

STAND

DECEMBER 2020

COVER ARTIST
ANSHIKA KHULLAR;

ART
FOR
THE
NEW
AGE



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Dear Readers,

Taking a look back at 2020, I never knew that we would be battling COVID-19 for this long and I'd imagine this is the case for you too. Instead of the hopeful and eventful start to a new decade we all looked forward to, we were slapped in the face with a year filled with worry, grief and restrictions. We saw our plans whether it be academic, professional or social postponed or cancelled causing unexpected inconveniences. However, they do say humans are a species of adaptation - we persevered, thinking of new ways to go ahead with our daily lives while staying cautious of the pandemic. One of the most popular routes was digital with everything from university to socializing moving to online platforms such as zoom, skype and Microsoft teams. The arts is no exception. As a publication we wanted to highlight the efforts musicians, visual artists, graphic designers and performers have made to keep the sector alive and thriving.

From articles on top picks for streamable theatre to watch over winter break and sexuality in video games to essays on the dangers of the digital age to a letter to Nostalgia Strand has a lot in store for our readers in this month's issue. We've also interviewed designer Kaja Høglund and digital artist Anshika Khullar to take a look at their experiences in such a difficult time. I wish everyone a warm and safe winter break and hope to see everyone healthy and happy and ready for the second semester.

Love,

Halim Kim (Editor-in-Chief)

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BON APPETIT'S

VERY PUBLIC

RECKONING

It's late at night and I am on my laptop, as usual, fueling my boredom on Youtube. You know when you just can't watch another episode or process a two-hour-long film? It is on one of those days when I stumble across the Bon Appetit channel. From 'Gourmet Makes' to Brad Leone's 'It's Alive', all of their content was so binge-able. It was like watching a group of friends in a sitcom; each character well defined and their moves predictable to the audience. Stylized editing and great production created Condé Nast Entertainment's bestseller where more people viewed the videos than they read the actual magazine. If you scroll across the webpage of Bon Appetit, it doesn't strike you as a Condé Nast publication. The recipes tab has a bizarre sub-section, divided into Chicken, Pasta, and Steak - an odd way of categorizing meals. Comparing both print and digital, it became clear that the primary stream of revenue was the Youtube channel. Sure, recipes were developed and published online or in print, but people watched and maybe cooked what they saw their favourite "characters" make.

However, the channel has its own issues pointed out time and again by the comment section. The people in front of the camera are white and the food they made was solely of their culture too. The number of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) presenters on the channel was minimal, along with the screen time given to them. While their white counterparts had separate shows and video contracts with CN, many BIPOC folk were not paid for their on-screen appearances. The conversation around racism and toxic work culture at BA sparked debate food culture and eurocentrism in recipe development for magazines with a global audience. Food writer Illyanna Maisonet had commented on BA's lack of diversity and tokenism in a thread of now-deleted tweets. The former Editor-In-Chief, Adam Rapoport, attempted to justify this by highlighting how Priya Krishna had created "many of the Indian recipes she grew up with". Sohla El-Waylly pointed out that she was not compensated for her video appearances and was hired as an assistant editor despite having more experience than her white counterparts. After a 2013 Vine of Alex Delany saying a homophobic word re-surfaced, Eater staffer Elazar Sontag spoke about how people like Delaney created "food into a hyper-masculine, deeply gendered sport".

”

The allegations made against BA have exposed the systemic racism embedded within the industry. The assumption that readers want to use European ingredients and eat pasta everyday patronizes them. This problem exists in culinary school as well where chefs are trained in the French technique, suggesting this idea of good food being Eurocentric. For the food world to move beyond French fine dining, it is important to start with food writing itself, focusing on regional cuisines and exploring the diasporas to help break them into the mainstream.

Bon Appetit staffers Priya Krishna, Claire Saffitz, Sohla El-Waylly, and Rick Martinez have left the publication while many have taken the decision to no longer appear in videos. The magazine has brought on eight new chefs and announced Dawn Davis as the new Editor-In-Chief.

TOP PICKS FOR STREAMABLE THEATRE TO WATCH OVER WINTER BREAK

Whilst theatre may be struggling this year, the spirit of watching something together, of being part of an audience, and something larger than yourself, might be recreated in a small way through our shared enjoyment of all the magical theatre that has been put out digitally this year.

Whether you are coming together with others virtually or physically, I would recommend you take a moment to browse the superb productions available to stream this year.

For those longing for the pre-pandemic fringe stage, Sebastian Michael's ninety minute **'TOP STORY'** tells the story of a group of London friends reckoning with an oncoming meteor strike that will destroy the world. With substantial acting and minimal set design, the play addresses the pursuit of joy, love and friendship in the ironic and macabre style I've missed from contemporary theatre.

If a story of government failure and individual struggle in the face of international crisis feels a bit on the nose, Dave Malloy's **'Ghost Quartet'** may be a better choice. A musical about human relationships and loss, this multi-twined story contains all the confusing, dreamy, and ghostly elements of any good winter tale, and will keep your party spellbound with it's eerie music and alluring vocals.

Another treat for musical lovers: Caroline Sheen and David Thaxton's **'Only The Brave'** is a Welsh play, a little reminiscent of Les Mis, about the lead up to the D-Day landings. The two hour production is gracefully shot and directed, bringing to life the charming songs, engaging exploration of women's roles in the war, and a final chilling twist. This would be a good pick for anyone trying to appeal to older relatives or intrigued by historical productions with political nuance.

If you're looking for quality, the Young Vic's **'The Departure'** is an elegantly shot and acted short starring Gillian Anderson as Blanche Dubois about to get on her "streetcar named desire." With it's disturbing interpretation of Blanche's pre-Streetcar life, the short lends itself to the atmospheric and slow pacing plot, I've missed in the time away from real life theatre.

A rendition of **'Romeo and Juliet'** available through the Globe Theatre's youtube channel will add some conventional theatrical spice to any gathering, with its traditional costumes and well directed comic, as well as of course tragic, sequences.

Anyone interested in a traditional Christmas experience might enjoy the Finnish National Opera and Ballet's performance of **'The Nutcracker and the Mouse King'** that is being shown through the Ooppera Baletti. It is a two and a half hour ballet that will take you back to the childhood enchantment of the winter season and is suitable for younger audiences.

Sadler Well Theatres has put out a variety of ZooNation dance classes which, with friendly instructors, teach the audience a variety of fresh moves. Whilst not strictly theatre, these classes should add some hilarity to any gathering with dancers as horrible as my family (especially after a few holiday drinks). After all, for me, what this year has really been lacking is the opportunity to come together and do something ridiculous. The beauty of streaming media is that only your friends and/or family will be able to see it (unless someone happens to have a camera).

BY OLIVE FRANKLIN
EDITED BY KETKI MAHABALESHWARKAR



Dancefloor On Demand:

Shygirl Embodies
The Digital
TikTok Age

SHY GIRL

Written by Josh
Aberman
Edited by Emma
Short

For fans of Shygirl's 'FREAK' - a fast-paced tune that sounds like BROCKHAMPTON took acid and went to a steam punk rave - here comes her new single, 'SLIME'. An energetically demonic and bass thumping song, 'SLIME' needs to be played with the volume up on full blast. The singles are a taster of her new record 'ALIAS' which shows what Shygirl has in store for us. This full-length EP came out on 20th November. The songs effortlessly merge a multitude of different genres like grime, 2000s pop, electronica, and hip-hop. Their hardcore techno-style rhythms leave listeners aching to thrash about amidst the energy and heat of a throbbing, strobe-lit dance floor. Unfortunately, with London clubs closed due to lockdown restrictions, we are left instead to dance around our living rooms with our housemates. If the current Coronavirus situation has taught us anything, it is that artists must adapt to the modern, digital age we are currently in, and Shygirl's new songs, especially 'SLIME', are just as ideal for apps like TikTok as they are for the club.

Musicians like Doja Cat, Megan Thee Stallion, and BENEE flourished as their songs were popularized by TikTok dance crazes. With her rhythmically focused and hard hitting club beats, Shygirl proves herself the perfect artist to take a TikTok generation by storm.

Her songs also proudly ooze sex and sexuality with lyrics like "turn her out, she like a ride/ Is she cute/ Yeah, she might/ She a baddie for the season or a baddie for the night"

ALIAS





ALIAS

and “now I give you what I like / I’m a freak in the sheets, and I go the whole night.” These bold anthems celebrating female sexuality would be right at home with other popular TikTok singles like Megan Thee Stallion’s ‘Savage’ or Cardi B’s ‘WAP’. Shygirl’s digital trend awareness perfectly fits the description her record label Because Music Ltd. has given to ‘SLIME’, saying: ‘Inspired by the MySpace-era heyday of Cassie-style chart R&B, the track takes early-00s hip hop and twists it through the prism of deconstructed club music’.

Even Shygirl’s website displays this commitment to the Myspace aesthetic, simultaneously remaining both oddly retro and incredibly of the times. ‘SLIME’s’ music video also adheres to this, as the video’s digitally animated characters seemingly exist within a Matrix-like reality. The geometric green lines of the video’s opening, call to mind the coding featured throughout the Matrix films, while the video’s shapeshifting backgrounds evoke the screensavers of early-2000 desktop computers.

The music video introduces us to the four aliases, Baddie, Bae, Bonk, and Bovine, which creatively weave together the story of Shygirl’s ‘ALIAS’. Each alias represents a different aspect of Shygirl’s personality and they take on a life of their own within the project’s narrative. With these different personas, Shygirl gives us her origin story, and has attempted to represent, explore, and embrace traits that exist within all of us - toxic or otherwise. Thankfully, Shygirl has crafted her inquiry into human pathos by setting it to some infectious hardcore beats.

An aerial photograph of two people swimming in the ocean. The person in the foreground is wearing a blue swimsuit, and the person further back is wearing a patterned swimsuit. The water is a light blue-grey color with some white foam from the swimmers.

HOW 2020 HAS FORCED US TO CONFRONT THE DANGERS OF THE DIGITAL AGE

***WRITTEN BY ZAZIE ATKINSON
EDITED BY KETKI
MAHABALESHWARKAR, DEPUTY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF***

It is no grand revelation that our lives are becoming increasingly digitalized, with technology constantly developing and improving at a rapid rate. There is a clear distinction between what is now known as the television age and today's digital age. The television age created deeper interconnectedness and tech-globalization, where we began to see the world outside our country's bubble; from the televised Iraq war at the beginning of the century, human rights protests across the globe, to the World Cup being broadcasted and celebrated worldwide. The digital age, on the other hand, has ushered in a new era of information – one of excess, but also of unknown territory.

With the pandemic swallowing a large portion of our year, we have been forced to adapt our everyday lives to an even more digital one. From school and university lectures to job meetings and interviews, the adjustment to online has been a widespread one.

Naturally, the advent of the digital age has made it easier than ever for wild conspiracy theories to spread on social platforms such as Twitter or Reddit. The anonymity which users can obtain using many of these sites enables them to disseminate misinformation with seemingly no consequences. John Suler writes that cyberspace “loosens the psychological barrier that blocks the release of inner feelings, known as toxic inhibition”. This separates people's real identity from that which they portray online. Anonymity means accountability is almost unattainable, which can cause further distrust in society. It erodes away social norms in interaction and normalises hate speech. Under the guise of ‘free speech’, the anonymity of harassers is protected.

As a result of this, more people are openly questioning science and turning to science deniers and alternative medicine, with many already refusing to be vaccinated when the time comes. The growth of the anti-Vaxxer movement can easily be attributed to social media, with Facebook reporting a tripling of anti-vaccination content between July and August. It is clear that the digital age has opened the floodgates for the widespread sharing of misinformation, where like-minded people can form larger, more influential groups.

The echo chamber effect created by these online spheres is further exacerbated by the algorithms which dictate social media sites, only allowing us to see a narrow viewpoint of what we wish to see; a 'filter bubble', where our 'likes' or 'comments' are processed and reflected back to us in our feed. This creates an ever-growing social and political divide in today's digital world that once aimed to be so interlinked and connected. This in turn, limits, or even conceals, opposing views or the bigger picture of information.

A highly notable example of this digital divide is The Washington Post's 'Red feed, Blue feed' experiment, which shows an individual's Facebook feed on either side of the political spectrum. The results show that users will see more content that aligns with their views, as opposed to that which challenges them, creating further polarisation. Because many news platforms rely on 'clicks' through contentious, click-baiting headlines, they continue to fuel this division. Instead of factual titles, editors opt for eye-catching, and often misleading headings. Additionally, algorithms eliminate serendipity, meaning people's mindsets are unlikely to change, instead continuing to diverge.

In light of the recent election results, Donald Trump and the buzzword 'fake news' have often come hand in hand. This year, more than ever, has brought his controversies to light. In the last four years Trump has used digital media as a direct tool to connect with the world, without the traditional use of press conferences or interpreters, and is arguably one of the first of his kind to do so.

His controversial and heated tweets have ignited fiery passions from his supporters and outrage from his critics. With an excess of capital letters and exclamation points in tow, Trump discredited a number of news sources and politicians, creating a sense of distrust in the political system. Whereas previously most people would be sitting together in front of their household television consuming the latest political updates and global events from mainstream news outlets, today we are glued to our mobile screens, where 40% of people claim to get their news directly from Twitter. Trump has played an important role in sowing the seeds of

doubt and attempting to discredit the truth online and the digital age seems to be giving him a helping hand. Politicians aren't the only ones contributing to the dangerous elements of the digital age. The Social Dilemma, the Netflix docudrama, enlightened viewers to the ways social media sites exploit their user's privacy for financial gain.


Whilst on the surface, social media addiction may be the most obvious danger, it uncovers a deeper threat of surveillance capitalism and data mining, with many social media sites storing a huge amount of our data and personal information. Despite algorithms possessing the ability to influence everything from our shopping purchases to our political opinions, it has become second nature for us social media users to go online whilst ignoring the consequences.

Yet, living in the digital age is not necessarily a dystopian world, it has brought about significant positive developments and awareness. If it wasn't for the viral nature of the internet, millions of people this summer would not have mobilised the global protests in response to George Floyd's murder, in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, which has since helped initiate crucial and overdue awareness. Even if we all decided to throw away our mobile phones, we cannot simply stop living in the digital age – so we must use this to our advantage and utilize current technologies in a positive way.

Hidden Albums: A Letter to NOSTALGIA

*WRITTEN BY JEANNE DESURMONT
EDITED BY KETKI
MAHABALESHWARKAR, DEPUTY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF*

One evening, after returning to my hometown at the onset of the second lockdown, my father discovered that he could play YouTube on the TV upstairs. He randomly played the live concert of the Nationals, in front of the Sydney



Opera House in 2016. It clicked; when I heard again the songs I used to know by heart, I was brought back to the slow and foggy mornings in my mother's car on the journey to school, my brother in the back, our stuff at our feet. For about five years we crossed the forests on their sweet melodies, slowly waking up and preparing us for the schooldays.

The evening when we watched together on that luminescent blue square, the person that filmed and posted that video, brought back memories I thought were so insignificant yet so representative of a period of my life. Technology isn't a figment of the future anymore; it can connect us to our personal past but also to the historical ties that bind us all. Technological souvenirs and keepsakes can bring back memories like a bittersweet digitized Proust madeleine.

The digital age we are living in can be demonized as much as we want. The addiction to social media, the fake news that confuses us, the digitalization that steals our personal data, and the insidious breach into our privacy. Technology can be tricky, and we can easily fall into perverse traps, if we are not careful. We can be easily manipulated by bright screens and toxic messages.

Searching for what is important and what matters in all this wide and unknown environment can be tough and challenging. So, don't look for it and let it find you, and surprise you.

In the infinite cloud and internet, there are time-capsules buried, lost and waiting for someone to unearth them. They are the old CDs and DVDs of the movies your father took on the day of your seventh birthday or of your brother's first Christmas. They (the YouTube algorithm) are suggesting your mother's favourite song. They are the recipes from your childhood, found on the predicted Google search bar, or Snapchat reminding you of your first kiss.

Don't judge those who try to capture every moment of their lives; don't be angry when they want to take your picture, don't close your eyes when they try to catch your smile. Because when you look through someone's photos, you'll see what they are most afraid of losing.

If you're the kind of person who takes pictures of every unimportant and important moment, never hesitate. Never have the regret of letting a memory slip forever. Because they fade away like a sandcastle crumbles slowly under the waves.

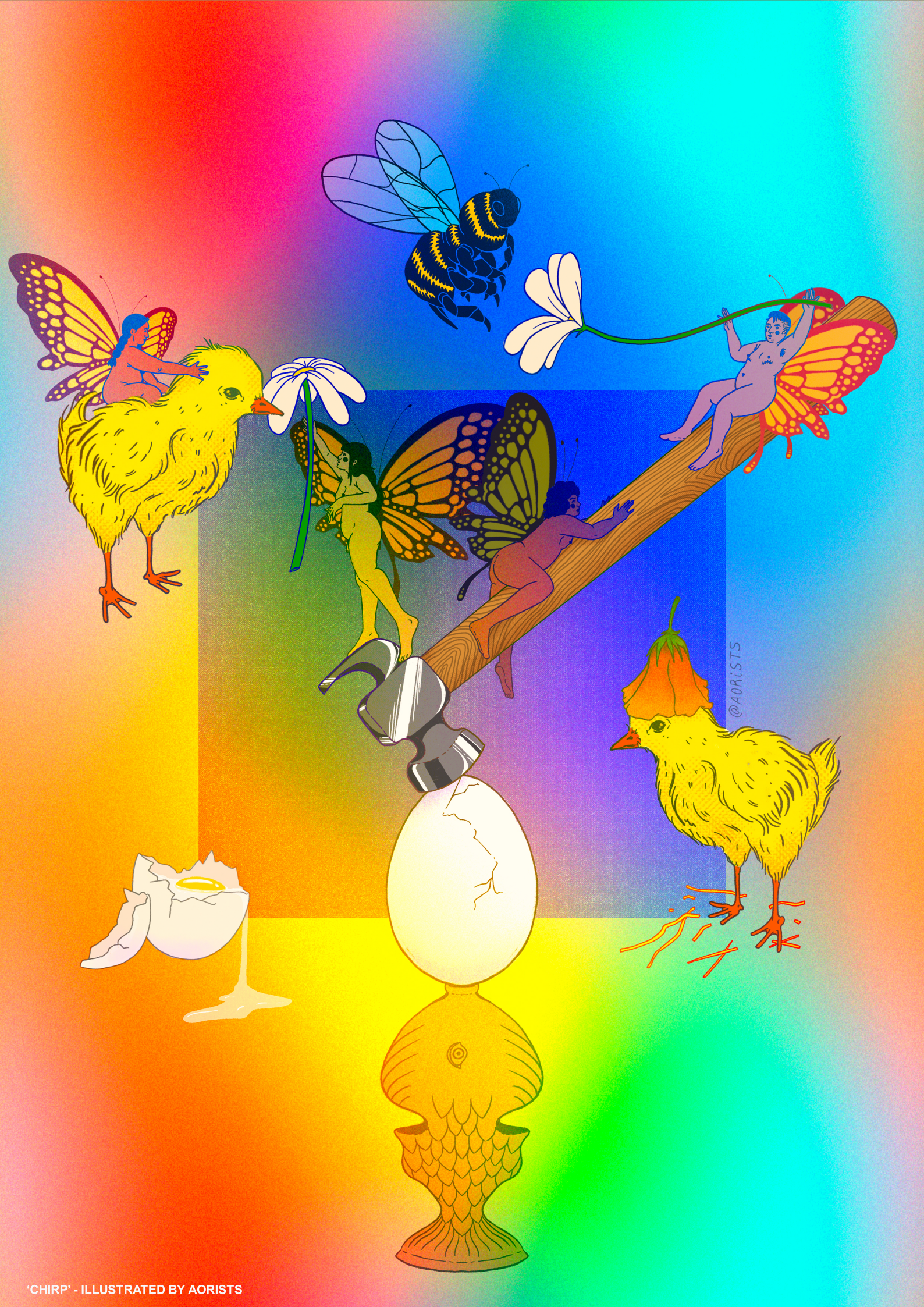
Inevitably, if 2020 taught me something, it's that everything can change in a blink of an eye, even what we thought would last forever. Every summer, I go to my grandparents' house by the sea with all my cousins, aunts and uncles. Every summer we find a couple of days to stay together. These days are the ones I cherish the most. Although I never made a movie of them, or a small clip, because I assumed it'll be the same next year.

Embrace the compulsion to collect those memories because afterwards, you can watch them forever. Until your eyes burn, until the melancholy embodies you, until it warms your heart like milk and honey. Until you remember that you exist, you matter, you're loved, and you love.

And if you're not convinced, watch an old person rediscovering their photographs, or watch someone looking at their vacation pictures for the first time. My grandfather digitized all his old films, invited his friends over where they spent the entire afternoon, evening, accompanied by a bottle of wine to watch every single one of them and reminisce on the story behind each slide.

And time stops. Today, yesterday and the last decade are blurred and mixed, and just like that, technology has no time-period. It becomes frameless and can reach moments we thought were gone.

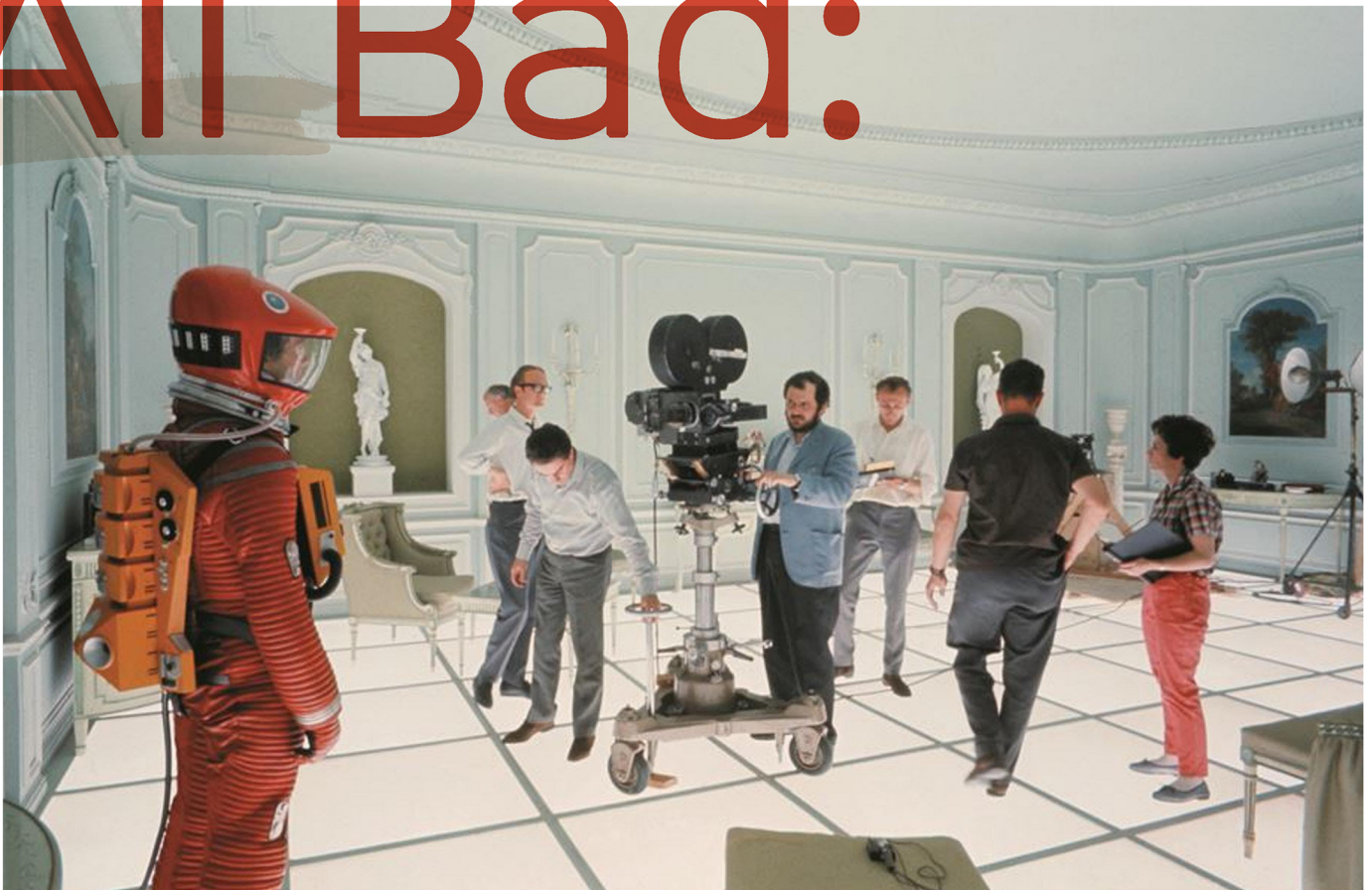
Colourise historical photography, scan old films, and digitise letters and correspondence, bring them back to life, and allow them a second chance to be loved and remembered. As long as they don't turn into dust, it doesn't let the stories die and fade away. It is proof that, us, normal people that didn't make it into the history books, will be alive forever, as soon as someone digs out a time-capsule. Even when we will be gone, our digital footprint will be somewhere, ready to tell our stories.



It's Not All Bad:

Words by
Olivia Hall

Edited by
*Andriani
Scordellis,*
Film Editor



Lockdown Cinema and The
Evolution of Film

Stanley Kubrick famously claimed that ‘the best education in film is to make one.’ In this rare departure from his infamous cynicism, he was right. But, I imagine, he may have struggled to comprehend the effect Covid would have on the world, let alone the movie industry. At first glance, in a film industry wracked by Coronavirus, this philosophy would be difficult to fulfil; ‘Covid-Killing-Cinema’ headlines being splashed across front pages as a break from regular broadcasting doesn’t exactly spark optimism in the mind of the producer.

Dull-night-in saviour and streaming favourite Netflix seems to have been one of the few cinematic means that has benefitted from new social distancing measures. As productive as I would have liked to have been, the lure of joggers, an offensive amount of Ben and Jerry’s and slapping on a face mask to binge-watch another sitcom was too strong. It seems I wasn’t alone, with over 10 million new subscribers joining thanks to lockdown. Who can blame them? Even Friends star Courtney Cox admitted to re-watching the show during quarantine to soothe our guilt.

With many viewers falling into the trap of familiar favourites then, it is easy to miss the quiet revolution taking film. Not for the first time, filmmakers have been forced to evolve. Just as pensive cinema-goers were shocked by the transition from black and white to technicolour in the 1930’s, modern producers have been forced to take Covid in their stride, adapting to socially-distanced sets and fresh financial minefields.

But Kubrick, despite Covid, is still right. The pandemic for one has refreshed a creative interest in the location of film. Previously ‘insular’ sets in bedrooms and gardens overlooked by more experienced filmmakers reserved for the producing rookie, have been granted a new curiosity. Thus, a genre of innovative, gritty films that take into account the trappings of home life in quarantine have been shaped from raw concepts. Subgenres of wrestling with technology, social strains and the mental obstacles of adapting to a new way of life have been blurred into features that are beyond worthy of the selection of international film festivals still happening. Festivals in Liverpool, London, Switzerland and even Zimbabwe provide a wealth of material beyond streaming which there is little excuse not to make. After all, the quality of the smartphone camera we all carry around with us eclipses the picture quality and convenience of those that filmed the young George Lucas’ ‘goofy’ sci-fi in 1977. It has actually never been easier to make a film in that regard.

I believe there remains room for some harmony between the escapist experience of the local cinema and convenient pickings of modern platforms, despite my soft spot for a cinema trip in the dark winters and innate fear that the streaming service would kill the cinema star. Promisingly, Amazon Prime lead by example, offering films for rent which had had their cinema releases cut short by lockdown. Successful low-budget psychological thriller *The Invisible Man* was happily buoyed by its equal popularity at home and in cinema.

“WITH MANY VIEWERS FALLING INTO THE TRAP OF FAMILIAR FAVOURITES THEN, IT IS EASY TO MISS THE QUIET REVOLUTION TAKING FILM”

As a lover of tradition though, it is hard to ignore the uncertain road ahead for the local cinema. AMC Theatres, owner of Odeon cinemas in the UK recently allowed a move that will permit films to be released for home viewing just 17 days after their initial cinema release, not long after boycotting Universal films entirely. While this sounds disastrous, the move completely overlooks how fond people are of their local cinema and how readily many will support them, be it an Odeon or independent screen. Now, more than ever, we need film, entertainment and distraction – I for one have never been happier to see so many classics return to cinema screens in a bid to attract audiences. Streaming or cinema, the potential audiences and opportunities for creativity are larger than ever.

Covid has ultimately introduced a sense of Darwinism in film; filmmakers must evolve or face uncertainty in their future. Using streaming platforms alongside, rather than as an enemy of cinema releases is the key to safeguarding a healthy industry in the future – combined, the platforms reach audiences that would have previously been unable to get to a cinema. Even the explosion of the BLM movement has rightfully brought to life a more diverse and powerful industry that remained hidden to audiences previously.

Audiences shouldn’t worry for the future of cinema as long as they remember the reasons they used to visit pre-Covid; wearing a mask is a small price to pay to ensuring they stick around.

So of course, Kubrick was right. Covid has been yet another education and opportunity for the evolution of filmmakers and audiences. Ultimately, film will survive as there is no excuse not to make one anymore – we need the entertainment industry more than ever. I for one, am happy to still have it around.

Image Credit: Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibition

**“There are
people creating
things through
these weird and
frightening
times same as
there have
always been
throughout
history”**



Art for the New Age as explored by Anshika Khullar | AORISTS.
By Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar
Edited by Godelieve de Bree, Head of Art





Photograph of Anshika Khullar - AORISTS

**"When art has changed, it's because the world was changing."
- Corita Kent**

Digital artistry is defined as "art that is made or presented using digital technology" (Tate), and it comes with no shortage of contemporary creators. Along with increased accessibility to tools like Photoshop, iPads, and Apple Pencils; platforms such as Instagram have popularised and re-introduced contemporary art to new generations. Mixed media and contemporary artists such as Gab Bois or Baron Von Fancy exemplify how the consumption of art has evolved to include reposting, liking, and commenting – an algorithmic form of appreciation.

Art may have changed drastically over the past few decades – undoubtedly attributed to new developments in technology and digital tools; but the purpose of creating this art remains the same. It is a form of expression or a vehicle for change, and a way to explore and celebrate identity. In 2020, another significant change has affected the creative community (along with the rest of the world), the Covid-19 pandemic, seeing the mass closure of galleries, museums, and creative spaces. In the wake of a new global landscape that has effectively 'marooned' us all on our own digital islands, I sought to explore what space art now occupies.

In our April issue, I examined how art can be used as activism, through the culture-jamming methods of the Guerrilla Girls in New York City. Months later, I am just as fascinated with how art exists to satirise, criticise, and analyse our socio-political landscape. Art, in the online sphere, is able to react real-time to events and shed light on underrepresented issues in the world. It is not just a new age for technology; it is a time where we continue working towards dismantling oppressive societal structures that harm people for being different, with even more urgency than before. It is an age for learning, unlearning, and holding the people in power (and those closest to us) accountable. It is a progressive age that feels hopeful, as much as it feels difficult.

With this in mind, I spoke to *Instagram's favourite illustrator Anshika Khullar, who goes by the pseudonym AORISTS*. They are an Indian, non-binary, transgender creative. Their vibrant and detailed work gravitates around intersectional feminist narratives and they produce powerful illustrations that showcase an unapologetic femininity that is both inclusive and diverse. On Instagram, they post WIPs and new designs, whilst speaking candidly about their own journey as a creative and non-binary person of colour. We spoke about white, cis privilege in the creative community, a social media fuelled pressure for perfection, and how art created out of pure joy, is its own form of resistance.

How did you start your journey as an artist?

Anshika: I've always been a creative person, ever since I was little. Growing up exploring digital tools like Photoshop when I was in my teens meant I felt very much at home when I started getting into my freelance work, and so digital illustration felt both familiar and exciting to me when I got started.

You work with a diverse variety of clients, like UniDays, the Tate, Gal-dem magazine, and more. Do you feel like this is more a collaboration than a commission?

A: In many cases, yes, but it depends. I try to be conscientious of who I'm working with and what the project will be and whether that aligns with my own principles as not only a creative but an individual too. This is really hard to do when you're just starting out and you're trying to get a foothold in the industry and you're happy to just be offered jobs, and to be completely honest, I think that's valid. Especially for marginalised creatives, it's rough. It's hard to be taken seriously in your field when you're surrounded by cis, white peers who clients are just more open to collaborating with and commissioning; institutional racism and queerphobia/transphobia still extends to industries you'd think of as being relatively progressive, unfortunately. So, I do think there needs to be a nuanced conversation about who has the privilege of saying no to certain jobs or certain brands/companies/organisations; often audiences won't realise how follower counts or engagement doesn't directly correlate to actually being offered jobs and getting paid for your work, and that the creatives they follow might be struggling behind the scenes. I'm still not in the position where I can be hugely picky about who I work with and who I don't, but thankfully I've also been able to curate my professional presence online in a way where I only really get approached by clients who are progressive and projects that do align with my own principles.

Do you feel like you explore your identity through your art?

A: Definitely, I do. More and more as the years pass, and I approach having lived in England for the same amount of time I lived in India, I feel the ways I'm actively being shaped by my experiences and my environment, and by the lived reality of being someone that's somewhere in between. I think it manifests itself more playfully in my work than it does in any other avenue of my life, but I kind of think my work has a way of doing that anyway: I tend to approach the details in my illustrations with my own sense of humour and little nods to my own identity. There'll be little hints of things I grew up with in my pieces, like a box of laddoos sitting on a side table, or a pair of jhumkas on a character, or the pattern on a piece of clothing having a Desi design.

Your art celebrates womxn in a way not many artists do; they are bold, unconforming, and inclusive of queer, non-binary, and transgender womxn. What does intersectional feminism mean to you?

A: I think that's a really big question to answer, but mostly I think to me it just means being conscientious and trying to do your best to be inclusive, kind, and to think critically about social issues instead of using niceness as a shield to get away from doing the hard work of actively questioning the status quo. I don't believe there's ever a time where we're perfect feminists or doing everything right or where we've learned all there is to learn. I think it's all a process and it's ongoing work, but it's vital that we do it, especially considering how the systems that run the world rely on our complacency to keep getting away with it.

One of my favourite things about your illustrations is the unapologetic exploration of socio-political issues and mental health. On your Instagram, and through your work, you bring up issues like rape culture, fatphobia, and how mental illness is perceived by society. Do you feel that art (and by extension, artists) has/have a form of 'moral responsibility' to use their art practise to push for change?

A: I'm cautious of generalising and saying "all art has to push for change" because I'm learning it places a lot of pressure on queer artists and/or artists of colour to always make art that could be described as activism. I think artists with large platforms and/or followings do have a responsibility to make clear what is and isn't tolerated in their spaces, and to cultivate a practice where people of marginalised identities feel safe and heard and welcome; cis, white artists need to step up and do more in this respect. But I also think art is (and should be allowed to be) joyful and frivolous and whatever else the artist wants it to be, particularly if the artist belongs to a marginalised identity/identities. In a way that's its own form of resistance: to create work for the pure joy of creating it as a queer person of colour, because your cis, white peers get to do that all the time. There's a balance there that I'm still finding myself.

On your Instagram, you are so honest and open about your personal journey and struggles. Again, this is something your followers (like me) truly admire and appreciate because issues like OCD or what it means to "look trans" are often associated with stigma, or not discussed openly. Why have you chosen to share your personal journey and growth? Do you think it has a big impact?

A: To be honest, it comes naturally to me to talk about these things. Talking about stuff is how I process my emotions, to a great extent, so it only makes sense that my work acts as an extension of that practice. I also know from first-hand experience how much not talking about something important eats me up from the inside: it's easy to talk about it when you realise there's so many people going through the same things you went through who might not be talking about it or might not be hearing about it from anyone else. I've always been a deeply introspective person driven by the desire to make positive change in some way; I don't know if it has a big impact in terms of numbers, but I get comments and messages telling me a certain piece of art and/or the accompanying caption was exactly what someone needed to see/hear because they were going through the same thing or because they hadn't thought of that issue in depth before, and to me, that's meaningful.

Do you think social media like Instagram - is integral to the life of a modern artist?

A: I think if you're starting out, probably, yes. Social media (and specifically Instagram) is literally how I got started and kind of fell into doing illustration professionally. It really only takes one or two people to notice your work and approach you in a professional capacity, and for you to gain that momentum that I think is needed to propel yourself into the industry proper.



I do also think, though, that it can get all-consuming, especially once you've kind of established your identity as a creative and you know your niche, because it's almost a little limiting.

There is an overwhelming pressure to display the best parts of our lives online. Will this pressure ever go away? Is it up to us (the users) to change this hyper-digital culture?

A: I think this is very much an issue that affects all users of social media, not just artists who use it professionally; I actually think often artists do a better job of showing the behind-the-scenes stuff since audiences do like to see sketches, works in progress and process videos. That having been said, we don't post the "failed" attempts, or the experiments that didn't work out, and I do think part of that is the desire to maintain a professional front since social media is how our clients mostly find us, and part of that is just human nature. We're exposing ourselves to thousands of people's opinions and judgment on our work, when pre-social media (in the form it exists in today, at least) at most we'd be dealing with a social circle of what - a couple hundred, maybe, over our entire lifetime? The jump from that relatively small number to a much larger one at any given moment is a lot to contend with, and I do think it brings out the instinct in us as people to be liked and perceived well. I think that applies across the spectrum to all kinds of users of social media, personally, and I'm glad there's a push to reframe what we show to our audiences and why, but I also think there isn't a way to get away from that base instinct of wanting to show our best side to our suddenly enormous social circles.

Finally, can you share any advice to other artists or creatives at Strand, who are persevering to work on their craft in the middle of this difficult time?

A: It's a weird time to be making art right now, for sure, but it's also more important than ever. Give yourself the space to breathe and explore what comes naturally, to be free in your expression, and to try new ways of doing things or practicing established ways of doing things depending on what your brain needs most right now. That's my advice for all the time, to be honest, but especially now. Also, take a little bit of time every day or every week (whatever works for you) to engage with other creatives and their work (social media's good for this!); it'll replenish some of your own creative stores, hopefully inspire you, and show you that there are people creating things through these weird and frightening times same as there have always been throughout history. Hopefully it'll show you that you can too.

**Follow Anshika's art and journey on Instagram :
@aorists | aorists.com**



HOW LGBTQ+ TIKTOK CAN TRANSFORM SOCIETY

WRITTEN BY MALINA AMOL

"Kiki do you love me? Are you riding?" If you were snapping your fingers to the beat, shaking your head in rhythm, or full-on diving into the dance routine, you have probably heard of TikTok.

Nearly every day there is a new tune with a matching dance choreography trending on this platform. Whether it's 'WAP', "Spooky, Scary Skeletons" around Halloween or "Laffy Taffy" (you might not know the name but if you ever spent a second on TikTok be assured: you will know the song).

Why TikTok? For me personally, it was always that unexplainable, mysterious phenomenon; people dancing, telling jokes, showing off their attractiveness in 15 seconds, and then all of a sudden going viral. I never got what was so great about it, and with this intuition, I wasn't alone. For a long time, the Chinese platform was ridiculed for being the "little sister" of Instagram and only attracting high school kids. It had only this one feature and didn't seem able to compete with its predecessors.

Today, it is placed 7th in a worldwide ranking of social media platforms with 689 million monthly active users, right behind Instagram, leaving former social media superstars such as Twitter or Snapchat way behind.

With countries entering lockdown nearly everywhere in the world, restrictions on going out and meeting up being imposed, it is not surprising that social media platforms have seen an upsurge in downloads on a global level. The time we spend online being on a high level already before the pandemic, has increased more.

In April, Britons spent nearly 40 minutes more online than in January, spending four hours on the web every day, with Gen Z spending the longest time on the internet with five hours daily on average. During this period, TikTok managed to increase its user base from 5.4 million to 12.9 million in the UK alone. And with Donald Trump nearly breaking off another Trading War because of the platform, it seems to be undeniable

that TikTok is no longer a platform only used by kids dancing.

With this change in numbers, we see more and more educational videos being posted as well as people sharing their opinions on current affairs. One field that has also seen a drastic increase in followers is the LGBTQ+ TikTok sphere with the hashtag #lgbt having 62.8 billion views. What you can find there, ranges from lesbian couples kissing to gay comedians educating through jokes to people simply telling you that you are being loved the way you are – and then there's Maggie Ann Le.

"This is probably an overused phrase: but it all happened overnight. I posted a TikTok that blew up towards the end of May in 2020. Since then, I've gained a following, experimented with fashion videos, and discovered my love for the creative process," she tells me over Instagram. The TikTok journey of the 20-year-old University of Houston student started when the pandemic really hit the US. Her story is like a modern, lockdown Cinderella tale: now nine months after publishing her first video, where she was shakily showing her room transformation, she has 84.5 thousand followers on TikTok

Most of her videos are about her style – Eliot from ‘Call Me By Your Name’ meets savage tomboy. Every once in a while, she posts videos with her girlfriend or content regarding societal norms and her family's expectations. "I come from a family of immigrants and didn't have the most accepting coming out process. I believe that's what helped me break out of my shell and gain the confidence that I have today." She radiates this positive feeling of being okay with yourself, not by doing the typical motivational speech type of videos (not to discredit them, they can be immensely powerful too) but rather by just being herself and sharing parts of her life, and what she is passionate about. Since we still experience it that whenever there is a gay movie character, there is some drama related to their coming out and their life as an LGBTQ+ person, it is refreshing to see that Maggie just does what she loves - no drama, no tears

She knows of the importance of having openly gay people in mainstream media or your life when you are trying to come to terms with your sexuality and live as an LGBTQ+ person. "I hope to make content that can bring a smile to someone's face and help them feel confident in their skin I try to be the person that I wish I had seen when I was younger so that they don't feel alone in their journey."

Nevertheless, TikTok isn't free of discrimination either, like every other, it is first and foremost a business that knows which content can increase their profits and which could decrease it. In September, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute found that TikTok had shadowbanned Russian and Arabic hashtags related to the LGBTQ+ community. The boss of TikTok asserted that TikTok is primarily an entertainment platform, and if one wants to be political, it has to have this entertaining factor still.

The lack of representation in mainstream media, while having improved over the years, remains a big problem as what we see there, shapes our understanding of the world. Due to the lack of representation, our perception of the world lacks part of the reality. Especially for people that face intersectional oppression and discrimination, there are often barely any representatives. Social media content creators can change this; they no longer have to go through the lengthy process trained media professionals have to go through - a process often discriminatory against minorities. Instead, they can directly set to work, share their content, amplifying their voices.

It is this focus on amusement which has rubbed me the wrong way for a long time. Yes, the pleasure we derive from watching a funny TikTok can be great if it happens occasionally, but the constant access to "anti-social" enjoyment can also be a dangerous trend and alienate us from reality. Political activism can be entertaining, but entertainment should not be a requirement. This has not changed, but after talking to Maggie, I can now see that representation on such a huge platform matters. It matters because without being an activist, just-showing-everyday-life people like Maggie normalize being openly gay. It matters for those who are trying to figure out their sexuality. It matters because people can reach an international audience and are inclusive, no matter which level of education one has.

When I asked Maggie about the role social media plays, she said: "We have never been in an age where information can be shared across the world in a heartbeat. Although it is easy to spread love, it is also easy to spread hate. If used well, I believe that social media can bring us all together to help save the world." A Kiki dance might not be able to save the world, however, the representation of LGBTQ+ people and the open talk about their experiences has the potential to change mainstream media and more generally, our perception of who belongs to our society. Just a hint: it is everyone.

TIKTOK, SUSTAINABILITY AND SELLING VIRTUAL PATTERNS:

KAJA HØGLUND, DESIGNER OF MURLONG CRES, ON DIGITALISATION OF FASHION.

WRITTEN BY BO NGUYEN
EDITED BY LIZA MIKHALEVA, FASHION EDITOR
IMAGE COURTESY OF MURLONG CRES



There is no need to deny that COVID-19 has accelerated the inevitable digitization of the fashion industry. From small businesses, to large retailers, to haute couture designers, everyone had to adapt as stores were closing and fashion shows cancelled this year. With us practically living online, the usage of social media as a marketing tool has become essential for the establishment and sustenance of a clothing label. Made-to-order brands have seen a rise in demand as more people see value in custom-fitted, handmade clothing whilst educating themselves on damages of the fast fashion industry.

Norwegian designer Kaja Høglund launched the label Murlong Cres last summer and mainly established her customer base through Instagram and TikTok. Inspired by once small boutique brands like Auguste and Sir the label, Kaja's designs stand out for their delicate ruffles, puffy sleeves and romantic simplicity. In our conversation, Høglund discusses the effects of the digital age on Murlong Cres: cost-free virtual space, trust built through online transparency and surprising selling of her secret recipe—the patterns.

Tell us the story of Murlong Cres, please.

In 2015, I decided to move to Australia to study. I wasn't really sure about what I wanted to study. Originally, I planned to do a bachelor's degree in International Business, but I figured out quickly that it wasn't for me. I decided to start a bachelor's degree in Digital Media majoring in Graphic Design instead, and I'm so happy that I made that switch!

In the final semester, our main project was to start our own business and create six products that we could sell. That's when I came up with the idea of starting my own clothing brand. I had no experience with sewing, but one of my friends kindly let me borrow her grandma's old sewing machine. I remember typing into YouTube "how to thread a sewing machine". I must admit, it was hard, and I remember thinking about choosing something else, but I was determined to finish what I started. Somehow, I managed to stitch together a collection of six tops, and I got the highest mark possible on my project.

When I moved back to Norway, I got a job as a graphic designer, but this project sparked something in me. For as long as I can remember, I have dreamed about starting my own business, and I finally figured out what kind of business. I kept working on my sewing skills whenever I could, and when I eventually felt that I was skilled enough I started Murlong Cres.

Because my journey started when I was studying in Australia, I wanted the name to somehow be connected. The street I used to live on was called Murlong Crescent, so I decided to take that name, just shortened it.

With many new labels solely establishing themselves online, physical stores are disappearing. Meanwhile, technological innovations like 3D scanning enable the clothes to fit better. What do you think of the digitalization of fashion and what effect does it have on Murlong Cres?

I think it's great and it has opened up for a lot of small businesses like me, that can't afford to produce in a factory and spend thousands on marketing. Digitalization and social media have been crucial for me, and I don't think I could have started Murlong Cres at the time I did without it. I didn't have a lot of savings that I could put into a physical store. Being online is pretty much free, and social media lets you interact and build trust with your customers.

Your brand is quite active on Instagram. How do you use the app to engage with your audience? Have you had any challenges?

Yes, I use Instagram and TikTok daily to interact with my audience. I love posting on social media. It's fun to share photos of my products and what's going on behind the scenes, and it seems like my audience really likes to see posts like that too. I think they trust me more because I show so much of what is going on. When I first started Murlong Cres, I put a lot of time and effort into growing my account because it's a free way to promote my brand. It has been very successful so far. 97% of all the traffic on my website comes from Instagram.

I haven't had any real challenges when it comes to Instagram or TikTok. The only thing is that it can be hard to build an audience, especially in the beginning. Creating content is also time consuming, and sometimes when I have a lot to sew it can be a bit stressful.

You sell your sewing patterns on your page. Would you like to expand on the philosophy behind this?

I have discovered that there is a large sewing community on Instagram and many of its members have asked me to sell sewing patterns. In the beginning, I was a little bit sceptical because I'm pretty much giving out the recipe to my products that they also can buy. I decided to digitalize one of the patterns as a test, and I was surprised to see that it was great for business. I have sold so many exemplars of this sewing pattern and my customers love it. They post pictures of their outcomes and tag me and rave about how good it is and how much they like my business. This top is still one of my best-selling products, so I don't think I have lost any sales because of it. Even though this test has been very successful, I don't want to digitalize all of my products, because I want to keep some secrets to myself.

What would you like to see more of online regarding fashion?

I want to see more smaller brands who focus on being sustainable and offer customized clothing. I think consumers are getting more conscious about their purchases and want to buy from businesses like mine, instead of supporting huge fast fashion brands.

What kind of future do you see for your brand and what role would technology play in it?

“MY DREAM IS TO HIRE A FEW LOCAL SEAMSTRESSES THAT CAN HELP ME PRODUCE AND CREATE NEW PRODUCTS. I WANT TO KEEP MY PRODUCTION LOCAL TO MINIMIZE OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. I WANT MY BRAND TO STILL BE ONLINE AND MAYBE START USING TECHNOLOGY LIKE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER SHOPPING EXPERIENCE.”

Vogue Global Conversations: The Future of the Fashion Show

Written by Ella Mansell

Edited by Liza Mikhaleva, Fashion Editor

Over the first global lockdown, Vogue Magazine launched Vogue Global Conversations—a series of webinars discussing the future of fashion in an increasingly digitalised society. With topics ranging from fashion shows, e-commerce and brick and mortar, these events invited the public into the world of high fashion and its current pursuit towards a digital and sustainable rebranding.

Runways make the fabric of the high fashion calendar, with Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter fashion weeks in Paris, London, Milan and New York at the centre. From the major seasons to micro-seasons in between, from prêt-à-porter to haute couture, fashion is in constant circulation, rarely poised static for long enough to catch its breath. Fashion shows are the performance not just of a clothes collection, but of a concept, a moment in time and culture. Every facet of brand is united in the production of a single show, from creative to PR and marketing, manifesting a sense of community—both on and outside the catwalk.

The runway is the ultimate creative outlet for designers and pinnacle of a brand's image, so its future is pivotal to the face of the new fashion industry. But how can it adapt to fashion's rapidly changing landscape? Hosted by Vogue Runway's Nicole Phelps, the 'Future of the Fashion Show' webinar boasted a panel of Balenciaga's Cedric Charbit, Balmain's Olivier Rousteing, and Chloé's Natacha Ramsay-Levi and asked its experts the same question. From Chloé's interest in the humanness and inclusivity of the industry, Balmain's regard for creative and social fluidity and Balenciaga's focus on the performative, these houses look forward to an increasingly technological horizon.

Chloé, founded by Gaby Aghion in 1952, is a Parisian luxury brand characterised by the free spirit and fearless elegance of the 'Chloé Girl'. It fuses feminine chic with loose bohemian and effortless layered silhouettes to capture the spirit of a woman by women; a romantic boldness. Natacha Ramsay-Levi, the current head of the house, speaks of the runway as of the fusion of all senses: carefully curated colour palettes, selected music, set design and location blend to create a compelling cultural vignette—a message. The runway being a highly immersive experience, Natacha Ramsay-Levi fears the disconnect of a digital show may catalyse a disconnect between the fashion house and its customers—its muses. Like we may respond to a poem or a painting in an increasingly detached way when it is presented online—in lieu of reading it out loud or viewing it in a gallery—we may see fashion in a despondent manner when we merely watch it online, when it is out of our physical reach. The human dimension is also fundamental across every aspect of clothing production as human philosophy, innovation and sentiment provide inspiration for collections which are then brought to life through designers, artistic directors, couturiers and craftsmanship. A digital future may threaten to disembody fashion, and what do clothes become without a body, without human shape?

Nonetheless, Ramsay-Levi looks optimistically to the accessibility the modern technology provides to the society, which can be the solution to fashion's stigma of elitism and cliques. Social media platforms such as Instagram have introduced high fashion to an increasingly expansive audience and welcomes those who may have previously been excluded by fashion's closed doors. Livestreams of shows amalgamate more voices into journalism and critique through comments and likes, and such criticism and discussion breathe new life into collections, while also removing the authoritarian nature of the artist-media outlets. The creative director believes that a wide community is the 'best value' fashion possesses, and it is visibility and inclusivity, which allow this community to flourish.

Balmain, founded by Pierre Balmain in 1945-Paris and now led by Olivier Rousteing, is a fashion house infamous for its rigid structures and fusion of the militant with chic through tunic dresses and bold bouffant skirts. Like Chloé, the brand has its eyes on the implications of a digital runway concerning the presentation and reception of its new collections. Rousteing admits that the future of fashion involves a compromise, yet emphasises that the creative outcome cannot be the factor compromised if fashion wants to keep the same impact within the arts. Instead, he suggests restructuring the fashion calendar through reducing runways to only Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter collections, and fusing menswear and womenswear within these seasons. Not only will this diminish the economic and environmental costs of the runway, but it will also respond to calls for increasing fluidity between what constitutes 'menswear' and 'womenswear' to accommodate expression outside of gender binary.

Founded in 1917 in Spanish San Sebastian by Cristobal Balenciaga, the now-Parisian based luxury fashion brand is run by its chief executive Cedric Charbit. Balenciaga's signature silhouettes—unusual shapes—work against, yet simultaneously complement the feminine physique, and are best captured through live performance, best seen as three-dimensional rather than two-dimensional on screen. Within a fashion show, extravagance is central as it draws the eye in, the audience is unable to turn away even for a moment. Therefore, for Charbit, the passive act of staring at a screen during a live stream rather than interacting with the models, the designer, fashion critics and other members of the audience risks the audience becoming a singular, collective viewer; in other words—passive and despondent—as the runway is a symbiosis of the collection's meaning and the meaning those watching it project. However, Charbit also sees possibilities for Balenciaga's search towards cinematic freedom, as editing and special effects may permit creative and artistic directors to develop concepts in new ways, working alongside the growing digitalisation.

While the future of humanity is currently questioned, the webinar made one thing clear: as the rhythm of heels on the catwalk mimics the pulse of the fashion industry, the pandemic and global climate crisis is encouraging it to re-choreograph the rhythms. Fashion is visionary, it is created by the creative and is centred on the boundless, imaginative freedom of the innovative mind. Fashion is designed to rejuvenate society and rejuvenate itself in response to changing social landscapes. It is in a constant cycle of metamorphosis and this digital revolution is no exception.





*"Social Media was both a lifeline and a poison-
connecting myself with
what was happening in
the world meant that it
was also connected to
me, and that was tough."*



TAKEN BY

ANANTH

SATHYANATH



DIGI - CULTURAL CHANGE

The Intersection of Social Culture and Social Media



“Biggest collective change...”

At the start of the year, I was convinced that COVID-19 was kind of an invisible threat that would survive just two weeks- allowing me go back to university quickly... and more importantly the clubs. Yet, here we are nine months later finding whipped coffee and random backgrounds on Skype calls entertaining. I think it is fair to say that our generation has unwillingly sacrificed a lot of what people claim to be the ‘prime of our youth’. I certainly felt this way and had no issue feeling sorry for myself for the best part of lockdown. While our digital devices have, of course, kept us going (and entertained), they cannot replace some of the experiences that we are missing: face to face interactions, the cultural exchanges of travelling, in-person concerts, and different foods! However, in the past eight months, we have seen social media being utilised in unprecedented and incredible ways.

I would argue that we have seen the biggest collective change and cultural re-awakening, with social media at the forefront. When George Floyd was killed on May 25th, we saw an instantaneous global reaction of anger, horror, and realisation that our complacency in the face of systemic racism, continues to allow institutions (like the police) to get away with brutality, murder, and hate-crime. Given the social distancing and the isolating conditions of the pandemic, COVID-19 could have been an ‘ideal’ excuse to brush yet another example of Police brutality under the rug. But we didn’t. We couldn’t. As a unified community, we made it a priority to amplify marginalised voices, listen to our activists and educators, and rally together to protest against the killing of Black people. We did this despite a global pandemic, due to the tenacity and courage of our youth. The desire to protest for human rights and work on social justice issues undoubtedly shapes our generation, but also largely rests on the shoulders of the hyper-digital age.

#SOCIALMEDIA

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his single black square created more of a cultural impact than any BBC documentary has tried to achieve in the last 5 years, although it was widely criticised for promoting the idea of virtue-signalling - aligning one's virtues with current social issues online, without putting in any more work. The fact that #BlackLivesMatter instigated a movement to address years of systematic injustice with the use of Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat, all in the face of a global pandemic, is a credit to the digital age. It just goes to show that while Tik Tok trends seem to dominate our social feeds, there is also a push to use our digital platforms in meaningful, educational ways, and to hold people accountable. This taught me that despite being active members of the digital era, there is still a degree of autonomy and control over cultural exchanges and changes we wanted to see.

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Remembering what we continue to achieve by utilising social platforms, reminds us that the digitalisation of our lives has proved to be a unifying force. We are more connected, and closer than we think. In a way, it has allowed us to create a separate sphere to instigate our own cultural and diverse exchanges with whoever we want, whenever we want! Whether you are online dating and talking to someone on the other side of the world, or celebrating Diwali with virtual fireworks, digital technology does not mean we have to give up on happiness or optimism. In fact, it has allowed us to continue to grow and empathise with experiences that are outside of our cultural comfort zone.

For final year university students, one thing that is certainly out of our comfort zone is the dreaded stress of graduate job hunting. Generally, students have had to change how they interact academically and socially. For soon-to-be graduates, the stress of graduating into a changed job-market seems even more immense. However, the age of digital remote working could also be a positive thing! With the rise of companies prioritising social mobility, mental health, and inclusion in their work culture, employees are seeing an improved and adaptable working environment. With work being conducted on remote Zoom calls, there has been a small increase in opportunities offered; whether it is for mothers who want to work at home, students who cannot afford the extortionate London rent, or even graduates from London who are getting to work for companies based in America.

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I conclude, the 'pandemic' digital age has actually inspired a lot more social change than I would have originally liked to admit. Yes, the increased reliance on technology may give me more headaches and strain my eyes, but the cultural and social changes we are able to organise seem worth it.

VISTING THE WORLD'S LARGEST MUSEUMS

*By Katharine Trojak
Edited by Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar*

2. THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM - ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

I visited the Hermitage in 2017 when my family and I had the chance to visit Russia. If you sleep on a boat docked in the St. Petersburg harbor at night, you can tour Russia for several days without an expensive visa. We took advantage of that. Our dry humored tour guide warned us in advance about the jokingly called “het, het” ladies, pronounced “niet, niet” and meaning “no, no”, who would swarm on us if we got too close to a painting. The Hermitage is 66,842 m² and located in several historic buildings, but we entered through the Winter Palace. It used to be a royal palace and was a gorgeous bright, light blue with stately decorations. This theme continued as each room filled with paintings and artifacts was stunningly painted, trimmed, and floored. Visiting this museum gave me an introduction to Russian artwork and a doorway into better understanding the beautiful country I was visiting.

1. THE LOUVRE, PARIS, FRANCE

The Louvre is the largest museum by gallery space in the world. It's also just a short train ride away from London. I've had the chance to visit the Louvre several times and each trip has been as exciting as the last. One could wander for days around the 72,735 m² of space. Clocking in 9.6 million visitors a year, it is also the most visited museum in the world. I love going down hallways - turn after turn - and only when I've had enough of absent wandering, will I find my way out using the museum map on my phone. My favorite sculpture, “Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss”, is housed here and I always find time to swing by the Mona Lisa, even when the room is crowded with other tourists. This museum is a journey through time and art and it fills my heart with French romanticism whenever I visit.

Museums are one of the best things to see when traveling. They can inform us about the location, give historical or artistic overview, and tell us about what the locality values enough to preserve. Sometimes, these galleries can be massive, in order to house as many artifacts as they do. There is a huge list of notable museums in the world and it seems impossible to visit them all, but keen travellers can definitely try! I was fortunate enough to travel to the five largest museums in the world by gallery space. They've helped broaden my knowledge and give me real insight into the world we live in.

3. THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CHINA , BEIJING, CHINA

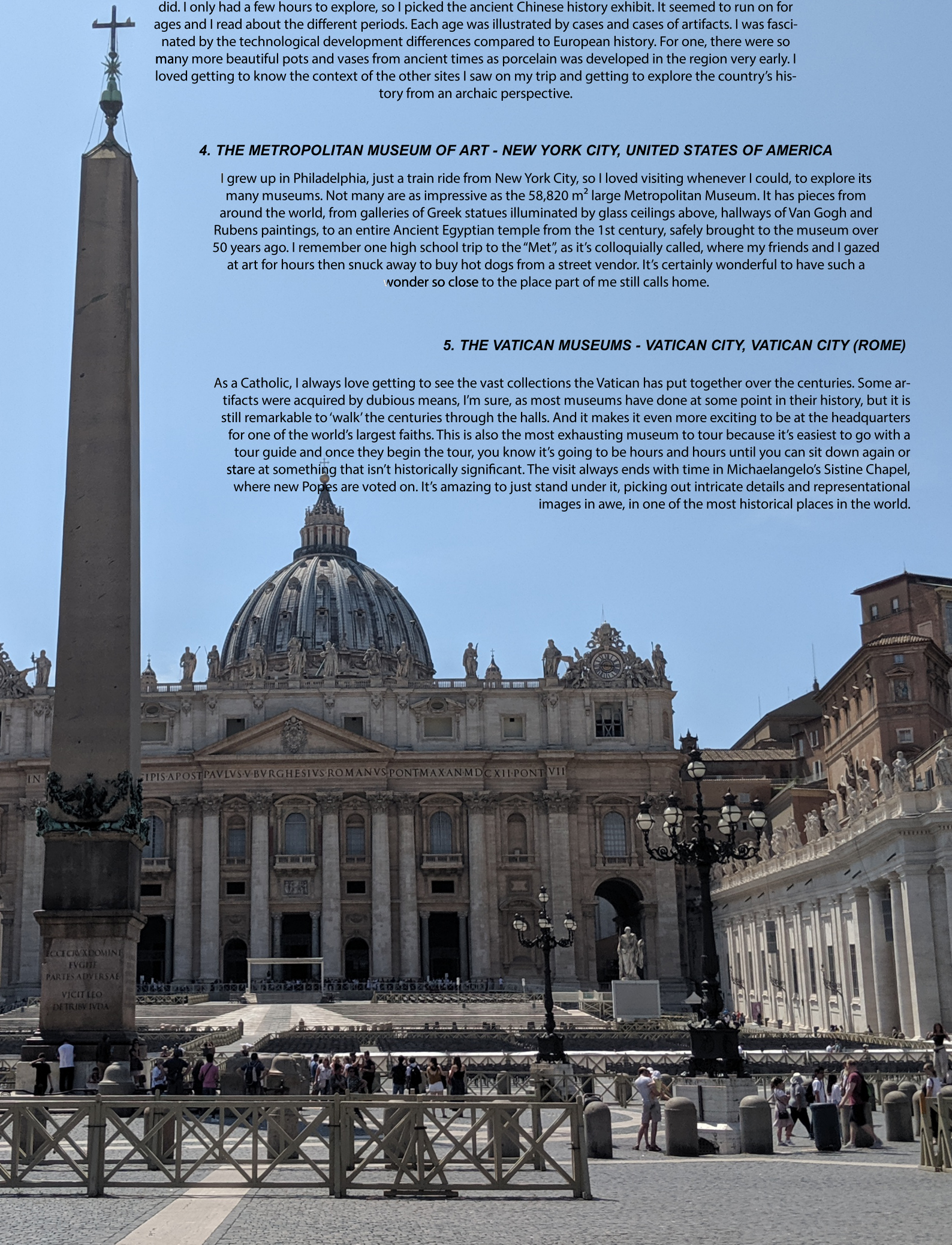
This is the museum on this list I've most recently visited, in the summer of 2019. I had the chance to volunteer at an English summer camp in Shanghai and I couldn't leave without traveling afterwards. One of the stops I had to make was at the National Museum in Beijing. It's 65,000 m² big and I wish I had more time in it than I did. I only had a few hours to explore, so I picked the ancient Chinese history exhibit. It seemed to run on for ages and I read about the different periods. Each age was illustrated by cases and cases of artifacts. I was fascinated by the technological development differences compared to European history. For one, there were so many more beautiful pots and vases from ancient times as porcelain was developed in the region very early. I loved getting to know the context of the other sites I saw on my trip and getting to explore the country's history from an archaic perspective.

4. THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART - NEW YORK CITY, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

I grew up in Philadelphia, just a train ride from New York City, so I loved visiting whenever I could, to explore its many museums. Not many are as impressive as the 58,820 m² large Metropolitan Museum. It has pieces from around the world, from galleries of Greek statues illuminated by glass ceilings above, hallways of Van Gogh and Rubens paintings, to an entire Ancient Egyptian temple from the 1st century, safely brought to the museum over 50 years ago. I remember one high school trip to the "Met", as it's colloquially called, where my friends and I gazed at art for hours then snuck away to buy hot dogs from a street vendor. It's certainly wonderful to have such a wonder so close to the place part of me still calls home.

5. THE VATICAN MUSEUMS - VATICAN CITY, VATICAN CITY (ROME)

As a Catholic, I always love getting to see the vast collections the Vatican has put together over the centuries. Some artifacts were acquired by dubious means, I'm sure, as most museums have done at some point in their history, but it is still remarkable to 'walk' the centuries through the halls. And it makes it even more exciting to be at the headquarters for one of the world's largest faiths. This is also the most exhausting museum to tour because it's easiest to go with a tour guide and once they begin the tour, you know it's going to be hours and hours until you can sit down again or stare at something that isn't historically significant. The visit always ends with time in Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel, where new Popes are voted on. It's amazing to just stand under it, picking out intricate details and representational images in awe, in one of the most historical places in the world.





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