

The Research Project Showcase

Introduction

This display is a curated selection of the results of the Critical and Contextual Studies module, 'Research Project'. The projects represented here showcase work from across our undergraduate courses at Cambridge School of Art, which include Animation and Illustration, Digital Media Production, Fashion, Fashion Communication and Branding, Fine Art, Graphic Design, Illustration, Interior Design, and Photography. The display is a celebration of the curiosity, interests and academic achievements of a new generation of creative practitioners.

Critical and Contextual Studies aims to help students recognise the powerful critical thinking skills they already possess when they arrive at Cambridge School of Art, while also exposing them to new ideas and ways of seeing that further develop their critical thinking throughout their time here. The Research Project is the culmination of this journey. It is our hope that when students leave, they will bring their capacity for critical thinking to bear on both their creative practice and the wider world.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the incredible Research Project team, who were so fundamental in supporting our students: Dr Lauren Fried, Dr Idrees Rasouli, Dr Emily Godden, Dr Leah Gouget-Levy, Dr Sofia Neto Correia Regalado, Dr Cavell Ord-Shrimpton, Allen Drummond, Alex Rodin, Folu Ajiboye, Joshua Phillips, Margo Michalik, Xinyue Liu, as well as Jolene Cushion in the library, Lisa Donkin-Scott and our other amazing colleagues in Study Skills.

Inside the room, you will encounter a spectrum of critical enquiry that explores urgent social issues and individual passions. Our graduating students have investigated a wide range of issues and delved into topics that fascinate them. Each Research Project represents twelve weeks of intense research, careful critical analysis, and thoughtful reflection, highlighting the distinctive voices of the students behind them. Students had three options for producing their research projects, including written essays, visual essays, and oral presentations, all on display here, demonstrating that rigorous academic research comes in many forms.

Cambridge School of Art
June 2026

Dr Farzaneh Yazdandoost

Lecturer in Critical and Contextual Studies (Research Project and CCS Showcase Lead)

Dr Elizabeth Johnson

Senior Lecturer in Critical and Contextual Studies

How Do Artists Use Their Practice to Negotiate Cultural Belonging in Response to Inheritance, Displacement and Social Regulation?

This study is the result of a practice-led enquiry grounded in a subject-position influenced by experiences of non-belonging across both British and Sri Lankan cultural frameworks. It draws on theories of 'diaspora', understood not as a fixed attachment to origin, but as a manner of belonging formed through displacement, inherited memory and ongoing negotiation. (Hall, 1989, Brah, 1996). Although born in the United Kingdom and not directly exposed to civil war, my positionality has been shaped by intergenerational histories of conflict, displacement and migration, producing an ongoing negotiation of cultural belonging rather than a stable alignment with either Western or Sri-Lankan cultural framework.

As Avtar Brah argues, present-day migrations generate "new displacement, new diaspora" (Brah, 1996), reshaping how belonging is experienced across generations. Within families marked by displacement, concerns around safety, stability, and security often persist beyond the original conditions that produced them, becoming normative expectations transmitted over time. When inherited in this way, such priorities can be experienced less as protection than as pressure to conform, shaping how identity is regulated and evaluated. Within this context, creative practice functions not as an act of self-definition, but as a space through which constraints and cultural evaluation may be suspended. Diasporic identity, therefore, cannot be reduced to geography or shared origin alone; it must be understood as the experience of inhabiting multiple and sometimes conflicting, cultural positions in which belonging remains uneven and provisional (ibid.).

It is within this terrain that broader debates surrounding diasporic and postcolonial theory concerning cultural identity emerge. Such debates have often been organised around essentialist framework or origin that define identity as homogeneous, alongside alternative approaches that emphasise hybridity, fragmentation and the ongoing negotiating. While this conceptual lens has historically offered coherence in the aftermath of colonial disruption, it risks masking how identity is experienced as relational and continually mediated (Hall, 1989). This dissertation examines how these differing models shape both cultural interpretation and lived experiences, and how contemporary artistic practices respond to their implications in varied ways.

"Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think instead of identity as a production which is never complete, always in the process and constituted within, not outside representation" (Hall, 1989, p.69).

Fig 1: Stephen, A. (2025) Closer to One, Not the Other. Oil on canvas, 150 x 250 cm.



For those shaped by hybrid responses, such as navigating Sri-Lankan heritage alongside British upbringing, identity rarely feels like a singular inherited essence. Rather, it is shaped by social contexts, interactions, and representation.



Fig 2: Stephen, A. (2026) Through the Branches. Oil on canvas, 180 x 340 cm.

Where identity is often expected to appear in legible forms, through cultural markers or traditions, abstraction interrupts these expectations. The refusal of formal closure in my work prevents the image from stabilising into a symbolic reference, resisting its placement within established frameworks of cultural interpretation. In this sense, abstraction operates as a strategy of a refusal to be read and categorised.



Indie Impact: Altering the Animation Industry

Modern indie animation inspired by early internet content has been having a significant impact on the wider animation industry, enabling creative individuals to tell unique stories through equally distinctive visual styles that have reached wider audiences than ever before (Lamarre, 2018; Johnston, 2020). However, there is a piece of mainstream animation from this decade that is particularly comparable to *The Amazing Digital Circus*, not only because of its widespread popularity but also due to its roots in internet-based animation culture.

The adult animated television series *Smiling Friends*, created by Zach Hadel and Michael Cusack, originated from animators who began their careers producing content on platforms such as YouTube and Newgrounds in the early to mid-2010s, including works such as *Hellbenders* (Hadel and O'Neill, 2012–2015) and *YOLO* (Cusack, 2012) (Wired, 2022; Adult Swim, 2022). The series, which airs on Adult Swim, follows the surreal misadventures of two employees, the cynical Charlie Dompler and the optimistic Pim Pimling, who work for a small charity dedicated to improving people's lives by solving their problems and bringing them happiness. The pilot episode first aired in 2020, with a full first season released in 2022, and the series has since expanded to multiple seasons and gained substantial popularity. It has been widely noted for its bizarre and surreal tone, combined with a range of animation styles that contribute to its intentionally inconsistent and occasionally unsettling visual aesthetic (The Verge, 2023; IGN, 2023).

Although *The Amazing Digital Circus* and *Smiling Friends* differ in their comedic approaches and are tonally distinct, they nevertheless share several stylistic traits, including absurdist and cartoony character designs, vibrant colour palettes, and the use of varied animation techniques to construct memorable narratives and characters. These similarities become less pronounced when examined from a narrative perspective. While both series feature episodic structures with distinct storylines and consistent worldbuilding, *The Amazing Digital Circus* employs an overarching narrative with a darker comedic tone, whereas *Smiling Friends* consists of largely self-contained episodes characterised by surreal and at times improvisational humour.

'Just because these projects aren't being backed by major studios or being made by studios, doesn't mean they are free from the same problems those studios have. There are already stories about people being left out of credits for one famous indie series. We live in a world where not everyone has access to or is part of an art fund or can make a successful Kickstarter. Not everyone can make these shows or pilots for a living' (Ward, 2024).



Fig 1: A still frame from *The Amazing Digital Circus* (2023), an indie animated web series created by Gooseworx



Fig 2: Still from *Smiling Friends* (created by Zach Hadel and Michael Cusack, 2020–present), episode "Charlie's Uncle Dies and Doesn't Come Back" (2022)

'I think it's fantastically important to have animators making work that does not depend on pleasing an awful lot of people. I think we couldn't grow this art form if we were always under the compulsion to make megabucks and to avoid unsettling or upsetting our audiences' (Mitchell, 2017, p. 129).

Fig 3: Still from *Smiling Friends* (created by Zach Hadel and Michael Cusack, 2020–present)

'There is still original storytelling happening in less moneyed areas and independent scenes... this is where a lot of the interesting new stories are happening' (Comerford, 2024).



The Role of Visual Elements in Creating Horror in Film, Animation and Game Design.

This visual essay examines how effectively game and film design can create horror. It analyses how they leverage psychological and societal understandings to generate anxiety by comparing examples from films and games, such as *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Coraline* (2009), *Five Nights at Freddy's* (2023), and *Mouthwashing* (2024). This research asks why particular visual elements, such as colour, work well and how they could be improved.

Colour, in any form of media, is used to set the tone or evoke a certain feeling in the environment. Typically, horror uses darker colours to create an atmosphere of absolute horror. This is due to a 'prepared fear' of the dark, built into us as a survival instinct (Antony, 2006, p. 19-22). The comparison between the games *ANATOMY* (2016) and *Garten of Banban* (2023) could further clarify this idea. Though both are horror games, *ANATOMY* uses the dark to create an overpowering sense of isolation and suspense, while *Garten of Banban*, on the other hand, uses bright, lit-up hallways and rooms that make the player easily able to see any dangers, losing all suspense and ambience.

Certain colours can also evoke specific emotions through societal symbolism and psychological associations linked to aposematism. Aposematism is the "combination of unprofitability (e.g. physical protection, chemical toxicity, or difficulty of capture) with one or more signals (such as warning or conspicuous colouration) warning of that unprofitability to potential predators." (Marples, 2005, p. 933). Our pattern recognition understands that since stinging wasps, poisonous frogs and venomous snakes are black and yellow, warning signs like wet floor signs and hazard warning tape mean we should stay away from them. It could be said that this is used in horror, for example, in *It Steals* (2020), where a monster uses very bold red colours to convey a sense of danger through aposematism. The red also fades out the farther it is from the monster, implying that it is the danger.



Fig 1: Barbara Maitland transforms into a monster to haunt people off her property. *Beetlejuice* (1988) Directed by Tim Burton [Film]. Warner Bros.

Green, when put in the context of danger, is usually to symbolise an emotion like greed or envy or it can be associated with disgust and death. This is due to its relationship with sickness. (Braam, 2025).



Fig 2: Jim's guilty hallucination of a dinner party with those he killed aboard his ship. *Mouthwashing* (2024), 'Wrong Organ'. [Video game]. CRITICAL REFLEX.

Art styles that leave a lot to the imagination can make the viewer feel uncomfortable and unsure of what they're looking at, while still providing enough visual clarity to remain frightening and contribute to the feeling of Automatonophobia. (Wen, 2024)



Fig 3: Chica and Bonnie standing in the cameras, made using animatronic puppets. *Five Nights at Freddy's* (2023) Directed by Emma Tammi [Film]. Blumhouse Productions and Scott Cawthon Productions.

"Uncanny feelings are a common experience for puppetry audiences, and not just for those watching something dark, gothic or scary. After all, much of puppetry's charm lies in the mystery and illusion that results when life is breathed into the inanimate, whatever the genre." (Jauregui, 2013)



The Architecture of Fear: How Audiovisual and Mechanical Systems Interact to Produce Fear Through Immersion in Survival-Horror Games

Survival-horror games are notorious for eliciting fear; however, academic dissections often confine this effect to isolated design elements such as atmosphere, narrative, or gameplay mechanics. This essay argues that fear in contemporary survival-horror games does not arise from singular systems, but instead from the synchronisation of audiovisual and mechanical design within an immersive gameplay framework.

Using the *Resident Evil 2* (2019) and *Silent Hill 2* (2024) Remakes as case studies, this research utilises a qualitative close-reading methodology informed by several analytical frameworks. Consalvo and Dutton's game analysis toolkit structures the systematic examination of gameplay systems; Perron's concept of forewarning is used to identify how audiovisual cues signal impending threats; Collins' theory of kinesonic congruence examines the synchronisation between player action and sonic feedback; and Ermi and Mäyrä's SCI model provides a framework for analysing sensory, challenge-based, and imaginative immersion. Through scene-based analysis, this paper demonstrates how environmental sound, spatial design, constrained agency, and resource scarcity operate together to generate sustained dread rather than momentary shock.

In the *Silent Hill 2* Remake, fear emerges through audiovisual ambiguity and psychological unease, where obscured vision and asynchronous sound design destabilise the player's perception. The *Resident Evil 2* Remake, in contrast, prioritises mechanical pressure through persistent pursuit systems, transforming familiar spaces into sites of threat through spatial audio cues and constrained mobility. Despite these tonal differences, both titles demonstrate that fear intensifies when sensory cues and mechanical consequences operate interdependently.

This paper positions immersion not as a by-product of horror design, but as the mechanism through which these systems converge. By framing fear as an emergent property of systemic interplay, the study challenges fragmented approaches within existing game scholarship and advances a more integrated understanding of how agency, mechanics, and game space co-produce emotional experiences within interactive horror.

Part of the analysis framework detailed how audiovisual cues prime the player for fear before the introduction of overt threats. Metallic echoes and hyperbolic footsteps create an ambient forewarning soundscape, alluding to the environment's instability and foreboding hostility.



Fig 1: The initial appearance of Mr. X (T-00 Tyrant) in the *Resident Evil 2* remake (2019). [Video game]. CAPCOM.



Fig 2: A key visual illustrating the narrative tone in the *Silent Hill 2* remake (2024). [Video game]. KONAMI.

The Tyrant's ability to freely prowl the RPD results in sound cues demanding immediate behavioural responses, either rerouting or temporarily abandoning objectives. This, therefore, means that fear becomes anticipatory rather than reactive, maintained by visual uncertainty.

Diegetic cues, such as the complex's condition and muffled movement behind blocked doors, provide the player with a subtle narrative forewarning that the threat has consumed this building long before the player's arrival.



Fig 3: The Tyrant pursues the player through the cramped RPD corridors. The *Resident Evil 2* remake (2019). [Video game]. CAPCOM.



To what extent is Chinese cultural heritage a continued influence within ready to wear fashion from 2011 – 2025

The majority of garments made by contemporary designers will have a 'made in China' tag, though these garments may have no connection to Chinese cultural heritage. The increase in fashion design institutions and their graduates ensured that fashion and garment production increasingly shifted the focus from the 'made in China' tag to the now-influential 'created in China' status. This key element has enabled design progression and enabled Chinese designers to hallmark nationalism that actively essentialises 'Chineseness' (Barron, 2021). Following its reemergence in the late 1980s, the Chinese fashion industry was initially largely directionless amid a flood of foreign brands entering the market (Jin, 2024). Through its cultural conversation, fashion leaps from the contemporary to the ancient and back again without settling exclusively in one temporal or aesthetic configuration. Leaping into the past, fusing cultures and histories, fashion can reconfigure the past in light of the present (Pistilli, 2018). Pistilli also states that protecting and enhancing their cultural heritage seems to be one of the most profitable strategies for brands.

This belief that designers can use their cultural heritage or that if their brands have an influence on designs may have been blurred by the use of the 'made in China' tag, as it caused a flood of garments that were not created with Chinese culture in mind. With western fashion trends dominating Chinese fashion consumption, it has been hard for Chinese designers to enter and capture attention in the Chinese market with original designs. Things are rapidly changing for Chinese fashion through the strategic intervention of the state in advancing fashion as a creative industry and the agency of Chinese fashion consumers, who are beginning to actively assert their presence through a preference for Chinese fashion (Jin, 2024). This is seen as a turning point; the country's vast internal market provides the foundation for advancing Chinese cultural and creative industries, which, in turn, reduces dependence on overseas goods and enables higher trade performance through cultural self-confidence and innovation development.



Fig 1: Traditional Chinese black hanfu with silver embroidery and flowing design.

The concept of heritage branding relates to the strategic perspective in which a brand makes heritage part of its values, using cultural heritage in competitive brand building, because it can serve as a differentiation tool that others cannot emulate. Making it a significant tool for designers to connect with consumers of the same culture. Chinese cultural heritage is seen to provide a limitless wellspring for contemporary cultural products (Jin Y, 2024).

Culture-led product design is a process that incorporates cultural values into products, providing designers with a rich, varied set of materials that inspire new design ideas (Barron, 2021).

Chinese traditional styles and textile heritage have significantly influenced Western designers who incorporate oriental elements to create 'Asian chic' designs (Wu et al., 2025).



Fig 2: China's luxury fashion brand NE Tiger opens Beijing Fashion Week with a collection themed on herdsmen culture.



Lines of Care, Layers of Meaning: How did community-based visual art practices in the UK (2000 to 2021) contribute to public mental health through the creative process as an alternative to institutional models of treatment?

To address this question, this visual essay considers mental health as an essential component of human wellbeing and a key factor in individual and collective quality of life (WHO, 2025). To contextualise how that shift from an institutional model of mental health care to more community-based and preventive approaches emerged, the first section of this visual essay looks at the historical roots of mental health care, tracing how the dominance of the medical model shaped responses to psychological distress through control, institutionalisation, and the authority of psychiatry.

This visual essay explores the shift towards more community-based and creative approaches in mental health care. The inclusion of the arts in public health policies represents a significant paradigm shift: care ceases to be seen solely as treatment and is understood as a collective process that involves creativity, belonging, and symbolic expression (APPG, 2017; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Stickley & Hui, 2012). This work expands the discussion by analysing collaborative artistic practices that operate outside the traditional clinical context, presenting the projects of Anthony Luvera, as well as the works Manifestos for Positive Women (WHO) and Eolas. They create spaces for listening, recognition, and belonging, in which subjective expression becomes a form of resistance to exclusionary models of care.

In this visual essay, I seek to reflect on the contrast between care models based on control, containment, and institutional labelling, and creative practices that operate through connection, sharing, and the reconstruction of meaning. Throughout the visual essay, I explore how participatory and community-based artistic approaches reveal the potential of art as a non-clinical space for care, capable of giving new meaning to human experience. Even when developed from individual practice, the artistic creation presented here emerges from shared experiences, dialogues, and affections, becoming a process of grieving, reinterpretation, and reconnection. In this way, the essay responds to its central question by affirming art as a form of care that moves beyond institutional silencing, sustaining and transforming human experience through creative connection.

Fig 1: Leite, F. (2025) *What is Prescribed, What is Lived.*

I defend the idea that, between the rigidity of systems that label and contain, and the delicacy of creative gestures that connect, care can both silence and restore meaning to human experience.



'The experience of isolated care as prison-like symbolises patients' longing for freedom and feeling restricted and limited by rules, stripped of rights, abandoned, controlled, powerless, and unsupported' (Lindgren et al., 2019, p.7).



Fig 2: Beautiful masks explore young people's experience of mental health difficulties. (2014) mentored by Stephen Jon. Ravensdale Rocks: Samworth Academy Performing Arts Centre.

'It's been a major help in my life, and I'm sure a lot of other people feel the same way, but it's what has kept me from ending up in the hospital and the end of the world happening. It helped when nothing else had helped, actually' (Creative Shift participant, n.d.)



'Restful Agitation': The War Photography of Anja Niedringhaus Sublime Images as Powerful as those that Shock

Throughout her career, photographer Anja Niedringhaus captured images that convey both human suffering and the destructive power of war. She often did this without resorting to extreme graphic content; instead, her photographs could be described as 'Sublime.' To further understand Niedringhaus's work, it is helpful to consider Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke states that infinity, another source of the sublime, can evoke 'delightful horror' (Burke, 2015, p. 60).

Building on Burke's ideas, Professor Phillip Shaw explains that the Sublime refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet, it is through this very defeat that the mind gains a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language (Shaw, 2017, p. 4).

Niedringhaus's images often depict hope and optimism within times of conflict: 'she always managed to discover signs of hope' (Beckmann et al., 2019, p. 189), especially by including children who symbolise hope for a better future (Beckmann et al., 2019, p. 191). Figure 16 shows widespread destruction, yet among the rubble, two children play with a telephone. This pleasing image of play is contrasted by its literal context; amid chaos, the boys are having fun, and the image offers hope (Beckmann et al., 2019, p. 600). This approach is encapsulated in Niedringhaus's own words: 'If I don't photograph it, nobody will know about it' (Niedringhaus n.d., quoted in Beckmann et al., 2019, p. 189).



There should be a balance between the aesthetic and informative elements, so the best pictures contain both the imaginative splendour of a painting and the reality of the world we live in. Human dignity must be respected even in the worst situations. (Rawija quoted in Benedictus, 2012).

Fig 1: Anja Niedringhaus, *Sarajevo* [Photograph] (2000).



Fig 2: Anja Niedringhaus, *Iraq* [Photograph] (2004).

'Photojournalism serves a very important purpose. And we should be made to look at the pictures war photographers bring home. But whatever the result might be, it has to serve an end, other than being made to look at gory pictures, an end that acknowledges the unbridgeable gap between those who experienced war and those who didn't.

Unbridgeable as it might be, there can still be connections made, connections that allow both sides to learn from one another, connections that allow a public to learn something, even though they weren't there when the bombs were falling' (Colberg, 2014).

'Human suffering appeals that combine sadness and the positive emotion of hope yield higher levels of sympathy and inspiration, which result in higher donations than sadness-dominant or hope-dominant appeals' (Homer, 2021).



Fig 3: Anja Niedringhaus, *Gaza* [Photograph] (2009).



'Zombie-Fungus' to Fungus Zombies: What is the Significance of the Inspiration of Fungus for the Visual Design of the Undead in 'The Last of Us' Franchise?

While consuming media featuring zombies and apocalypse, I often wonder why I am drawn to this particular niche of the horror genre. Although I experience the expected feelings of disgust, fright and shock at these cannibalistic creatures, the emotion which overrules the rest is awe. Brigid Cherry suggests in his book *Horror*, that 'the pleasure comes from experiencing the narrative reasoning that results in the monster being identified, confronted and overcome' (Brigid, 2009, p. 158). This explains perfectly how I felt while playing 'the most awarded video game in history' (Wright, 2014, p. 126) and later watching it adapted as a TV series: *The Last of Us*.

The Last of Us (TLOU) was first created as a video game in 2013 by American game developer Naughty Dog. The story is set in apocalyptic America where a parasitic fungus has turned humanity into zombie-like creatures, and follows middle-aged Joel and teenager Ellie, who is immune to the infection, on a journey for a cure. The first game's sequel, *The Last of Us Part II*, was released in 2020, and the game was adapted into an HBO TV series in 2023, starring Bella Ramsey and Pedro Pascal.

In this visual essay, I argue that the inspiration from fungus for the outbreak and the visual design of the infected 'zombies' in *TLOU* have resulted in one of the most innovative and plausible zombie concepts. According to Bryan Tillman in his book, *Creative Character Design*, 'All originality means is that you have taken something that already exists and added your own super-awesome twist to it' (Tillman, 2019, p. 42). With this idea of originality, I demonstrate how *TLOU* infected and/or 'clickers' depict a clever blend of traditional zombie characteristics (mindless, consuming human flesh, wounded and gory) and a new approach using natural fungus as both a zombie design and concept.

Fig 1: Romero, G.A. (1968) *Night of the Living Dead* (Film). Zombies as portrayed in the film.

"A zombie is the animated corpse of a single being, usually a human. Zombies are frequently depicted as shambling and rotting, although in some instances their bodies may be preserved, especially when magic is involved, and they may sometimes display superhuman characteristics, such as increased strength and speed" (Eldridge, 2012).



'The infected are gradually dehumanised, covered with more and more tumorous fungal growths until they ultimately become immobilised fungus-colonies that only vaguely remind us of human bodies' (Webley & Zackariasson, 2020, p. 277)

Fig 2: Jose Ramon Pato, *Cordyceps Militaris* (Photograph) (2008).

'As this fungus manipulates the host system, the victim behaves like a "zombie", with frequent convulsions; it is also called "zombie fungus' (Sharma et al., 2023)



Fig 3 and 4: Gower, B. (2023) Vision holes in Clicker makeup. [Online] BGFx/HBO. Stan Winston School of Character Arts.



What Can Be Gothic? An Exploration of Whether *Jibaro* (2022) Qualifies as Gothic Media

“A classic and highly acclaimed piece of Gothic media, Mary Shelley's book *Frankenstein* (1818) shows non-compliance with a happy ending. Both Frankenstein, the monster in the novel, and its creator come to miserable ends (Britannica, n.d.; SparkNotes, n.d.). So what is to be learned from this? Well, it mainly showcases how closely the plot of *Jibaro* (Alberto Mielgo, 2022), an episode from the animation anthology series *Love, Death & Robots*, aligns with the key characteristics of Gothic media: no happy ending, no heroes, and not a single “good” character in sight. Why might identifying a work as Gothic media be considered meaningful or valuable? Why am I arguing that an obscure episode from this show, which on the surface is just a thrilling animation, is a piece of Gothic media? Surely, all that this tragedy and the subversion of traditional archetypes do is depress us as readers or viewers.

Going back to the main theme running through this dissection of the gothic genre, subversion of norms and the presence of an alternative narrative are evident. In mainstream culture, the gothic is seen as something to be marginalised or culturally peripheral. Perhaps it is too spooky, too dark or too scary. The view of what can be Gothic is very narrow (Kliś, 2012, pp. 1-16). But what if we opened that up? What if pieces of media, such as *Jibaro*, with its beautiful forests, its luxurious imagery, its apparent absence of vampires and bats, could also be seen through the same lens? The themes that gothic media champions might be brought into the mainstream. Themes of giving power back to victims, redefining monsters and most importantly of all, the concept of failing (Shelley, 1818). Imperfection is a natural part of our human experience, and the sooner we allow ourselves that, the sooner we come together over our shared imperfect humanity rather than shunning those who are “other”, the sooner we as a culture might begin to build that long-sought-after happy ending.

The Sirens were nymphs encountered by Odysseus, often depicted with birdlike bodies, who sang such enticing songs that seafarers were lured to their death. A siren has come to mean a seductive woman. Siren song refers to bewitching or alluring temptation that also may be treacherous (Morford et al., 2014).



Fig 1: Flaxman, J. (1805) *The Sirens* [Etching]. Royal Academy of Arts.

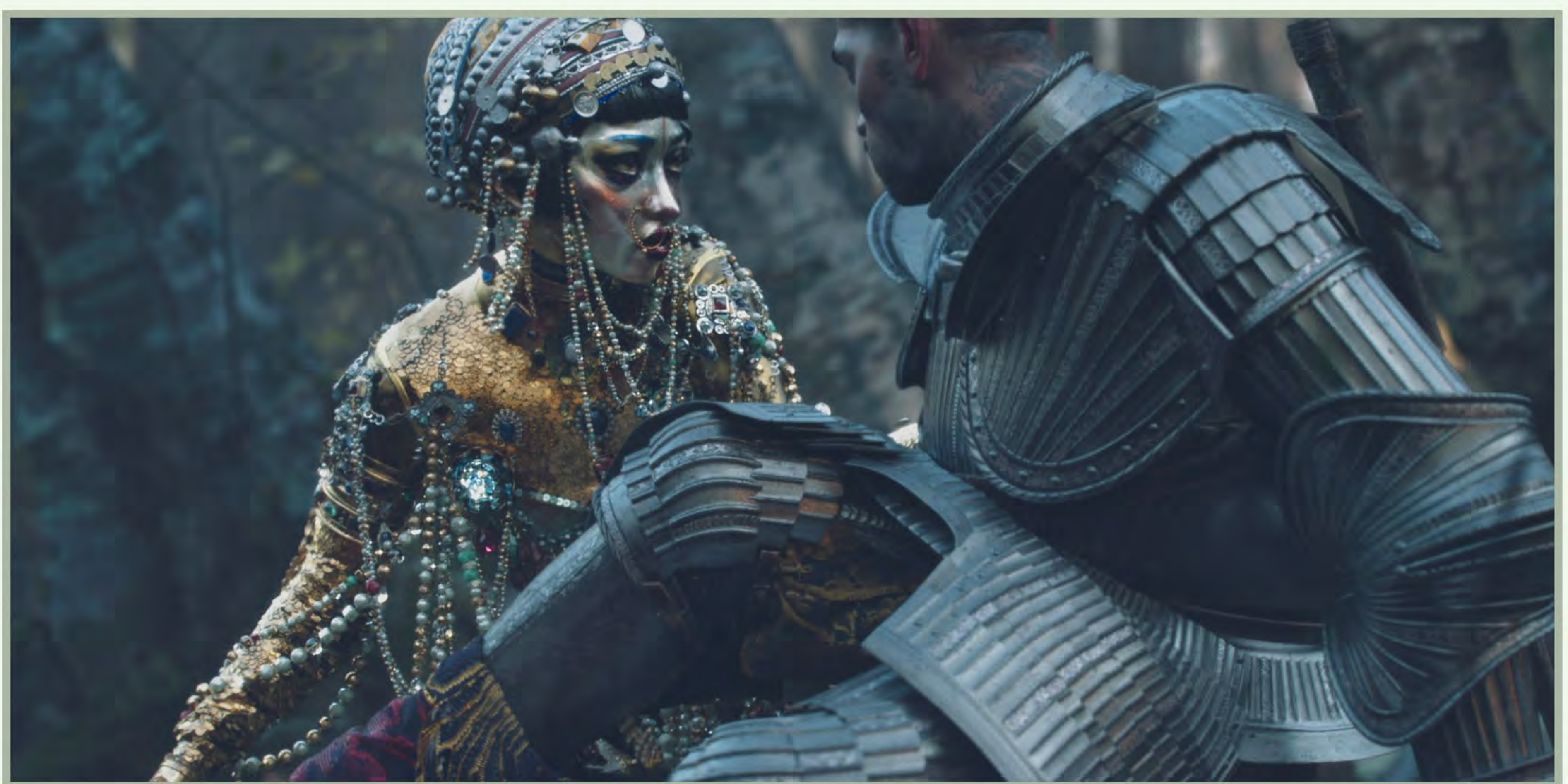


Fig 2: The Siren and Jibaro meet. *Jibaro* (2022, Series 3) [Video]. Blur Studio. Available at: Netflix [Accessed 15 December 2025].

The armour the soldiers in *Jibaro* (2022) are shown to be wearing very closely resembles 15th-century Gothic armour, and so it is a very small stretch to claim that Mielgo is not only aware of the Gothic style, but actively used it as inspiration for the setting of the story.



‘Since childhood, I’ve been faithful to monsters. I have been saved and absolved by them, because monsters, I believe, are patron saints of our blissful imperfection, and they allow and embody the possibility of failing’ (Guillermo Del Toro, 2025).

Fig 3: *Frankenstein* (2025) [Feature film]. Directed by Guillermo Del Toro. Netflix.

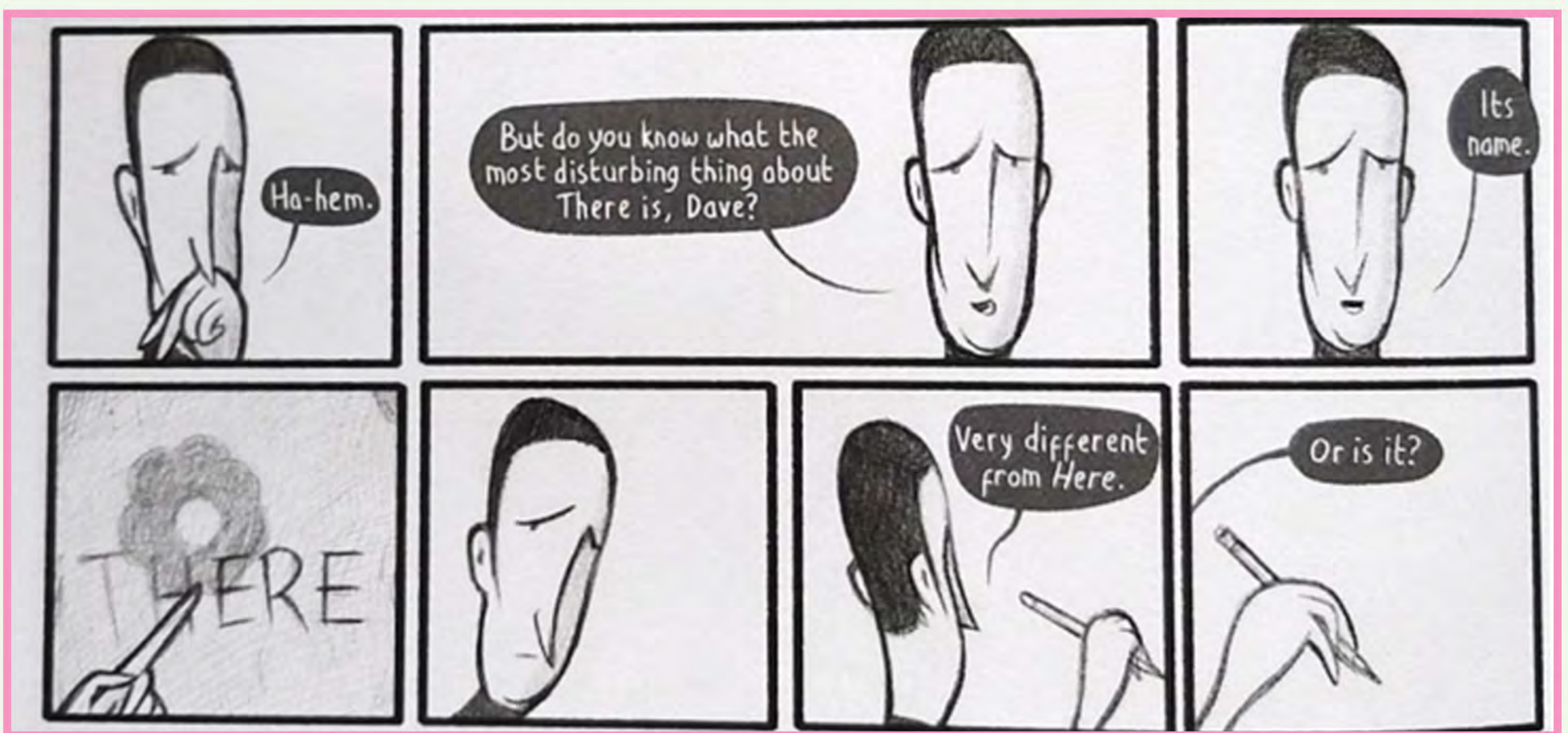


An Investigation into the Benefits of Prioritising Intent over Style

The 2013 graphic novel *The Gigantic Beard That Was Evil* by Stephen Collins tells the story of a land of people with no facial hair who live in an almost dystopian place called 'Somewhere'. Where the only rule is to be entirely perfect and be just like everyone else. And yet the main character starts growing a beard, one that eventually takes the entire city by storm. Collins utilises different textures and a tonal colour scheme of blacks and greys. The book cover already sets the tone; the beard, which takes up three-quarters of the page, looms as a presence.

His other works include political comic panels for *The Guardian* and children's books like *The Dinosaur Awards* (2021). His typical style, however, uses techniques very different from those in his work on *The Gigantic Beard That Was Evil*. Using bright colours and minimal line art, which is a direct contrast to how Collins approaches *The Gigantic Beard That Was Evil*, especially in the media itself. For his comics, Collins uses Gouache paint. He notes that, with a different intent, he viewed his projects through a separate perspective (Collins, 2023). When working on *The Dinosaur Awards*, he had to balance his own illustration style with the necessary detail of a book about dinosaurs. His work is usually quite simple and reductive, but he found he had to develop a midpoint between how he drew and how these animals looked. (Collins, N.D.). This fluidity was necessary for Collins' project on *The Dinosaur Awards* to create illustrations that were suitable for a children's book while remaining educational.

Fig 1: Collins, S. (2013) *The Gigantic Beard that was Evil*, p. 99.



When an artist allows themselves artistic freedom to change their style as another element to effectively communicate to their audience, it allows them to explore their process fully, often creating a far more successful product.

'Stylised drawing particularly serves to translate the emotions that manifest in a graphic novel, especially in conflict, presenting them visually to readers. The stylisation of the line continuously generates the mood embedded in the narrative' (Gamache, 2024).



Fig 2: Briggs, R. (1977) *Fungus the Bogeyman*. London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 26.



'While the artists applied the same method to various motifs/subjects (i.e. subject modification), they realised the potential and also the limitations of the method' (Okada and Yokochi, 2020, p. 537).

Fig 3: Spiegelman, A. (2011) Sketchbook drawing (1991), in *MetaMaus*. New York: Penguin Random House, p. 118.



From Grotesque Corpses to Ayami Kojima's Sensual Beings: An Exploration of the Evolving Vampire Imagery Through the Centuries and Its Impact on My Creative Journey

Vampires are some of the most evolving and enduring creatures in global history, continually reshaped through folklore, film, literature, and illustration. While many supernatural beings maintain a relatively fixed image, vampires stand out for their fascinating visual adaptability and constant transformation. Throughout centuries, their forms have shifted dramatically, from grotesque, corpse-like figures in folklore to romanticised, aestheticised, and often sensual beings depicted in contemporary art. This ability to evolve visually has helped vampires survive as cultural symbols, reflecting the fears, desires, and identities of each era. To illustrate this concept, my visual essay explores their history, early personifications, cinematic portrayals, and contemporary artistic representations.

My fascination with vampires has profoundly shaped my artistic journey over the years. I am continually drawn to characters who exist on the boundary between beauty and monstrosity, danger and desire. Vampires, with their inherent contradictions, have inspired my work in unexpected ways. Through this research, I explore how perceptions of vampires and the fears they represent have evolved, and how these changes have influenced my own practice. Ultimately, I situate my personal art practice within the evolving tradition of ambiguous vampire imagery and contribute to the ongoing reimagining of what vampires represent. By delving into history, engaging with the world of illustration, and drawing inspiration from my own influences, especially the work of Ayami Kojima, I demonstrate how illustration functions not merely as representation, but as an active form of myth-making and artistic creation.



Dracula's status as a foreign figure entering British society mirrors anxieties about the perceived threat of outsiders, a theme later visually amplified in early cinema.

Fig 1: *Portrait of Vlad III* (c. 1560) [Painting], Ambras Castle. Reputedly a copy of an original created during his lifetime.

These ideas of fear are exceptionally represented in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), where the vampire's exaggerated features and animalistic qualities visually reinforce associations with plague and radicalised fear (Harrabin, 2024).



Fig 2: Grau, [Artist] (n.d.) *Nosferatu* [Film poster].

Fig 3: Eggers, R. (2024) *Nosferatu* [Film]. Screenshot from the film.

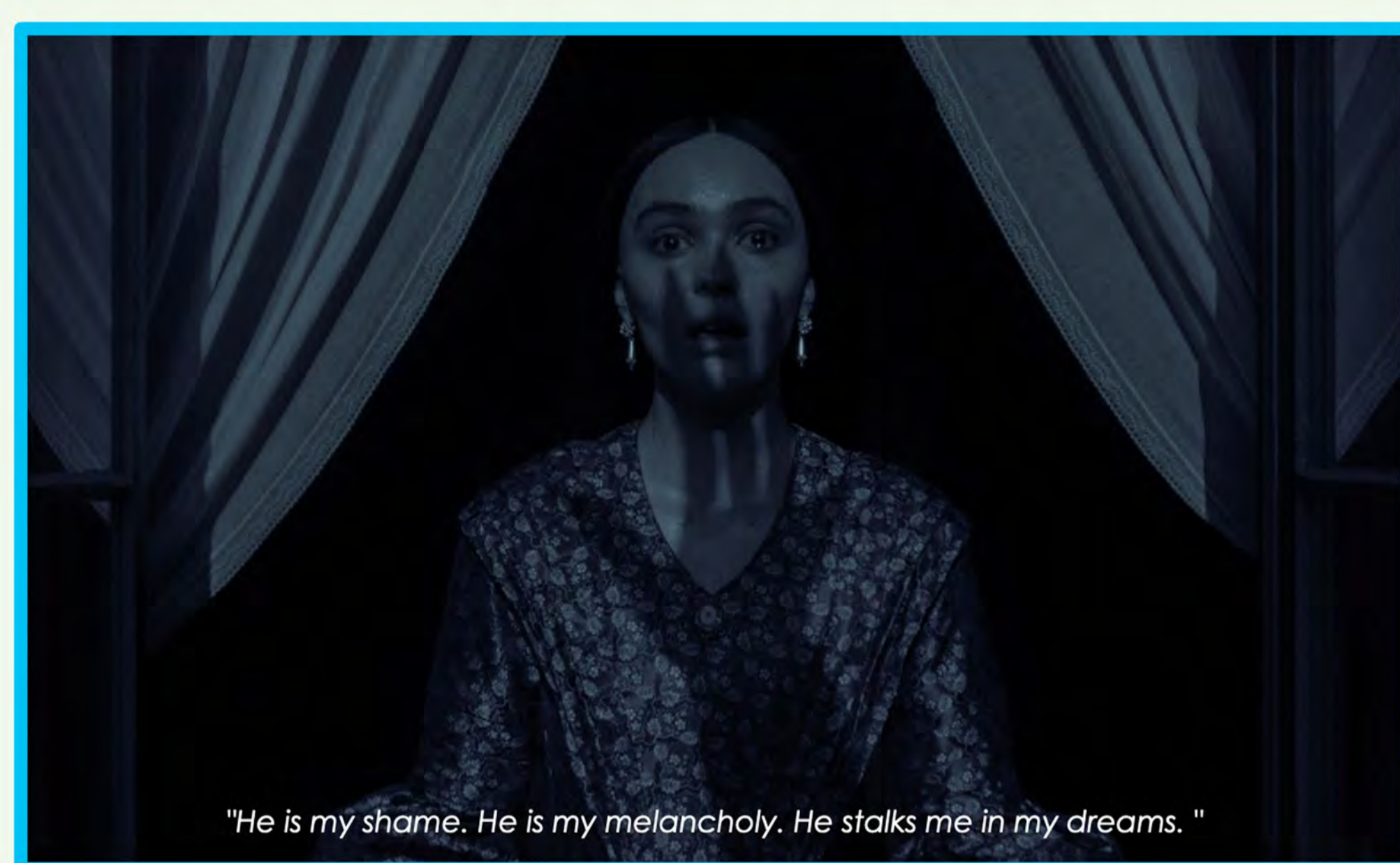
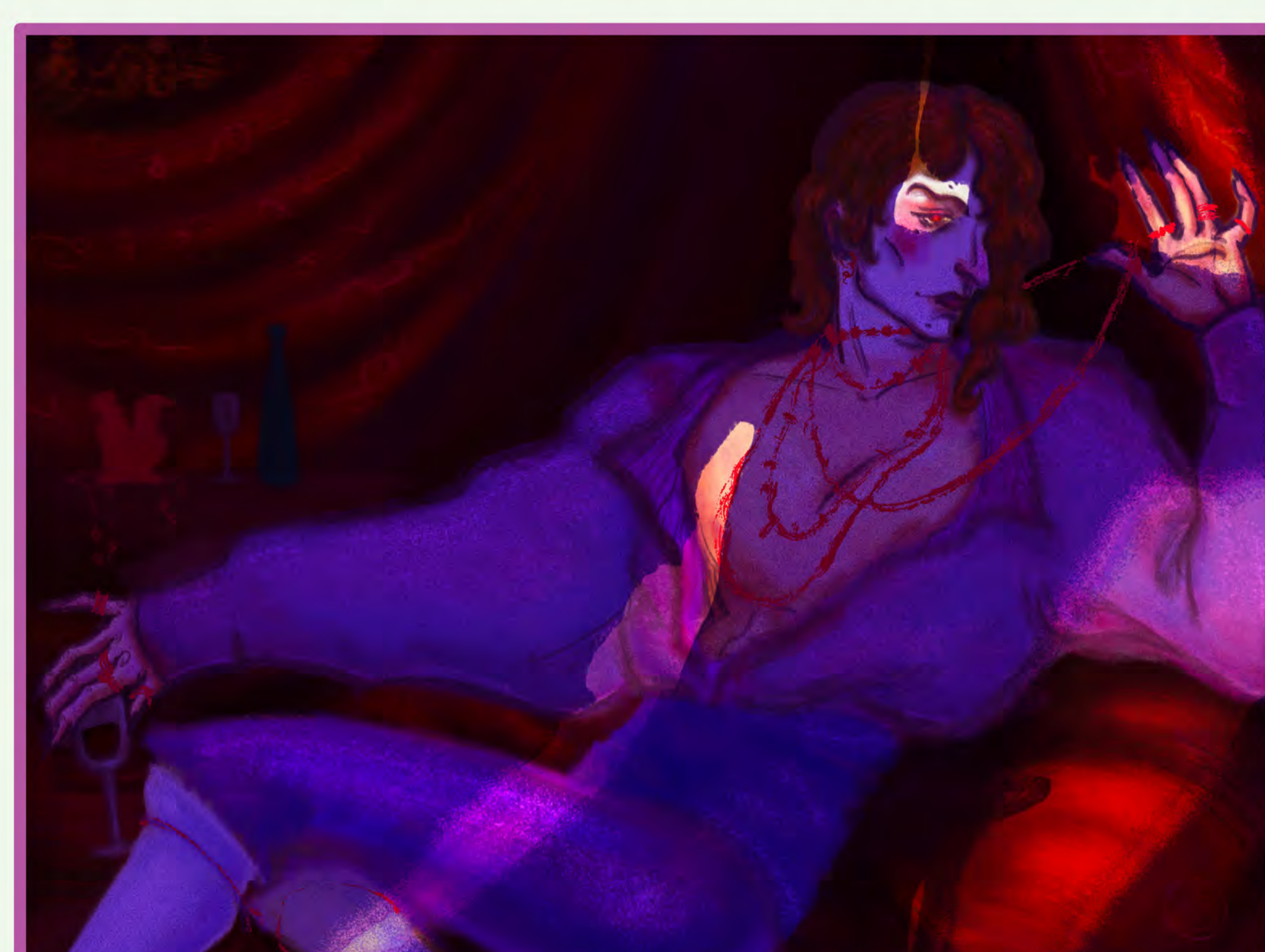


Fig 4: Konstantinova, O. (2024) *Reveal* [Illustration]. Inspired by vampire imagery.

While contemporary media was continuing to emerge, the vampire had been fully transformed into a symbol of eternal youth and idealised beauty. This progression from grotesque corpse to romantic icon demonstrates a broader cultural shift from fearing the body to aestheticising it.



'Everything beautiful, that's truly beautiful, is dangerous...' (Frost, n.d.).



Fig 5: Konstantinova, O. (2024) *Suggestion* [Illustration]. Inspired by vampire imagery.



Cultural Appropriation or Appreciation in K-Pop? A Study of Music, Fashion and Styling.

I have long admired K-pop music and fashion, but I remain critical of its cultural representation. K-pop has had a huge global influence not just as a music genre but also as a source of fashion trends, performance styles, and a way to bring people from different countries together (Jin, 2016; Yoon, 2018). Since the early 2010s, the worldwide popularity of groups such as BTS (debuted in 2013) and Blackpink (debuted in 2016) has brought increased attention to how the industry uses aspects of other cultures, specifically Black culture. This includes everything from African American hairstyles and hip-hop-influenced music to symbolic references (Liu, 2023; Kim, 2024). Through this project, I explore when the use of culture feels like appropriation and when it becomes appreciation, and what this reveals about the industry, its artists, and its fans.

This research focuses on four specific case studies that stand out for their shock value, controversy, or for representing common trends within the industry. Any regular K-pop listener will have heard of at least one, if not all of them. These include Lisa from *Blackpink* (2016), who has faced criticism on many occasions for wearing hairstyles associated with Black culture. In one instance, Lisa apologised, saying, "I didn't know. I didn't have bad intentions, but I feel so bad. I'm very sorry someone got hurt from that" (Koreaboo, 2016). This apology highlights the complexities of cultural borrowing, showing how intentions can differ from impact. Other examples include Bubble Sisters (2003), known for performing in *Blackface, Kiss of Life* (2023), a group whose music is heavily inspired by Black cultural elements, and Tarzzan from *All Day Project* (2025), an artist whose aesthetic has sparked debate about appropriation within the K-pop community. All of these artists have faced criticism for using elements of Black Culture in their work, making them important examples for exploring the line between appropriation and appreciation.

'The problem isn't that she can switch between two skin tones; most people can do that. The problem is that Lisa switches skin colour, hairstyle and fashion according to the song, to the "ghetto vibes"'. (Participant A, 2025)

Fig 1: Lisa from *BLACKPINK* has faced controversy over her tanned skin, leading to accusations of cultural appropriation and blackfishing.



Fig 2: Tarzzan showcasing braided hair styling in the *All Day Project* photoshoot (2025).

'Braiding is a symbol of perseverance and tradition. Most importantly, it reminds us that Black hair is Black history' (Simeon, 2022)

Fig 3: Album cover of *Blackface* by Shai (1995).



Following criticism of their 2003 debut, the Bubble Sisters defended their concept by stating that they "love black music" and had "just thought it was fun to play around with the image," denying any intent to associate Blackness with ugliness.



Cultural Essence in Clean Lines: How Minimalist Aesthetics Reframe Traditional Expressions in Modern Interiors

The evolution of the world has seen several changes in interior design and spaces that have adapted to the modern and contemporary world. Traditional culture remains an integral part of modern interior design, underscoring the importance of cultural identity (Yang, 2018). It is curious to acknowledge that we, as humans or designers, have forgotten the importance of our past, our culture and our identity. However, as time goes by, we designers see the beauty of past designers' work, yet we even use the elements of traditional and sophisticated design in our current generation.

This research examines how contemporary and minimalist design influences expressions of traditional culture in interior spaces and how minimalist aesthetics reinterpret tradition. The visual essay argues that the ideology of "less is more" (Mies van der Rohe, 2025) allows minimalism to impact and highlight cultural identity in modern interiors. The design ideology of minimalism is to reduce and show clarity spatially and emotionally. Minimalism can reduce visual overlap while effectively enhancing the user experience and functionality of the space through carefully curated space, lighting, and materials. Traditional designs often emphasise ornamentation, symbolism, and spatial richness, which makes them likely to work in minimalist spaces. From this focal point, the contrast is highly evident and discussed to highlight traditional elements, making them more valuable and visible within uncluttered, neutral backgrounds. This visual essay draws on examples from my creative practice, and its outcome informs my coursework.

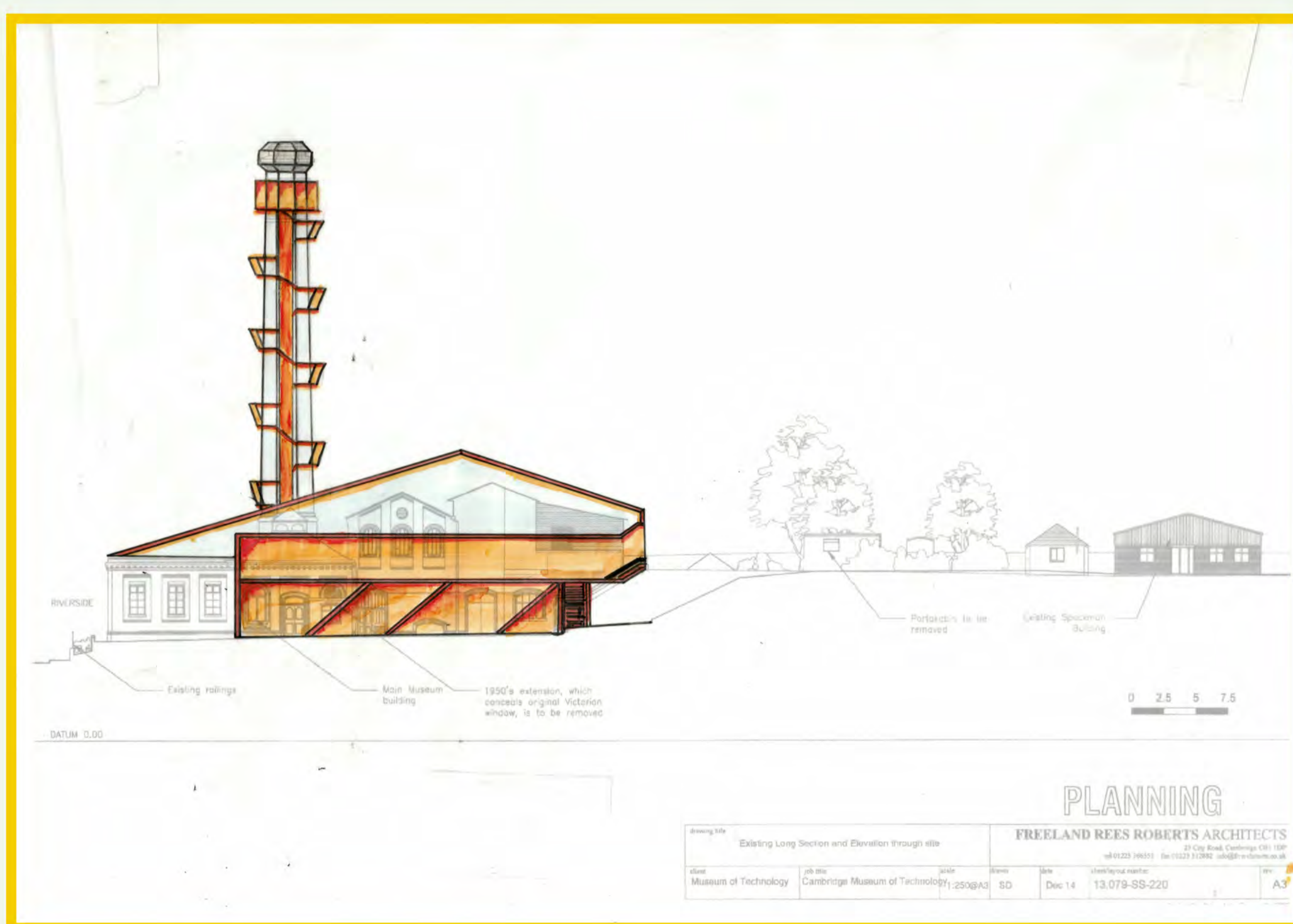
'Hide the vulgar and the common... include the excellent and the splendid' (Ji Cheng, 1631).

Fig 1: Classic circular moon gate exemplifying traditional Chinese garden architecture (Lotsomoons, 2014).



'Minimalism in design offers a framework to reconsider cultural elements, providing open and adaptable spaces that balance heritage with contemporary living' (Lee, 2025).

Fig 2: Sleek minimalist interior with neutral palette and clean architectural lines (Modern interior rendering, n.d.).

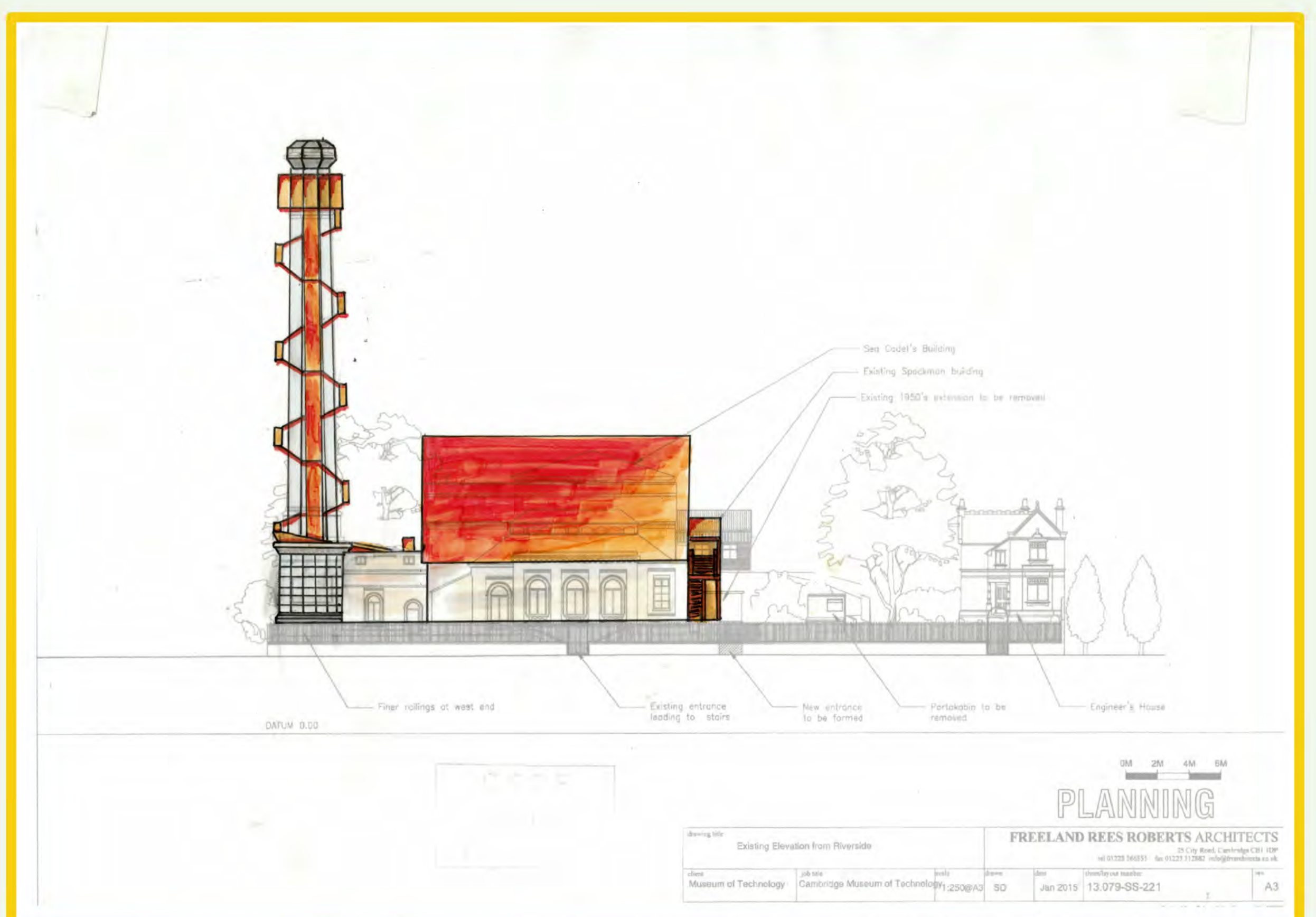


'Restraint reveals spiritual focal beauty' (Nishi, 2022).

Fig 3: Chan, P.Q (2025) Minimalist Orange Prism, Fantasy Idea: Visualization 1.

"Designer sculpts silence for contemplation" (Ando, 2023).

Fig 3: Chan, P.Q (2025) Minimalist Orange Prism, Fantasy Idea: Visualization 2.



Wholeness, Beauty and Belonging: The Power of Tactile Language to Invigorate the Graphic Arts

My purpose is to present the expansive potential of an experiential design language, grounded in the methodologies of ANNI ALBERS, to address sensory marginalisation and disconnection within the communicative arts. I explore the values and philosophies embedded in the creative vocabularies of master textile artist, printmaker, and modernist designer Anni Albers — and demonstrate their continuing relevance in shaping the relationship between beauty and legibility in design storytelling. I highlight inclusive practices which centre touch and their power to cultivate belonging in communicative design experiences and show, with both visual and material examples, how Anni Albers' work has influenced my own practice.

Tactile Aesthetics can teach us about what might be missing in our concept of beauty and design thinking. This medium is read by gradually building up the sense of a composition. This is a skill that can be developed (Hart, 2021). Textures can evoke emotional responses (Sakdanaraseth, 2020). In tactile perception, beauty might derive from sensory pleasure and depth - manifesting from a rich experience of satisfying textures and contours, variety of surfaces and sensitive use of space.

When more than one sense is engaged, the communicative experience is enhanced, even transformed (Rizzo Naudi, 2025). When museums prioritise high-quality audio description for visual works, the act of listening not only improves the experience of audiences with visual impairments but also opens up the work, enriching the experience of the art for everyone. While an expression of wholeness, engaging audio description fails to address the ability of every audience member to perceive the work through their own experience. Only touch can do this.

Inclusion activist and blind art-science theorist Lillian Körner expands on the implications of ocularcentric bias within the arts in her article, "Feeling the Museum: Towards Multi-Sensory Mediation," noting that tactile perception as a language remains largely unarticulated within European art education and theory (Körner, 2025). This prevailing bias narrows the experience for everyone; as Körner observes, 'those who only see do not feel.'



Fig 1: Embodied Experiments: Textiles and Printing Work (2025) by Polly Griffiths

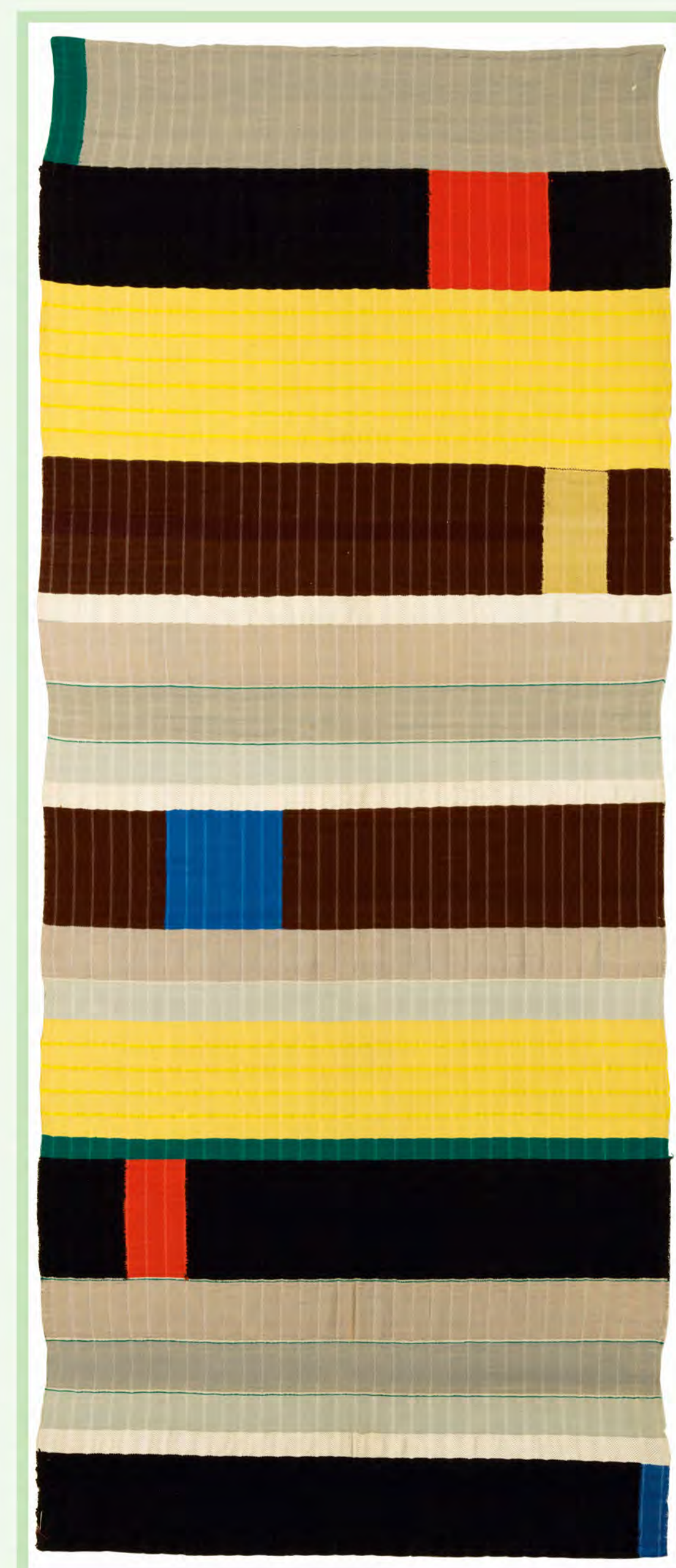
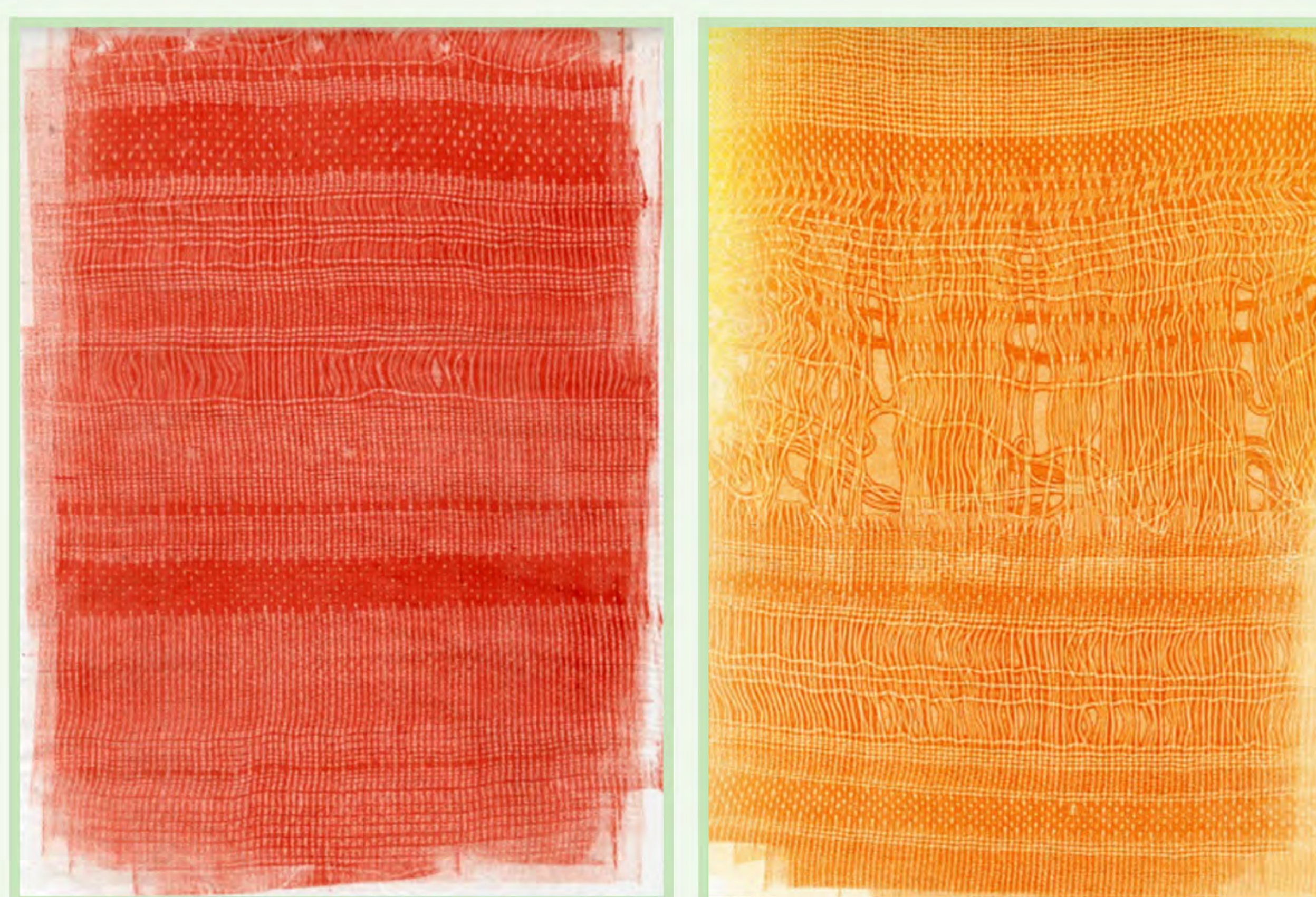


Fig. 2: Untitled Wallhanging (1925) by Anni Albers. Wool, silk, chenille, and bouclé yarn. Josef & Anni Albers Foundation.

'The threads won me over, I learned to listen to them and speak their language' (Albers, 1982)

'Weaving offered 'ways to regain sensitivity towards textile surfaces: texture' which also suggests a means to regain a connectedness to a bodily and corporeal existence. 'Sensitising' the forms of geometric abstraction in this way is one of [Albers'] most striking achievements.' (Briony, 2018)



Figs. 3: Embodied Experiments: Textiles and Printing Work (2025) by Polly Griffiths



The Impact of AI on Gen Z's Perception of Fashion Advertising: Personalisation, Trust & Purchase Intent

Among a large pool of consumers, Generation Z has emerged in this study as digitally native and brand-aware. As this category of clientele has lived through various digital advancements, from filters to social media algorithms, it is an audience that is accustomed and critical of AI content (Feger, 2025). A study done by Magid (2024) suggests that Gen Z prioritises authenticity, inclusivity, and sustainability. Thus, these three key factors influence their purchasing behaviour, and these values often conflict with the artificiality of AI or algorithmic advertising. The above creates a paradox in the fashion advertising industry: whilst automation can improve brand visibility, efficiency, and personalisation, it simultaneously creates barriers to trust and emotional connection (Razak, 2022). Gen Z's engagement with fashion shopping is primarily digital, and this trend skyrocketed after the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by Šimek and Sadilek (2024) found that this audience's shopping experience shifted after the pandemic, from physical stores to online platforms.

Whilst the study did not specifically mention which online platforms were/are used, other research, such as *Vogue Business* (2024), suggests that the main platforms are Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok. Those social media apps are mainly used for fashion advice. 'The TikTok algorithm and Shop are undefeated', says 23-year-old TJ Eaglin (2025), whose go-to apps are Instagram and TikTok when it comes to fashion inspiration and shopping (Schulz, 2025).

The above-mentioned ideas display a pattern, indicating that Gen Z encounters fashion content through algorithmic (personalised) feeds, curated to their needs and wants. This raises questions about how AI-generated fashion advertisements align with this audience's values of authenticity, a topic that is currently underexplored. The above also applies to AI in fashion advertisements, as studies show that trust predicts purchase intentions in a digital environment. Therefore, advertisements that lack credibility tend not to convert the initially sparked interest into purchase decisions.



H&M's AI twins were static, not placed in an occasion/ an event, making it difficult for an audience like Gen Z to view it as personalised content. This means they were placed in the content for aesthetic, not functional, reasons.

Fig 1: Jill Kortleve and her AI digital twin (Business of Fashion, 2025).

Fashion brands should aim to encourage diversity among their audience by advertising garments on people of different races, ethnicities, skin tones, sizes, etc. The aim should not be a homogenous audience. This allows a company to grow and improve, as different people/ cultures produce different opinions, leading to improved processes.

Fig 2: Critical commentary on AI-generated advertising models (Levi's, 2023).

"...AI visuals can look false and hint at low quality (NIQ, 2024)."



"DO THE GARMENTS ACTUALLY EXIST?"
-INSTAGRAM USER, 2025

The use of AI and the negative reactions associated with it are highly context-dependent, as it fails when it replaces humanity rather than enhancing creativity. Therefore, AI should be used as a tool, not as a replacement for human elements, with transparency, emotional resonance, and realism being present in a fashion advertisement.

Fig 3: Dichiu, (2025) *Do the Garments actually exist?* [Poster]



How Can Advertising Influence People's Psychology Through Colour, Typography, and Composition?

In an ever-growing, competitive market, advertising has developed beyond simply promoting products. It has now become a game of forging emotional connections with the specific targeted audiences of the businesses. Brands aim to manipulate people into purchasing their products, but to do so, they need a clear understanding of what users want and need, and how they react emotionally. It seems challenging to influence people without speaking to them directly, which is why I became interested in exploring how advertising uses visual elements to affect people's psychology. Visual advertising relies on visual elements, with text to clarify the message. However, the visual elements become dominant in affecting people's psychology. Advertising is a form of human-centred design, which means that designers must pay attention to how people's emotions are engaged to sell the products successfully. As Carbon (2019, p. 2) explained, to establish a human-centred design process from the start, designers must adopt a psychological turn that ensures their work aligns with people's emotions and perceptions. Following this, this visual essay focuses on three visual factors: colour, typography, and composition and explores how they can influence people's emotional response in advertising.

These visual factors are crucial in advertising, which employs marketing strategies to influence consumers. Designers must ensure balanced communication between brands and customers by addressing customers' needs and expectations. This visual essay explores these factors by examining three case studies: Nike's "Just do it/Why do it?" campaign, Dove's real beauty campaign, and Pepsi's "Live for Now" campaign.

In advertising, brands use images to promote their identity or products and the visual elements in these images, such as colour, typography, and composition, are important to evoke feelings. When reading the images, focus on the visual elements. For instance, if an image uses bright colours, you might feel a strong or energetic feeling. You can understand the messages brands want to convey by analysing the visual elements. On the other hand, images cannot convey a direct message, but they can be manipulated to convey meaning. Therefore, it is important to understand the psychology of these elements.

Fig 1: Analysis of Qinwen Zheng in the Nike 'Why Do It?' campaign (Nike, 2025).

'Compositional methods help focus the viewer's gaze on key parts of the image, guiding their vision so they can easily understand the emotion or story expressed' (Chuang et al., 2024, p. 3).

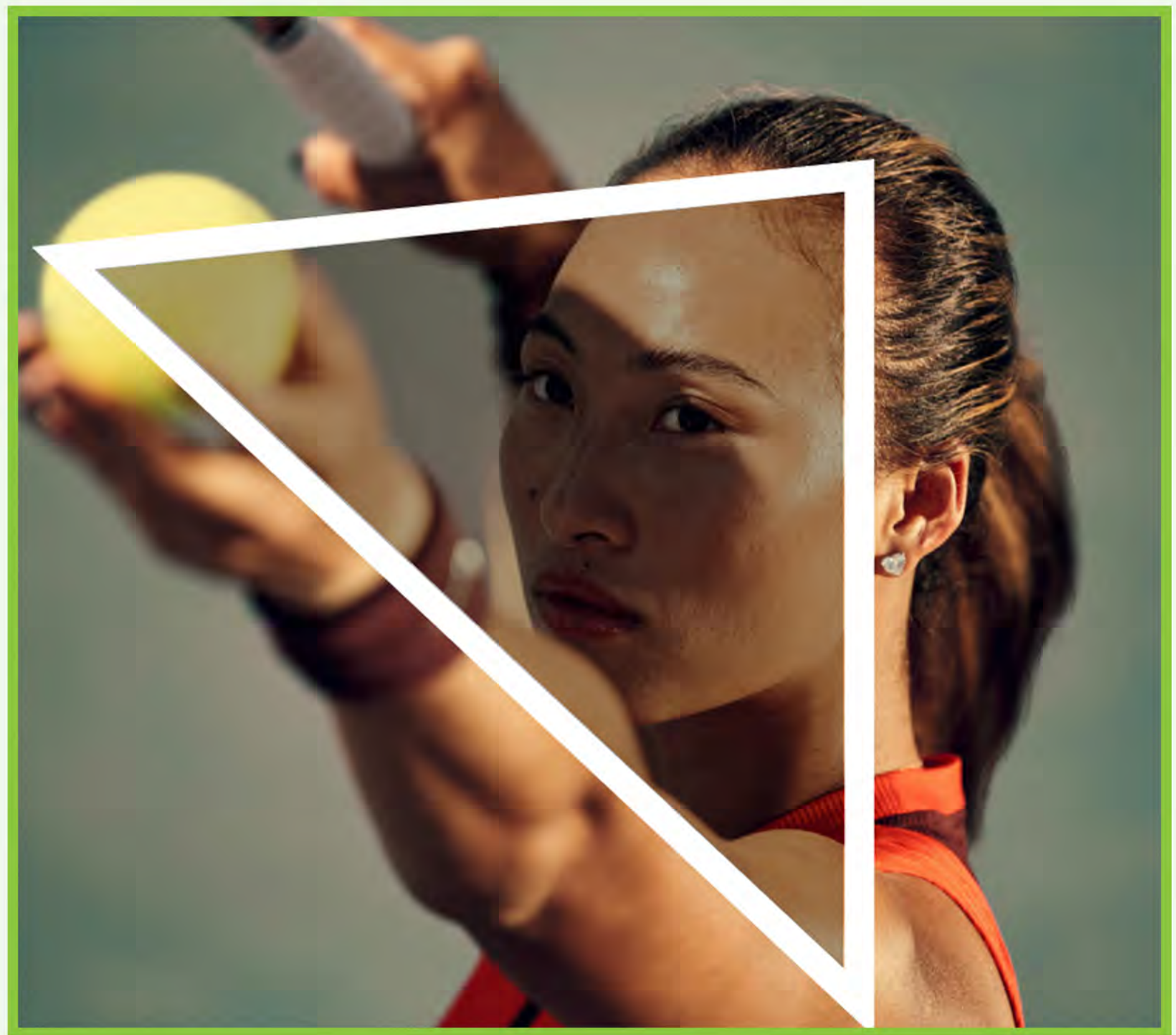


Fig 2: Analysis of typography hierarchy in Dove advertisement (Dove, n.d.)



'When designers interact, hierarchy stands out, directing attention to vital elements. In text hierarchy, key parts are emphasised, usually through size and boldness' (Bobeico, 2024, p. 2325).

Fig 3: Analysis of a still from the Pepsi 'Live for Now — Moments' commercial (PepsiCo, 2017, 02:20)

'Layered designs, creating a sense of depth, enhanced gaze alignment, supporting the role of hierarchical spatial arrangements in facilitating perceptual flow' (Yuan and Teeravarunyou, 2025, p. 10).

