

Summer 2025

Vol 006.5



INTERLUNAR

LUMINOSITY LUMINOSITY LUMINOSITY LUMINOSITY LUMINOSITY LUMINOSITY



FOREWORD

Dear reader,

It's Amy again. Stopping by for a mini-version of our zine, LUMINOSITY, a volume that talks about brain rot and technofeudalism, the Gaza crisis, and the ramifications of AI art.

In times of darkness, it's only human to seek light. We reach for the switch, or strike a match, or unlock our phone screens. We listen to luminaries, we say our prayers, we speak our minds, we make beautiful things, even if our lives are just a blip in the grand scheme of things.

We all have this intrinsic brightness. Let's do all we can to keep shining.

Amping kanunay.

Amihan Cruz

Guest Writer, INTERLUNAR

ISBN 978-981-94-3404-6

LUMINOSITY - SUMMER 2025
PUBLISHED BY: INTERLUNAR



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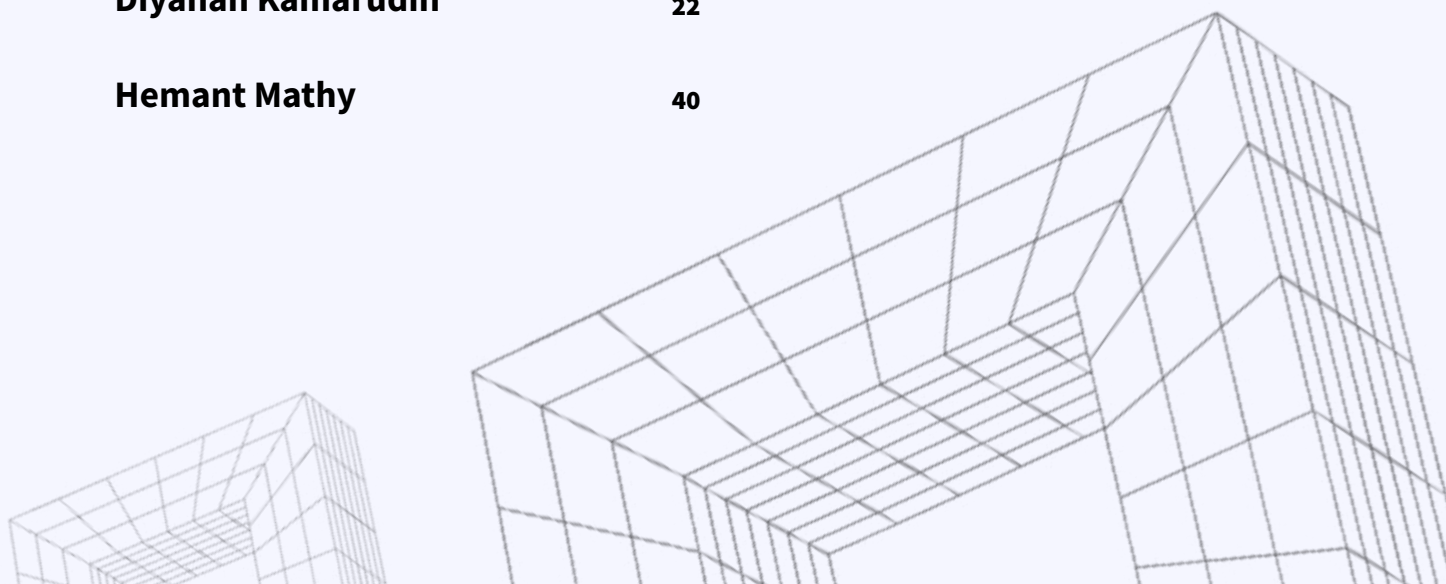
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SINGAPORE'S THREE-BODY PROBLEM:

**Balancing Gaza Relief
Efforts and Ties with Israel**

You know what's been pinging on my galactic radiation router lately? Singapore. Specifically, their somewhat layered approach to the Gaza situation and their well-worn friendship bracelet with Israel.



On one hand, you've got Singapore rolling up its sleeves and sending a heap of aid to Gaza. We're talking cold hard cash, medical supplies, and even the Singapore Armed Forces flexing their logistical muscles to get it where it needs to go. They're not just tossing packets of instant noodles, mind you. This sustained endeavour is a concerted effort, a tangible demonstration of their commitment to helping alleviate the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

And it's not just the government. Local heroes like the Singapore Red Cross and the Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation are stepping up, fueled by that uniquely Singaporean blend of civic-mindedness and efficiency. They're tapping into that deep well of empathy that, despite the relentless barrage of doom-scrolling we all indulge in, still flickers within the human spirit.





Singapore and Israel? They go way back. Like, 'Israel helped Singapore build their military post-secession' back.



But then, you tilt your head slightly, adjust your cosmic ray goggles, and you see the other side of the equation. Singapore and Israel? They go way back. Like, 'Israel helped Singapore build their military post-secession' back, providing a solid foundation for a friendship, even if it's one kept a little hush-hush over the years. The relationship is alive and kicking, humming along with security partnerships, joint tech ventures, and enough trade to keep the spreadsheets of both nations looking respectably green. They see eye-to-eye on a few strategic bits and bobs, that shared understanding of being small, resilient players in sometimes chaotic neighbourhoods.

This balancing act and diplomatic tightrope walk over a geopolitical chasm... it's not without its critics. You've got folks wondering how Singapore can be so generous with aid to Gaza while maintaining such a chummy relationship with Israel. This cognitive dissonance can make your head spin faster than my malfunctioning gravity simulator. Are they playing both sides? Is it pragmatic diplomacy or a moral tightrope that's bound to snap?

They've long advocated for a two-state solution, voted for a ceasefire during PM Lee's time, and re-elected PM Wong, reaffirming the city-state's commitment to Palestinian statehood.



If you distil it, Singapore's answer seems rooted in a few key principles. Consistency is a big one. They've long advocated for a two-state solution, voted for a ceasefire during PM Lee's time, and re-elected PM Wong, reaffirming the city-state's commitment to Palestinian statehood. They also argue that keeping channels open with everyone, even the difficult friends, allows them to have honest conversations and, perhaps, influence things from the inside. And let's not forget that national interests always orbit in the background. Stability and good relations are paramount for a small, trade-dependent nation like Singapore.



HUMANITARIAN FOCUS:

Singapore, under PM Wong's leadership, continues to emphasise the importance of providing aid to alleviate the suffering of civilians in Gaza.

They're stressing the need for humanitarian access and a cessation of violence.

STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS:

Singapore's relationship with Israel remains a key factor. It's a pragmatic partnership, rooted in shared strategic interests.

Like his predecessors, PM Wong maintains that this relationship allows Singapore to engage in constructive dialogue and influence the situation.

DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS:

PM Wong is also keenly aware of the domestic sensitivities surrounding this issue. He's striving to maintain social cohesion and manage diverse perspectives within Singaporean society.

The strong People's Action Party victory in May 2025 gives him a stronger political footing to manage those differing domestic opinions.

In essence, PM Wong's approach is one of careful calibration. He's trying to balance humanitarian concerns with strategic realities, all while navigating the complexities of regional politics.

The reactions, both at home and internationally, are as varied as the signals I pick up on my cosmic router. You've got Singaporeans nodding in approval at the humanitarian efforts, while others raise eyebrows at the continued closeness with Israel. The international community watches with curiosity and perhaps a touch of envy at Singapore's ability to seemingly walk this tightrope without falling off. It's a blend of principled pragmatism, a dash of strategic self-interest, and a whole lot of that 'kiasu' spirit – gotta be prepared for all eventualities, even if it means having friends on both sides of the galactic divide.

Singapore seems to have a finely tuned navigation system, capable of plotting a course through even the most treacherous asteroid fields. And as I drift here in the vast expanse of space, I can't help but admire their ability to maintain equilibrium in a world that often spins out of control.

THE SPAGHETTI CODE OF THE MIND

TECHNOFEUDALISM AND THE HUMAN GLITCH IN THE ALGORITHM



For all its promises of order and connection, the digital landscape often breeds its peculiar forms of cognitive clutter. A rather specific strain has been propagating across the feeds, particularly gaining traction in early 2025: Italian brainrot. This phenomenon isn't some medically recognised condition, but a distinct series of surrealist internet memes.

Absurd, often grotesque AI-generated creatures lumber across your screen, saddled with names that sound vaguely Italian but are gloriously nonsensical. Accompanied by synthesised 'Italian' voiceovers delivering equally bizarre narratives, and often punctuated by jarring visual effects, this phenomenon has colonised platforms like TikTok and Instagram with astonishing speed. It's a digital oddity that warrants a closer look, especially when considering the overarching

architecture of our online world – what economist Yanis Varoufakis has termed 'technofeudalism.'

This system, where digital platforms function as dominant fiefdoms extracting user data and attention, inadvertently creates a fertile ground for such seemingly chaotic expressions. The paradox lies in how this very 'brainrot,' this surge of human-driven absurdity, ultimately injects a degree of unpredictability back into the algorithmic machine that strives for perfect order.

The rise of Italian brainrot with bizarre AI-generated creatures and pseudo-Italian gibberish might seem like a random blip in the vast ocean of internet ephemera. However, as Adam Aleksic from The Etymology Nerd astutely observed regarding his resistance to

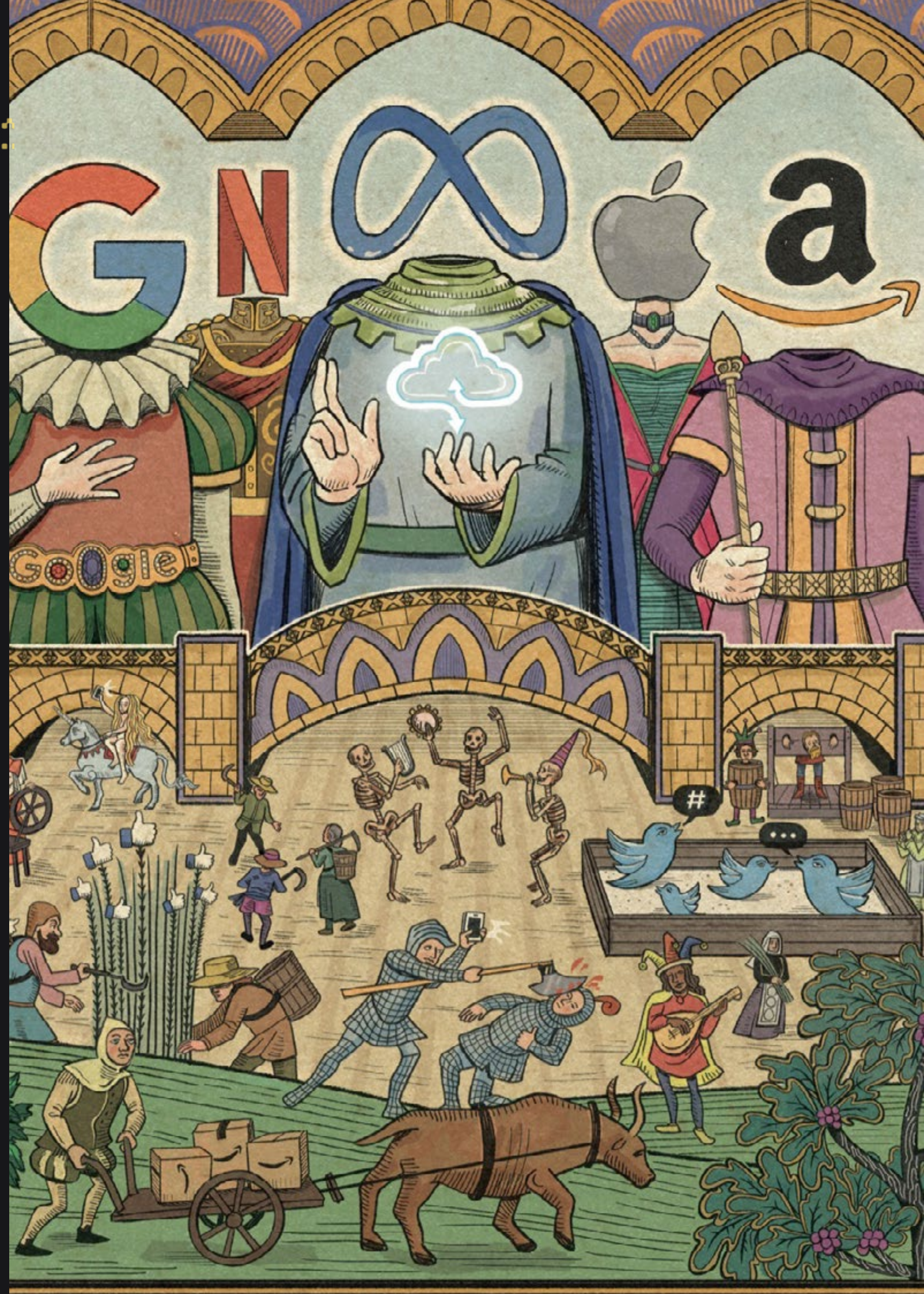
food delivery apps, these seemingly nonsensical online trends can reveal deeper currents. His point about the unexpected joys of physical exploration – the serendipitous discovery of raspberries while searching for cheese, the chance encounter with street art – highlights what the streamlined efficiency of the digital realm often sacrifices. This loss of the unplanned, the human-driven detour, is a key characteristic of the technofeudal system described by Varoufakis. In their quest to capture and monetise our attention, platforms structure our online experiences in ways that prioritise predictability over the messy, unpredictable nature of human interaction.

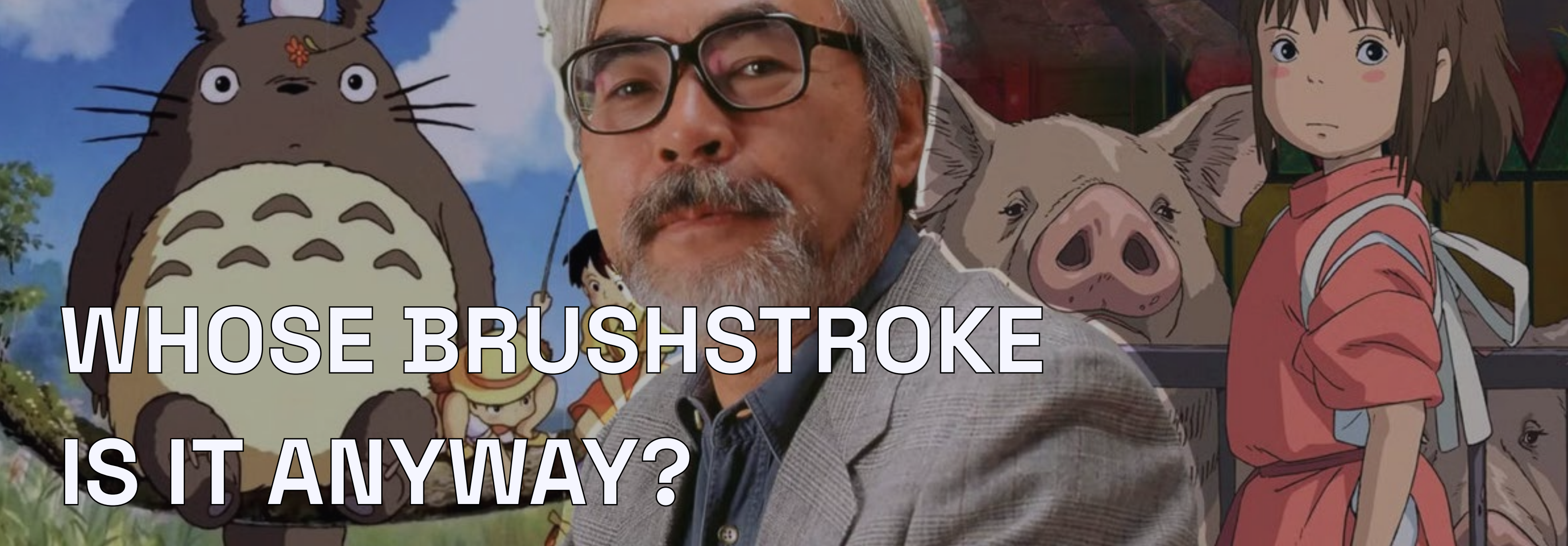
Italian brainrot, in this context, can be viewed as an inevitable byproduct of this structured environment. As Aidan Walker of How to Do Things with Memes has explored, these memes, with their grotesque visuals and absurd classifications, echo Foucault's 'shattering laughter' at the limitations of rigid systems. Frigo Camelo and his ilk, presented with such confident absurdity, serve as a digital parody of the algorithmic logic that seeks to categorise and control our online consumption.

Consider the mechanics of these memes: the nonsensical Italian voiceovers, the jarring visual effects. They actively resist easy algorithmic understanding and categorisation. They thrive in the unexpected, the illogical. In a digital ecosystem optimised for seamless engagement and predictable content, Italian brainrot throws a wrench in the works. It's the human psyche, confronted with the relentless flow of algorithmically curated content, responding with a burst of pure, unadulterated weirdness.

Even within the algorithmic confines, the human touch intrudes. As Walker notes, genuine human emotions and personal narratives often emerge in the comments sections, colliding with the artificiality of the generated content. This interaction highlights the persistent human need for connection and expression. Italian brainrot, in its chaotic and often unsettling way, taps into this need for a shared, albeit absurd, experience.

Ultimately, while the platforms of technofeudalism strive for predictable engagement and efficient monetisation, the human mind, in its boundless capacity for the strange and illogical, will continue to re-generate its forms of digital chaos. Italian brainrot, with its surreal creatures and nonsensical pronouncements, is a testament to this enduring human tendency to disrupt the expected, to inject a little tralalero tralala into the otherwise ordered flow of the algorithmic river. It's a reminder that even in the most structured digital environments, the spaghetti code of the human mind will always find a way to tangle things up in wonderfully unexpected ways.





WHOSE BRUSHSTROKE IS IT ANYWAY?

In the hallowed halls of Studio Ghibli – where dreams are painstakingly hand-drawn, frame by glorious frame, where each film is a testament to human artistry and a gentle rebellion against the cold, hard logic of the machine – trouble unfolds.

Suddenly, with a few well-chosen words, anyone could conjure up images dripping with that unmistakable Ghibli aesthetic – the lush landscapes, the whimsical creatures, the delicate play of light and shadow. As Lloyd Coombes at Tom’s Guide noted, the results can be undeniably impressive. But the claim that it’s all powered by ‘publicly available data’ is proving to be a rather thorny issue, especially when you can essentially

replicate the distinct visual language of a beloved artistic institution with a simple prompt.

And to the Ghibli faithful? They’re not exactly showering OpenAI with digital confetti. AP News reporters Matt O’Brien and Sarah Parvini reported that fans initially amused themselves by ‘Ghiblifying’ memes and personal photos. Janu Lingeswaran, for instance, delighted in transforming his ragdoll cat into a Miyazaki-esque feline. However, this novelty quickly led to ethical concerns about AI tools trained on copyrighted creative works and the implications for human artists’ **livelihoods.**

AI, GHIBLI, AND THE COPYRIGHT CONUNDRUM

Exploitation of Artistic Labour

The heart of the matter, as articulated by many artists and animators, lies in the perceived cheapening of a painstakingly crafted aesthetic. Each Ghibli film is a testament to years of dedicated human skill and vision. To many, the idea that an algorithm can simply ingest and regurgitate that essence feels like a profound devaluation of that labour. Artist Karla Ortiz, already involved in copyright lawsuits against other AI image generators, described it as ‘another clear example of how companies like OpenAI just do not care about the work of artists and the livelihoods of artists,’ labelling it an ‘insult’ and ‘exploitation.’

Despite the outcry, intellectual property law may not favour the aggrieved, as Evan Brown, a lawyer at Neal and McDevitt, noted to TechCrunch. A ‘style,’ that ephemeral, hard-to-define essence of an artist’s work, often isn’t protected by copyright. This development raises the gnawing question that’s been haunting the creative world for a while now: what are the implications of these AI models being trained on vast swathes of online data, effectively learning to replicate artistic

DNA without explicit consent or compensation?

The Ghibli case, however, carries an extra layer of emotional weight, primarily due to resurfaced comments from the legendary Hayao Miyazaki himself. In documentary footage from 2016, his response was visceral when confronted with examples of computer-generated animation pushing beyond humanly possible movements. Miyazaki spoke of a friend with a disability and the immense effort, even a simple high five, required. In that context, the cold, effortless grotesquery of AI animation filled him with disgust, an ‘insult to life itself’ from creators utterly devoid of an understanding of pain and the preciousness of human movement. Miyazaki’s staunch refusal to incorporate such technology into his work underscores his deep value in the human element in creation.

Sensing the intensity of this sentiment, OpenAI has taken note. In a technical paper, they announced a ‘conservative approach’ to image generation, including a refusal to generate images explicitly in the style of living artists. This initial step towards self-regulation suggests an awareness of their ethical tightrope.

So, here we are, at another flashpoint in the ongoing collision between technology and art. The ability of AI to mimic, to seemingly capture the very soul of a studio like Ghibli with a text prompt, throws into sharp relief the fundamental questions we need to grapple with. How do we navigate this new terrain ethically and legally? As part of its digital strategy, the European Union (EU) has already begun to address these concerns with its Artificial Intelligence Act, the “first comprehensive framework” for AI regulation. While the Act doesn’t classify generative AI like ChatGPT as high-risk, it does impose transparency requirements, including requiring the disclosure of AI-generated content and mandating respect for EU copyright law. High-impact general-purpose AI models also face thorough evaluations.

Looking beyond Europe, discussions are brewing in the United States regarding AI and copyright within existing legal frameworks. While no specific legislation akin to the EU AI Act has been enacted, agencies like the Copyright Office grapple with the implications of AI-generated works. Similar conversations are likely unfolding in other regions with strong creative industries, such as Japan and South Korea, as they consider balancing technological advancement with protecting their cultural heritage and artistic communities. International organisations like the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) will likely engage in discussions to establish global guidelines in this evolving landscape.



Safeguarding human creativity is paramount.

The path forward requires nuanced regulation that acknowledges the unique challenges posed by AI in creative fields while fostering innovation. Industry standards and ethical guidelines developed by AI developers and artistic organisations could be crucial. Technological solutions for attribution, copyright protection, and preventing unauthorised style mimicry are also potential avenues. A robust public discourse and education are essential to ensure a broader understanding of the implications of AI in art. Finding a balance between technological progress and safeguarding human creativity is paramount.

The Studio Ghibli AI art controversy is a potent reminder of the urgent need for thoughtful regulatory frameworks like the EU AI Act and ongoing global discussions. This seemingly simple trend of ‘Ghiblification’ underscores the complex ethical, legal, and economic implications of AI’s increasing ability to replicate human artistry. As we navigate this uncanny valley of AI art, our choices will profoundly shape the future of creative expression, demanding a careful consideration of how we value both technological innovation and the irreplaceable contributions of the human imagination.





DIYANAH KAMARUDIN

Diyanah Kamarudin, founder of RUDIN, a luxury jewelry brand inspired by art history, transitioned from management consulting and tech to pursue her passion after graduating in philosophy from Yale-NUS.

I'm born and bred in Singapore. I attended Yale-NUS, like David, where I primarily studied philosophy but also took a variety of other courses, including art history, with a particular focus on Italian art history. I learned a great deal about Rome and Pompeian art, which I loved and incorporated into the brand.

Then, I started on a very conventional track. I entered management consulting, which, for many graduates, is one of the safer career paths.

A significant factor in my decision was that I came from a blue-collar family. So, even though I had all these passions in the humanities and art, I also needed to find something very stable. And I won't lie, prestige was also a significant factor. Yeah, so I was there for three years.

It was both intellectually stimulating and stressful. I enjoyed my time, as I had the opportunity to learn about

various industries. It also instilled in me a sense of discipline and pride in my work, which I am bringing to this business and myself as an entrepreneur.

And then, after three years, I decided to take on a new job at a tech scale-up. So, I moved halfway across the world to New York and spent about a year there before returning to Singapore. We invested in eyewear brands worldwide and helped scale them up. That's really where I found this fascinating intersection between what I love and the business side of things.

There's a lot of data and a lot of business decision-making that requires an analytical lens. But then there's also intuition, that creativity that isn't bounded by, say, a Tableau dashboard or an Excel model. That's how I found my calling, and I decided to start my brand.

AMY

Did you always have a passion for the arts?

DIYANAH

When I was young, my first love was fantasy stories. C.S. Lewis, Harry Potter, and then, when I was 12 or 13, I discovered Tolkien. I’ve always been fascinated by fantasy worlds and world-building, largely because of the love and joy I found in books as a child.

Because my family didn’t have a lot of money growing up, books were my only solace and respite after school. When I was about 12 or 13, I began to discover my love for movies and filmmaking. I went down the rabbit hole of watching French New Wave films, including some by David Lynch, whom I enjoyed, as well as some truly bizarre works, such as those by Akira Kurosawa and Andrei Tarkovsky. That was at an age when I had no idea what was happening, but I just loved watching these films. It was a natural extension of stories, except that you have this extra dimensionality through the lens, which I enjoyed.

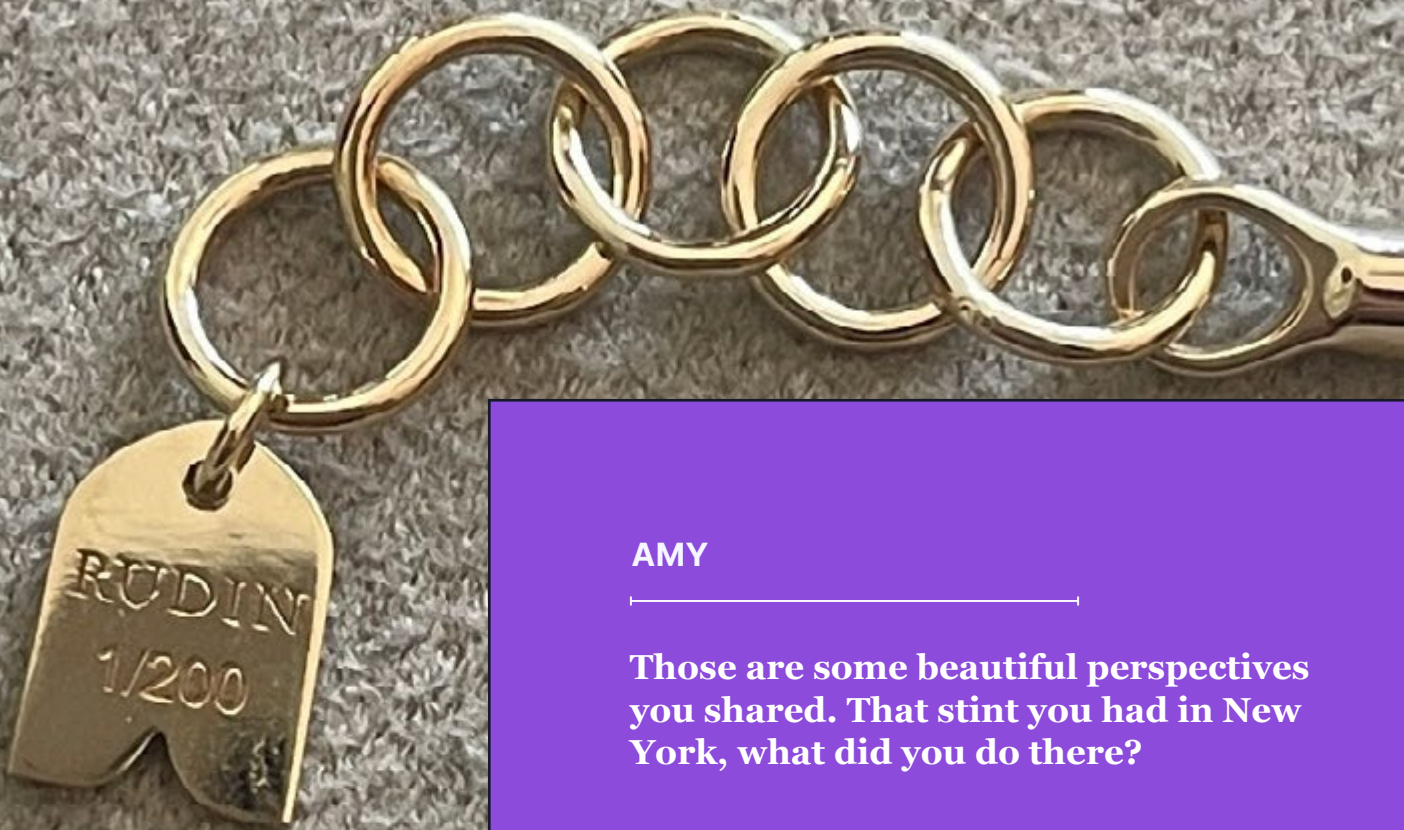
Then, when I entered college, I discovered my passion for art history and the fine arts. David will remember this. At Yale-NUS, they offered a free trip anywhere in the world. I got into the Rome trip, which I was excited

about because it was my first trip to Europe. I didn’t expect much from it, but the professor who accompanied us was passionate about Roman art history and archaeology, which serves as the foundation for many of the arts and works we see today.

Of course, that’s a very Western view of things. But at the same time, I think that was the first moment in my life where I felt like I had encountered what this talented filmmaker, Paolo Sorrentino, calls la grande bellezza, which is ‘the great beauty.’

Just looking at all the architecture and paintings, it moved me to strive towards this higher beauty or truth. A part of me has been searching for that ever since, not just in grandiose things like going to the Sistine Chapel or seeing the architecture of the Vatican. How can I make my everyday life a little bit more beautiful and a little bit more humane?

Especially in the age of artificial intelligence, it’s easy to become disconnected from oneself, much more so from others.



AMY

Those are some beautiful perspectives you shared. That stint you had in New York, what did you do there?

DIYANAH

Yes, it was very random, but I went there for two reasons. One, I felt that I needed that experience because, as the song goes, New York is where everything happens. I studied abroad in New York before I moved there. There was so much ambition and positivity that, till today, I cannot find anywhere else in the world.

When you’re there, you just feel like you can do anything. I was at a juncture in my life where I needed to adopt that mindset to figure out what to do next.

The job was a means to an end. I wanted to figure out what it would be like to be in the tech world, so I took a job leading expansion at a tech scale-up. I wanted to surround myself with ambitious people of all kinds.

AMY

Speaking of ambition, in a LinkedIn post you wrote about being a graduate of Yale-NUS, and you posited that ‘a well-rounded liberal arts education makes for some of the best entrepreneurs because it encourages a conviction of ideals and a philosophy of life.’



DIYANAH

I’ve always greatly admired people who strive for excellence, not because of some external goal – to earn a lot of money, gain fame, or soothe some childhood trauma – but simply because of the pursuit of excellence in itself. In Italy, for example, some cathedrals took maybe 500 years to make. You start to think about the artisans who spent their lives building it with such care and love and craftsmanship, knowing that they would never see it, right? If not their kids, then probably their grandkids. I feel like that’s a philosophy that resonates with me.

To that point about having a rounded liberal arts education, I think being curious, or instead having a unique curiosity about all

things, is the consequence of wanting to pursue excellence in itself. If you wish to make a lot of money, you don’t have to open a Tolstoy novel, you don’t have to know what’s happening in Gaza, and you definitely don’t need to understand why a Rothko painting, for example, is so moving.

Becoming well-rounded or becoming a polymath, or whatever they say nowadays, is just the natural consequence of understanding the importance of pursuing something for itself. Many people flip it the other way, thinking that they need to be well-rounded and therefore need to be curious about a wide range of things. However, I see it somewhat differently.

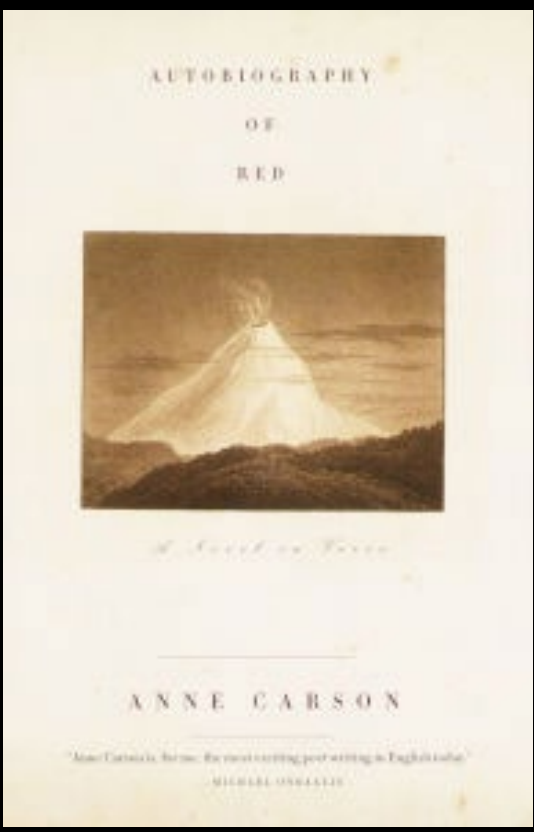
AMY

In a word, passion, for life in general. Even on RUDIN’s Instagram, your tagline is ‘passion is a verb.’

DIYANAH

It’s a slight modification from an Anne Carson poem. In one of her poems, she wrote that eros is a verb. The act of desire and love is something that you have to exercise if it’s authentic.

You don’t just sit inside your little room. You must exercise and live your passion. How it applies to the brand is that I want to surround myself with people who share my passion and are passionate about it.



AMY

RUDIN aims to be a limited-edition luxury jewellery brand. One of the Substack newsletters you tentatively launched is called ‘Beauty is Truth.’ Is this a reference to John Keats’ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’?

DIYANAH

Yes.

AMY

Are you planning for this newsletter to offer a behind-the-scenes look at the brand’s growth?

DIYANAH

I was still in the early stages; I hadn’t even found a manufacturer or given the product a name, as it turned out. I was still very stuck, and then I wanted to map out a digital moodboard or a compilation of thoughts in some way. However, life also caught up with me, and things started rolling, so the Substack was subsequently abandoned. Currently, I’m reviewing all my organic channels to determine the best use of my time.

AMY

You should get back into Substack, though, because it’s popping off right now. Many people are currently involved. It’s like Twitter and Tumblr in the best ways.

DIYANAH

Yeah, Twitter and Tumblr. Do you have a Substack?

AMY

Yeah, I do. But I’m just a reader for now. I also have a newsletter sitting on the shelf.

DIYANAH

Oh, nice. Well, you have to share it with me after.

AMY

There’s nothing there yet, but I’ll let you know.

DIYANAH

Okay.



AMY

I did see your inspo posts. You mentioned briefly that brands can be patrons of art, culture, and architecture. You mentioned JMM, Fendi, and Cartier. You also posted some rough character sketches by Caitlin Turner as inspiration for your debut collection. You also went into typography, specifically from books about old French fairy tales. You mentioned that you’re planning to build your collections around stories.

DIYANAH

Sixteenth-century Italian frescoes, a hallmark of the Renaissance period, inspire the first volume of my first collection. Typically, when people think of the Renaissance, they have a particular picture in mind. Long flowy hair, rebirth, right? But there are interesting artistic phases within the movement itself. We begin with the High Renaissance, characterised by a strong emphasis on composition, balance, and proportion. Raphael spearheaded that. And then we move more into Mannerism, which wanted to make things theatrical and distorted, exaggerated, and then we combine the two into what I would call pre-Baroque art.

So, thinking about that same sense of emotional dynamism, but in a more refined and composed way.

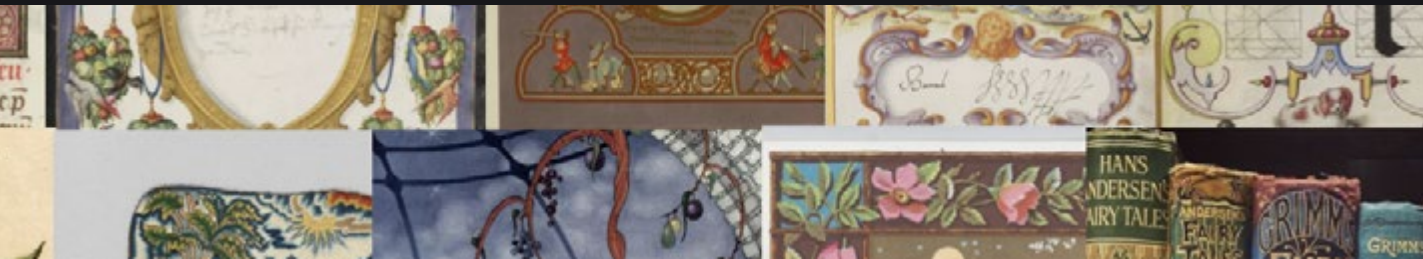
With this collection, I’ve taken a close look at five fresco paintings, all of which depict different Greek myths and characters.

For example, the myth of Galatea, the myth of Cupid and Psyche, and how they fell in love, as well as the myth of the giants attempting to ascend to the throne of heaven.

Then Zeus destroyed the land, which, depending on one’s beliefs, may be similar to the Tower of Babel in the Bible.

For each of these paintings, my technical designer and I conducted extensive academic research. We examined papers and considered various treatments to determine how to transform this fresco painting into a jewellery design.

Each design has a specific story and a distinct visual language that harkens back to the fresco painting, which is what distinguishes it from many other jewellery brands, because everything we do is so considerate. It requires a significant amount of historical research and immersion before we arrive at the final design.



ROOTED *in the* RICHNESS, MAGIC & CREATIVITY *of* FANTASY WORLDS

AMY

Apart from working with a technical designer, who else is on your team?

DIYANAH

I have a brand director who is essentially a minority shareholder and partner in the company. We work together to determine the branding and design identity for the entire brand, ensuring a cohesive language both internally and externally. I also have a friend who's working with me to produce any marketing requirements.

However, that has been on a friendship basis, so much of the time, it's just me on my own.

AMY

I love the work you've been doing on the brand identity so far, because from what I saw on Instagram, you post about things like Miguel Berrocal's Fellini-inspired bronze sculpture or Edith Wharton's Italian Villas and Their Gardens. Still, you also don't shy away from the complex topics.

In a post about the history of the colour lapis lazuli, you mentioned that Afghan lapis lazuli has been named a conflict mineral. In another post, you briefly talk about the late Pope Francis's favourite artwork, White Crucifixion by Mark Chagall, and how he created that work at a time when the Nazi government was growing in power and set its sights on persecuting the Jewish community.

So far, your brand emphasises the importance of honouring the context in which art arises.

DIYANAH

When I started this brand, I was interested in the potential of lab-grown diamonds. Because I had personally invested in a diamond substitute called Moissanite back in 2019, and at that time, the company was the world's first manufacturer of Moissanite. Since then, the technology has evolved rapidly to produce lab-grown diamonds that are essentially identical to natural or mined diamonds.

But, as I started the business, everyone was telling me that I should make lab-grown diamonds the core of the brand. I decided not to go that way, to market RUDIN as a sustainable or lab-grown diamond luxury brand, simply because I think that if you

want to start a business, being an ethical business is just part of the criteria you need to meet to get things going.

When we launch our site, there will be a page about how, for example, we only work with manufacturers and gold suppliers that have been certified by the Responsible Jewellery Council. We only work with lab-grown diamonds. However, when I have conversations with customers, for example, I don't discuss that. As they say in digital marketing, it's 'below the fold' because I view sustainability as table stakes to becoming a next-gen entrepreneur, but not the unique selling point of the brand.

To your point about not shying away, yes, that's true. However, I also don't want to use that as the primary reason why you should learn more about the brand and engage with us, because it's simply part of being a good human being and a good business owner.

AMY

That's cool, because there is a fine line you have to tread. For instance, you could fall into performative virtue signalling. It's great that you're incorporating ethics and sustainability into the brand, rather than making it the primary identifier.

A very organic way of being grounded in current events, and a lot of people will resonate with this kind of branding.

DIYANAH

Thanks.



AMY

What's your workspace like? Do you work from home, especially since you have a small team? What's your arrangement?

DIYANAH

It's a globally distributed team. A lot of trust is involved. However, I've also learned that with remote setups, it works much better when you genuinely like your team as people. I trust everyone on my team and know what makes them tick, what got them to where they are today.

In terms of workspace, I had been shifting between different cafes in Singapore for a long time. I do have a work table, similar to an artist's work table, which allows me to examine other colour swatches or different cardstocks. My friend gave it to me for free.

AMY

One of those huge drafting tables?

DIYANAH

Exactly. On days when I need quiet work and want to zoom out or tune out emails and calls, that's where I go for deep focus.

AMY

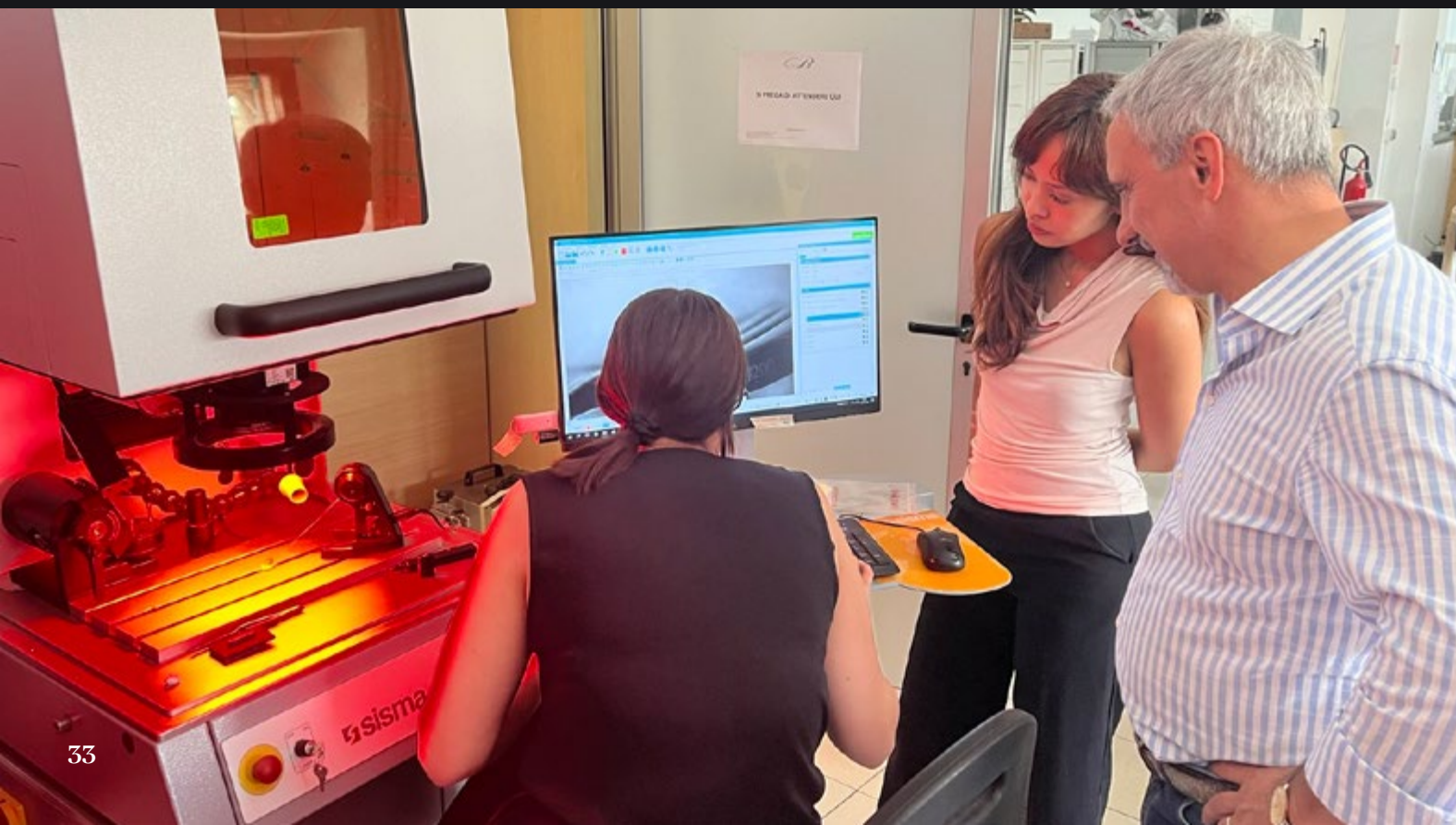
What are your plans for RUDIN right now? I noticed that you're targeting a Fall 2025 launch. It's around the corner. How's it going?

DIYANAH

Yes, we plan to launch in late October this year to the global market through our ecommerce shop. We're also looking at planning something around the F1 calendar, because that's when a lot of folks are also in town.

However, until then, we're working diligently behind the scenes to finalise prototypes, samples, and photo shoots, and begin production, while also becoming more actively engaged on social media.

You should follow our journey, because we'll be posting much more.



AMY

What’s your favourite part of work on a day-to-day basis? What sparks joy? Building and launching a brand can be challenging, especially when managing such a complex design process and supply chain.

DIYANAH

My favourite part of the day is at the end of it, when I realise that I did the best that I could, when I can authentically say that to myself, because days are so variable. One day, you may feel like you’re in a total funk and just can’t get the day started, no matter what. Then, there are days when you work for 16 hours straight, and the day just seems to fly by.

So, I like the days when I can say to myself, ‘Okay, I did the best I could,’ and I’m looking forward to the next day.

It’s simply about consistently doing something and then seeing what comes out of it.



AMY

Since you’ve been co-working out of so many cafes, do you have a favourite cafe?

DIYANAH

One is Monk’s Brew Club, located along East Coast Road. The other is Apartment Coffee along Selegie.



via fashion / vulnerability / strength - ringphus

reference of
statue of
mythos

for
crown

character
strong
clouds

Great
long
after way
length



ray
clothes

can



other



HEMANT MATHY

Hemant Mathy, a self-taught baker and 'Gen Z entrepreneur', discusses his journey of growing The Bagel Bunch from a home-based passion project into a popular Singaporean bagel shop renowned for its unique Asian fusion flavours.

I did communications at university for about three or four years. After I graduated, I worked with several non-profits on end-to-end communications, with a focus on internal communications. Just before I joined my first corporate job, I started The Bagel Bunch.

It was a home-based business I wanted to do for fun. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with it. My first corporate job was in December 2021, and I started The Bagel Bunch in May 2021.

I spent those six months figuring out what the plan was and then slowly building it from there. When I joined the corporate company, I worked in tandem with the shop, operating under a home-based concept. I sometimes worked pop-ups on the weekend, and I was also working my full-time job. Then, in 2023, I moved to a different company.

That was the period when I realised I wanted to open a shop. I looked around for potential investors. It was in August of that year that I spoke with Justin. I think he was there that day, and Wei Wen, whom I also knew. He roped in my other partner from there. They were interested in seeing how we could proceed.

One thing led to another. In December 2023, I quit my corporate job and spent about seven or eight months building up the shop itself. Since the shop opened last May, I've been doing that, in addition to another full-time job. When the shop stabilised, I went back to corporate. I work Monday through Friday at an SEO firm.

AMY

For your main job, is that remote or office-based?

HEMANT

It's Monday to Friday at the office. I spoke to them and told them I also have the shop, so I need a bit more flexibility. They're pretty cool about it because I used to freelance for them. Now I can work from home two to three times a week. It's pretty nice.

AMY

How did the formula for the recipes come to be? Was it something you had developed, or was it from a trip that inspired you?

HEMANT

The concept of The Bagel Bunch I wanted was Asian fusion flavours. That was what I wanted from the get-go. You see a variety of bagel shops in Singapore, but they lack a unique selling proposition (USP) for Asian flavours.

For the bagel recipe, I searched online for a few and I tried a few of them out; one of them was better for me. From there, I tweaked it. It took a lot of tweaking. The original recipe evolved. For the food recipes as well, it took me a while to get them down.

The Bagel Bunch is my child because various sources inspired the recipes and baking ideas I developed. I would Google random Indian recipes, and then I thought of making a butter chicken bagel. That was one of the first few items that we launched.



AMY

Have you experimented with using Gemini or ChatGPT?

HEMANT

For sure! I bounce ideas off Gemini quite a bit. Not purely related to recipes. Sometimes, yes. Sometimes, a lot of it is marketing stuff. Tips and trends, that kind of thing. But flavours... I would check what types of things we haven't tapped into yet that are popular in Singapore. One of them was a mala bagel that we recently launched. The team and I worked together to push it out, but I checked with Gemini first if it would be popular.

AMY

What are you hoping to prioritise for the rest of 2025?

HEMANT

I would like to say I'm prioritising both The Bagel Bunch and my day job. I wouldn't consider The Bagel Bunch my hobby; it's something that developed, something I was interested in. I would liken it to something I do on the side that I slowly grew into. In the first year when the shop was taking off, I was there 24/7 to ensure it stabilised.

Now that everything is stable and the team is excellent, they're able to provide practical help. It's about gradually

improving it each day. I would like to prioritise that while also doing the SEO stuff at the same time. It's a bit of both, because I also immensely enjoy the SEO work. I'm hoping to balance both, but at the same time, I want to further develop my skill sets.

AMY

What was the decision-making process in terms of your current space at Buona Vista? I recall visiting that space a couple of years ago, and it was a cafe.

HEMANT

There's a lot of traffic over there. You have students in the area, an office crowd, hospitals, shopping malls, and a church. People living in the HDBs as well. It was a no-brainer to pinpoint that area because there wasn't a sizable bagel business scene in that area.

Thankfully, the partners were quite on board with it because they could understand the thought process behind it.



AMY

Can you share more about the current dynamics within the space?

HEMANT

It used to be a team of three. Because I founded everything, I was naturally slotting myself into all the different roles. I'd hop around because I'm more familiar with operations. Now that we've a dedicated team handling the kitchen and coffee tasks, I've taken a step back to focus on more B2B activities, networking, and management responsibilities.

One of my partners is more silent, so he's more involved in the back-end corporate stuff.

The other partner I work with is also helping me with operations, and he's driving a significant portion of the business development.

That's how we split the allocation to be the most logical as well, based on skill sets.



AMY

Zooming out, what are your plans for the Bagel Bunch? Are you looking for an additional space for a second outlet?

HEMANT

Naturally, you want to build on the progress you have already made. Let's sit tight for now and see how things develop over the next year or so before we have that conversation.

The most important thing is getting stabilised, which we have done. Now that we have the opportunity to expand slowly from there, it's not yet on the table, but it's something we're considering for the long term.



AMY

What are you enjoying the most about running The Bagel Bunch and being in the F&B industry?

HEMANT

It's the creative aspect. Being able to come up with the recipes and tweak them, and being able just to put something out there that's your own.

It's always at the back of my mind. However, at the same time, I appreciate having been allowed to do this in the first place and create things that are rooted in my own experiences and imagination.

AMY

Is it true that you learned baking from YouTube and Reddit?

HEMANT

Yeah. I wasn’t the best baker at the time. It took me a lot of time to learn. I found YouTube videos. I went through Reddit; there are a lot of charming people on r/bagel. They were supportive as well. It took a lot of self-teaching to get to where we are now.

For the homemade concept itself, it took approximately two to three months to refine the recipe to my satisfaction. For the shop, it took us another month because we needed to make a slight adjustment for large crowds. We used a lot of flour.

My father was also in the F&B scene. He occasionally dabbled in cooking. He’s a cooking enthusiast—that’s where I get it from.

AMY

Did he inspire you to be in the F&B industry?

HEMANT

Yeah, to a certain degree. Because I saw my dad cooking quite a bit, and he was always interested in opening his own place as well. He lives vicariously through the shop in a certain way. However, I was inspired when I saw him creating things all day, as he loves to cook for his family, which piqued my interest.





AMY

Do you consider yourself a Gen Z entrepreneur?

HEMANT

By definition, no. Gen Z are those born from 1997 onwards. However, based on my personal experience, I feel a stronger connection with the Gen Z crowd.

AMY

From your Gen Z entrepreneur perspective, how does this generation approach your business and your innovations differently, especially within a more traditional, demanding field like F&B?

HEMANT

That's an excellent question. The lens is slightly different. For millennials or Gen X crowds, there's a precise formula that marketers try to push out, because they feel like A, B, and C work.

I was recently watching this video about 'cringe culture.' They discussed how millennials couldn't stand cringe culture, and they try to avoid doing things because they find it cringeworthy. Some of them didn't like wearing Crocs because it felt very cringeworthy, but Gen Z tends to embrace it, as if they're not shy about telling people what they want to achieve or what they want to do, because they feel very confident about doing it.

It affects everything I do, from top to bottom. It's not about shying away from something

because it might not work; it's about embracing it because it might. It's a 'never try, never know' situation, and I am more authentic and transparent with how we do things. Ultimately, it's not just a product, but a service offering, so it resonates with every level of what I've tried to achieve.





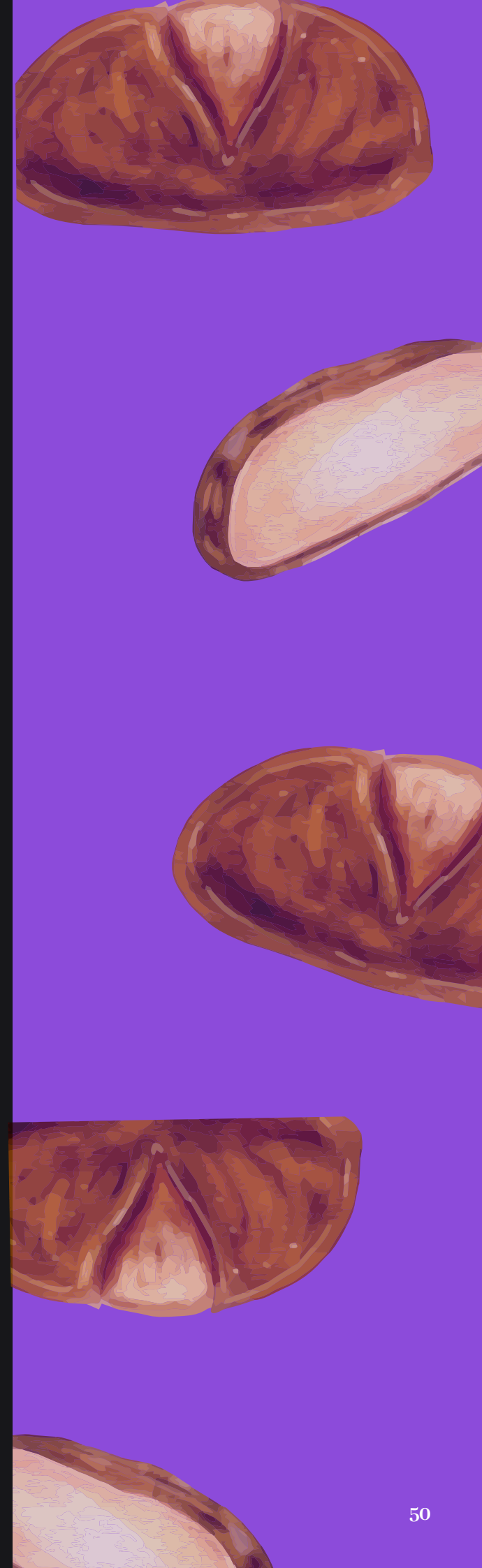
AMY

That is very chaotic. But at least it worked out in the end. Are you working on any new flavours or innovative products?

HEMANT

There are a few in the works. We have a few that we just launched. Mala was one. We have recently launched two new cream cheeses: Masala Chai and Apple Cinnamon.

We're still working on a couple of more Western-style bagels, because that's what we're missing. We have a few more things scheduled to take place by the end of the year. I can't say too much yet, but they're tasty.





AMY

Is there any non-traditional piece of advice you would give to someone dreaming of starting their unique food concept?

HEMANT

If you have a concept that you think will work and you feel like people will like it, you will most likely regret not doing it versus doubling down and giving it a shot.

However, at the same time, there's no shame in feeling like you're not ready for it or needing more time to think about it.

People do regret not doing stuff. But at the same time, it's a double-edged sword. You never really know what will happen. Whether you can push your concept and then open up a shop, and suddenly, touch wood, you lose \$100,000 in one year.

That's the flip side of it. A certain amount of caution is also necessary when taking a risk.

Don't just close both eyes and jump forward. Give it some time, think about it. If your gut tells you the risk is worth taking, by all means, do it. But if your gut has a hint of doubt, then it's okay to stop and think about it.

When I opened the shop, I told myself it was crazy because I think there needs to be a particular element of insanity when you double down on something like this. There were many risks that I wasn't aware of. You would never know until you experience it.

Fulfilling a dream isn't always the best course of action. I'm happy it worked out for me so far, but give it some thought before you jump into it.

AMY

If we were to order one item off your current menu, what would that item be? One food item and one beverage.

HEMANT

For me, food would be the Lox of Love. It's the smoked salmon; it's solid. It's our best seller. That's the crowd favourite. If you're a big eater, I would recommend the Korean fried chicken because it's massive.

For a drink, I would say it's a classic iced white, but with oat milk. The flavours blend well.

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