

YEARBOOK MAGAZINE

*Achieving the
Now*



EDITOR'S LETTER

We're only halfway through 2025, and already it feels like a year that will be remembered. Not because it's easy to define, but because it refuses to be.

When I first imagined this magazine, it was out of a feeling I couldn't shake: rejection. From jobs, from systems, from the future I thought I was working toward. Around me, headlines spoke of war, of women's rights eroded, of AI reshaping our lives faster than we could process. The ground felt unstable. Optimism, scarce.

I know I write this from a place of privilege—raised in the Netherlands, now living in London. My distance from crisis is real. Still, the shift was undeniable. I could feel history tilting. Trump's re-election. Gaza still burning. "Male loneliness" turned into an excuse for misogyny. The word "oligarchy" suddenly relevant to daily life. These weren't just stories; they were markers of a world in transition.

And yet, history is rarely told by the people living through it. More often, it's written by those with power—the ones who get to decide what is remembered. While the world was changing, our voices risked being lost in the margins.

So I started listening. To friends, to musicians, journalists, grandparents, activists. I expected despair, but what I found was fire—a will to change, to be the change. Where I felt helpless, others were carving out meaning. Where I felt rejection, they insisted on resistance.

That's when the idea shifted. YEARBOOK would not be about defeat—it would be about documenting the moment we're in, honestly and urgently. To capture not just events, but emotions. Not just history, but memory.

Because when we look back on 2025, what will matter isn't only what happened. It's how it felt to be here.

This is YEARBOOK. Archiving the now.

Frederike
Herkstroter

Flop **GROWTH**

unstable
hectic

chaos

WW3

Child's
Play

EXCITING!

C R

WILD

**What word describes 2025?
We asked our readers to
describe 2025 to us
in a word.**

THE GREAT

ANXIETY

RESET

HECTIC

transitional *Marchid*

ambness

surreal

ONGOING **Fulfilling**
CONCERN

RAZY

pivotal

overwhelm

Disaster

morbid

fascination

ONGOING
CONCERN

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BEYOND

THE FEED

Well, nothing really fits me, so I just pulled out this top. I asked 'is it too much belly'; until I realised, there's never too much belly!!



Algorithms Are Dressing Us & Personal Style Is Vanishing

In a time when algorithms seem to dress us before we even open our wardrobes, the idea of personal style is getting a little blurry. Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, they serve us the same trends, the same aesthetics, the same silhouettes, on loop. We save the same images, shop the same pieces, copy the same influencers, and the result is an overwhelming sense of sameness.

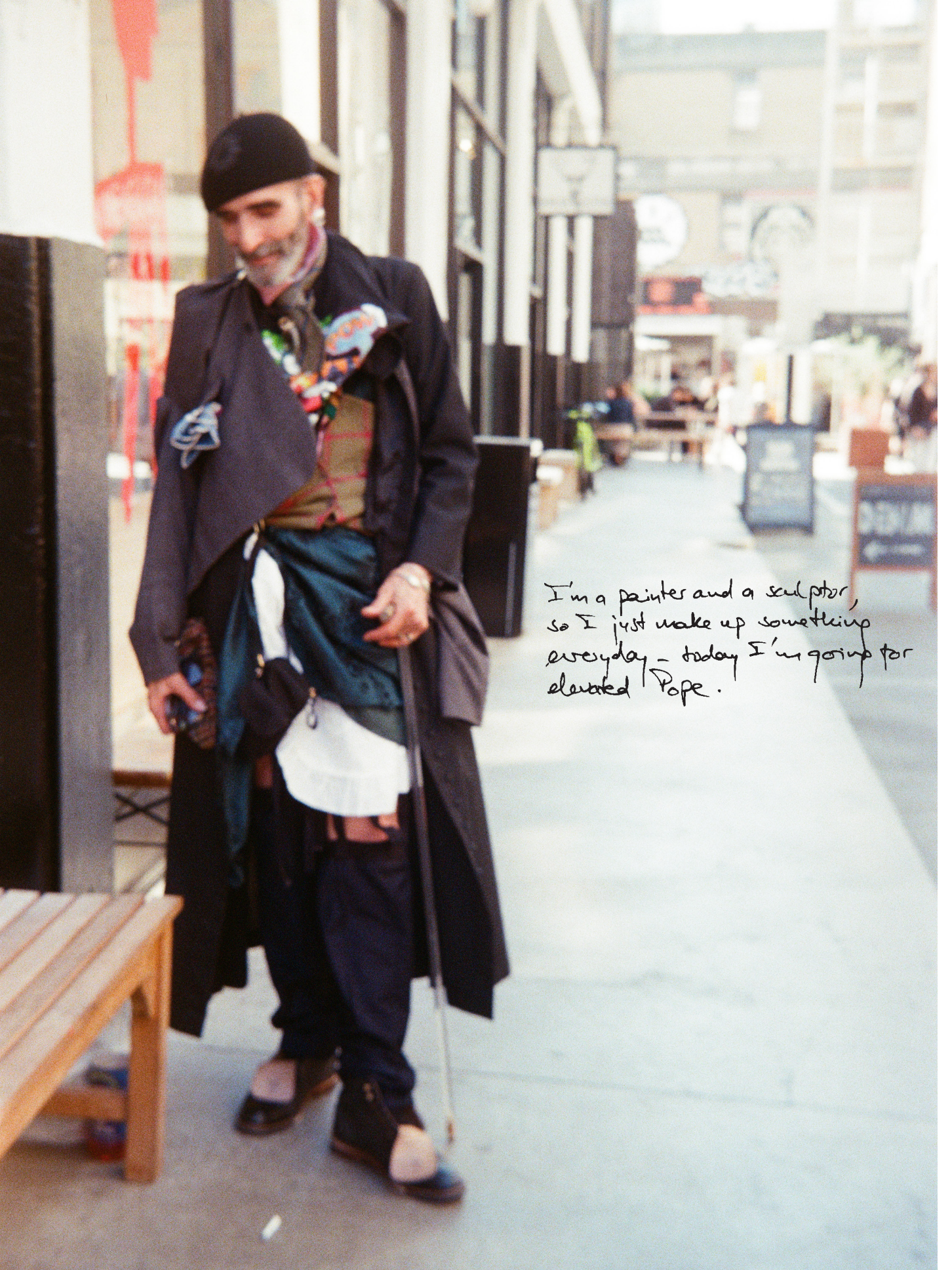
Online, “personal style” is carefully curated using ready-made trinkets we’re told to add to our baskets in the name of “randomness” and personality. But that true Jane Birkin-esque self-ness—dressing for functionality and personal preference, nothing more, nothing less—feels lost. At least digitally.

Luckily, not everyone’s playing by those rules. As a countermovement against algorithm-fed inspiration, street style and personal

style have come to a rise again. Not buying into trends or wanting to look certified “cool”, seem to bring us the most exciting and fun outfits—the only genuine displays of personal style left.

So, photographer **Rekha Rao** took to the streets of Shoreditch, London, to see what personal style looks like in real life. No butter yellow, no pre-made keychains to ironically emulate a personal touch, and certainly no Adidas sambas—just outfits built on preference and functionality. Raw, expressive, sometimes chaotic, or perhaps even subtle, each outfit captures the personal choices that can’t be pinned to a moodboard.

We asked everyone just one question: *What inspires your style?* Not *who*, not *which trend*, but *what*. The answers were surprising, honest, and often had nothing to do with fashion at all. So, here is to dressing for yourself, not your feed.



I'm a painter and a sculptor,
so I just make up something
everyday - today I'm going for
elected Pope.



I GUESS JUST BEING CONNECTED,
BEING INSPIRED BY OTHERS





This is my
"5-minutes to get
ready look". It's just
whatever speaks
to me honestly

The second I stopped cooking,
That's when it all came together





I want to be different.
We're not originally from this
country, so we already "don't
belong" — might as well stand
out even more!

**Young,
Mild &
Free:
No More
Drinking for Gen-**

Everyone's had that night—the one where you wake up with a dry mouth, a pounding head, and a creeping sense of dread. You scroll through your texts with one eye open, terrified of what you might have said, done, or worse, what you don't remember. You dodge your friends' stories with a sheepish laugh and a desperate "please don't tell me."

To anyone born before the year 2000, this used to be a rite of passage. Not for Gen Z.

While Millennials and older generations drank their way into adulthood, Gen Z is increasingly opting out as the "young, wild and free" motto has turned "young, **mild**, and free". But Gen Z's revolt against alcohol isn't self-righteous or loud. It's more like a quiet exit through the side door—fewer regrettable texts, fewer blackouts, fewer "what happened last night?" horror stories.

But why would an entire generation walk away from something once synonymous with coolness, freedom, and fun?

Throughout our youth, drinking is everywhere. With the first sign of sun, people dive onto terraces with a cold beer in hand, a cigarette in the other. Anyone shamelessly announcing "I'm not drinking" gets the automatic mix of admiration and pity: "I could never, but good for you." Alcohol has long been shorthand for joy,

for connection, for confidence.

In 2023, the global alcoholic beverages market was valued at \$1.64 trillion. It's not just marketed as fun anymore—it's part of a curated, aspirational lifestyle. The glass of red next to a book. The cocktail on a rooftop at golden hour. It's all been made to look effortless and chic. But Gen Z isn't buying it.

As much as we love to hate social media, it's changed everything. People are also socializing less, especially in person. According to *The Times*, average in-person social time dropped from 30 hours a month in 2003 to just 10 in 2020—that's under three hours a week. Fewer parties, fewer pre-games, fewer reasons to drink.

Most of all, alcohol has lost its edge. Thanks to social media, kids can perform adulthood in countless ways—chatting to boys, accessing inappropriate content, or posting provocative TikTok dances. Being drunk simply doesn't scream "grown-up" anymore. If anything, it disrupts the carefully curated persona demanded online.

Growing up, Gen Z has never known a world without constant visibility. Not drinking has become a way to maintain control, since there's no margin for mistakes when every moment can be captured and shared within seconds. Having lost the ability to embrace our humanness, what might once have been "a funny video from a night out" to millennials, now feels horribly shameful in a culture that demands perfection to Gen Z.

That same pressure shapes beauty ideals: standards have shifted from unrealistic to outright punishing. On TikTok and Instagram, youth isn't just admired, it's demanded.

Ten-year-olds buy anti-aging serums, and preteens follow skincare routines that rival dermatologists, as the obsession with youth is instilled from, well, youth.

Alcohol simply does not fit that picture. It's bloating, bad for your skin. It gives you puffy eyes and brain fog and hangovers that are anything but Instagram-worthy. Even worse, it's full of empty calories, and—in a world where Ozempic has made thinness both trend and status symbol—alcohol feels indulgent and obsolete.

But it's not all surface. According to the WHO, younger generations are caring more about their mental and physical well-being than those before them. Perhaps they see alcohol for what it is: a substance that clouds your brain, accelerates aging, and sometimes makes you cry in public for no real reason.

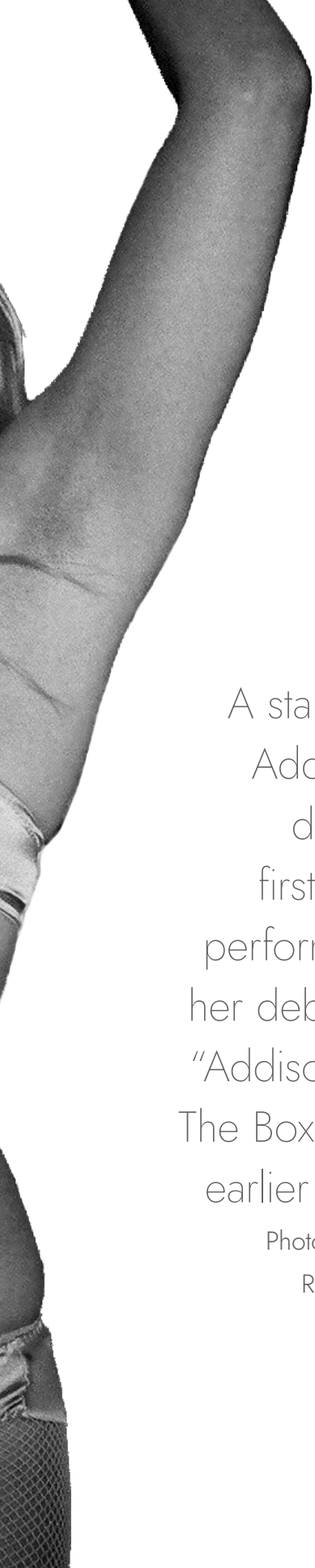
Still, there's something bittersweet about the shift. Alcohol, for all its flaws, gave teens the courage to be messy. Finishing that second (cheap) beer and finally kissing your crush. Drinking away puberty's awkwardness and striking up a conversation with someone new. Or completely screwing up, making it weird, and learning to survive the fallout. In many ways, for better or for worse, alcohol helped previous generations stumble into growing up.

Still, it's clear Gen Z doesn't need alcohol to grow up, leaving everyone else to wonder: how do they do it?

Perhaps developing social skills is now done online, in therapy, through self-awareness and better boundaries. And, while it's vastly different, it may be healthier—better, even. Or maybe, just maybe, those computer-taught kids will grow up trading hangovers for digital burnout and chronic social anxiety. But at least this time, we won't blame it on the booze.

**IS
MUSIC
REALLY
DEAD?**





A star is born:
Addison Rae
during her
first-ever live
performance of
her debut album
“Addison” in the
The Box, London
earlier this year.

Photo by Stephanie
Rutcofsky, 2025

Mourning and reimagining the meaning of music

In June of this year, Addison Rae released her debut album *Addison*. Anticipation for the project ran high, fueled by widespread online debate about her “authenticity” and artistic direction—conversations that quickly became the centerpiece of music magazines. For the first time in a long while, Rae, a former TikTok star, has brought a blend of familiarity and novelty to her artistry.

Her music is dissonant yet dreamy, paired with mystifying visuals reminiscent of an experimental student film, balanced by Rae’s confident and candid performance. The result is something unexpectedly mesmerizing. **It seems that Addison Rae is what music has been missing.**

In 2025, all pop songs have grown to sound alike: raw, heart-felt guitar acoustics sung by a belting folksinger in love, a highly over-produced pop song with a disappointing, predictable refrain, or an “empowering” song about how much a previous boyfriend absolutely sucked. But the worst ones? The songs that are oh-so-carefully curated to

ensure a number one spot within the TikTok algorithm. No imperfections, no storytelling, no controversy – just a three-beat tune, with a catchy one liner to ensure a trend on the social media horizon.

It begs the question: in 2025, is music finally dead?

Once, the act of turning on the radio or choosing a record made music tangible—an experience we carved out time for. Today, the contrast couldn’t be sharper: songs trail us everywhere, from public bathrooms to supermarkets, streaming endlessly through our earbuds as we multitask through the day. Always on, yet rarely truly heard.

For loyal music lovers, older recordings still carry a charge. The crackle of analog, the rough edges of a vocal take, the spontaneity of an instrumental solo—each reflects the human hand behind the music. There’s a rawness, a soul, that stands apart from today’s slick production.

For others, the soundtrack is different. Pop albums from artists like Dua Lipa, Sabrina Carpenter, and the

singer behind “Ordinary” play on repeat, their polished beats and irresistible hooks sliding easily into daily routines—walks, bus rides, grocery runs, cleaning the house. Now and forever, it seems convenience wins.

And yet, amid this sense of musical stagnation, Addison Rae offers an unexpected reminder. In an interview earlier this year, she spoke enthusiastically about discovering Carly Simon’s *Boys in Trees*, an album that reignited her passion for music.

“When I listen to music, it’s like, ‘Alright, I’m going to listen to music.’ That’s how it used to be—you’d sit down with a record or a CD and just listen. That was the whole moment. And I think that’s such a beautiful and rare experience these days.”

Only recently, the introduction of the iPod in 2001 transformed music into something instantly accessible and just as easily disposable. With shuffle and skip features, listeners no longer sat with unfamiliar or challenging songs. What began as convenience soon reshaped our habits: finishing an album front to back, tolerating a slow build, or even enduring a track we didn’t love fell out of practice. Today, we crave instant gratification—scrolling, skipping, and searching for easily digestible soundbites. Instrumental intros, ten-minute epics, or songs that take their time simply don’t fit. If it can’t work on TikTok, what’s the point?

Jason Derulo’s “comeback era” in the depths of COVID is a telltale example, and perhaps the founding father of this particular shift in music. Songs like “Selfish Love” and “Ta Ta Ta” consisted of no more than 2 repeated chords, with the lyrical creativity of a 10-year-

old on Garage Band, specifically curated to cater to TikTok algorithms. While commercial gain in music is nothing new, social media seems to have accelerated its central role. As strategy takes precedence, the soul and originality of music are slowly suffocated.

With time and technology, the definition of “what it means to be an artist” has also changed accordingly. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, centralize and prioritize superficial expression above artistry, and more and more the line between

“Music isn’t dead, not really. We just have to resurrect what it can mean to us.”

artist and art is blurred. It seems only hot people get to make music now. If you don’t perform well on socials, there is no career for you.

Sabrina Carpenter, begging her boyfriend to “Please, Please, Please” be better with a snaggle tooth, squeezing into a bodysuit at size XXL would likely become a meme with today’s beauty standards, before it would ever become a hit. Yet, it seems the tide is beginning to turn.

After years of chasing “perfection” through digital editing—growing numb to real-life excitement—people are reaching back for

meaning and relatability. No more filters, no more polish. What resonates now is raw, honest, real music.

Artists like Addison seem to understand this shift. Her social media presence embraces the unfiltered—cellulite, imperfect rehearsal clips, and lyrics that lay bare intrusive, honest thoughts. It’s an essence that satisfies the craving for something recognizable, something tangible. More than that, her candid admission of wanting fame resonates: ambition is no longer something to hide, but to respect and admire.

Before Rae, Billie Eilish took the world by storm with her haunting honesty and





delicate depth. Only last year, Chappell Roan rose to fame with her lyrical frankness and raw expression. Charli XCX, too, owns imperfection with bold, unfiltered realness. Their power? Refusing to conform, and making space for the messy, the honest, the deeply human.

The legendary David Bowie said it best: *"If you feel safe in the area you're working in, you're not working in the right area."* And Rae agrees. Speaking to Zane Lowe, she explains:

"I find a lot of compliments in weirdness and uncomfortability. I think it's the best way to provoke someone; making them feel the way they don't feel comfortable, or even embarrassed, to feel."

So, perhaps not all hope is lost.

But while artists like Rae are doing their part, it's up to us, listeners, to nurture music like the art form it is – not a streamable, shareable, forgettable thing. To listen with intention. To rediscover the albums, listen patiently to the imperfections, the songs we may not like, the stories told, and perhaps even find inspiration in the uncomfortable.

Because music isn't dead, not *really*. We just have to resurrect what it can mean to us.

finding friends offline

**stella's
supperclub
is here to help**



Stella's Supperclub in Utrecht offers young women a way to connect offline over simple, home-cooked meals. What began as founder Merche Ariza Gallego's search for new friends has grown into a monthly gathering where conversation flows as easily as the food.

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At 25, many of us encounter a "quarter-life crisis." Much like a classic midlife, the same existential question is raised: *What do I want to do with the rest of my life?* As we transition from the predictable structure of school into the open-ended uncertainty of adulthood, a deep sense of discomfort is almost inevitable. And no one is immune. But between finding a job, wanting to travel the world "before it's too late", or just not having a clue at all, one important change is often overlooked: the changes in our friendships.

One friend is earning a master's, another an undergraduate degree, and a third has just started a first "real" job—life paths inevitably diverge and a sense of loneliness, after years of being in the same boat, starts to creep in.

Despite the rise of social media, forming real friendships has become harder as we hide behind our screens. Gen Z—often described as the lonely generation—consequently spends more time online than with each other. Merche Ariza Gallego, 27, knows this experience all too well.

After moving to Utrecht in 2023 to live with her boyfriend and start her career as a freelancer, she found herself isolated. "Working from home didn't work for me at all and, before I knew it, I had nearly no social contact in the city." She continues, "Don't get me wrong, I love being alone," Merche says, "but after a while, that loneliness becomes depressing." In November of 2023, that

would change and Stella's Supper Club was born.

Driven by her solitary boredom—where most good ideas are born—Ariza launched Stella's Supper Club, a monthly dinner meet-up for young women looking to connect offline. Through Instagram (@stellas_supperclub), Merche invites strangers to join her for a casual dinner at her home, creating a space where real-world connections could form organically. The idea was simple: "it shouldn't be complicated—just friends eating together."

Being 27, Ariza understands how life after school can suddenly feel overwhelmingly serious. "The way I see it is: It's like you go to secondary school and suddenly you're not allowed to play with dolls anymore. Everything becomes more serious, from relationships to work," she explains. "That's why a group like this is so comforting. Life is heavier, but it's good to talk about it."

Though the monthly dinners have helped more than 80 young women forge new connections—combating Gen-Z's loneliness epidemic—Merche is candid about her initial motivations: "The point was, 'I need to meet new people!' It wasn't about saving the world from loneliness, as other interview-articles have claimed." Merche admits, "In the end, I really did it for myself."

Preparing the meals herself, days in advance, the laid-back spirit defines the club. Looking ahead, she plans to keep Stella's Supper Club true to its roots: "I want to keep a kind of clumsiness – nothing too complicated, just nice chatting."

So, if you're feeling a little lonely, or just eager to meet new faces offline, Stella's Supper Club might be just what you need.

**“It wasn’t
about saving
the world from
loneliness...
In the end,
I really did
it for myself”**



PRINT ISN'T DEAD

It's just moved to Clerkenwell

Why Gen Z is rediscovering the power of magazines and how
Jeremy Leslie's MagCulture is leading the charge.



Imagery courtesy of www.MagCulture.com

When Jeremy Leslie opened MagCulture in 2015—a bright, tightly curated magazine shop on 270 St John Street in Clerkenwell—the print industry was widely believed to be in its death throes. But Leslie, a former creative director and long-time champion of independent publishing, saw things differently.

What started as a blog in 2006 became a physical space dedicated entirely to magazines: reading them, collecting them, but specially celebrating them. With their 10th anniversary coming up this year, MagCulture is more relevant than ever—not in spite of the digital age, but because of it. As Gen Z grows increasingly disillusioned with algorithm-fed content, a new wave of readers is turning to magazines for something slower, more tangible, and more intentional. With 600 magazines in store at all times, MagCulture has become a source of inspiration and even a social hub for the new generation.

Print is once again cool—it's back, and better than ever.

We sat down with Jeremy to talk about risk, resilience, and why, against all odds, the future of print might just be in the hands of the next generation.

MagCulture was established as a physical shop in 2015, at a time when digital media was rapidly eclipsing print. Many would have seen this as a risky move. What made you confident that there was still value perhaps even urgency in creating a space dedicated solely to magazines?

I'm sure there were people who thought it was a crazy idea to start a shop focused on print. The name *MagCulture* actually goes back to 2003, and then became the blog in 2006—that's when it really started to become what it is today: an agency for print. Even back then, people were saying print was dying, so we were already used to that narrative. In some ways, it was useful. It gave us something to push against.

There were a few reasons I opened the shop. First, I saw so many great magazines being made that weren't being showcased properly. By 2015, I'd been writing about this new generation of magazines for almost a decade. I just wanted to give them a proper platform.

Another reason was practical—the space I'd been working in was being turned into luxury flats, and I needed to move. I thought, maybe this is the time to do the thing I've always wanted: open a shop.

And the third reason was from traveling. Cities like Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin—they all had beautiful magazine shops. I've always lived in London and, sure, you could find the magazines you wanted here, but you had to go to five or six shops to get them. I thought: London deserves better.

In the end, all those reasons aligned. But really, I just wanted to try. Because if someone else had done it before me—that would've really annoyed me.

How did people respond to you – did people voice their doubt or did you ever doubt it yourself?

Looking back, it was a complete jump in the dark. I had no retail experience. No idea what I was doing.

When you see pictures of the shop when it first opened, it looks so bare—we had about half the number of magazines we have now. Looking back it's like, "how did this even work?"

It took us 18 months to feel confident enough to open five days a week—we started with just three. We had strong support from the industry—magazines, publishers, distributors—everyone saw the value in what we were doing. But even then, it took a long time before we made money. The first six years were a real struggle.

During those years, was there ever a time you wanted to shy away from it, or did you always believe in MagCulture's potential?

No, I never thought it was wrong. We had so much support, so much positive feedback and that made it all feel worthwhile. Even when the money wasn't there, we knew people were responding.

But even now, things are unpredictable. I remember someone who ran a magazine shop in Brighton told me: "Don't bother looking for patterns in sales. You can't say, 'last Thursday at lunchtime was busy, let's prep for that again next week.' It just doesn't work that way." It really is day by day. Completely random.

You began your career in graphic design and have since had a successful run in creative direction in publishing. Speaking from that experience, what is it about magazines that continues to inspire you creatively and professionally?

There's something so fundamental about the physical object—it holds all this effort and intention. It's been carefully honed. There's nothing else quite like flipping through a magazine.

There's so much praise for technology, and in that process, I think a lot of publishers forgot what magazines can actually deliver. But there's still a significant group of people who crave that—something visceral. You can over-describe, “over-technicalize”, but at some point, you just want to put a magazine in someone's hands and say, “Here. Just read it.”

We just finished a magazine project for a client—the first from-scratch magazine we've made in years—and it really reminded me how special that process is. We had about twelve people working on it, each bringing different things. We had to figure out the tone, the voice, the feel. It was a group effort, and none of us could have done it alone.

And that's the thing with digital: that's mostly done alone—writing a blog or posting anything on social media. There is no balancing of someone's input of “what if”. There is no collaboration. And that's what makes magazines so human.

As we digitalise more and more, what can magazines offer that online can't?

There's always this desire to simplify everything—black or white, yes or no. But the world's not like that. Magazines deal with that kind of complexity in a far more satisfying manner. They have space for grey areas, there is space for contrary views that aren't so in-your-face, for people to make proper arguments. There is space for communication on a decent human level, for surprise, for serendipity.

All the things that used to be on a digital platform but have now been squeezed out by algorithm and AI slop. It's such a circular motion: it's all about making more of the same stuff to be seen. Magazines still progress and still move forward. Of course, digital has its positives—we use Instagram too. It's not about rejecting it. It's about knowing what each platform is good for. There's space for both.

Do you think independent magazines could shape the public more than social media could?

I'd love to see that. But it's frustrating how few people seem to be trying. The digital space has been poisoned by the toxic right, while somehow print has leaned more left. It's interesting.

There's a real gap between what's happening at the top of government and how people are actually feeling on the ground. I think people are more open-minded than the internet would have you believe. Magazines could really help people reconnect with nuance and conversation again—especially locally.

I think a lot of people who don't regularly read magazines would still relate to them—they just might not be able to articulate why. That makes me wonder if there's space for bigger publishers to step in and fill that gap. Maybe we'll see big right-wing magazines again, representing a different experience, but still using print as the medium.

What, according to you, are the magazines of the future?

Apartamento, The Gentlewoman, MacGuffin — there are so many. Especially in the fashion space, although I do think there's room for improvement there.

What matters is that magazines have their own identity. Their own idea. They should challenge people to enjoy them — not just feed expectations. And they should be something the makers believe in.

It's also a great space for experimentation. Some magazines only last two or three issues, and people call that failure — but what amazing things they were. It's not always about business success. It's about creating something that matters to you. And in doing that, especially with others, you discover a lot about yourself.

Besides, magazines are not only escapism, but they are also aspirational—They can transform you, and challenge your perceptions, and that makes them so beautiful.

Lastly, what are you most excited for in the near future for MagCulture?

We've got a few things in the works, but I can't say too much. I'm a believer that if you talk about it, it feels like you've already done it. So sometimes you don't end up doing it at all.

Maybe it's a bit mundane, but we've got our 10th anniversary coming up, so we'll have a party. But along with that comes a lease renewal, so that's the next thing to sort out. I just want to get that done first.

THREADS OF TIME

BY HOLLY SHIH

On July 17th, 2025, at 1:27 p.m., the streets of Taipei erupted into motion. A missile alert flashed across phones citywide, triggering a bomb drill that—by now—has become almost routine. With Chinese pressures growing evermore alarming, the threat to Taiwan no longer feels distant—it's immediate and impending.

But amid the sirens and drills, a quieter erosion persists: the slow disappearance of Taiwan's cultural identity. For decades, the island has grappled with preserving its heritage. Under the weight of modernization and intensifying Chinese influence, historical sites have vanished, and artifacts have been lost—leaving many to mourn what once was.

Threads of Time, a collection by Taiwanese designer Holly Shih, channels that grief into resistance—a call to remember, protect, and wear the essence of Taiwanese heritage with pride. Through sculptural silhouettes and traditional materials, Shih poses the question: *Who will preserve what time threatens to bury?*

Photography: *Lea Chen*

Creative direction: *Frederike Herkströter*

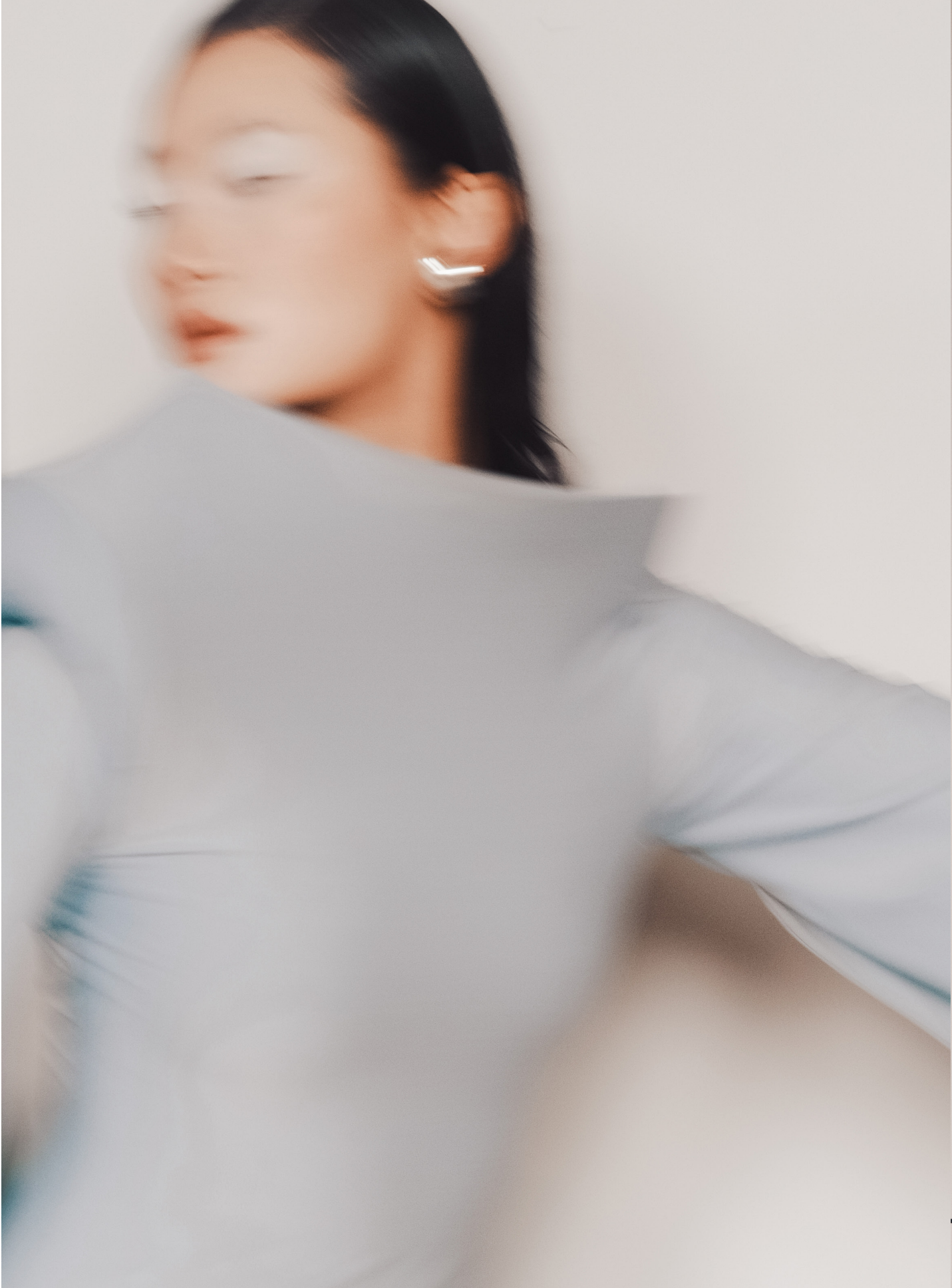
Designer: *Holly Shih*

Styling: *Frederike Herkströter*

Hair & Make-Up: *Lina Levein*


Production: *Frederike Herkströter*





Inspired by traditional Taiwanese iron window grilles, the silhouette plays with shadow and structure—mirroring the dualities within Taiwanese identity: old and new, light and dark.





Plywood—a humble material rooted in traditional Taiwanese architecture—sits at the heart of the collection. Here, it symbolizes both structural integrity and cultural resilience.

Rigid yet refined, the plywood is sculpted into wearable art—styled with 2025's most playful trends: butter yellow and polka dots.







Shih reimagines this season's standout hues—pink and yellow—with a bold, futuristic edge, merging trend and timelessness in a single palette.





EXISTING ANYWAY

Trans Survival and Joy in

2025



In a year marked by escalating anti-trans legislation and rising global bigotry, a new biography “Marsha”, on LGBTQ+ advocate and legend Marsha P. Johnson, arrives as both a tribute and a lifeline.

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Starting her writing process in the early months of 2020, Tourmaline, an artist, writer and now the pre-eminent scholar on the life of Marsha P. Johnson, noted the importance of her story. As quoted by *DAZED*, this book is “a gift to know and a gift to share with the world”, hoping its readers will find inspiration and power in Johnson’s spirit. But why does Marsha P. Johnson’s legacy matter now?

Marsha P. Johnson (1945–1992) was a Black transgender activist, drag performer, and central figure in the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement. She gained national recognition for her role in the Stonewall Riots on June 28, 1969—an uprising against police brutality that became a catalyst for LGBTQ+ liberation movements across North America and beyond—and remained an advocate for marginalized communities until her tragic passing in 1992. To this day, Marsha P. Johnson’s legacy endures as a symbol of resistance, compassion, and radical inclusion within the fight for queer and trans liberation.

At the start of this year, however, hard-earned progress came to a halt with Trump’s presidency. After running a campaign steeped in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, his election once again placed transgender rights on the chopping block. According to the activist group Trans Legislation Tracker, 103 anti-trans bills have already passed in 2025, with another 731 still active. In just the first five months, these numbers represent a doubling from 2024, when 51 such bills were enacted. And while these figures reflect the U.S. political climate, the backlash against transgender rights is part of a broader global trend, as similar legislation and rhetoric gain traction worldwide.

In April, the UK Supreme Court redefined “woman” in law, ruling that anyone not biologically female must be legally recognized as male. Speaking about the decision, Lara, an LGBTQ+ advocate, reflects on what it means to revoke transgender women’s legal recognition as women. “It really does suck, but it didn’t come as a surprise to anyone,” she says with unexpected calm. “Queer and trans communities are always waiting for the ball to drop. Truthfully, the UK just follows the U.S.—only a little later.”

Sacha, another member of the LGBTQ+ community, tries to make sense of why trans people are so often targeted. “It’s something they don’t understand—of course they’re afraid.” Yet, transness has always existed. What’s relatively new is the language to describe it—language that centers lived experience rather than pathologizing difference. The term transgender only entered wider use in the 1970s; before then, most words surrounding gender identity came from medical frameworks, not community life. Still, the use of trans people as scapegoats feels like a more recent phenomenon. As Lara puts it, “The language for trans people simply didn’t exist. And perhaps people just weren’t as aware.”

Only in recent decades have queer identities and possibilities become more visible to the broader public—and that visibility has never been evenly shared. “I’ve always grown up around queer and trans people—it was just normal to me,” Sacha explains. But for many others, that isn’t the case. Without the internet, generations could go their whole lives without knowingly encountering LGBTQ+ people. And for those who did identify as such, offline life rarely offered safe spaces to be open.

“For many, the internet is the only space where they can truly be out,” Lara explains. Social media has amplified voices once silenced, offering visibility that would have been unthinkable in public life just a generation ago. For much of the queer community, these platforms became a beacon—a place to connect, to be heard, and to be represented. Yet Lara underscores the paradox: “At the same time, being online means constantly reminding everyone that you exist.”

For many outside the community, that reminder is perceived as disruption—an unwelcome challenge to entrenched ideas about gender, identity, and love. Expressions of queerness—whether trans, non-binary, or otherwise—are



Photo by Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona, 2022.

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-LARAM



Photo by Thiago Rocha, 2023.

often cast as threats to traditional family structures and rigid social norms. And in times of crisis, when people cling most tightly to what feels familiar, difference becomes an easy scapegoat.

“If you are queer or trans, you are inherently outside the binary,” Lara says. “And that scares people, because you’re undefinable in some way. You don’t fit into normal society. When we’re in danger, we want to conform to the normal.” That sense of danger today is sharpened by a global atmosphere of economic and political instability.

Historically, times of crisis have opened the door for right-wing parties to rise to the forefront of global politics and 2025 is no exception. Their playbook is familiar: empty promises, power grabs, and a constant search for someone to blame for economic decay. Conveniently, the culprit is never capitalism, nor the untaxed wealth of the top 1%, but instead a small, marginalized minority—queer and trans people.

The irony is stark. Trans identities account for just 0.3–0.6% of the global population, according to *Healthline*. In the U.S., that’s around 1.6 million people—barely 0.6% of citizens. Statistically, hardly a threat. Yet right-wing narratives frame gender and sexual diversity as a menace to youth, a danger to impressionable minds. Sacha sighs, “We’re not here to take over the world, we just want to live.” But the fight for freedom is unrelenting and exhausting.

Lara sighs, “Why is no one else screaming? Why is no one else in pain?” Rightfully frustrated, she adds, “We want people outside our community to be talking to us, not just about us. Cis and straight people have the power to make us look less threatening. It shouldn’t just be on us.” After all, allyship isn’t about centering yourself, but rather about doing what you can—even when it’s uncomfortable. Luckily, many do.

In 2025, protests for trans rights erupted worldwide in response to mounting legislation and rising hate. In Berlin, thousands filled Alexanderplatz in March, waving trans flags and chanting, “*We won’t be erased.*” In São Paulo, activists staged a multi-day occupation outside government buildings to oppose healthcare restrictions targeting trans youth. Even in countries where LGBTQ+ visibility is criminalized, underground networks in Uganda, Poland, and parts of Southeast Asia organized candlelight vigils and digital campaigns, using encrypted channels to spread information and signal solidarity. Whether public or covert, these acts make clear: the struggle is not confined to any single nation. It is a global outcry, a collective refusal to be silenced.

And yet, even as LGBTQ+ communities and their allies continue to exist boldly and visibly, the question lingers: where do we go from here? More urgently still—what does survival look like in times such as these?

According to Sacha, the need for connection is deeper than ever. “Loss

of community isn’t just queer, it’s everywhere. There is this need to find community elsewhere and that space isn’t the internet.” Ultimately, real-world solidarity—whether through family, allyship, or protest—remains irreplaceable. Especially now.

For Lara, the answer to how to move forward is simple, though far from easy: “You can’t fight hate with hate. You fight it with joy,” she says. “The bravest thing to do is to exist anyway. To love anyway. I can’t singlehandedly stop my rights from being taken. All I can do is exist.”

Sacha puts it more plainly: “We are not gonna go away.”

That act of existence—public, joyful, and unapologetic—is itself resistance.

Remembering Marsha P. Johnson’s story today feels not only historical but revolutionary. Her joy, defiance, and insistence on visibility remain acts of resistance that still echo. The path forward is lit by a long lineage of trans struggle, rooted not just in survival, but in organizing, mutual aid, and protest. These movements remind us that resistance is not new, but inherited—a torch passed through generations, fueled by the courage of those who dared to live loudly, demand justice, and care for one another when institutions would not.

As Johnson herself once asked,

“How many years has it taken people to realize that we are all brothers and sisters and human beings in the human race?” In 2025, let’s make sure it’s not one year more.

20

25

It Isn't All Bad: Positive News Stories from

As the world flips the final pages of 2025, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the hard headlines. But zoom in just a bit, and you'll find something else: breakthroughs, bounce-backs, and big wins for people and the planet. Here's a look back at the moments that made us feel a little more hopeful this year.

1

A Potential Universal Cancer Vaccine

In a breakthrough that could reshape cancer treatment, researchers at the University of Florida have developed a powerful mRNA-based vaccine that prompts the immune system to target multiple cancer types. As reported by *The Sun* and *Inside Precision Medicine*, the treatment has shown the ability to shrink or eliminate tumors in mice, offering real hope for a universal cancer vaccine. Human trials may be on the horizon.

2

Trees, Trees, and More Trees

Environmental restoration is gaining ground. According to the United Nations' SDG partnerships platform, Ethiopia's Green Legacy Initiative has planted billions of trees in recent years. Meanwhile, Canada's federal "2 Billion Trees" program is well underway, reforesting huge areas to support biodiversity and fight climate change. These are tangible steps toward a greener planet.

As we close the book on 2025, one thing is clear: even in a year full of challenges, humanity didn't stop trying. From classrooms to conservation zones, hospital labs to diplomatic tables, people showed up—with ideas, compassion, and resilience. The world isn't perfect, but these moments remind us that it's still moving forward.

Here's to carrying the good stuff with us into 2026.



The Revival of the Northern White Rhinos

As reported by Scripps Research, scientists have completed the genome of the critically endangered northern white rhino—a crucial step toward creating embryos and potentially restoring the species. Using stem cell and surrogate technologies, conservationists hope to see the first calf born as soon as 2025. It's a rare, hopeful chapter in the story of extinction.

4

Education Reimagined Through AI

AI is making education more accessible and engaging worldwide. According to *Axios*, OpenAI has partnered with Instructure to bring ChatGPT tools directly into the Canvas learning platform, assisting teachers with lesson planning and grading. In India, the government's SOAR initiative (as covered by *The Times of India*) is teaching students AI skills starting in grade 6, giving a generation the tools to thrive in a tech-driven world.

5

Peace Talks in the Horn of Africa

While conflicts persist, diplomacy is making quiet strides. According to *AP News*, Ethiopia and Somalia have resumed talks over the Somaliland port dispute, with Turkish mediation facilitating dialogue. Although fragile, these talks offer a rare moment of constructive engagement in a region long plagued by unrest.

Little Treat Culture : Coping with High Costs One Matcha at a Time

Hate them or love them, Labubu's are everywhere and they are here to stay. In an age of rising living costs, where housing is unaffordable, groceries are climbing, and traditional financial milestones feel out of reach, younger generations are finding joy in the smallest of places—from \$6 matcha lattes to enamel pins and Labubu bag charms—this cultural shift (affectionately dubbed “little treat culture”) has become a defining way for Gen Z and young millennials to economically engage with fashion, society, and self-care.

An Instagram Reel by cultural analyst Eugene Healey (@eugbrandstrat) perfectly captures the essence of a growing trend. Declaring that “our little treats are here to stay,” Healey highlights the tiny indulgences that bring a spark of happiness: getting your nails done, picking up a bag charm, buying a cute snack (most ideally Instagram-worthy)—all small gestures that signify wealth in a time when actual wealth is increasingly out of reach. In 2025, it's all about the joy of the small, the

intentional, and the emotionally gratifying—but this isn't just a vibe, it's a response to economic reality.

With real wages stagnating and essential costs like rent, food, and transportation rising, many young people are simply priced out of bigger purchases. Homeownership, luxury fashion, and even full-priced concert tickets are often unattainable. “Although many Gen Z-ers do not feel financially secure, more than half say they buy themselves a small treat at least once a week”, *The New York Times* reports. Still wanting to participate in consumer culture and maintain social relevance, little treats have become not only emotional coping mechanisms but substitutes for larger lifestyle experiences.

Brands have taken note. **Erewhon**, a high-end grocery store often criticized for its unattainable price points, has leaned fully into the logic of little treat culture, positioning its offerings more like luxury goods than essentials. Its smoothies—frequently launched in collaboration with influencers or celebrities—now retail for up to

\$30, offering consumers the feeling of indulgence and exclusivity, without actual access to the wealth or status that true luxury once represented. The appeal lies in proximity: you're drinking the same smoothie as a celebrity, even if you can't afford their lifestyle.

Fashion too—once defined by large purchases and seasonal wardrobes—has adapted as Gen Z engages through micro-trends, thrifting, and collectible accessories. A \$12 enamel pin or \$20 charm becomes a fashion statement just as potent, and far more accessible, than a \$1000 handbag. These objects carry symbolic weight: they communicate aesthetic, personality, and a sense of identity, all for a fraction of the price. Again, such (albeit small) purchases have become aspirational, a way to exude, and seemingly participate in, wealth without the price tag.

What sets little treat culture apart is its digital feedback loop. On Instagram and TikTok, even the smallest purchase becomes a moment worth sharing: a carefully angled matcha in golden hour light, a shot of bag charms clipped just so, or a video of a freshly done manicure. The performance of treating yourself—documented, liked, and reposted—reinforces the value of the treat itself. These rituals speak in a quiet but clear language: *I'm still participating.*

But there's irony here, too. Gen Z is acutely aware of its financial constraints, and small purchases, while comforting, risk becoming emotional crutches. *The New York Times* notes that of those Gen Z-ers who regularly buy themselves

treats, **59% say it leads to overspending.** "Buy now, pay later" apps and instant-delivery services make it easier than ever to spend impulsively, said Gregory Stoller, a master lecturer at Boston University. He adds that these treats are often bought on a whim, in places like bakeries or clothing shops, more for the experience than the item itself—a serotonin boost for a much depressed economy.

For most, these tiny indulgences aren't just about consumerism. Today's treats are less about aspiration and more about emotional survival. In 2025, little treat culture isn't a trend, it's a reflection of the times. And right now, those times call for bag charms, Labubu's, matcha, and a fresh set of nails. Because if we can't buy houses, we can at least enjoy overpriced coffee.



The Political Power Behind the Pixie Cut

FLIRTED TO

On this particular morning, I walked out with confidence. My freshly cut hair fell just right, my heels clicked perfectly against the sidewalk, and my new sweater tied everything in—I was looking good. Ready to head to my dinner plans, I ran to the grocery store, picking up some ingredients. I had promised to make brownies—big mistake. In a rush, I turned a corner to the next aisle too quickly and crashed straight into someone.

“Oh, I’m sorry, sir,” he said without hesitation.

I’m sorry... Sir?

The mascara. The pink-striped scarf. The red-painted nails. The heels. None of it registered, apparently. Had he just said “sir?”

Four months earlier, I had cut my hair short, into a pixie. It was a bold move, a change for my personal aesthetic. But the change went beyond my style.

With long hair, men smiled at me. They said thank you, graciously giving up their seats on the bus out of kindness (or something like it). With that attention also came catcalling, unsolicited flirting, and lingering stares on public transport, but for the sake of argument: *I was seen*. With short hair, it’s as if I’ve been wiped off the “eligible ladies” list entirely—it seems I was no longer a lady at all.

Fast forward to today’s incident: I wish I could say it was the first since the haircut, but it was misgendering offense number four. “Bruv,” “dude,” even “mister” had already been tossed my way

in recent weeks. My confidence wavered—could a haircut alone really make men so indifferent?

This March, the Netflix mini-series *Adolescence* struck the world with a message at exactly the right time (or perhaps far too late). It tackled the growing danger of the online “manosphere”: a digital culture where male influencers like Andrew Tate have become alarmingly influential among young men – a movement still overlooked by many (including myself).

Claiming “women are property” and “sex is a man’s right”, Tate has gone on to establish a globally known brand with a mass following. According to *The Independent*, a UK poll of 1,200 men aged 16 to 24 found that **45% had a positive view of Andrew Tate**, while only 26% viewed him negatively. When asked why, many answered: “He wants men to be real men,” or “He gives good advice.”

As children, what we consume becomes our truth. Just as fairytales were as real as the earth is round, young boys now absorb messages like “women are the property of men” from self-appointed father figures like Andrew Tate. To them, there’s no reason not to believe it, and who can blame them, they haven’t yet developed the tools to question authority—especially when it affirms their power. And so, these boys grow up carrying that truth into adulthood.

Entering the real world, encountering women who aren’t tethered to a stove or waiting for male validation, is a rude

FORGOTTEN

awakening—perhaps even a sense of rejection, disobedience. One might cry at such disappointment, but Tate suggests manifesting emotion into activity: “hitting the gym,” or simply “being a man” and “sucking it up”. Denial curdles into resentment and rejection becomes betrayal, and, ultimately, betrayal demands consequences.

It becomes: *How do I solve this disobedience?* And too often, the answer is violence.

In 2024, *The Guardian* reported that one woman was murdered by a man every three days in the UK. Government data further revealed that 92% of female homicide victims were killed by men, and 78% of the perpetrators were current or former partners—numbers that are eerily understandable with Tate as a central figure of male “wisdom”.

Leaders like Trump have also given this cultural shift policy-level power. From dismantling DEI initiatives, campaigning against abortion, and the sheer fact of being convicted for sexual assault, Trump’s presidency condemns hostility to women’s futures.

Enter: the pixie cut. In recent months, the pixie cut has returned to fashion, with young women opting for a short coupe as a quiet form of rebellion. And it’s nothing new.

Back in the 1880s, women began cutting their hair short for practical reasons. Long hair was heavy, painful, and inconvenient. Yet even this seemingly simple choice provoked outrage. Fashion historian Nicole Rudolph notes how male-run newspapers of the

time labeled short-haired women as grotesque:

“There is no fun in gently stroking a head that has nothing but stubble... For heaven’s sake, don’t let us have bald-headed ladies!”

Coinciding with the First Wave of Feminism, the short haircut became a symbol of female defiance—not because women claimed it as such, but because of how men responded to it. What had been innocent in intent, became revolutionary. Before long, short hair was a marker of freedom and revolt.

The 1920s saw flapper bob: fun, wild, unapologetically un-domestic. The 1990s a grunge pixie: gritty, anti-establishment, raw. Time and again, whenever politics push women into a corner, women cut their hair and push back.

The resurgence of short-do’s in 2025 is therefore no surprise, as traditional gender roles are trending once more. Trends like “the trad wife aesthetic” glorify soft-spoken, well-groomed, ageless, endlessly nurturing, long hair, dressy silhouettes, with a home-cooked meal always ready, as the female blueprint. Alongside a rise in right-wing, male-centered sentiments, beauty trends for women have once more become stereotype. But the pixie cut? It refuses to play along. It exists boldly, unapologetically, and without the male gaze in mind.

In the end, I recovered from the initial shock of being “*sir*” quite quickly, because (I figured) if existing for my own enjoyment means being called “*bro*” ten more times, I’ll take it. Gladly.

ART

WITHOUT

AI





The Surreal Vision of Ben Zank

New York born photographer Ben Zank talks about his fight for authentic, fun—and most of all—man made art.

A faceless, well-suited man appearing as one with a tree, or a pair of legs floating from a traffic sign in the middle of the desert. Perhaps a pavement line, crossing over a body uninterrupted or a man seemingly erupting from the walls. These are images one might encounter when observing the work of 34-year old photographer Ben Zank. Born and raised in New York City, he found his grandmother's Pentax ME Super and immediately fell in love with the art of images. First pursuing photography beyond a hobby at 18, he passionately continues as a photographer today, publishing his first book "Nothing to See" just June of last year.

With years of experience, strictly following a "one photo per day" regime, Zank has trained the eye to spot perfect symmetries and visual opportunities. From his viewpoint, a simple kids slide will become a photo-prop, with the model moulding to its shape, while a basketball court's lines may be matched up perfectly with the lining of the model's clothing—each creating its own bizarre but satisfying visual. He has carefully curated his own visual language and his work has, as a result, become easily recognizable in its absurdity.

**“These Things
Don’t Just
Happen”**





Categorizing his work accordingly as “surrealist absurdism”, his images evoke a feeling of confusion yet excitement. The mind can’t quite comprehend what is in front of it but undeniably acknowledges the artistry that is so clearly at centre. It is hard to fathom how one could dream up such scenes, yet to Zank, it comes naturally.

Describing his creative process to *Metal Magazine*, he explains, “Occasionally



I have an idea that I put planning into. Those images are easy to spot (Road lines, , Going Nowhere, etc.) but due to my spontaneity, most of my work is thought up while I'm shooting. I rely heavily on the location to carry the image through.”

In a time where AI-generated art is rapidly circulating, viewers are now often left wondering: is this even real? For Zank's work, the answer is yes.

As critiques and questions grew, speculating photoshop or even AI, Zank

addressed the longing questions. As for photoshop he told *Metal Magazine*: “It depends on the image. I put most of my photos through extensive retouching to give them a cleaner look and feel”—a natural post-production process. But AI, he won’t touch.

Earlier this year, the photographer took to Instagram to let his followers in on the behind-the-scenes of his work, making sure his creative process was recognized as real, not computer-generated. The caption read, “We live in a world where I need to tell people ‘no AI was used’”—a clear statement against AI’s artistic indolence.

Zank’s Instagram bio reads, “These things don’t just happen”, and in today’s day-in-age, with AI-dawning upon human creativity, this is important to remember: Zank’s commitment to hands-on creativity and spontaneous image-making is a refreshing reminder of what human artistry can achieve. His work doesn’t just challenge perception—it reaffirms the value of imagination, effort, and real-world experience. And right now, that is exactly what we need.





In the age of TikTok therapy and endless trauma talk, feelings have taken over the spotlight. Emotional literacy was meant to empower us—to help name, own, and express the chaos inside. Instead, it's morphed into emotional narcissism: every mood demands a label, every quirk needs a diagnosis, and having a bad day without blaming your "inner child" is apparently unthinkable.

But it's not just that we talk about feelings more. Social media rewrote the rules of emotional connection entirely. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram didn't just hand us new tools to connect—they built stages where vulnerability is a performance, and emotions become content to be packaged, polished, and played for likes. The more dramatic, the more trauma-adjacent, the more viral you become. Real-life messiness—awkward silences, tough conversations, raw imperfection—is edited out or ignored because it doesn't fit the algorithm.

This shift is everywhere. Take the "grandma lifestyle" trend, where twenty-somethings glorify cozy nights in, scrolling and sipping tea instead of going out. It looks peaceful, even wholesome, but beneath the surface, it's a social media-friendly way to dodge discomfort—be it confrontation, risk, or just the unpredictable, messy business of actual human connection. When was the last time holding a friend's hair after too many drinks was something you'd share? Now it's "too uncurated" for the highlight reel.

Friendships have been reshaped by the viral logic of social media. They're reduced to rigid checklists dictated by TikTok "How to Know When Your Friendship Is Dead" videos. Miss a text? You're ghosted. Fall short of impossible emotional standards? Your friendship's over. These digital contracts leave no room for human error or forgiveness. When conflicts come up, instead of talking it out, we disappear—silencing the very conversations that build understanding.

We are more alone than ever: hiding behind screens, cutting off friendships when they do not match TikTok's expectations.

Confrontation itself has become taboo online. Disagreements aren't resolved; they're labeled "boundary violations" and punished with silent disappearances. Screens have turned empathy into an endangered species,

as tough talks give way to avoidance. Without real communication, we turn inward, armed with therapy buzzwords we learned from viral videos to explain—or perform—our feelings.

Everyday moments get sucked into clinical frameworks. Saying "you too" to a flight attendant? Social anxiety. Insisting on paying on a first date? Hyper-independence. Nothing just *is* anymore; it needs a diagnosis, preferably one that makes you feel special or interesting. Personality quirks aren't quirks—they're ADHD or autism. Our uniqueness is pathologized like symptoms needing treatment, as if clinical labels are the only way to make sense of ourselves in a world obsessed with categorization. Meanwhile, our tolerance for boredom, silence, or simply being "human" shrinks faster than a trending hashtag.

This is where social media's design does real damage. These platforms thrive on engagement, and nothing drives attention like emotional extremes. We become addicted to visibility, confusing public performance with authentic connection. Instead of processing feelings privately or with close friends, we broadcast them for applause and validation. The louder and more dramatic, the better. We aren't just sharing—we're self-branding. "Being understood" becomes a metric, "being perceived" a personality.

On TikTok, ordinary experiences become emotional sagas. Choosing sobriety at a party because you're "hypersensitive to energy" isn't just a choice—it's a performance. Comments flood in: "That's ADHD," "You're an empath," "Could be PTSD." In the rush to be seen, every feeling demands a diagnosis; nothing is allowed simply to exist.

Diagnosis has become identity. Our moods, quirks, and traits are clinical shorthand for depth and complexity—a way to sound interesting, deep, or clickable. Self-expression is content; emotions are commodities. And empathy quietly fades away.

Our inner lives are treated like grand narratives, held with dramatic reverence. But without real-world engagement, we broadcast endlessly, cultivating self-focus as a full-time job. The result? Performance over presence, introspection over empathy, curation over messy, shared reality.

That said, therapy TikTok isn't all doom and gloom. For many, it's a lifeline—helping people understand themselves better, normalize mental health struggles, and find community in shared experiences. The language of feelings can be empowering when it leads to self-awareness and healing rather than performance. It's a powerful tool—if we remember it's just one part of a much bigger, messier human story.

But social media's emotional fluency has crossed into overreach. In our isolation, we spiritualize discomfort, pathologize the ordinary, and take ourselves far too seriously.

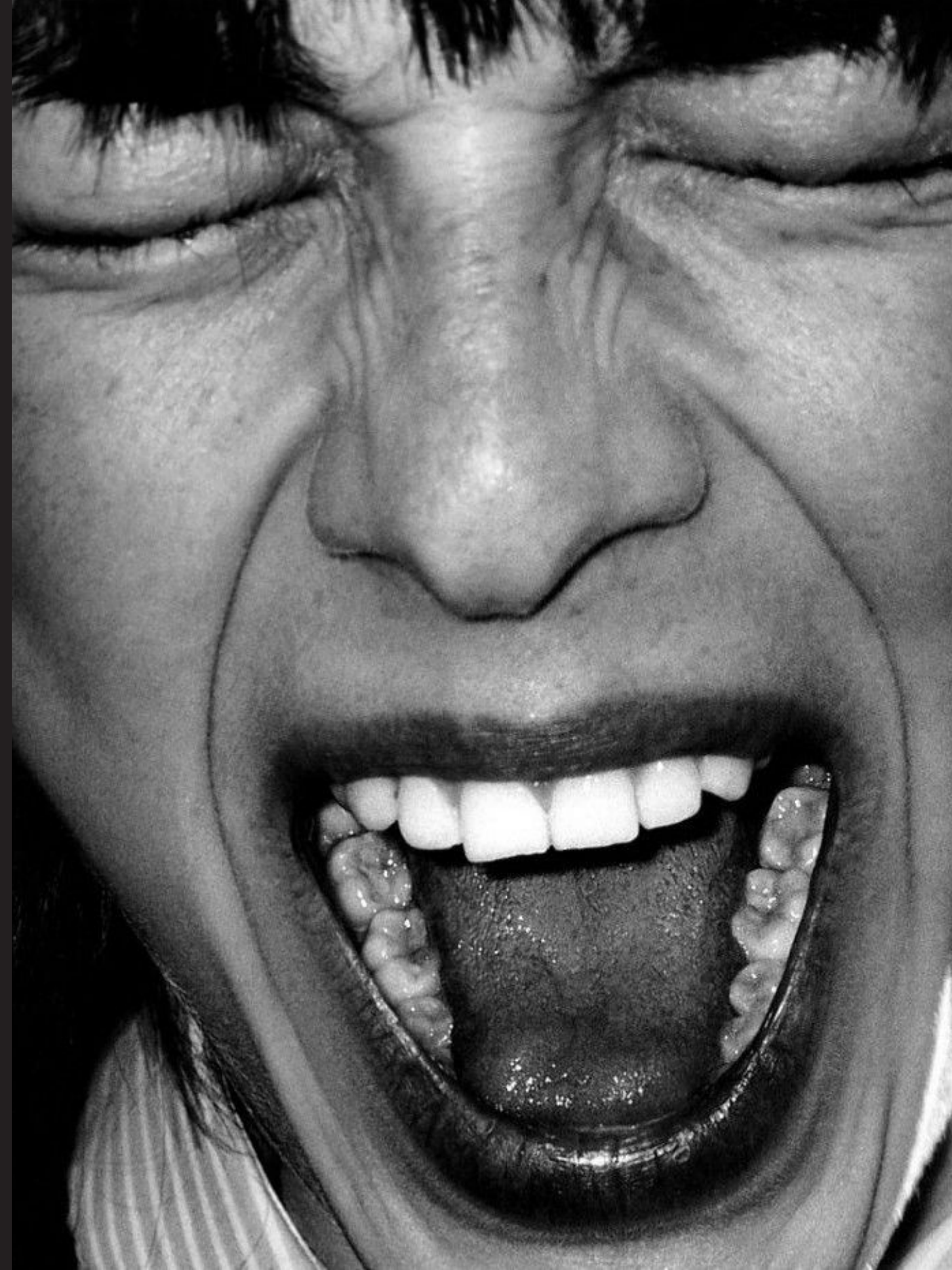
The problem isn't feeling—it's mistaking analysis for connection and diagnosis for identity. When every mistake is a trauma trigger or boundary violation, empathy slips away. We stop giving people the benefit of the doubt. We excuse bad behavior as trauma. Mostly, we rush to label ourselves—not for healing, but for validation and attention.

As emotional narcissism reshapes how we relate, what we need is nuance: the courage to sit with discomfort without diagnosing it, and the humility to accept ourselves and others as gloriously messy humans without explanation.

True, Gen Z may have nailed the language of feelings, but what we desperately need now isn't more awareness—God, no—it's a whole lot more grace.

NOBODY CARES ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS

When Emotional Literacy Becomes Emotional Narcissism



**OW I QUIT
MY PHONE**

Is Living Offline Possible in 2025?

My screen time is six hours a day. And if I'm honest, it's eight. Yours probably is too—though no would actually admit it.

In 2025, not having a phone isn't just inconvenient, it feels impossible. What began as a tool for convenience—constant access, effortless messaging, reliable navigation—has turned into something else entirely. What once helped us now controls us. One study by OnePoll, surveying 17,000 people globally, found the average screen time sits at 5 hours and 48 minutes a day. That's 88 days a year—nearly one-third—spent scrolling.

As we spend more and more time behind screens, society has grown more individualistic and self-serving, accordingly. Shifting public etiquette to cater only to our own needs, phone calls that used to be taken in private now blare shamelessly on speaker in crowded trains, collisions on sidewalks go unacknowledged, eyes glued to screens, and gazing out the window on a train has become a relic of the past—we now scroll, heads bowed, avoiding all human contact. But this transformation isn't just social, it's neurological.

It is no coincidence that in December of 2024, the Oxford Dictionary named “brain rot” word of the year—a silly term to encapsulate a collective feeling of disengagement, chronic distraction, and forgetfulness thanks to our phones. But what we affectionately call “brainrot” has proven to be very real, and our cognitive independence is declining. We're not just addicted; we're rewiring our brains in the process.

Welcoming Artificial Intelligence (AI) to public spheres in 2024, has come to influence our ways of thinking, feeling, and believing information fed to us. According to the Times, a study by MIT's Media Lab, recorded choking results amongst ChatGPT users. Conducting the study amongst 54 subjects—18 to 39 year-olds from the Boston area—each subject was asked to write various SAT essays using OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's search engine, and then nothing at all. MIT's research recorded that, “ChatGPT users had the lowest brain engagement and ‘consistently underperformed at neural, linguistic, and behavioral levels.”

With a decrease in critical thinking and human creation, “digital fatigue” is felt by many across the globe. Unknowingly, there is a desperation to regain a sense of purpose and, above all, human interaction. But how do you unplug from a world designed around being constantly online?

Id always considered myself mindful: no scrolling in public, one book a month, no phones in bed. But after moving to London, alone and broke, my phone became my world. Twenty minutes turned into hours. I woke up craving it. I justified it—I'm a journalist, I need to be online. But I felt the change: anxious, restless, constantly comparing. I knew I needed a change. Courageously, and perhaps naively, I bought a flip phone—I would bravely reject



“WHAT ONCE HELPED US NOW CONTROLS US”

modern technology and live in the past.

I was, however, unprepared for how hard going phoneless would be. Digital payments were no longer an option and ATM's had disappeared silently since online banking—I, too, hadn't noticed, which is part of why they were gone—which was a bummer. After gambling my way through a few small purchases, my card finally declined on a £1.75 bus fare. Still determined, I continued on foot. But at the post office, I hit another wall: I needed a QR code my flip phone couldn't open. The final straw came as I walked home—no navigation, no one around, the sun setting fast, and no idea where I was. I caved and ordered an Uber.

I realized the obvious: the world is built for smartphones. And I was built around mine.

As “punk” as total rejection of my phone felt, it wasn't sustainable. What I needed wasn't rebellion—it was balance. So I stripped my smartphone down to the essentials: calls, texts, email, Safari, Maps. Everything else—Instagram, Snapchat, Vinted—was moved to my iPad. If I wanted distraction, I had to seek it out with intention.

The first day was euphoric. Like an addict in early recovery, I felt a lightness, a quiet pride. I wrote an article, read sixty pages in the sun at London Fields, and managed to make conversation with a few strangers. Life felt immediately calmer, more beautiful—I took notice of things. I arrogantly wondered why I'd ever needed my phone at all.

But my snobbery soon preceded me and, when I got home, withdrawal hit. Determined to

stay strong, I put on Netflix. But after just half an episode (I suppose my attention span had suffered over the past few months), I got restless, cleaned the kitchen, checked Instagram on my laptop four times, baked banana bread, and replaced my bedsheets—anything to stay busy, to distract me from what I truly wanted. Horrified by the true nature of my addiction, I went to bed, and day two came around.

Waking up, I swapped my morning scroll for a book. It wasn't satisfying, at first, but I was far less anxious. I had blamed anxiety on my nature, but maybe it was just the *overload*—news, texts, likes, tragedies, trends—all before 9 a.m.

Throughout the day, admittedly, I kept typing “Instagram” into my browser out of habit. And every time, I felt relief at not having access. I didn't *want* to be online, I just didn't know what else to do.

Day three hit hard. A stressful moment came, and I instinctively wanted to post about it—to my “close friends” story, like I always did. I had gotten into the habit of not personally reaching out to friends whenever I had a dilemma, but instead, I broadcasted it to 40 people—it was an ironic way of avoiding personal contact, without isolating myself. But this time, with no audience, I had to sit with the feeling and I called my boyfriend instead. Within 5 minutes, my problem was solved—no 30 DMs, each with different advice, adding to my inevitable spiral. Just human advice from someone who cared—who (apart from anyone alive before the 21st century) would have thought?

I hadn't realized how reliant I'd become on my phone to regulate my emotions—soothing myself with mindless videos, validating texts from friends, or comforting words found online (therapy TikTok reassuring me about my “anxious attachment style” and “masculine energy”). It was all so self-affirming that genuine reflection often got lost in the noise. It was honestly startling.

By day four, I was suddenly keeping up with messages effortlessly. Before, I'd get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of input—Instagram posts, emails, LinkedIn notifications, the occasional YouTube video, and a constant stream of messages. That flood of content left me too mentally cluttered to actually engage with anyone, even online. But now, with everything else stripped away, messages were all I had to focus on—and engaging conversations became

not only manageable, but genuinely enjoyable.

Day five, I'd become a pro and spent three hours without Wi-Fi on the Eurostar without noticing. I just worked, read, stared out of the train window—it was all satisfaction enough.

Day seven, I ditched ChatGPT for writing. To my surprise, perhaps pathetically, not using ChatGPT for work had become empowering. Writing was slower, yes, but far more satisfying. Everything on paper was *mine*, and the process throughout was, while sometimes frustrating, exciting. Just one year of AI and I had already forgotten what that felt like—how troubling. But how good to be back.

By day ten, I'd become a full-time observer. With nothing else to do on the train—where I spent half my days—I developed a particular (and non-creepy) fascination with families. I found myself decoding their dynamics, entertained yet quietly unsettled. What struck me most was how overlooked children seem to be in 2025. As moms and dads sat hunched over their phones, lost in their screens, their kids delivered full-blown performances—swinging from handlebars, sprinting down aisles, opening strangers' suitcases. Their antics grew increasingly inventive, all in a bid to reclaim their parents' attention—almost always in vain. I couldn't help but wonder: what does that do to a fragile ego, to be constantly performing just to be seen?

Day eleven, was the most exciting. For the first time in months, dopamine was coming from *real* things again: crossing off to-dos, having conversations, finishing work. That tiny buzz from likes and comments was being replaced with something better, something more real. I stopped journaling soon after. Not because I gave up, but because things were going so well.

By day seventeen, my screen time had dropped to 1.5 hours a day—a 78% decrease. And it felt good. My days were longer, calmer. I found joy in the small things again: cleaning, reading, talking, walking. Conversations with friends and family were rarely boring and I no longer grew antsy in desperation of my phone. With fewer digital connections, I found more real ones. I was still on social media, sure, but social media became something I had to *choose*, and that felt freeing. Still, it wasn't all blissful.

In the moments I had lived without a screen, I had come to witness the truth of our

global addiction, and it wasn't pretty. Walking down the street, I was the only one looking up. No one smiled back. No one said thank you when I held the door. No one gave up a seat. The world felt cold, and choosing not to participate in that coldness made me feel alone at times.

Yet, there were glimmers of hope. Small ones. Someone reading a book on the train, making eye contact, giving me a nod of solidarity. Or the tourists holding a fold-out map, asking for directions. A kid who wasn't yet old enough to have a phone smiling at me. The conductor helping me find my travel-route. Or the taxi driver who shared his life story, as they so often do. These moments were small, but so terribly, authentically human. I hadn't realized how deprived and desperate I had been for this kind of contact—real life, awkward, irritating, cute, unexpected, kind moments of interaction. We all need more of it.

Luckily, it's not too late. We are only just beginning to understand what this tech is doing to us—maybe we shouldn't blame ourselves for falling for it. But we do owe it to ourselves to wake up. As research becomes clearer, I hope we listen, I hope we remember our true strength: our humanity and ability to connect and care for one another.

Ultimately, technology *can* be good. And, either way, there is no way without it anymore. It can connect us, help us, inform us—technology *can* still serve us. But only if we remember who's in control.

**“WHAT I
NEEDED
WASN'T
REBELLION
- IT WAS
BALANCE.”**

Gurbet Eller by Selin Yücel

Immigration. A defining conversation in 2025. Amid what many label an “immigrant crisis,” the word *immigrant* has become distorted—reduced to labels like criminal, lazy, uneducated. Across the globe, prejudice intensifies, casting a shadow over the lives of millions—documented and undocumented alike. But beyond the headlines and rhetoric are stories of courage, sacrifice, and resilience.

Selin Yücel, a Turkish-German designer, seeks to reclaim that narrative. Drawing from personal archives—family photographs, oral histories, and lived memory—her collection *Gurbet Eller* (“Foreign Lands”) is an intimate tribute to her grandfather, Ahmet Durna, who left everything behind, his belongings tucked into the pockets of his coat.

Deeply personal yet universally resonant, *Gurbet Eller* is an ode to the immigrant experience—then and now. In reclaiming the word *immigrant*, Yücel’s collection tells a story not of crisis, but of humanity, bravery, and resilience.

Photography: *Mimi Ezinne*

Creative direction: *Frederike Herkströter*

Designer: *Selin Yücel*

Styling: *Frederike Herkströter*

Hair & Make-Up: *Lina Levein*

Production: *Frederike Herkströter*

Assistant production: *Lowri Ashton*

HOME AWAY FROM HOME





To honor her heritage, Yücel worked with Turkish artisans and local communities to create heavy felt coats—traditional in craft, modern in silhouette.



The oversized fit and exaggerated pockets reflect more than function—they hold memories of what's carried, left behind, and held onto.





Thank You

Thank you to everyone who
contributed to this issue.

To our contributors, photographers, illustrators,
and collaborators — your ideas, time, and
creativity shape the heart of this magazine.

Your work continues to define the quality and
character of each issue.

Special thanks to our graphic designer, whose
sharp eye and design sensibility bring clarity and
visual impact to every page.

This magazine is the result of collaboration, care,
and shared effort. I'm proud to put this issue into
the world with all of you.

— Frederike Herkströter, Editor

YEARBOOK MAGAZINE

