former Drag Race US contestant, Nicky Doll, wittily referencing right-wing backlash over the Olympics opening ceremony show she was a part of.

eBay: Endless Runway

Fashion is one of the most wasteful industries on earth. It generates tonnes of non-recyclable waste that is expediting the impending threat of dire climate change consequences. Slowly, however, the industry has begun to take notes. Thus, in a time when sustainability is becoming increasingly crucial, the fashion industry is embracing more eco-conscious practices.

Thrifting, sustainable fashion, and reworking pieces have all become commonplace. A pertinent one of these is the rise of pre-loved fashion with companies like The RealReal or Vestiaire Collective becoming big names in the space.

An intriguing take on pre-loved fashion came this September from the unlikeliest of places—eBay! eBay's Endless Runway sought to exemplify the pre-loved fashion movement. Through events in New York and London, Endless Runway reflects how pre-loved clothing can offer both style and sustainability. The endeavour promotes a circular economy that reduces waste and extends the lifespan of garments.

A collaboration with the renowned Council of Fashion Designers of America and the British Fashion Council, the event featured shoppable shows sourced from eBay. The first show, at the Chelsea Factory, was curated by model stylist and online tastemaker Wisdom Kaye. Kaye curated second-hand clothing, picking pieces from American designers, including the likes of Willy Chavarria, The Row, and Marc Jacobs.

The show's format enabled viewers on the live stream to bid on and purchase items being displayed in real-time. Kaye described pre-loved fashion as giving old garments new meaning and life, akin to a "circle of life".

This September, we witnessed extraordinary work from names like Raf Simmons and Miuccia Prada at Prada, Matthieu Blazy at Bottega Veneta, Pieter Mulier at Alaia, Maximilian Davis at Ferragamo and so many more.

September's reputation as Fashion Month is not just a calendar event—it's a spectacle, an arena where art, industry, and imagination coalesce. New York, London, Milan, and Paris became canvases for designers and for the industry to prepare for the year ahead.

Through the Eyes of David Anfam

Partha M Bharadwaj

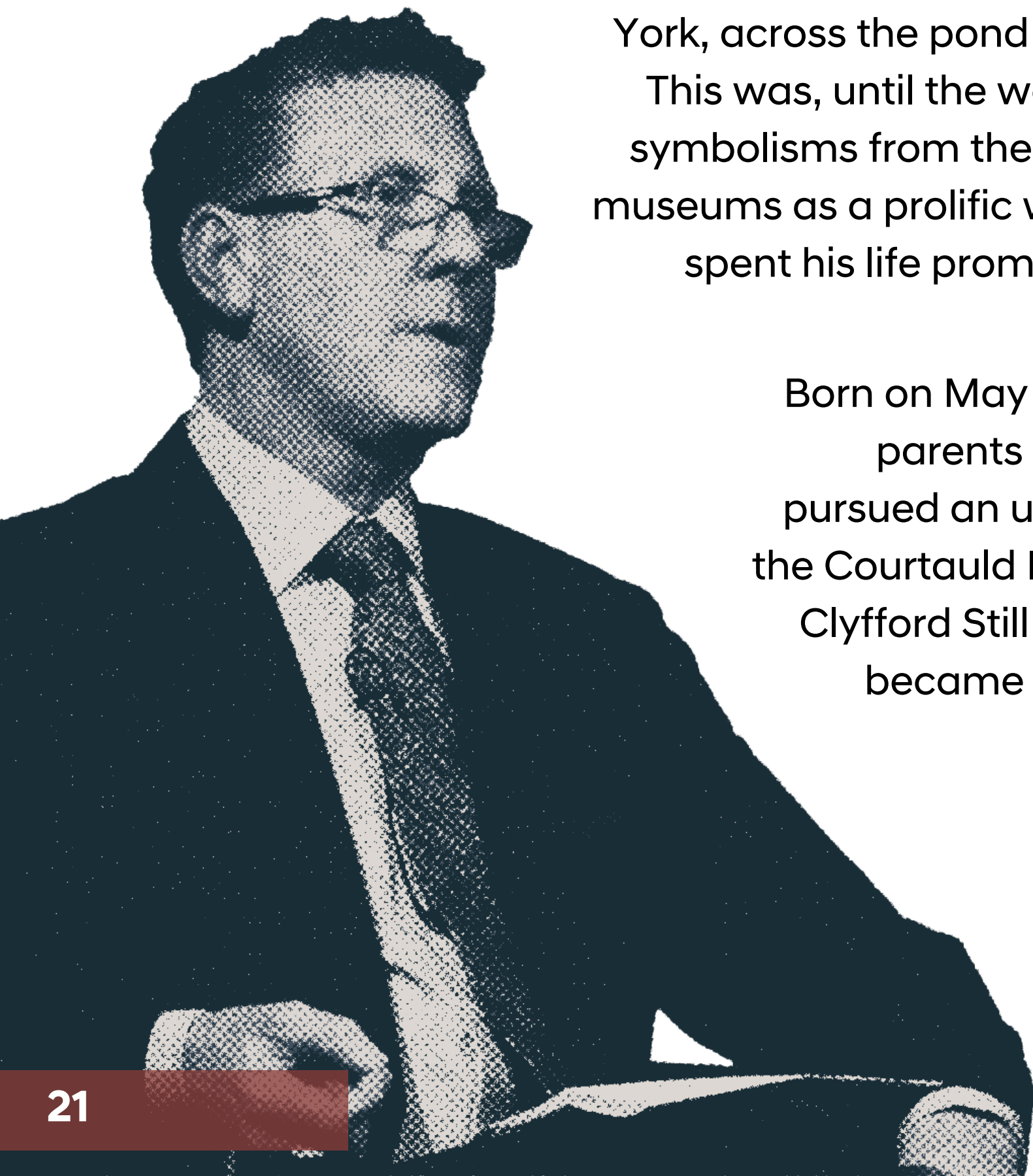
Despite the intrinsic human nature of art, it often comes across as complex and elusive to many. At its core, art is a form of expression. It captures the expression of the artists, the audience, and the world in which it was born.

A pertinent example of this is the post-WWII American art movement of Abstract Expressionism (AbEx). The movement is the culmination of spontaneous brushstrokes used to mirror personal reflections, breaking away from the deliberate gestures of traditional painting styles by leaning into the improvisation of paint and environment interacting with each other.

However, the movement remained in obscurity for a long time in New York, across the pond from the established French Painting standards.

This was, until the work of David Anfam. He extracted meanings and symbolisms from the canvas and displayed them beyond the walls of museums as a prolific writer, curator, historian, and public speaker who spent his life promoting Abstract Expressionism to the wider world.

Born on May 12, 1955, Anfam found solace in the art books his parents lent him. Interest developed into passion, and he pursued an undergraduate degree and a PhD in Art History at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. His PhD dissertation on Clyfford Still would be his first mark on the world of AbEx — it became the blueprint for his approach to art, gaining him much notoriety.



This dissertation would prove to teach Anfam a valuable lesson — to always personally observe the works of his subject, a practice he maintained throughout his life and considered critical to his study of art.

It was this approach to art that made Anfam a leading authority in the world of AbEx. He became a thorough scholar, an accessible writer, and a master at turning shapes that most couldn't read into efficient, simple words. Anfam's ability to explain the deeper concepts and meanings of AbEx, tying together history, mythology, symbolism, and his personal experiences, helped make the art style accessible.

While David Anfam was a great teacher committed to making art accessible, he was also a dedicated learner and researcher who looked to gain a deeper understanding of art.

In 2007, he was amongst a select group of art historians and curators who flew to New York to uncover 2,000 previously unknown paintings of Clyfford Still. Examining the paintings and blueprints, Anfam felt that he had finally seen the missing pieces in the history of the American art movement. Here, he saw the history of Still, discovering and refining his technique over the years.

Anfam continued to pour his dedication into his study of Still. To him, Still was an undiscovered master he hoped to reveal to the masses.

in other news

Theatre Show Cancelled Over References to Trans Rights and Palestine

One of Manchester's most significant cultural hubs, the Royal Exchange Theatre, cancelled an entire run of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' over references to trans rights and the inclusion of the protest slogan "Free Palestine." This decision has raised concerns about freedom of artistic expression and political censorship in the arts.

However, Anfam's most renowned achievement, contributing to the Thames and Hudson collection of 'Abstract Expressionism', came while he was working multiple jobs and teaching art history part-time in his extensive efforts to unearth the complexity of AbEx.

Spending 10 years on his impressive 1,000-page catalogue raisonné on Mark Rothko, published in 1998, Anfam highlighted the personal effects of Rothko's work, expounding meticulously on Rothko's masterful technique.

Anfam recognises Rothko's use of large canvases and larger applications of paint to blur the border between the viewers' and the artist's psyche as the crux of the art movement's philosophy.

The celebrated scholar remembered the ten years of researching and analysing Rothko as a physically taxing, yet rewarding event in his life. Though it seemed frivolous to others, he mentioned in his interview with John Yau of the Brooklyn Rail that he believed that as it was a catalogue of 'things in the real world', only a physical, first-hand examination would yield insights.

Throughout his life, Anfam was a proponent of the idea of gifting all artwork with the same time and diligence, to reveal something unseen. When he was the Executive Curator for the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver, he helped curate several distinguished galleries and exhibits. Between writing, teaching, curating, and public speaking, his principles stand strong as he platformed many artists including the likes of Rachel Howard and Sean Scully.

David Anfam's sincerity and utter dedication to his craft have created access to the ideas of these painters. Anfam's absolute focus on his subjects has left us with some of the most comprehensive works in the field of AbEx. He has set the standard for a multi-disciplinary approach to art and delighted the world with his passion for the Abstract Expressionist era — a legacy that continues to thrive after Anfam's unfortunate demise in August 2024.

Can TIDAL's New Songwriting Tool Redefine Royalties for Artists?

Eshal Zahur

For years, songwriters have been fighting an uphill battle. The explosion of streaming platforms has turned the music industry on its head, but for many creators, that hasn't translated into fair compensation. While the hits they craft rake in billions of streams globally, the pennies per stream model leaves many wondering: "Where's the money?" Artists are often left in the dark about what they're truly owed.

Enter TIDAL, an artist-first, fan-centred music streaming service, known for its high-quality audio and dedication to artist empowerment. While platforms like Spotify may dominate the conversation, TIDAL has carved a niche by focusing on transparency and support for those at the heart of the music industry.

The service was sold in 2015 to Project Panther Ltd, a company owned by the American rapper and businessman Shawn 'Jay-Z' Carter. After the acquisition, stars such as Beyoncé, Rihanna, Kanye West, Madonna, Alicia Keys and Nicki Minaj became its co-owners, intending to foster artist-friendly procedures and a fairer royalties system.

These celebrity stakeholders contributed to creating awareness about TIDAL as a platform that is focused on musicians' welfare with better quality content, and with better revenue share compared to the other existing services. The second change happened in April 2021 when TIDAL was sold to Square (now Block, Inc.), a company owned by Jack Dorsey who planned on transforming it into a music-financial technology firm.

Now, they're going a step further with a new service aimed directly at songwriters: a royalty management tool designed to give creators more control and insight into their revenue.

This tool intends to offer songwriters some control and visibility over the revenue earned from streaming. TIDAL aims to improve transparency for songwriters since this has been noted as a weakness in the music industry, a frequent complaint filed by artists, who feel overlooked.

Along with suggesting earnings for individual songs, albums, territories, and time, this new service provides songwriters with real-time insights into streams and their respective royalties.. The platform further breaks down the payment structure of royalties from various revenue sources such as performance rights organisations (PROs), mechanical royalties, and digital streaming royalties to demystify the complexities of royalties. In so many ways, the service assists songwriters in improving their financial planning.

Songwriters and artists alike have previously lamented not receiving their fair share of income generated from their work. Those under traditional deals often sign away large sections of their publishing rights to receive advances or deal terms with publishers, labels, or intermediaries, entitled to the majority of income emanating from a hit song. Songwriters are left with only the crumbs of what they were initially owed.

A prominent example is Taylor Swift, who has been vocal about songwriters' challenges in retaining ownership. One of her most famous battles involves her record masters, where she criticised how the entirety of her early music catalogue was sold without her consent. In this case, Swift didn't have the rights to her recordings, meaning she wasn't fully compensated for the streams or the usage of her songs.

In 2014, Swift also pulled her music from Spotify, criticising the platform's free tier, which she felt devalued the work of songwriters and artists by offering low per-stream payouts. She later penned an open letter to Apple Music, protesting their policy of not paying artists during users' free trial periods.

With the shift in the music industry from physical music sales to video and audio streaming, the world of royalty payments has become even murkier. Instead of a fixed payment per sales unit, streaming royalties are paid per play, and then divided again between various parties including the songwriter, performer, publisher, and label. Because of this process, songwriters may find it difficult to verify how much they are being owed, and if and when they might be paid.

Streaming services have also been criticised for the overall rate paid per stream. Apps like Spotify, Apple Music, etc. have enabled billions of streams to be generated daily. However, individual artists and songwriters get paid only a few cents for each stream. Many are saying that the low per-stream payment is not a sustainable solution for most creators who exclusively write songs and use it as a source of income.

Tools such as TIDAL's new royalty management tool are vital for songwriters to improve the playing field. With access to consistent, detailed, and transparent data, TIDAL's tool promises songwriters the ability to hold platforms, pubs, and all respective stakeholders accountable for proper payment. It offers the ability to negotiate a more favourable deal with a publisher or collect other sources of earnings they didn't know were available.

TIDAL's new tool offers hope to songwriters, giving them the transparency, control, and accountability they have long demanded, perhaps finally shifting the balance of power in their favour.

in other news

FX's Shogun Breaks Emmy Record with 18 Wins

FX's Shogun set a new Emmy record with 18 wins, including Outstanding Drama Series. The show, already a standout with 14 Creative Arts Emmys, took top acting honours for Hiroyuki Sanada and Anna Sawai, and directing accolades for Frederick E.O. Toye, marking a historic achievement and landmark for Asian and Japanese representation on television.

Short 'n Sweet

Sabrina Carpenter's Pop Candy Confection

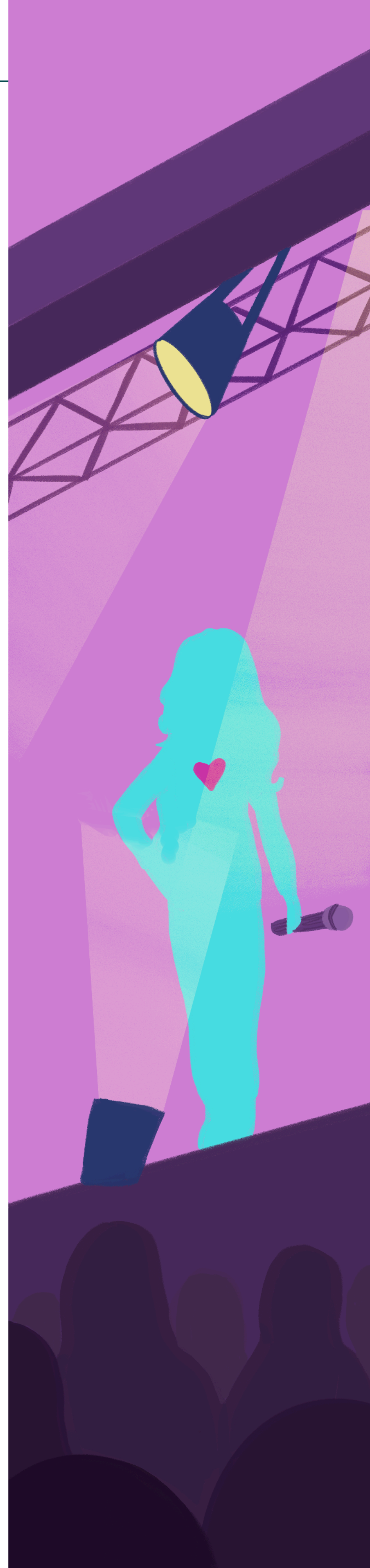
Anish Paranjape

“Oh I leave quite an impression, five feet to be exact,” sings Sabrina Carpenter, opening her sixth studio album, *Short 'n Sweet*. A mere glance at X or TikTok however, would easily lead one to think this was her debut record, her breakout moment, one that would cement her as one of what the internet refers to as “main pop girls”.

Catalysed by the phenomenon of an earworm that is the “that’s that me espresso,” Carpenter is now here to stay. Still, she’s painted herself in a bit of a corner when it comes to placing an order at coffee shops worldwide: “They’re just waiting for me to say it.”

Her steadily mounting success that began with the shifting pop music landscape in the early years of this decade culminated in the release of her previous record, *emails i can’t send*, which broadened her horizons both artistically and commercially. Then came *Espresso*, the lead single for *Short 'n Sweet* and certified song of the summer, along with her follow-up *Please Please Please*.

Carpenter’s journey to this meteoric breakout, however, has been anything short of short and sweet, perhaps most poignantly embodying the phrase “it takes 10 years to be an overnight success”. Sabrina began her career at 15, as a young Disney Channel star who had just signed with Hollywood Records to a multi-record deal. Her actual debut, *Can’t Blame a Girl for Trying*, an EP, released a decade ago, set the stage for her singer-songwriting ways.



The following years saw Sabrina release her first full-length studio record *Eyes Wide Open* and *EVOLution*, finessing her sonic and vocal ability with highlights like *On Purpose*. The latter half of the decade saw her gain heightened levels of notoriety, opening for Ariana Grande's *Dangerous Woman Tour* and releasing her *Singular: Act I & II*.

This dyad saw her transition to more thematically resonant and mature subject matters. The 2020s saw her release *emails i can't send* followed by her opening for Taylor Swift on the global juggernaut that is *The Eras Tour*.

With *emails i can't send* and *Short 'n Sweet*, Carpenter sought to solidify her sonic and thematic characterisation, solidifying her aesthetic. *Short 'n Sweet* delivers exactly what it promises, cute bops and California surf rock, with Sabrina's cheeky humour wrapped in unskippable choruses. Her sonic shift from the more generic, bubbly realm of pop to the more current genre bedding sound has emerged as one of the more intriguing aspects of the record.

Strings, synths and guitars with a slight twang seem to occupy the majority of her sonic space on *Short 'n Sweet* with Carpenter hopping from genre to genre, at times singing over plucky country guitars and switching over to classic Jack Antonoff-produced pop beats.

Short 'n Sweet also sees Ms. Carpenter foray into R&B with reverb melodies and layered harmonies. Sonically channelling bits and pieces of Kacey Musgraves or Rilo Kiley, Sabrina also gives hints of her tutelage under prolific songwriter Taylor Swift.

Sabrina's lyricism in *Short 'n Sweet* is quite simply hilarious, harkening back to a time when pop songs weren't mined for subtext and broader cultural commentary (not that that's a bad thing). In *Short 'n Sweet*, Carpenter embraces the frivolous, petty, and audacious self-referential humour that has made her the internet darling she is today.

Ms. Carpenter wants to have fun, and she wants us to have fun with her. Her humour doesn't conceal the story the album wants to tell though, as is exemplified by the meaning behind the title, *Short 'n Sweet*.

In fact, her sharp wit only enhances the storytelling, adding layers of relatability and warmth to the narrative and Sabrina's persona. Rather than detract from the music and the album's tone, it helps create a more accessible protagonist for the listener.

"I thought about some of these relationships, how some of them were the shortest I've ever had and they affected me the most," she tells Apple Music's Zane Lowe, adding "And I thought about the way that I respond to situations: Sometimes it is very nice, and sometimes it's not very nice".

Her brutally honest wit came to the forefront when she wrote a majority of the album on a trip to a small town in rural France, as the isolation helped, Carpenter said. “There are no rules to the things you say,” she tells Lowe on the songwriting process. “You’re just like, what sounds awesome? What feels awesome? And what gets the story across, whatever story that is?”

Highlights like Please Please Please strike the balance between her sonic and lyrical stylings perfectly, as Sabrina begs her boyfriend not to embarrass her (again), poking fun at herself as well. Bed Chem and Good Graces play with R&B elements as Sabrina talks about her chemistry with her partner while also letting him know he should stay in her good graces. Juno, perhaps the most sonically and lyrically diverse and playful tracks on the album, sees Sabrina ponder parenthood over an incredible instrumental.

Contrarily, songs like Dumb & Poetic, an acoustic ballad that serves also as a caricature of someone who masks their sleazy tendencies with buzzwords and highbrow affections, are quaint yet listless. Slim Pickins, on which she croons: “This boy doesn’t even know the difference between there, their and they are” is another mostly forgettable addition to a short collection of duds.

“So much of this album was made in the moments where there was something that I just couldn’t stop laughing about. And I was like, well, that might as well just be a whole song,” she quips.

Carpenter reframes heartbreak through the lens of life’s absurdity. Her candour is refreshing in pop music and so is her pseudo-debut record. A summery evening with some iced latte and a book would suit Short ‘n Sweet right.

Sabrina seems to be taking it all in, her monumental success has her now headlining an arena tour of her own, scheduled to run through the Spring of next year.

It’s very apparent that Ms Carpenter may be done for now but she wants us to miss her. In her own words, “Don’t smile because it happened... cry because it’s over”.



THE SEPTEMBER VINYL

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Girl, so confusing featuring lorde by Charli XCX & Lorde

The Worst Is Done by Weyes Blood

Space Invader by The National

Just a Western by Nilufer Yanya

Somebody Come Through by Wasia Project

Todo esta bien by Cynthia Fion

Billions by Caroline Polacheck

For Sure by Ethel Cain

September by Earth, Wind, and Fire

Ya Tak Ustal by Molchat Doma

Femenine (feat. Urias) by Empress Of, Maffalda

Sunset by Caroline Polacheck

So I by Charli XCX

Kamala Harris is Brat

A Meme-ified Political Campaign

Eshal Zahur

In the teeming cesspool of American politics, where endorsements feel like they are stuffed into kid's goodie bags at a five-year-old's birthday party, one voice has risen above them all—defining the ethos of a generation. It is not Oprah. It is not even Beyoncé. How ironic it is that it is not even Mark Ruffalo posting eco-friendly Instagram stories into the void of celebrity tabloids! It is Charli XCX—British pop singer, pop musician, and now seemingly the unexpected queenmaker of Kamala Harris' presidential bid. Honestly, how did Charli do it? Not through impassioned speeches or a carefully crafted op-ed, but with three curt and cryptic words that blew up the Internet: "Kamala IS brat."

No grand intros or policy breakdowns. Just Charli XCX, her iPhone, and a world-altering X post (formerly known as a tweet).



The Viral Explosion

In mere moments, Charli's post with its bold lowercase aesthetics exploded across the digital landscape like a ringtone from 2005. "Kamala IS brat" trended, garnered millions of retweets, unfurled in Reddit threads, and was memed into oblivion. Harris's own X account wasted no time hopping on to the bandwagon, taking advantage of going viral, changing their profile image to neon chartreuse—the same shade from Charli's album cover for Brat. Harris, typically something of a sharp interlocutor in debates and adroit at maneuvering her bureaucratic post, had been transmitted into the realm of being a celebrity—a rebel—because brat was no longer just a word; it was a vibe.

What did Charli even mean by "brat"? A criticism? An endorsement? An avant-garde form of political analysis? Nobody knows for sure, and that's the genius. It was the precise kind of meme whose efficacy was predicated on cultural literacy—if you were not immersed in Charli XCX's neon club aesthetic, chances are you wouldn't even have noticed, or at least understood, unless you were adept at comprehending rare memes. You see, a good meme is not simply a joke or aside; not simply, or reductively, a polemic, however clever, but to me, quite vociferously a gatekeeping attempt. It is a blocking out of one group from another, a sort of inside joke that both overtakes and penetrates through the consciousness of the general public. Charli's brat meme was outright the key to the coolest "club" in political endorsements.

Memes: The New Political Endorsement

Charli's minimalist endorsement wasn't simply an instance of pop cultural lightning; it was, what I refer to as, a political mindbomb. It is a term coined by Bob Hunter, a co-founder of Greenpeace after he sent an image of a bleeding whale to the media so they could shock and enrage the public into action. Today we refer to political mindbombs as memes and they have become the currency for today's political dialogue.

Memes in politics are as important as fast food is to culinary arts. Memes are fast, disposable, universally digestible, and leave little intellectual impact. They are vile little things filled with low nutritional weight. And yet, like fast food, they pack a caloric punch. In this age of attention spans measured in nanoseconds, a meme will reach more people in seconds than any campaign ad could reach, ever. Just ask Hillary Clinton: her campaign's ill-fated trial to harness the power of the Pepe the Frog meme in her 2016 campaign ended badly when the meme mutated into something much worse.

The element that makes Charli's simple three-word endorsement so great is that it is a perfect encapsulation of the definition of a political mindbomb. It featured an explosive amount of content that cuts through the noise, grabs your attention, and stampedes into your brain. Soon after Charli's endorsement, Harris' team embraced the neon glow of the brat aesthetic that had been waiting to cross over professionally.

But let's face it: considering that policy wonks rarely trend on Twitter, any replacement of that content with some Gen Z-friendly trend would have been the best thing that happened to Harris since... well, ever.

A Suit, a Senator, and Some Serious Vibes

In a most extraordinary transformation, Kamala Harris has become a brat. She has gone from her cocoon and emerged as a butterfly. Here is a woman who has spent her work life traversing the office-infested corridors of government buildings, interviewing individuals before the Supreme Court bench, and jousting with other politicians about serious matters of immigration, health care, and criminal justice reform. And now? Now she is living her best brat life, courtesy of the vibes gifted to her by Charli XCX. Does it matter what she believes about immigration or police reform? No, because she's a relatable trend. After all, puns matter more than politics for the politically unengaged privileged youth. The elections are, after all, fodder for cracking a joke.

And let us be clear, this is a serious political strategy. In our current moment—how can someone truly win the minds of the public without becoming a social media influencer? Image is everything, without which you are nothing more than another cog in the system. After all, Harris has a reputation for being bright and serious. Why not try out a little bit of bratty irreverence?

Associating a person who could be the next President of the United States with a one-dimensional image of a young woman who, in XCX's words, "just likes to party and maybe says some dumb things sometimes," is a serious rebranding. It adds an obvious shot of fun and relatable emotional content to Harris's largely vacant public presentation. In today's meme-driven culture, engaging people with serious messages about helping those in need is shifting passive attitudes to political awareness. Relatability matters more than a 10-point policy plan.



The Danger of the Meme

Let us proceed with a note of caution. Memes are like fire; they can be useful but can burn you if not handled well. The Democrats learned this the hard way in 2016 when they took on the meme of Pepe the Frog and helped it evolve as an alt-right symbol. In other words, Ed Miliband, former UK Labour leader, became a walking meme after a meme of him awkwardly eating a bacon sandwich went viral. The “bacon sarnie incident” did nothing to enhance the image of a relatable, everyman candidate; it may have indeed cost him the election.

Mememes are subversive by their very nature. They exist to expose, to skew, to poke fun, to elicit some reaction ranging from joy to cringiness. They thrive on sarcasm and irony and they have no rules about consistency or nuance. So while Harris may enjoy the viral moment that was their brat rebrand, there is always the chance the very meme will swing back at them, and her attempts to seem relatable become yet another entry into the “cringe-worthy things politicians do” bucket. Maybe this is Kamala’s road to becoming cool to the apolitical youth, or maybe this is just her 15 minutes of fame.

Kamala IS Brat—Whatever That Means

Ultimately, Charli XCX’s endorsement of Kamala Harris is a beautiful snapshot of the world we live in—utter chaos, beauty, absurdity. It’s a world where a three-word meme post of a British pop star can send political campaigns on a loop. This is the world where vibes matter more than policies, where gauche neon chartreuse may ostensibly be the key to the white house.

In the year 2024, Kamala Harris could indeed become the first brat president, perhaps guiding the free world with a combination of political wit and recklessness in rebellion, or perhaps she will be at least the only candidate to have ever rode a meme to the Oval Office.

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