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## *I N T H I S I S S U E*

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH FRENCH ELECTRO GROUP L'IMPÉRATRICE // VISITING ACCLAIMED ARTIST VINCENT KAMP // WHERE TO FIND FRESH YOUNG DANCE IN LONDON // SPEAKING WITH MULTI-PLATINUM SONGWRITER ROSS GOLAN // FASHION AND THE ANDROGYNOUS FUTURE // JOURNEY INTO ANDORRA // AND MORE...



This is my last issue. I'm leaving my baby. When founding Strand Magazine in my first year of uni, I didn't think I would get this far. I've started charities, met creatives, designed loads, collaborated with the likes of O2, Tate, Mind and more (watch this space), I've made friends, fostered relationships, lost friendships, lost relationships, got stupid drunk and possibly sacrificed some of my degree in the process of it all.

My personal thanks go out to: Corissa Hollenbeck, Seline Cornfield and Patrick Wright for helping me found this thing and supporting me the whole way through; Maia Robins for always being there to help; Hemali Patel for awarding and guiding me with the magazine; and to the most dedicated early readers and editors who really pushed this from the start (looking at you Nikhil Kanukuntla, Jared Phanco, Victor Chaix, Ceyda Uzun, and Isabel Veninga).

I've been asked so many times why I didn't establish the magazine as a company and take it out of university with me - the short answer is: it's for King's. Students deserve a good publication they can write for, enjoy and to represent them, a magazine cultivated by all of us. That's why I founded this magazine; this is something necessary for King's.

Samuel Antonio Turner
Founding Editor-in-Chief, Design Head



cover\_'L'IMPERATRICE' lby\_MOLLY BONIFACE

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# I N D E F E N C E O F N E W Y E A R ' S R E S O L U T I O N S

written\_JULES BRAHMS  
edited+images\_VICTOR CHAIX

Over the last few years, New Year's resolutions have acquired a bad reputation. And I do understand why people dislike them; I agree with them, even. In an egocentric society such as ours, New Year's resolutions that focus on pseudo self-improvement are not at all helpful. We shouldn't feel that because we had a good time in December, maybe had a drink too many and ate more chocolate than we normally would, we now have to atone for it in January by going on gung-ho diets and work out to punish ourselves for enjoying the festivities - I think that is an entirely wrong message. January is bad enough with having to take down Christmas decorations, the grey weather, coming exams and going back to work and uni. We shouldn't feel obligated to put an extra strain on ourselves by making major changes to our diet and lifestyle. That can't be good for anyone's mental health. Especially so because most people don't set themselves realistic goals. If you haven't been to the gym in all of 2018, you won't suddenly start going five times a week just because you decided you would when you woke up bloated and hungover on January 1st. If you like junk food and hate cooking, you won't miraculously start living a #healthfood life just because you sent five people drunken voice messages at 12:01 am.

From an entirely unscientific background and based only on evidence I have collected from observing myself and my friends, I assume that the majority of New Year's resolutions are bound to fail. What started off as genuine commitment to that new gym membership you bought quickly becomes only going if your gym buddy whose motivations is equally fading goes, but then it's a class per week and comes deadline season in March - your gym kit is gathering dust in a corner, only to be picked back up when you move at the end of term, making you feel like a complete loser. That is not to say that I am not 100% in favour of trying to live the healthiest life possible, and if you decided to start doing so on January 1st and stick with it, good for you.

If you are of the I-don't-need-a-day-to-change variety and decided to make some changes to your life, well done. However, on the whole, I believe New Year's resolutions to be quite toxic in perpetuating that we can't enjoy ourselves without later compensation.

On another perspective, yet, it somehow feels like they have a lot of unused potential. I can't help but think that we should somehow make use of the fact that, as a global society, we have agreed that January is a time to make some changes in life. So, what if we all resolved that rather than chase pseudo-improvements we most likely won't stick to, we all set a goal to make other people's' lives a little better? After having been with my family over Christmas - with the exchanging of presents meant to make others happy and telling each other how much we love each other - I always feel like January is a rude awakening of how isolated and egocentric we have become as people. And I genuinely think that we could use the concept of New Year's resolutions to combat that trend.

# CHOOSE LOVE



As my dad always says, it's way easier to do more of something than to do less. Because that way, even if you slip up, it's fine because on the whole, you have done more of a good thing than before. For example, if you resolved to read 50 books this year and only read 35, in all likelihood that's still more than you would have read if you hadn't tried to reach 50. Good deeds are the same: say you resolve to call your grandparents every week. Even if it ends up being only every other week, or even once a month, it's less than you wanted but probably still more than you would have called them otherwise, and they'll still be happy if you called them once a month. Or maybe, you make a resolution to incorporate a vegetarian or vegan day per week into a meat heavy diet. Even if you don't manage to do it every week, you still ate less meat overall and the environment will thank you for it.

The thing with good deeds is that they are contagious. If you do a nice thing for someone, maybe help a friend with studying, they might then decide to do a nice thing for someone

else, and the good deed gets carried on. Imagine if everyone did this. A global chain of good deeds. This might all sound incredibly naive, but I am a categoric believer in the power of kindness. I think the world needs a lot more of it. So, if there already is a whole day of the year designated to thinking about how we could better ourselves, why not extend that to thinking about how to improve society and make life better for everyone else?

(left)  
'CHOOSE LOVE'  
by\_KATHARINE HAMNETT

(above)  
'Westminster Bridge' (2018)  
by\_VICTOR CHAIX

# WHERE TO FIND

# FRESH YOUNG

# DANCE IN

# LONDON

I arrived in London mostly fired up about being at the epicentre of Europe's dance scene. I have sometimes heard the choreographic world being qualified as niche, difficult to spot, inaccessible... Would it make it easier for King's students to look at dance performances if they could relate to the performers and choreographers? That's my bet with this listing: young dancers under 25 are central to each of the following productions, performing in them, creating, choreographing and sometimes already full-on directing. There's something for everyone, from contemporary dance to hip hop, through traditional tutus-and-point-shoes ballet, physical theatre, Israeli Gaga and sometimes... a mix of all. If you go to one of these shows, consider those on stage are your age (or younger), although if you look at their dancing you really won't be able to tell.

**1. Resolution 2019: The Festival of New Choreography**  
WC1H 9PY

Until 23 February 2019 @7.30pm  
Tickets £16 / Concessions £12

81 young artists and dance-makers at the avant-garde create and perform works of all styles, giving us a hint at what to expect in tomorrow's dance world

**2. BA3 Choreography - New Choreography Now - Mixed Bill**  
SE8 3DZ

Tues 26 February 2019 @7.30pm  
Tickets £6 / Concessions £4

Final year dancers of iconic London arts conservatory Trinity Laban soon to become the choreography stars of the future show their challenging new work

**3. The Place Youth Dance Platform**  
WC1H 9PY

Sat 9 March 2019 @7.00pm  
Tickets £10 / Concessions £7

A showcase of the talent and creativity in London: the next generation of dancers celebrate the diversity of dance and dancers across the city

**4. London Contemporary Dance School - Mixed Bill**  
WC1H 9PY

Tues 26 and Weds 27 March 2019 @7.30pm  
Tickets £15 / Concessions £10 / Students £8

LCDS final year students pull off a demanding programme of improvisation, interpretation of the ground-breaking postmodern Event by Merce Cunningham and new choreography

**5. KCL Dance Soc - This is 20!**  
SE1 3RA

Weds 20, Thurs 21 and Fri 22 March 2019 @7.00pm  
Tickets not on sale yet

150 King's dancers perform pieces of all styles to celebrate KCL Dance Soc's 20th anniversary - all proceeds will go to charity



**6. Fresh Talent - Mixed bill**  
SE8 3DZ

Fri 29 March 2019 @7.30pm  
Tickets £6 / Concessions £4

First year undergraduate students from iconic London arts conservatory Trinity Laban create and direct four ensemble performances, supported by established professional choreographers

**7. Rambert2**  
N120GA

Thurs 4 April 2019 @7.30pm  
Tickets £12-£25

This brand new dance ensemble just had their first performance ever in London a couple months ago - so this is a bit of a catch-up session. Claiming they have the 13 best young dancers in the world, I can now assure you that is true (review of their world premiere is up on our website)

**8. The Norwegian National Ballet 2**  
WC2B 5PH

Fri 21 and Sat 22 June 2019 @7.45pm  
Tickets not on sale yet

Launched in 2015 and made up of dancers between the ages of 17 and 23, the company makes its first appearance in London

**9. Dutch National Ballet Junior Company**  
WC2B 5PH

Fri 5 and Sat 6 July 2019 @7.45  
Tickets not on sale yet

The younger dancers of Europe's most cutting-edge ballet company will showcase a mixed bill including work from Dutch geometrical genius Hans van Manen

**10. The Royal Ballet School Summer Performance**  
WC2E 9DD

Sun 14 July 2019 @1.30pm  
Tickets not on sale yet

Students aged 11 to 17 of one of the world's best ballet schools take over the iconic stage of their mother company for their ritual annual performance

(left)  
The Place Youth Dance Platform  
via\_THE PLACE

(below)  
Rambert2  
via\_RAMBERT

written\_AUDREY LEMARCHAND  
edited\_SAMUEL ANTONIO TURNER



# I N S T A G R A M

# V S S A R T R E

Our conception of ourselves is necessarily conditioned by factors such as our environment, our childhood, and life experiences. To know who we are, let alone to know who we want to be, is a challenging question to face. We may find it difficult to describe what gives us a sense of our own identity. We may, in turn, resolve to define ourselves through external factors, stating things we've done or are doing in order to introduce ourselves, for instance. Yet, these snippets of information are never quite enough to encompass the complexities and manifold aspects we hold within ourselves.

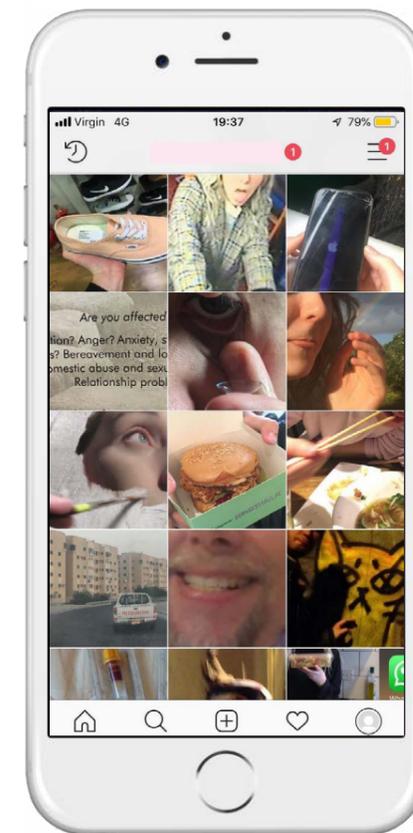
We may notice that we are rather selective with the things we chose to reveal about ourselves, or that we even build ourselves a facade to present to the world, in order to be perceived a certain way. Sometimes, this is due to us not liking ourselves as we are, for how we look, do, or even think. Realising you don't like or know who you are can be a very distressing thought to bear. To feel a sense of powerlessness against your own mind, and to be aware of this, can bring great dejection. This particular sense of unease is caused by a trembling tension between who you are and who you are not yet – an uncomfortable space between your being and your becoming. This instance, in which you oscillate between growth, stagnation, and recession and the 'in-between' nature of it can seem insurmountable and unbearable.

The rise of social media has facilitated our attempts at advertising and curating this desired image of ourselves. The role it plays in our society, in this day and age, can be identified as a contributing factor to the confusion of our personal sense of identity. The image of ourselves we share is typically an idealised version of who we think we should be, or of who we want others to think we are, rather than who we truly are. So, are you who you claim to be? Who are you really, in all the intricately linked physical, psychological and mental factors that make you into one, whole, individual?

written\_EGLANTINE CHAHMERIAN  
edited\_VICTOR CHAIX

It seems that our vulnerabilities and self-doubts are not all that uncommon, or that new. Seeking out a sense of individuality, and wanting to be a part of a community, where we are accepted as well as respected, appears to be part of the human experience. Although social media can serve a greater purpose, it can nevertheless add affliction behind our affectations. This can largely be due to running the high risk of never feeling fully content with the space we occupy within our community, let alone the world. Seeking out external validation does not serve to soothe your deepest woes - you ultimately are the only one in control of the tides and storms within you. You may fear or doubt this power, but it resides within you, nonetheless.

This behavioural trend to seek out the approval of others has served our egos more than ourselves. This can in turn amplify an acute awareness of what ails us. Social media stands almost as a means of self-avoidance – we can hardly bear the thought of introspecting, free of distractions, which ultimately is to explore and expand our self-knowledge. It seems that we are in fact 'connected' to others, but not so much to ourselves. We go online, engaging and subscribing to false ideals, ones that give



us the illusion that we are tapping into our ambitions by virtue of the content we choose to see in our news feed. We tell ourselves we wish to be more like this or like that, but we aren't engaging with the part of ourselves from which these desires stem. We find ways to avoid directly confronting our own thoughts and behaviours, of questioning our own motives.

Turning to philosophy and self-knowledge for reassurance and hope in times of confusion, difficulty or despair can do wonders in aiding you on the path to feel secure within yourself. You can delete your Instagram account but you can't delete the self-doubts. Hence, to know that you are not alone in feeling the way you do, in facing the dichotomies of existence, and for someone else to phrase it in such a way that it makes sense, can be a source of immense reassurance and appeasement. You are, in fact, a 'human being, who is at once a facticity and a transcendence', in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, meaning that you are both your body and your consciousness, your being and your becoming, simultaneously. In Simone de Beauvoir's view, the person is more defined in his becoming than in his being: 'cut off from his transcendence, reduced to the facticity of his presence, an individual is nothing; it is by his project that he fulfils himself, by the end at which he aims that he justifies himself' – an advocacy of her companion's second premise.

The facticity of social media, arguably, conflicts with our inevitable disappearance. We want to somehow have created a lasting impact and to have left a mark on a world which we are set to leave sooner or later. We fear being forgotten within our community, or network, as a symptomatic oppression of our deepest fear, which is to not have mattered, or to not have done enough, in this lifetime. Ultimately, our identity transcends the vision of ourselves which we seek to publicise and display. And if, as Sartre famously says, 'man is condemned to be free', then we may as well seek to become that which we truly wish to be and pursue the things which give us further chances of becoming someone we want to be – off-screen.

(left)  
'Simone de Beauvoir  
and Jean-Paul Sartre'

(above)  
'finster 2' (2019)  
by\_SAMUEL ANTONIO TURNER

# FRENCH

# ELECTRONICA

# L'IMPÉRATRICE

interview+edited\_AUDREY LEMARCHAND  
photography+illustrations\_MOLLY BONIFACE  
assistant\_DANNY LLEWELLYN

Behind the mysterious figure of a woman exhaling smoke, *L'Impératrice* hides a French band full of 6 musicians' creative force. The delicious groove of their first album *Matahari* will cross the Channel in April for its UK release. I was lucky enough to sit down for a chat with all 6 members of the band (Charles, Flore, Hagni, Achille, Tom and David) before their first London show at the Village Underground. But for those who might develop a light case of addiction to their tracks, *L'Impératrice* will be on their way back to London for a gig at Heaven on May 2nd.

*So who is L'Impératrice (French for 'the empress')?*

*All:* She's the 6 of us!

*Charles:* Well... really she's a fantasy. At the very beginning of the project back in 2012, I didn't feel legit to make music. So I decided to hide myself behind this woman who is intended to represent my idea of the music, and now of the music we make today.

*Where do you get most of your musical inspiration?*

*Charles:* Movie scores basically, then disco, and all the groovy stuff. But we all have different musical universes, having received very different education in music...

*Hagni:* Three of us trained in classical music.

*Flore:* I've done jazz and jazz-influenced music, and Tom rock music.

*What do you attribute this musical interdisciplinarity amongst yourselves to? Maybe the way we live today?*

*Flore:* That's the thing; today we have such an easy access to everything and especially to music. I guess we are used to being under mixed influences anyway in our everyday lives. And it's not only that. We're lucky that the 6 of us could find such harmony together because you can also have similar backgrounds but not really get along.

*Hagni:* The interesting thing is even that we have different backgrounds. For those who were trained in classical music, it didn't happen because we wanted to play classical instruments when we were 4. Our parents wanted us to play those instruments, so it first became ours through our parents. Whereas for rap or hip-hop or pop music and later influences, it grew on us when we were teenagers and it was a choice.

*Are there any feelings or emotions you intend to instil in people who listen to your music?*

*Charles:* The main goal is to confront two different feelings in each song. For example, in *Sonate Pacifique* we confronted joy and melancholy to create a third feeling, which is the one you really feel while listening to the song. And each and every time, we try to dig up a feeling that doesn't exist.

*Flore:* To me that is what makes a song addictive, when it makes you feel in a way you can't identify...





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**Charles:** I say it's the main purpose of our music because we do not carry any kind of message in our lyrics. We aren't a political band, we only write to create images and atmospheres. We are very hedonistic, always looking for beauty.

**You almost exclusively sing in French. Is that a deliberate choice? Is singing in French now cool?**

**Flore:** I don't know, is it cool? Actually I really wanted to sing in French. When you're singing in your own language, as a singer it's easier to feel much more touched, and I really wanted to feel what I was singing. Also, the French language is actually very difficult to write!

**Charles:** The words are just not the same... For example in French you can't, absolutely can't sing about a Yellow Submarine. It just does not work! While in English it's so beautiful and the song is an anthem.

**Hagni:** The language also has a specific tone that works with the music in a certain way. It's like in opera: according to whether it's in German, in Latin or in Italian, the colour of the music becomes different. It's the same with pop music. Even the tone of the voice itself

changes according to the language. Flore's voice for example sounds different when she sings in English.

**Flore:** So at first we couldn't avoid French. Now we're fine singing in English and we'll be doing a mix, we're releasing some English versions of our songs in April. Overall we're not closed to any ideas, we're open to any kind of language. French is because we're French, because it's natural. We don't intend to defend the French language or enter in any kind of struggle like that.

**Is the process of transmuting songs in another language difficult?**

**Flore:** The songs remain quite similar in theme so I thought it was going to be pretty easy. In the end it wasn't really, but we're happy with what we've done! I guess it sounds French anyway, unfortunately, or fortunately maybe!

**How do you approach performing and singing in French in front of an English-speaking audience?**

**Flore:** Well it's not only the singing, we also play 'French': in the French way, with French

keys, and a French guitar.

**Charles:** The French thing is about the music itself, not only the lyrics. It's the way we think, the way we play, the colours of the songs, of the chords. It's the way we approach music, it's the French touch.

*Is it special to play in London, because the city has such a strong...*

**Charles:** ...history yeah!

**Achille:** We're proud to be able to play here. So many great bands in pop music came from England so... big pressure.

**Charles:** We're also really lucky and thankful because the concert has been sold out for 4 months.

*Any favourite places in London?*

**Achille:** Yes actually near here! In the clubs in Shoreditch, I had some great nights at the Three Crowns.

*Any iconic songs about London?*

**All:** The Clash – *London Calling!*

**Flore:** For me, *London* by the Alessi brothers, but it's a bit cheesy, so maybe that's just me...

**Hagni:** There's *Shoot The Runner* by Kasabian, which we grew up with during our teenage years.

*And when did you first start playing music?*

**Flore:** I started pretty late, later than the others... I played cello since I was 6 but I was *super super* bad. Then I started the jazz conservatoire in Paris when I was 19. When I met these guys, everything started! It was a bit by accident, originally I was doing documentary cinema studies and all of a sudden I just switched completely.

**Charles:** I used to be a journalist and write about music. That brought me to making music just by wanting to understand the thing from the inside. I wanted to discover how to make music instead of just talking about music without knowing anything about it – which is what most journalists do.

*Have you all known each other for a very long time?*

**Hagni:** Achille and I met in high school but we didn't play music back then. 1 year later, I met David and Tom and we started to make music together. But David and Tom actually already knew each other from the same school...

**Tom:** To be fair we failed the same school...



**Charles:** Then later I met Hagni, who introduced me to Tom, who introduced me to David, then Achille came... so it was a slow build up. And that's the last domino effect.

*Are there any ups and downs of being in a band of 6 people?*

**Charles:** It's great, it's like family.

**Achille:** and 6 times more ideas!

**Flore:** You're never bored! It's more than the 6 of us really. There's our crew and the technicians. It's a big family, with a lot of boys... not a very feminine family for that matter.

*Any advice for aspiring young musicians that want to live of their music?*

**Charles:** Just keep doing good work, and to listen to themselves, without looking for advice.

**Flore:** Don't try to sound like everybody else, don't try to find what is working.

**Hagni:** And playing music with friends is really good, for me at least it's better than with other people. With friends there's something more that adds to the mix...

*Any thing special coming up for your gig at Heaven on May 2nd?*

**Charles:** Maybe we'll play, then DJ, why not?

*Is there something to add?*

**All:** God save L'Impératrice!

All images are taken by Molly Boniface and courtesy of L'Impératrice

# T H E A N D R O G Y N O U S

written\_JIYOUNG KIM  
edited\_CORISSA HOLLENBECK

The idea of wearing your boyfriend's hoodies or jeans is now commonplace, and men wearing feminine clothing is now fashionable. The fashion industry has developed from displaying merely 'unisex' clothing to embracing the androgynous style. Major brands like Balenciaga, Martine Rose, and Louis Vuitton have presented not only androgynous clothing but also androgynous models on the runway. Louis Vuitton's SS19 show proved itself to be the epitome of the current gender-neutral and androgynous fashion through their show.

Louis Vuitton's SS19 collection merges the gender binaries through their androgynous models who put on view the works which unify both feminine and masculine tropes. While dresses are traditional forms of womenswear, the accentuated shoulders and accessories, like the briefcase in Look 31, are masculine in appearance. Yet, the two contrasts blend in seamlessly to produce a modern and trendy look. Louis Vuitton's Spring collection is still gender-specific, but the clothing line contains specific forms, designs, patterns, or accessories that are more commonly worn by the opposite gender. This shows how the fashion trend aims to eradicate the stereotypical binaries that restrict people's fashion choices and expression of style. Furthermore, the androgynous models on the Louis Vuitton runway have accentuated the gender-less feature of the androgynous look.

These models were paragons of the fashion philosophy that was embedded in the runway look for Louis Vuitton's SS19 collection. They passionately represented this androgynous look on the Louis Vuitton runway and the media was blown away. Emma Allwood from Dazed Magazine mentioned that these 'trans and androgynous models stole the show at Louis Vuitton'. The models' familiarity with the androgynous style, influenced by their

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personal experiences with the expression of gender identity, made the Louis Vuitton show more relatable. Model Jessica Espinosa who walked down the Louis Vuitton SS19 runway explained 'I was born as a woman, but I always felt like I was in the wrong body' to DAZED magazine. Despite being challenged by the social norms of gender and sexuality back home in Guadalajara, Mexico, Jessica persevered in developing her own androgynous look, which stole the heart of Paris.

Krow Kian is a trans model who debuted in this Louis Vuitton show. He feels strongly for the queer and gender-fluid community and hopes that his presence on the runway will inspire many people to be proud of their own identity, no matter which gender they identify with. There were also cisgender female models who simply preferred the fashion more commonly worn by the opposite gender. Miriam Sanchez who walked the same runway as Espinosa and Kian wore a boxy sleeveless shirt with suit trousers and leather boots. Although this was a masculine look, she said she felt more comfortable with this style of clothing and mentioned, 'I believe the casting in the show was very important because it proved to me that being yourself can take you a long way.'

It is important for the fashion brands to adapt to the fast-changing attitudes that consumers have towards major concerns of society, such as gender and sexuality, which affects consumer choices. The Louis Vuitton SS19 show has provided a platform for fashion-lovers to freely express their gender identity. Fashion has become a safe space which ensures freedom of expression and acceptance; a philosophy that lies in the heart of all art form.

(above, from left to right)  
*Louis Vuitton Spring 2019  
Ready-to-wear (Look 31)*

*Louis Vuitton Spring 2019  
Ready-to-wear (Look 32)*

(left above)  
*Jessica Espinosa on  
the Louis Vuitton SS19 runway*

via\_GETTY IMAGES FOR APPLE

(left below)  
*Jaden and Willow Smith  
via\_GETTY IMAGES FOR APPLE*

# I N T E R V I E W   W I T H

## M U L T I - P L A T I N U M

### S O N G W R I T E R

## R O S S   G O L A N

As much as we'd love to deny it, no one can resist a pop song. They define the times we live in and well, they're catchy. There's a lot that goes into making these songs and with his podcast, *And The Writer Is...*, Ross Golan has done a great job at exploring this. Ross interviews a fellow songwriter to talk about life, their creative process and the industry itself. Having written number one songs like "Dangerous Woman" and "Same Old Love," Ross has a lot of knowledge to share and the interviews are proof. Through the podcast, he's also advocated for songwriters' rights in the United States by rallying the industry to implement the Music Modernization Act, which allows for music licensing to suit the demands of the 21st century and give better rates to those who help create these songs. *Strand Magazine* had the chance to talk to him about his podcast and the current situation of the music industry.

In each episode of his podcast, *And The Writer Is...*, Ross Golan interviews giants of the songwriting industry including Benny Blanco, Charli XCX and Julia Michaels. "I love showing who these people are. I mean they're fascinating humans, they all sell air for a living." The process for selecting these people is very varied. "Sometimes, they come to us and they're interesting people and sometimes I'll call someone I'm working with that day and see if they want to do the interview before the session. They're all over the place and it's a small community so everyone knows each other. Most people in the business have been really supportive, so it's easy to find people," Ross explained. When asked what the goal for the podcast was, his answer was very clear: "my goal is to tear down walls in the music industry in order to understand how we can communicate with each other and give them information because the more knowledge of who we are all, the better it is for the community." It's evident that Ross wants to showcase these people to emphasize how critical they are to the industry itself. This is why he was such a strong advocate for the Music Modernization Act.

interview+written\_AMIKA MOSER

The Music Modernization Act was passed in September of 2018 and means fairer market rates and fair pay for music licensing. Challenging the status quo was critical for Ross. "Our industry is extremely young but we don't have to say that because things have always been a certain way that's the way it has to be done. A lot of times people get complacent. With the Music Modernization Act, we see that songwriters are ready for change and the rest of the community is, for the most part, backing our movement." For songwriters, the implementation of this bill is just the beginning. Ross also commented on the importance of streaming and its relationship with songwriters. "As a whole, Spotify, Apple, Pandora and all the others are saving the music industry so the goal is to work well with everybody," he explained. "As streaming services become more and more profitable, they should up how much money they pay songwriters. You're already seeing an increase of revenue on people's statements since the Music Modernization Act. Ideally, streaming services continue to build and we continue to support them with good music and they continue to support us with more money." Streaming has also impacted the importance of singles and albums. "You'll see both... It depends who the artist is. Some artists aren't made for albums, just because they can doesn't mean they should." However, he doesn't neglect their importance. "If someone is intentionally creating a long-form piece of art, it should be consumed as such. People are just used to it being a singles market. The minute people start releasing albums that tell stories that means the next artists will want to do that."

Rich Polk/Getty Images for  
The Recording Academy

All images are courtesy  
of Ross Golan

The evolution of the music industry is something that came through multiple times in our conversation. As topics like feminism and the current political climate become much more prominent in pop culture, the music on the radio also reflects this. "We have a choice if we put out music and art that empowers different genders, races, all of it. We should be more inclusive and that's our choice. It's not that if it's a love song, you have to touch on politics. It's just being conscious of the fact," he explains. Having written songs for women who've advocated female empowerment through their music like Ariana Grande or Little Mix, Ross is very conscious of the way in which this comes across in his songwriting. "I personally try really hard to make sure that the listener isn't the antagonist and that the person that is listening to the song feels empowered... Especially, if it's a female artist, I want them to be the one in power. I want them to be able to tell their story confidently."

Mental health is another topic that has recently been at the forefront of conversations in pop culture. Now more than ever, writers and artists have been encouraged to speak up about their struggles. "It's something that we've really been fighting for. We've been trying to get healthcare for songwriters and trying to address mental health among the writing community and the artist community because a healthy songwriter writes better songs." Ross also highlighted the benefits of sobriety in creativity. "I would imagine if you look through the fifty interviews we've released

so far with the podcast, around forty percent are not only not drug users but they're sober, so they're recovering alcoholics and addicts who have written better since." Nevertheless, addiction still remains a very serious issue in the music industry that affects artists and songwriters alike. "We also interviewed people who tend to thrive when they're intoxicated," Ross continued. "My assumption is none of those people wishes they were still doing drugs, I don't know if it means that they make more money as an artist but no one should kill themselves for a song. In the end, no one is going to remember any of our songs but they'll remember you as human."

Overall, it's clear that the songwriting industry is booming right now as songwriters are being more acknowledged than ever. "I think it's a good time for people who write songs." When asked who the most influential people in the industry were, he responded: "the topliners are the people who are the most entrepreneurial and not the producers which is interesting to this generation. People like Justin Tranter, J Kash and Savan Kotecha. It all comes from the value of the song versus the music."

The next season of *And The Writer Is...* will be released between February and March, but until then, there are fifty episodes available on iTunes for you to indulge in and discover more about the writers that are currently defining the music landscape.



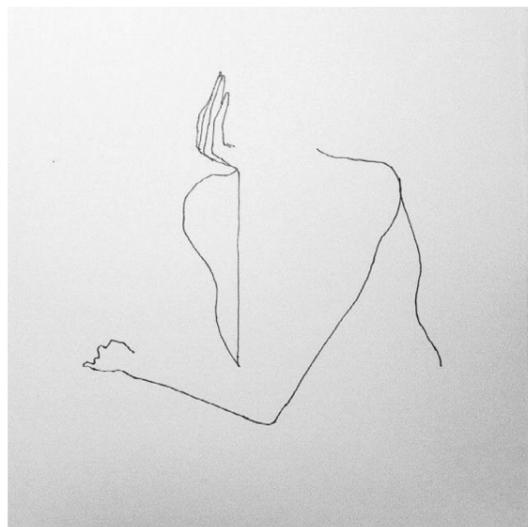
# E L E G Y     F O R

# M I N I M A L I S M

written+illustration\_ISSABELLA ORLANDO  
edited\_VICTOR CHAIX

We are a generation in constant motion. We function in a breathless hustle, ceaselessly reaching for the next grand idea, a future great invention, tomorrow's wild adventure. This is no surprise; we grew up being told we could do anything, and in the lives we've built for ourselves since, the encouragements we were told during our youth remain the foundations. We still strive to do, to be, to have everything.

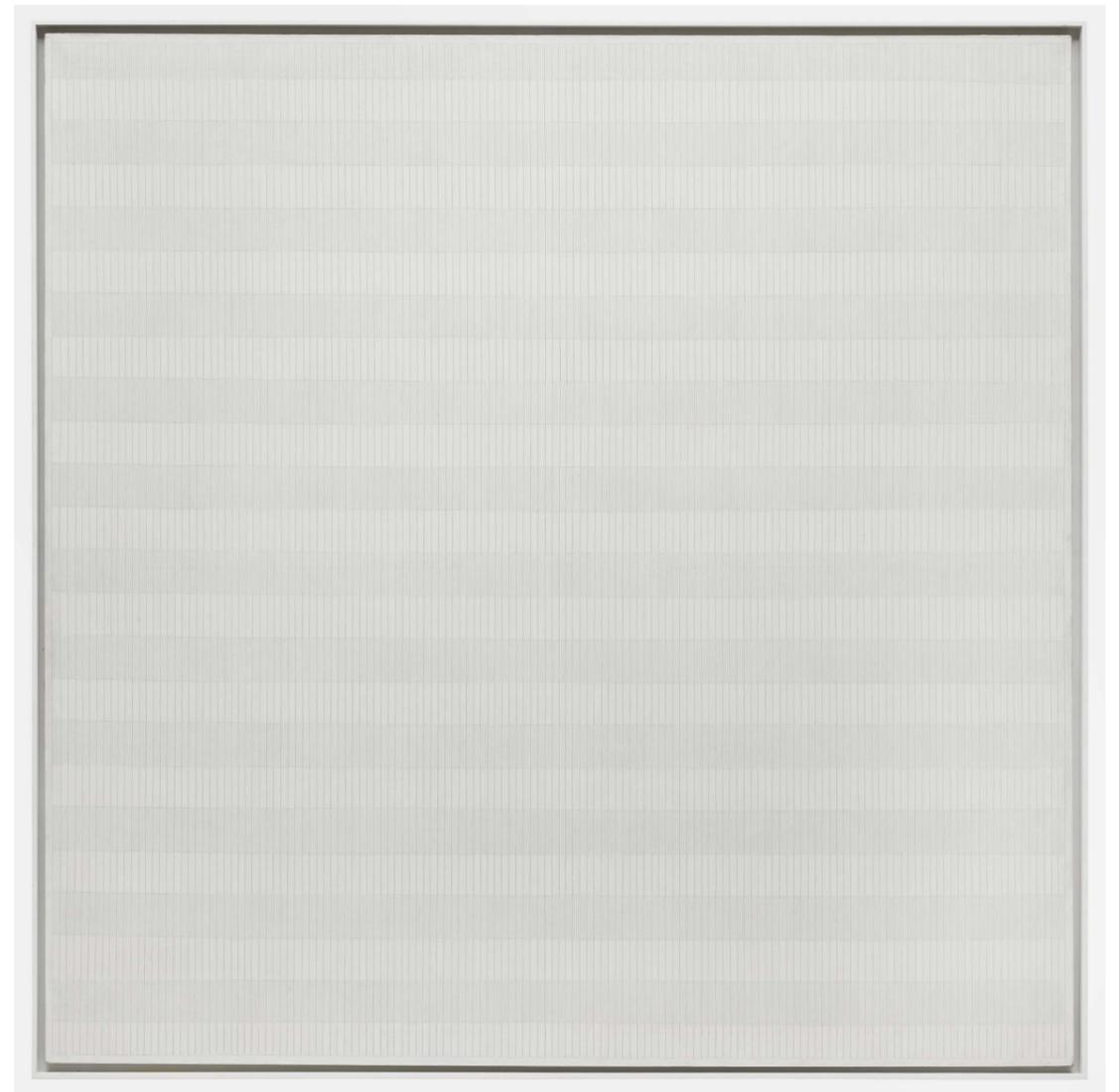
We are inherently ambitious, searching for more: more success, more wealth or more meaning to be added to our lives. In this enterprise, we often end up buried in a mountain of belongings that promise just this: the image of success, an output for our hard-earned money, the promise of satisfaction offered by material possessions. But I hear another phrase that I'm sure has rung through our ears many times: money can't buy happiness. The possessions we put such faith in to make us happy – are they successful in doing so? Maybe for a little while. But before long, when the appeal of shiny newness wears off, we are hoisting our overstuffed baggage along again in pursuit of the next best thing.



Breaking the cycle is possible but not an easy task; it requires not only a change in habit but a change in outlook. In refocusing our visions for the future, we must shift our mindset to an idea that seems a little foreign, a little backwards: living with less. Fewer possessions, less belongings, decreased excess. Does the notion of 'less is more' shake the foundations of everything we've ever been told? Perhaps a little bit. But the beginning of a new year is the perfect time to reassess our habitual rhythms and patterns and consider if they really are the best way to go about living our lives.

Enter, minimalism. Growing in popularity in recent years, the movement advocates for living with fewer material possessions the conscious consumption of quality goods over an unnecessary quantity of them; fundamentally, for how consuming less might allow us to lead better lives. Its goal is in equal parts philosophical, psychological, economical, and environmental. Consuming less as a generation will surely have an impact on our struggling planet, as production-based pollution decreases and less waste is generated. In being more selective about how we spend our money, we will inevitably save some money, which can then be used for a different kind of enrichment: seeing the world, drinking the nice albeit expensive coffee... or even splurging on the occasional, rather than regular, unnecessary purchase. Inseparable from the positive impact minimalism promises the earth and our wallets is the personal effect of adopting this lifestyle. Minimalism, by progressive changes, empty our physical and mental space of excess – in this lies the promise of a life that might be, ironically, fuller.

It's not easy to wrap our minds around the idea that having fewer possessions equates to a more meaningful life - our youth was dictated by a rhetoric of abundance, urging us to find happiness in surrounding ourselves with the material comforts of our wealth and success. It can be even more difficult to want to get on board when the ethos of the movement is, like many others, lost amidst extreme



interpretations. But minimalism doesn't mean lack or scarcity. It doesn't ask us to abandon earthly possessions and become wandering monks. It doesn't demand that we ditch 'purposeless' trinkets that simply look nice or have sentimental value. It doesn't require us to be able to carry everything we own on our backs, nor live in a micro-home, nor strip our wardrobes down to ten items. It is essentially about making space for the experiences, people, and, yes, belongings that will genuinely add meaning to our day-to-day engagements with the world, clearing away the clutter in the process.

The butterfly effect comes fluttering, after, with full force: less pressure to maintain a lifestyle of excess, less necessity to achieve six-figure success when it might mean sacrificing irreplaceable time for wellbeing, less stress. In packing away what doesn't serve us (and responsibly donating or disposing of it), we manifest a different kind

of more: more financial leeway with which to experience the world and all it has to offer, a more environmentally conscious lifestyle, resulting in more generations to experience our stunning planet, as well as more presence, wellness and peace of mind. In reducing the excess that crowds our lives and minds, we finally hone the most liberating skill of them all: the art of letting go, of letting be.

(left)  
*'Untitled'*  
by\_ISSABELLA ORLANDO

(above)  
*The Tree (1964)*  
by\_AGNES MARTIN  
via\_MoMA

T H E

B R I L L I A N T

V I N C E N T

K A M P

written+edited\_ISABEL VENINGA  
photography+written\_JARED PHANCO

The weather is stormy and dark as we arrive at the train station to meet up with Vincent Kamp. Vincent – “Vince” – is known for his realistic paintings, depicting gritty lifestyles full of tension and glamour. Taking a great deal of inspiration from masters such as Rembrandt & Zorn as well as contemporary cinematographers, Vincent Kamp’s work is as distinct as the man himself.

Vince drives up to the station to pick us up in his shiny black Jaguar. As we step in, he drives us through the countryside, picking up friendly conversation as we head over to his home-studio positioned amongst the bucolic rolling hills of Surrey, seemingly a universe away from the grisly underworld portrayed in his paintings. Inside the secluded studio is packed with dozens of Vince’s paintings, inspiration boards, images and books. Ella Fitzgerald’s voice emanates softly from a record-player next to a Terminator skull as we sit down to chat with the man himself.

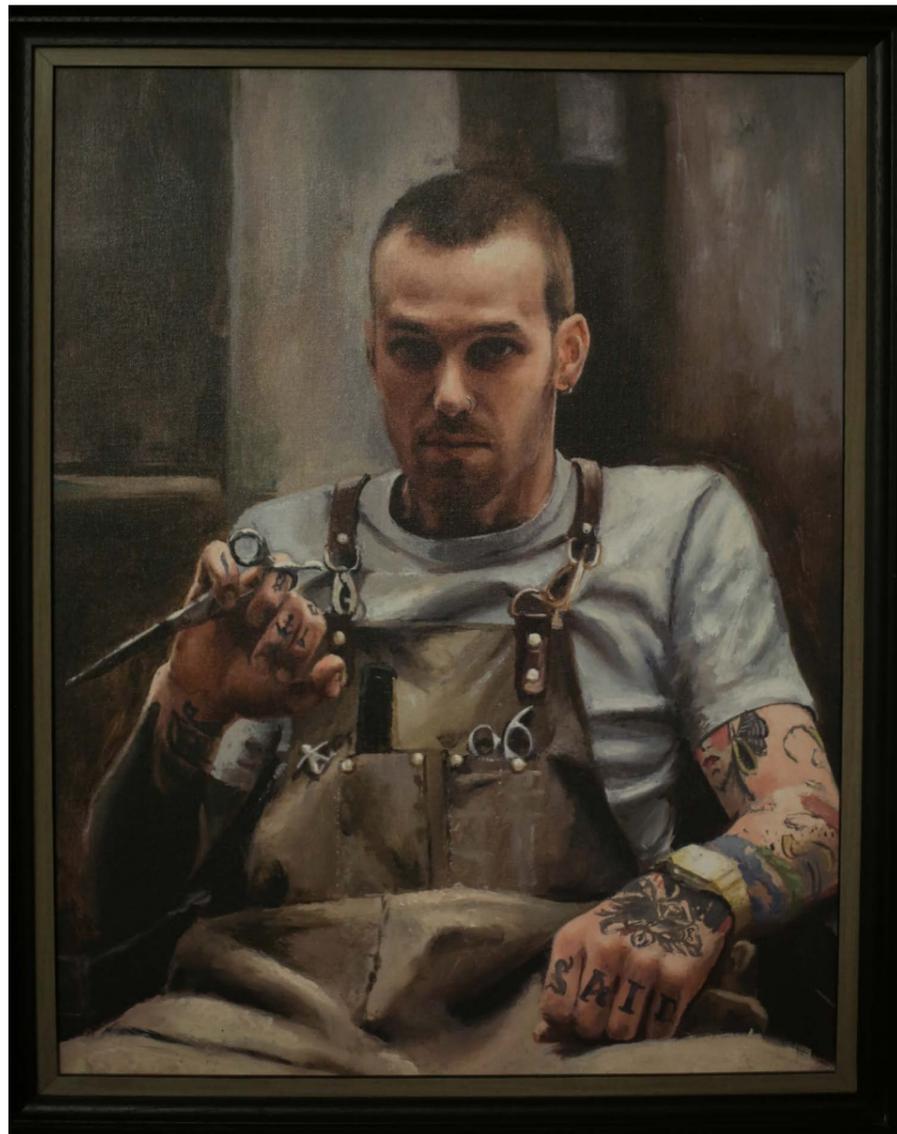
*Can you tell us something about your work process?*

My work always starts with writing a story. I tend to write in the form of a screenplay—it keeps it simple, nice and easy. I hire actors to pose for my compositions, so if I give them a screenplay, they understand the concept. They understand what I want, and they bring

something to the table as well. The process is a collaboration. I’m just the guy that comes up with the basic idea – the framework – but there is so much that goes into the painting, from the people I work with, to the people I talk to, to the people I show the screenplay to... And then they go “well that’s cool, but what if you do this...” and that gives me more ideas. At the end of the day, I am the one painting it. It’s me holding the brush right at the end of it, but once you’ve painted a thousand paintings – like I have – you can paint in your sleep. So, I don’t have to think about the technical side of painting – its more about the story; creating a series of paintings. The hard bit is actually coming up with all that.

It’s funny that lots of young artists ask: “How do you do well?” And I say it’s a real shame that you think it’s to do with how good your painting is – the technical side of it is that there are actually thousands—if not millions—of artists (and artists who are way better technically than I am) but it’s really the story of what you’re trying to tell that matters. It is the idea that people buy. If you get hung up with brush strokes and things like that, it’s really only the art “officinos” who will appreciate that. There are loads of people who can do that but it’s not what it’s really about. I get the story together, hire my actors, find my venue and then get thousands of photos and it all comes back here. I do most of my compiling here: this is where I do my editing and photoshop. There is always a lot of distortion with your lenses,





so you have to do a lot of pushing and pulling to make things work.

*Is it different to painting from life?*

Yes, it's completely different. I've done tons of painting from life. You can't get this result from painting from life. Artists are quite snobby with painting from life and that's all well and good, but just you try and get an actor to hold a position that's natural for that length of time that you need to make a painting—six hours or so. I don't see painting from life as actual life, really. If you're asking somebody to stay perfectly still for six hours or longer they're going to stop maintaining the true intensity of the expression. It's very important to paint from life whilst you're learning to paint, but when you want to create a real narrative in your paintings then it's just not possible to paint from life.

*You incorporate script writing in your work often. Can you tell us something about your new work and how you've incorporated script writing and film in it?*

Painting is my first love, but it is all based on cinema and film, which is also what I love. I wrote a screenplay for "Diamond roulette," a series of six paintings about a diamond heist that happens in the Ritz. I wrote the story as a screenplay with no intention of turning it into a film, but a few people read it and encouraged me to make it into a film, so I just said "okay, let's see what I can do." I made a few calls and now it's snowballed. Hopefully I'm gonna film in the Ritz mid February. The actor Tamer Hassan is going to play in it, hopefully it'll end up at a film festival or something, it's been really exciting. I already did the paintings with different people but I might do some more paintings for the story.

*Your work reminds me a little of Tarantino. Who are your main inspirations?*

Yes, absolutely – obviously I like Tarantino. There are people in painting that inspire me, purely from a technical point of view. People like John Singer Sargent, Anders Zorn, Rembrandt. There are various people that I look at for how they create paint and drama and life. I look at cinematography a lot more, like Roger Deakins' work – he is absolutely incredible. There are certain directors who go for a certain look – like David Fincher – that create a lot of drama in a scene. I think I look more to that and I kind of feel that maybe the art world is not that interested in the way I work. It's not that I turn my nose up at the old masters, but I think that if you take the old masters (the Rembrandts for example), they'd be cinematographers nowadays, because they are obsessed with light and drama. Caravaggio especially is a crazy, reengaged painter – I wonder what he would have been nowadays; would he have been a painter or a film-maker?

*What did you do before becoming a painter?*

I've always drawn and painted and created throughout my life. My parents are originally from Holland and when I was five, they were planning to go back, but this is the "land of opportunity" for business, so we ended up staying. People say the Dutch heritage is why I like all the life. Frans Hals and Jan Steen influenced me with lots of good characters and expressions.

I ran my parents' business for many years because my mum got cancer and died fifteen years ago and my dad was falling apart, so I stepped in, running the business. That took an enormous amount of time – I was getting up at four o'clock in the morning and painting every day. I was always telling stories, doing lots of writing, but then you've also got to run a business. Then, the family came along—I've got two boys—and life just gets in the way of your plans. Eventually, when the kids got to a reasonable age, I started to get time back, get a little more sleep, and it allowed me to concentrate on the art.

*How long did it take you to get to the point you are at now?*

The success has only been very recent. I went to Rome and studied with one of my favourite artists, Sean Cheetham (an American figurative painter). At the time I was only really doing private stuff and I was trying to guess

what would be successful in art. I always loved the Renaissance style of painting – lots of light, muted palette. Modern and abstract art was popular and where the money was, but I wasn't interested in that. When I showed Sean some of my art, he said, "if that's what you like, then that's what you should do." If you're not authentic to something you really love then you just can't make it. You'll never be really good at it because you can't fake something long enough to be really good at it. I then started doing what I wanted to do, creating these stories, painting these series, then the recognition came quite quickly. The gallery that I'm with now approached me and offered me a really good deal. I was a bit worried to begin with because the artists that they have are very different to me and I was worried they would try and steer me toward them, but they totally got what I wanted to do. Because I got the success a bit later on in life, I was set on what I wanted to do. The gallery really got on board with that. The first show I did, all the paintings sold right there and then, within the first hour. There were about 5-6 paintings, all very expensive – a lot more than what I was expecting. When you go to a gallery, you expect people to pay a lot of money for a painting and they recognised real value in what I was painting.

*Would you say you have a target audience?*

Maybe, because there is a certain style I paint and a certain type of person that likes this work. I do revolve around high-drama and high-tension because that's the genre of films and TV I like to watch. I'm not ruling anything out – if there is a good story I wanted to tell that doesn't involve these things then I will tell that story. The story I just did at The Ritz is different. It's all high-end and gold and mirrors and paintings and crystal chandeliers. It's completely different from the seedy nightclub in the last series I did (*The Long Game*). There are common themes, but they are different styles. Some people won't like it, because the people are much more sophisticated in this one.

*When you started doing art full-time, how did you meet these people?*

The gallery puts on shows for me. I tell them the idea for the show and organise it all and they just have a list of customers who have bought similar work. They put out a catalogue to their galleries across the country and all their gallery managers suggest it to their customers. Eventually, it creates a group of

people who like my stuff. I am getting more well-known through interviews and social media—that's how Sam Smith found my stuff. As much as I can't bear the social media side of it—I hate taking a 1.5 metre painting and just putting it into a tiny photo—you have to work with the tools you are given. That's why it's nice to do shows. In my last show, I had all the actors and the poker table in the gallery and I played a video of a guy telling a story of what happened that night.

*What interests you so much about these places?*

Our lives are all so sanitised and safe – there is no danger anymore. I think people are attracted to stories with a bit of danger, at least that's the case for me because that world is so different from my day-to-day life. Everything is so safe now – there is police,

CCTV everywhere. There is a lot of mundane existence going on. Hearing about people in this criminal world appeals to people—you can see that with the kinds of films that are popular in cinemas.

(page 23)  
'Vincent Kamp'  
by\_JARED PHANCO

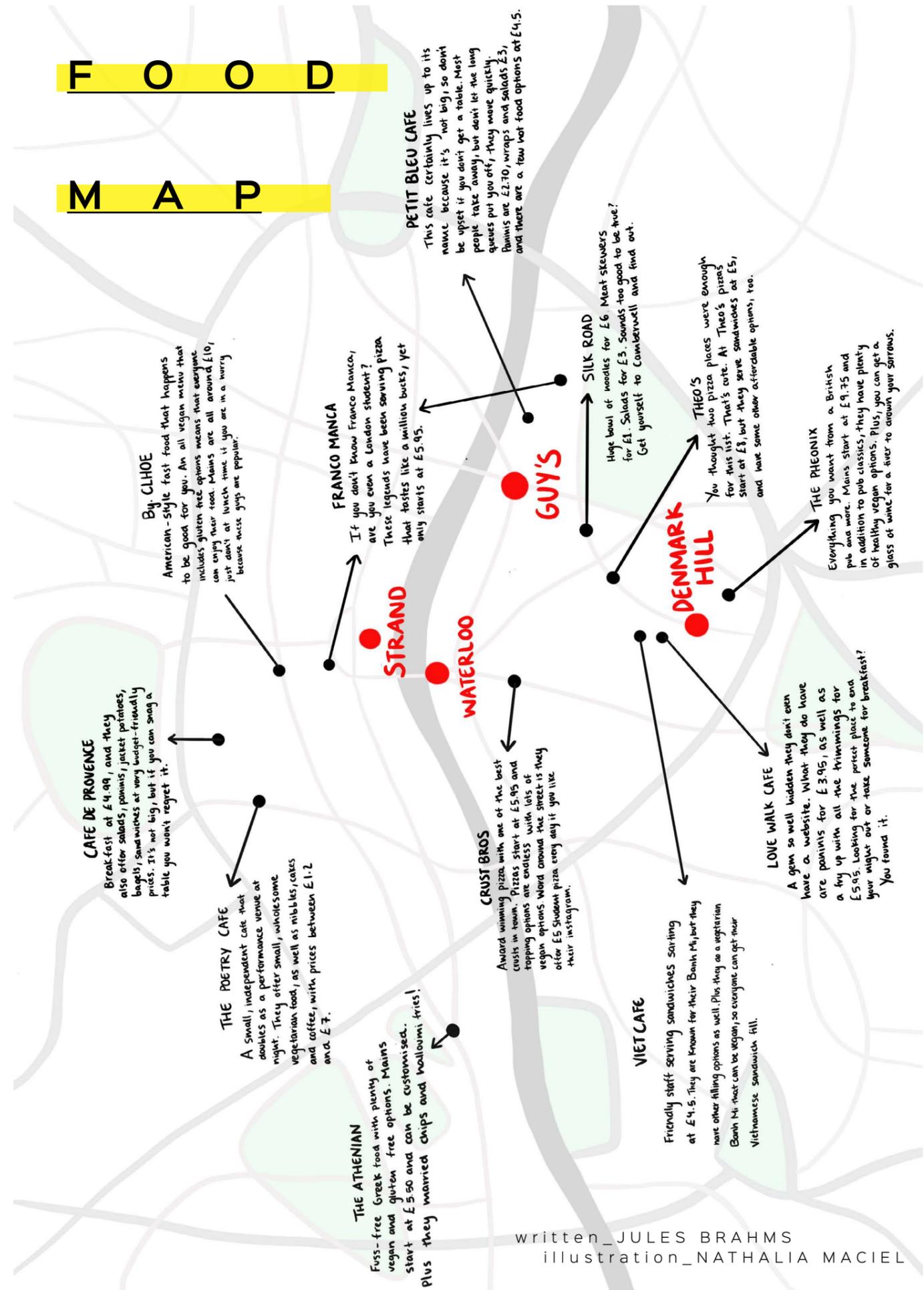
(page 24)  
'untitled'

(below)  
'Skull 2'  
by\_JARED PHANCO

All images are courtesy of Vincent Kamp



# FOOD MAP



written\_JULES BRAHMS  
illustration\_NATHALIA MACIEL

# F O R A R E G E N E R A T I O N O F O U R S O C I E T A L A N D H U M A N V I S I O N

2018's last semester has seen the birth of two major social movements in Europe. The first, in the United Kingdom, is a movement built on the assessment of an environmental catastrophe: that of the rising climate and the political world's immobilism in face of the existential crisis – the Extinction Rebellion, which along with other actions blocked all major bridges of central London in an act of Civil Disobedience in mid-November. The second in date, larger in scope and mediatic covering: that of the French gilets jaunes or "yellow vests" born out of a popular anger against what they consider unjust fiscal measures, and which came to become more broadly an expression of social discontent over all inequalities. A main difference between them, it is known, is the scope of their violence – physical or material – also the cause of their different notoriousness. Yet, despite their differences in their form or revindications, both are ultimately a reaction, it is arguable, to a dying democracy – they ask in their own way a more representative approach in accounting citizens' wishes. Both, I believe, represent a re-politicization of the contemporary citizen and collective wake-ups, in movements that know no hierarchical structures nor political affiliations – this, in my view, is the best we could have hoped for today.

What we need, in 2019, is a response to these expressions of political despair and discontent. An enormous challenge awaits before us as we are to begin the new year – to switch from a technocratic anti-politics to a re-idealized political vision in which the citizen is re-integrated and tears himself of his antecedent fatality. Beyond old narratives of the twenty-first century, more importantly, we need to invent a new story that will re-imagine our societal organization and human nature – a map to guide us in an indispensable collective transition.

At the very beginning, we are first to find that old and precious characteristic of

written+images\_VICTOR CHAIX

any truthful political progress: idealism or utopianism, pretty much lost in the tumult and excesses of twentieth century's political disasters. Wrote by Rutger Bregman, a Dutch historian and author, *Utopia for Realists* is a pioneering book for this idealist resurgence. As he describes our current situation, the 'land of plenty is shrouded in fog. Precisely when we should be shouldering the historic task of investing this rich, safe, and healthy existence with meaning, we've buried utopia instead'. Utopia, in his view, could resolve the problem – an ideal vision that, unlike a blueprint and more 'like humor and satire', would 'throw open the windows of the mind' and inspire progress towards it. As he rightfully explains, 'without utopia, all that remains is a technocracy' – a modern dystopia of its own sort. Society needs an ideal vision to guide its progress – 'alternative horizons that spark the imagination', and never more than today, 'a new lodestar'. Our systemic crisis may indeed be the result of a lack of ambition and willpower for something better – though utopias are and must stay unreachable, without it, societies just stagnate and immobilize themselves.

Yet, how are we to march towards those visions? The most humanly effective way, for sure, is to create a new political narrative: a guide and map to use to travel to our imaginary destinations. Here, it is George Monbiot, British writer and activists, which in his *Out of the Wreckage* essay provides us the most interesting analysis on this imperative strategy. Monbiot reminds us of the great power of the narrative, an essential political tool with which, if we 'develop the right story', will necessarily 'infect the minds of people across the political spectrum'. A new twenty-first century adapted one is necessary, as 'the old world, which once looked stable, even immutable, is collapsing'. This observable

present societal collapse, to which the Brexit decision, if not the 2008 crisis, probably are its inaugurators, can still be a great opportunity; an opportunity that just depends 'on our ability to tell a new story, a story that learns from the past, places us in the present and guides the future'. A story to 'navigate the world', as stories indeed allow us to emotionally interpret news information's 'complex and contradictory signal'. What is needed is a new story to replace the outdated twentieth century successful ones of social democracy and neoliberalism (broadly speaking, of State interventionism and market liberalization), in a world to which's problematics changed massively since then. Ideally, we should aim for a coherent and inclusive narrative that 'resonates with deep needs and desires' and 'appeals to as many people as possible'.

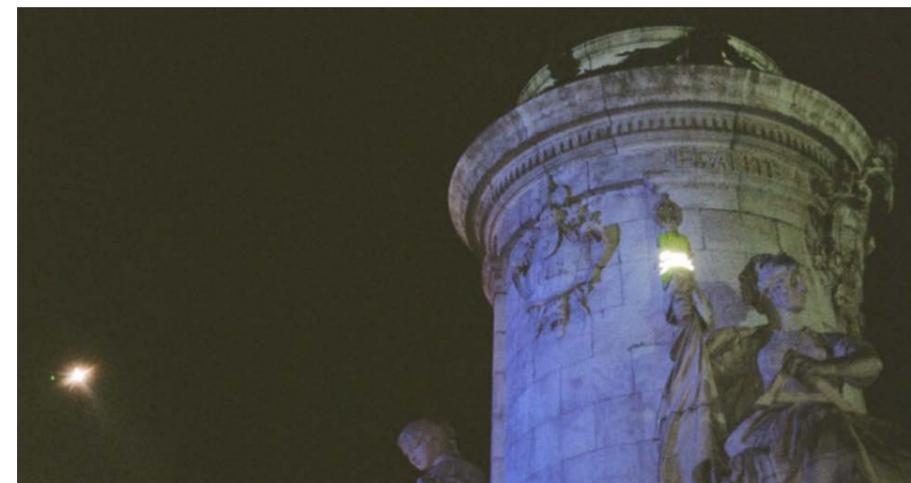
These new visions and different narrative, to best serve our systemic crisis, are finally to be imbedded in a renewed vision of man itself, his nature as much as his most intimate values. Beyond a fraudulent and misconceived conception of an inevitably egoistic human person, we have instead to reconsider this human agent as naturally cooperative, altruistic and empathic one.

Still drawing from Monbiot, we need to go from extrinsic to intrinsic values – the first ones, to transcend, are 'desires for self-enhancement', while the more fruitful second ones, to regain, are of 'compassion, connectedness and kindness towards all living beings'. This is not, as many would believe today, of the realm of impossibility: as Monbiot observes, 'most people, when asked about what they care about, prioritize intrinsic values, placing community, friendship and equality at the top of the lists' – benevolence as the most

cherished human value. This goes contrary, as you may have noticed, to the conception of human nature that the status quo keeps on trotting on since Adam Smith's notion of the 'invisible hand' – that of self-desire, a fallacious and absolutist vision of mankind that makes us 'accept a vicious ideology of extreme competition and individualism that pits us against each other'. While of course, this search of self-wellness is indispensable and necessary, it is of our present duty to place it in a larger value circle of cooperation and mutual benevolence, before the world's social climate truly explodes.

This proposition is quite general, I admit, and does not go into very concrete grounds. I believe that the Extinction Rebellion and gilets jaunes might however provide some suggestions of those particular resolutions to rapidly implement today. While capitalism obviously brought us to our contemporary, and unprecedented, plentitude, what is needed is an ecological and social regeneration of its laws – an equally obvious necessity of providing its system a human foundation to rests its feet on. The ideals and story suggested by Bregman and Monbiot can also be of much interest: respectively that of a guaranteed basic income and a fifteen-hour week visions, and a new narrative of togetherness and belonging (as opposed to cultural alienation). But of course, I prefer to let you, students, envision the imperative utopias of today and build the best narrative for tomorrow – making them reality.

(below)  
'Place de la République' (2018)



# S O M E W H E R E I N A N D O R R A

I like to plan ahead, I really do. When I travel it's reassuring to know that everything is in line and that nothing will go awry. But sometimes, even when you plan everything to a T, things can go hilariously wrong. My friend Alex and I flew to Barcelona and took a day trip to the tiny country of Andorra, nestled in between Spain and France. It was mostly to check another country off the list, but because it's in the gorgeous Pyrenees Mountains, I convinced my friend to spend the day hiking.

We found a hike the night before that seemed challenging but doable, estimated around 6 hours long. Soon, we were running around the city trying to find cold weather gear since the forecast for Andorra said there might be snow. I was excited at the thought of snowfall, but neither of us had considered this possibility when packing for characteristically warm Barcelona. Alex found a winter coat and I bought gloves, intending on layering the next morning.

We woke up at 5 am to start the first leg of our journey, taking the subway to the bus terminal where we'd be leaving from. It was a bit confusing finding our way before the sun was up, but we eventually made it to the bus and immediately decided to nap. As we drifted in and out of sleep, we saw the ocean and rigid mountains of the coast fade into the green and high mountains of Northern Spain. We cracked open our giant can of peaches purchased the night before, and that was our first mistake of the journey. We thought we were being savvy, buying a healthy breakfast of fruit for the ride up, but it didn't even occur to us that once we open a can on a moving bus, we had to eat all the fruit and drink all the juice inside. We were both sick of peaches by the time the bus pulled into the city of Andorra La Vella.

I try not to be the ignorant American who expects everyone to speak English, but things were much more difficult without it. Luckily, Alex took Spanish in high school, saving our butts, but all conversation was slow and broken. Neither of us exactly had words like "hike" or "trailhead" in our vocabulary. Several different people told us several different versions of how to get to the trailhead. Each bus driver told us to take a different bus. L2, L4, L6. After nearly an hour of trial and error, we turned pleadingly to the woman next to us and asked if she spoke English or could help us.

written\_KATHARINE TROJAK  
edited\_CORISSA HOLLENBECK

She helped translate information from another person and told us to wait on the other side of the road for the L2 bus.

Sure enough, nearly as soon as we crossed the street, the L2 pulled up. Except it wasn't exactly a bus so much as a large van. It had the official signs of an Andorran bus though, so we shrugged and boarded. We were the only people on the bus. After turning his personal phone off and having pulled over and parked for several minutes, the driver left us halfway up the mountain with instructions to wait for another van to take us the rest of the way. We laughingly wondered if he had been on the phone to instruct someone to come kidnap us, but there were crazier stories that had happened. Right on schedule, a black van came and took us up to the trailhead. It was about 12:30 by the time we arrived. Before leaving, Alex asked when the last bus came to go back into the city. The driver answered 3:30. We were planning on doing a 6-hour hike. There was no way this was going to work. But we shrugged and got off anyway, figuring that if we missed it we could just walk the extra hour down the winding roads to the city. And so, seeing a sign that titled the hike we were searching for, we marched into the woods.

After the first few switchbacks, the trail turned incredibly steep. Through trees, over rocks, and up crumbling pathways. There was only one sign during the first few hours and only two that we saw in total. I kept checking my phone's GPS to make sure we were still on the right hike. Our thighs burned, but we pressed onwards.

Eventually, we were high in the mountains and saw snow up ahead. It was light and littered the green forest floor. We walked further, and there was more snow. Then more snow. And then we were just trudging through snow as far as the eye could see. It made the trail slippery, cold, and much more challenging than we had first thought, but still, we climbed. The higher we got, the more incredible the views became. Though it might have been foolish to hike during the middle of a Tuesday during the offseason, it was thrilling to know that we might be the only people for hours and hours of walking. It made the pristine landscape that more exciting.



Hours passed by and we were making pace, but not fast enough for dark. So we made it to the top of the mountain, dusted off a rock, and ate our lunch for a little while. We took off our shoes and sat barefooted for a few minutes so that we could replace our sopping wet socks and replace them with dry ones we brought as backups. We were exhausted, but we had food and one of the most gorgeous sites I had ever seen.

After long enough, we packed up and began the trek down the mountain. Because it was snowy and icy and slippery and because the trail was very steep going up, it was a very interesting hike down the mountain. Alex and I realized very quickly that it would be less about walking down and more about falling and sliding down. We slipped and tumbled down the slope, our backpacks protecting our back but still ending up fairly bruised. At one point all I heard was Alex's scream as she disappeared from the frame because she had fallen.

Then we saw the bear prints. We were not at all prepared to deal with bears. I had hiked most of Western America, bears didn't really frighten me that much and I knew that since we had been talking and singing the entire day, any large creatures likely stayed far away. However the thought that they might be cub prints was terrifying. I did not want to run into a cub or mama bear while isolated on a mountain. Luckily, we made it back down the mountains without any run-ins.

Alex and I made it off the mountain just at sunset, whooping and cheering when we saw the trailhead again. The dwindling light didn't concern us as much as we marched down the paved roads back into the city. We were about halfway down and in total darkness when a white windowless van pulled over on the

side of the road and the person inside began shouting Spanish towards us. "Hablas ingles?" I said in weak Spanish. The woman speaking asked us if we wanted a ride into the city. We shrugged and warily made our way over to the vehicle. Things could have gone very badly, but it was just one woman sitting in the front seat, so we loaded in. Once we arrived, we were so relieved to have been given the ride.

Though we had relaxed, our day of ridiculous stories was not over yet. When we boarded the next bus, we spread out across several seats and immediately fell asleep. Minutes later, we woke up to a man boarding our bus speaking rapidly in Spanish. Then he looked at me as if expecting an answer. He repeated himself in English and told me to follow him. Alex and I realized how shady this was, so I tried to grab my passport before leaving the bus, but I couldn't find it in time. I didn't even have shoes on as I exited the bus. He began asking me questions, with Alex just behind me. Whether we bought anything in Andorra, where our luggage was, how much money we had on us. I responded to the last question with a tired "only 5 Euros". After a moment of tense silence, he released us onto the bus.

We pulled into Barcelona late at night and exhaustedly made our way back to the hostel. We stretched, packed our bags for the next day, and fell immediately asleep. It was a crazy, laughable day with stories that I would be telling for months. Most people visiting Andorra probably find it a lot easier than we did, but hopefully, if we ever go back, now we'll be prepared. Alex and I do hope to go back to finish the hike someday, but for now, I'll take just having made it to the top of that gorgeous, unbelievable mountain

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