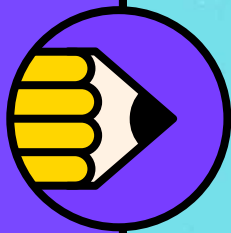


Trend Report 2026

The Drawing Arm



thedrawingarm.com

Artist: Annie Wright

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Artist: Kimberly Morris

01

Introduction

In an era where algorithmic sameness threatens to dilute originality, brands must work harder than ever to forge meaningful connection. Audiences are no longer moved by the expected—they gravitate toward what feels distinctive, intentional, and HUMAN. Within this landscape, the demand for true differentiation is intensifying, and we believe it is through the transformative power of art that brands can cut through and resonate on a deeper level.



Artist: Lara Allport



AT THE DRAWING ARM, WE ARE
DRIVEN BY A POWERFUL CONVICTION:

Art will save the world.

Artist: Sian Roper

This is not a lofty vision, but a strategic point of view grounded in clear and purposeful insight. Art holds the potential to transform how businesses respond to today's challenges while shaping a more compelling future.

Against this backdrop, The Drawing Arm's annual trend report unveils five emerging themes that pioneering organisations are using to redefine their landscape and connect more meaningfully with audiences. Through accompanying case studies, we hope to spark ideas for you and your team—encouraging you to move beyond 'business as usual' and create a distinctive edge in an increasingly uniform world.

Emerging Themes

02

**Handcrafted
Revival**

**Motion +
Magic**

**Soulful
Surfaces**

**Material
Ecologies**

**The New
Nostalgia**



The world of illustration and image-making is evolving rapidly, shaped by new tools, shifting aesthetics, and a renewed value on human creativity. At The Drawing Arm, we sit at the intersection of craft and innovation—collaborating with exceptional artists who span traditional mediums and emerging techniques. Together, we help brands translate bold ideas into compelling visual experiences.

Lara Allport, Founder of The Drawing Arm

Artist: Paul Pâté



Handcrafted Revival

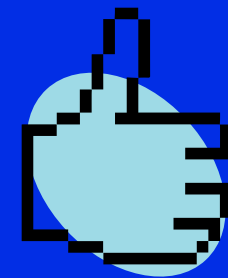
The Return of the Human Touch

As AI-generated visuals proliferate, brands are embracing imperfection, process, and visibly hand-made work as signals of authenticity and trust.

Artist: Karin Kellner

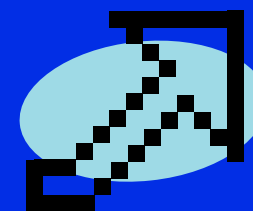


The commercial impact of human-made, handcrafted visuals is both measurable and compelling:



38%

of consumers say they trust brands more when visuals feel human-made rather than machine-generated.



Handcrafted or imperfect visual styles can increase perceived brand authenticity by up to

71%

Motion + Magic

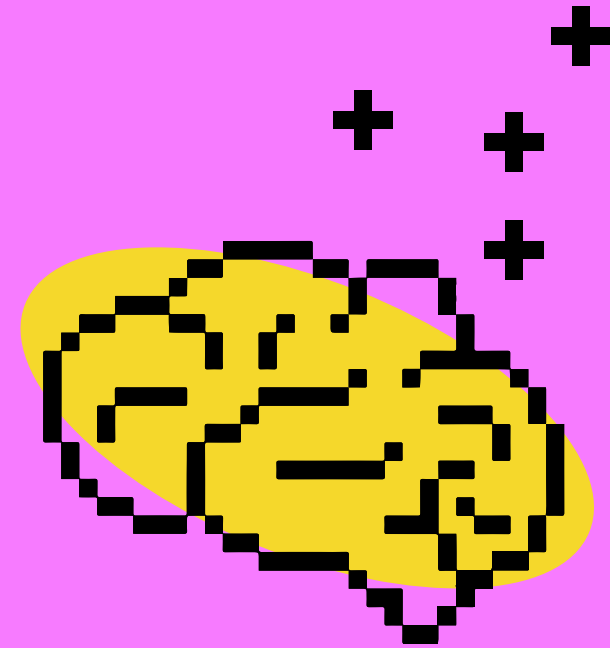


Artist: Ed McGowan

Living, Breathing Illustration

Illustration expands beyond the static into motion, AR, and interaction—creating dynamic, shareable experiences that increase engagement and dwell time.

EMERGING THEMES



Don't just take it from us — according to research when individuals engage with written text supported by illustrations, their comprehension and performance improved by a whopping

323%

compared to text alone.

Soulful Surfaces

The Mural Movement Evolves

Large-scale, hand-painted works shift from decoration to destination—anchoring identity, shaping place, and embedding storytelling into physical environments.



Artists: Lara Allport and MLON. Photo credit: Belinda Nowell



Artists: Brentos & Partner Tash. Photo credit: Gabby Villalba @kayapacs

Places enriched with large-scale, site-specific art see up to a

24% 

increase in foot traffic—demonstrating the power of art to transform environments into destinations.



Material Ecologies

Texture as a Premium Language

Hybrid, mixed-media approaches—combining digital and analog—introduce tactility, depth, and sensory richness back into visual communication.



Artist: Neryl Walker

The New Nostalgia



Artist: Bowling Tong

Specific Stories, Not Generic Retro

A shift from broad vintage references to deeply rooted, culturally specific storytelling—where memory, place, and identity drive emotional resonance.

And it turns out, nostalgia isn't just emotionally compelling—it's economically powerful too.



A study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* found that evoking feelings of nostalgia makes people more willing to whip out their wallets and spend more on consumer goods and services.

The Pioneers

02



Artist: Dave Homer

Dropbox x Artists

Handcrafted Revival



Why we love it

Dropbox — Rebrand with Hand-Drawn Illustration System

Dropbox moved away from slick tech visuals toward a hand-drawn illustration + photography system to humanise its brand. The shift broke from Silicon Valley sameness, making an abstract product feel more emotional and creative while clearly signaling values of collaboration and humanity.

The impact is clear. Hand-drawn visuals can increase perceived brand authenticity by up to 38%, while illustrated campaigns achieve up to 2× higher engagement than stock or AI-led imagery. More broadly, 70% of consumers say they trust brands more when visuals feel “made by people.”

Illustration by Lynnle Z



Photograph by Alexandra Gavillet

M.J. Bale x Bowling

Handcrafted Revival



Why we love it

M.J. Bale x Bowling Tong — The Return of the Human Touch

For M.J. Bale's Christmas campaign, Bowling Tong creates a detailed, hand-drawn world that celebrates the rituals of an Australian summer—told through nostalgic, carefully observed moments.

We love how the vintage aesthetic and visible linework bring warmth, personality and a sense of authorship to the piece. In contrast to the polish of digital sameness, the imperfections, texture and time embedded in the work signal something far more valuable: craft, care and authenticity.

[Read the blog](#)



[Watch the making of](#)



Ardea x Lara

Handcrafted Revival



Why we love it

Visit the website



Ardea Whitsundays — Watercolour Illustration & Pattern Design

For Ardea Whitsundays, a luxury coastal development set within the natural beauty of the Whitsundays, a series of bespoke watercolour illustrations were commissioned to create a rich, textural brand layer. Hand-painted elements inspired by native flora, coral forms and coastal details were developed and thoughtfully composed into repeat patterns, bringing a sense of softness and artistry to

the identity. What makes this approach so effective is its handcrafted tactility. Rather than relying on digital illustration or stock assets, the use of watercolour introduces natural variation, depth and movement—qualities that echo the surrounding landscape and elevate the overall brand experience. The resulting patterns feel both refined and relaxed, capturing a distinctly Australian coastal sensibility while maintaining a polished, contemporary finish.



Telstra x Barry P

Motion + Magic



Why we love it

Telstra x Barry P — Infinite Worlds, In Motion

This collaboration showcases the power of infinite zoom as a storytelling device—drawing viewers into an ever-expanding illustrated universe. What begins as a single moment unfolds into a layered, interconnected world, mirroring the reach of Telstra’s satellite messaging service.

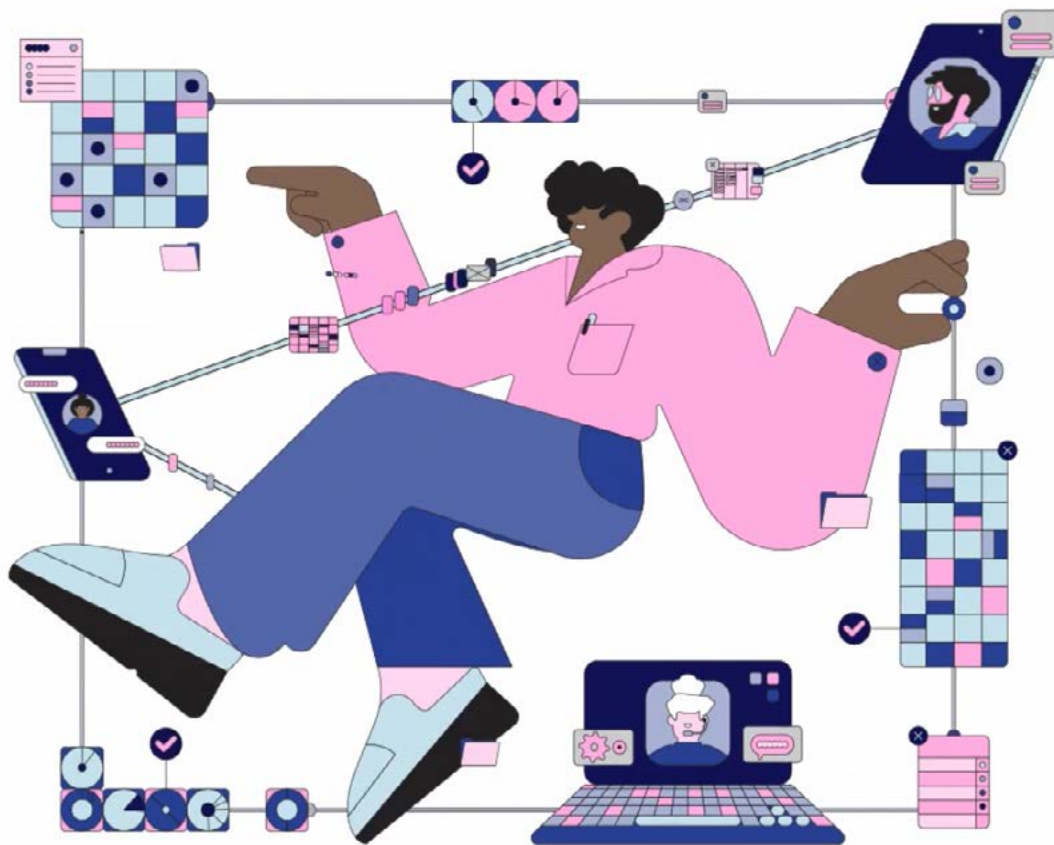
By combining handcrafted illustration with infinite zoom motion, the work transforms into an immersive experience—one that rewards curiosity, extends dwell time, and invites repeated viewing. It’s a compelling example of how motion can move beyond animation to become exploration.

Watch the clip



Raconteur x Bratislav

Motion + Magic



Why we love it

Raconteur x Bratislav — The Future of Packaging

Bratislav Milenkovic translates Raconteur's Future of Packaging into a dynamic, interconnected visual system—where people, materials, technology and recycling flow together.

We love how it simplifies a complex, technical topic into something intuitive and human, while still capturing the scale and ambition of the industry's shift toward circularity.

It's a perfect example of illustration doing more than decorating editorial—it becomes a thinking tool. A visual narrative that doesn't just explain the future of packaging, but lets you see how it all connects.

[Read the article](#)



Spotify

Motion + Magic



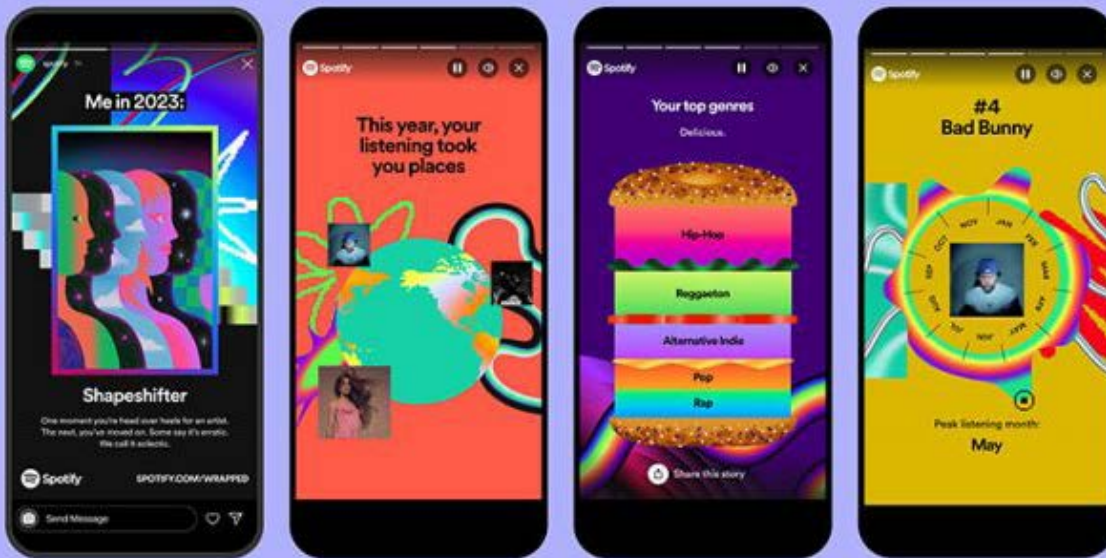
Why we love it

Spotify — Wrapped Illustrated Motion Systems

Spotify Wrapped transforms user data into a dynamic, illustrated experience—using character-led visuals, looping animation and motion-first design to turn information into celebration. The result is highly personal, emotionally engaging, and built to be shared.

What makes it effective is how motion humanises data. Illustration softens complexity, while animation adds rhythm, personality and momentum—holding attention and encouraging interaction in a way static content cannot.

Watch the clip



BUMP x MLON

Motion + Magic



Why we love it

Spotify MLON — BUMP Title Sequence Illustration & Animation

For the Australian series BUMP, MLON created a vibrant illustrated title sequence that blends character-driven storytelling with fluid, expressive animation.

The sequence uses distinctly MLON illustrative forms and rhythmic transitions to introduce the show—reflecting its warmth, humour and emotional complexity through a distinctly graphic lens. Characters transition in ways that mirror the unpredictability and energy of the narrative itself. This creates a visual language that is both playful and sophisticated, setting the tone before a single line is spoken.

Watch the clip



Facebook x Artists

Soulful Surfaces



[Read the WIRED article ↗](#)



Why we love it

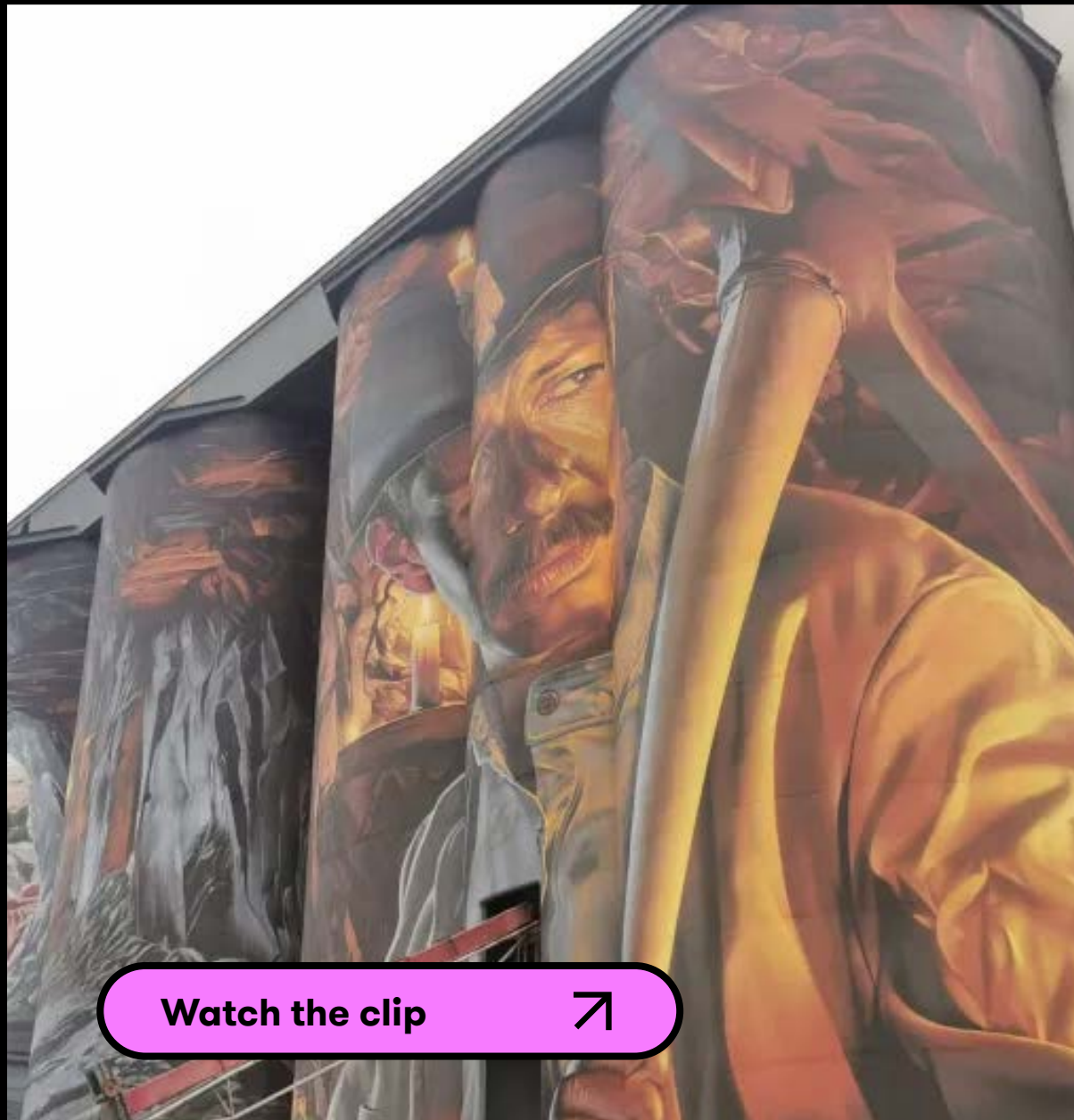
Facebook (Meta) - Artist-in-Residence Murals, Global Offices

Artists were commissioned to create large-scale, site-specific murals that respond directly to local culture, community stories, and surrounding architecture. These works moved beyond decoration to become identity anchors within each space, reinforcing Meta's narrative of local connection within a global brand. At the same time, they generated highly shareable content, both internally and externally.

The impact is measurable. Workplaces featuring art report 15–20% higher employee wellbeing scores, while employees in visually enriched environments are 32% more likely to describe their workplace as inspiring. In public settings, murals can increase foot traffic to surrounding businesses by up to 24%, demonstrating their power to transform spaces into destinations.

Kapunda x Smug

Soulful Surfaces



Watch the clip



Why we love it

Kapunda Silo Mural (produced with Juddy Roller)

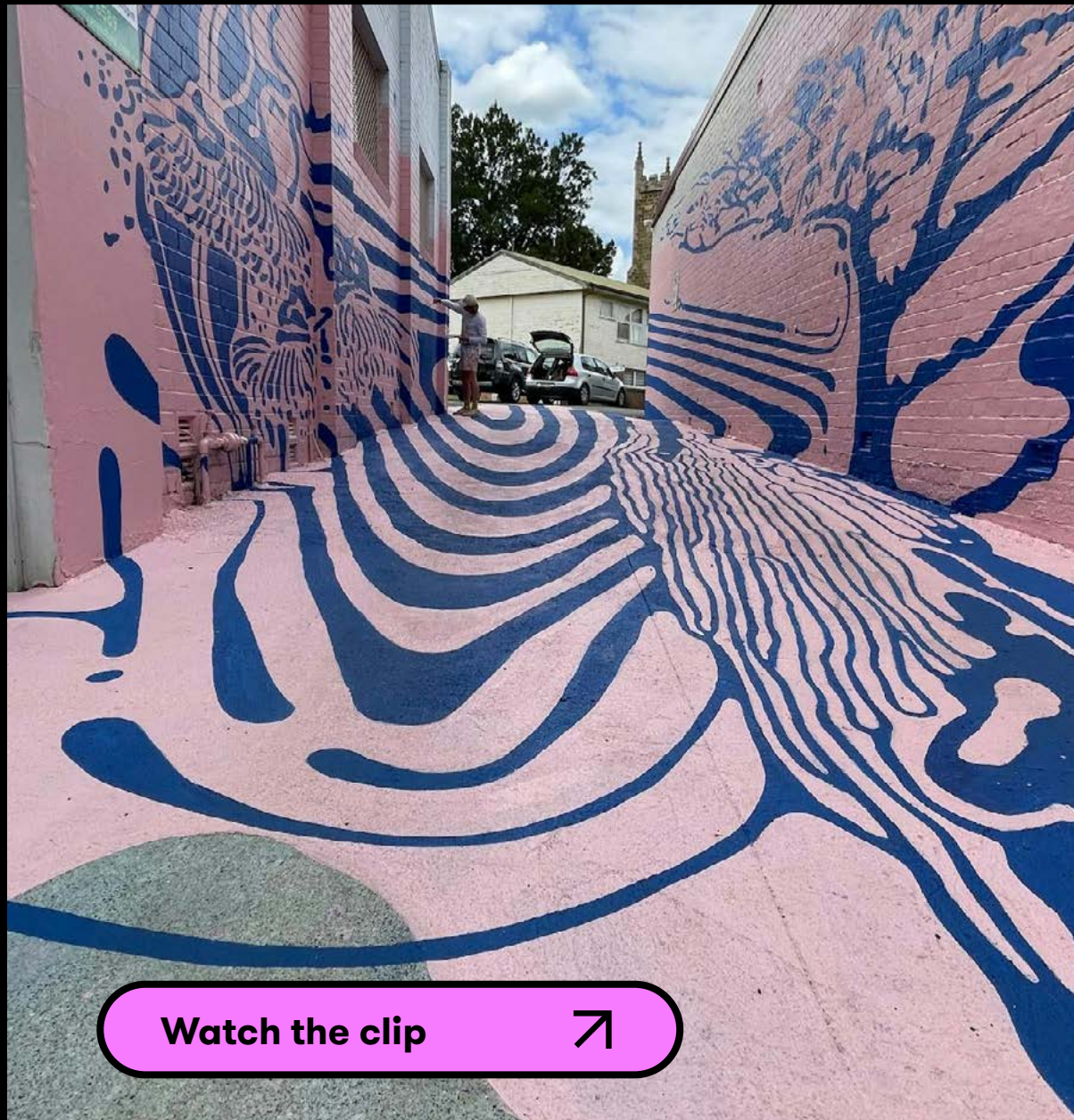
In Kapunda, South Australia, muralist Smug (Sam Bates) transforms a set of industrial silos into a powerful, place-driven narrative—depicting a copper miner deep underground, illuminated by candlelight. The work draws directly from the town’s history as Australia’s first successful mining settlement.

Through Smug’s signature realism, the mural captures not just a figure, but a story—one rooted in community memory, labour and pride. It turns infrastructure into storytelling, and in doing so, redefines the space as something to be experienced rather than passed through.

This work has helped position the town of Kapunda as a destination on Australia’s Silo Art Trail, demonstrating how art can shift perception, drive tourism, and bring communities together around a shared story.

Ink Hunter

Soulful Surfaces



Watch the clip



Why we love it

Patrick “Ink Hunter” — Immersive Mural, NSW

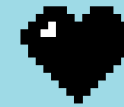
Patrick “Ink Hunter” Hunter creates murals that are deeply embedded in place—drawing on surf culture, ocean life and coastal living. His work transforms everyday walls into expressions of local identity, often reflecting environmental themes shaped by his lifelong connection to the ocean.

What makes these murals powerful is their authenticity. Created by a local artist for a local community, they carry a sense of ownership and familiarity.

The result is more than visual impact—it’s placemaking. These murals become meeting points, landmarks and conversation starters, reinforcing the idea that when art reflects the people and stories of a place, it doesn’t just enhance space—it gives it soul.

Miami Creative District

Soulful Surfaces



Why we love it

Wynwood Walls — Miami Creative District

Wynwood Walls has transformed a former industrial district in Miami into a globally recognised creative destination, bringing together over 100 artists to turn entire buildings into an open-air gallery.

What makes it so compelling is its collective authorship—an evolving ecosystem of large-scale murals that shape the identity of the neighbourhood itself, rather than sitting apart from it.

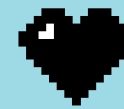
The result is a place where art drives both cultural and economic value. Wynwood has become one of the most visited and photographed creative precincts in the world, demonstrating how site-specific, artist-led interventions can reframe perception, attract global attention, and turn a once-overlooked area into a vibrant, living destination.

Watch the clip



Liquid IV x Lara x MLON

Soulful Surfaces



Why we love it

Liquid I.V. — Illustrated Mural Campaign (via The Live Agency)

For Liquid I.V. – a large-scale illustrated mural was developed to bring the brand’s “Tear, Pour... More” campaign into a bold, public-facing format. The artwork was designed as a series of poster-like panels, each capturing a different moment of movement—surf, walk, swim and hydrate—using stylised characters, vibrant colour and flowing forms to convey energy and vitality.

What makes this approach so effective is its modularity. Drawing on the visual language of street posters, the mural breaks into distinct yet connected scenes—allowing each panel to stand alone while contributing to a larger narrative. The use of bold geometry, layered gradients and dynamic composition creates a sense of rhythm and motion, reinforcing the product’s role within an active, lifestyle-driven context.

Aesop x APFEDL

Material Ecologies



For guiding hands and watchful eyes



For guiding hands and watchful eyes



Why we love it

[Read the Case Study](#) ↗

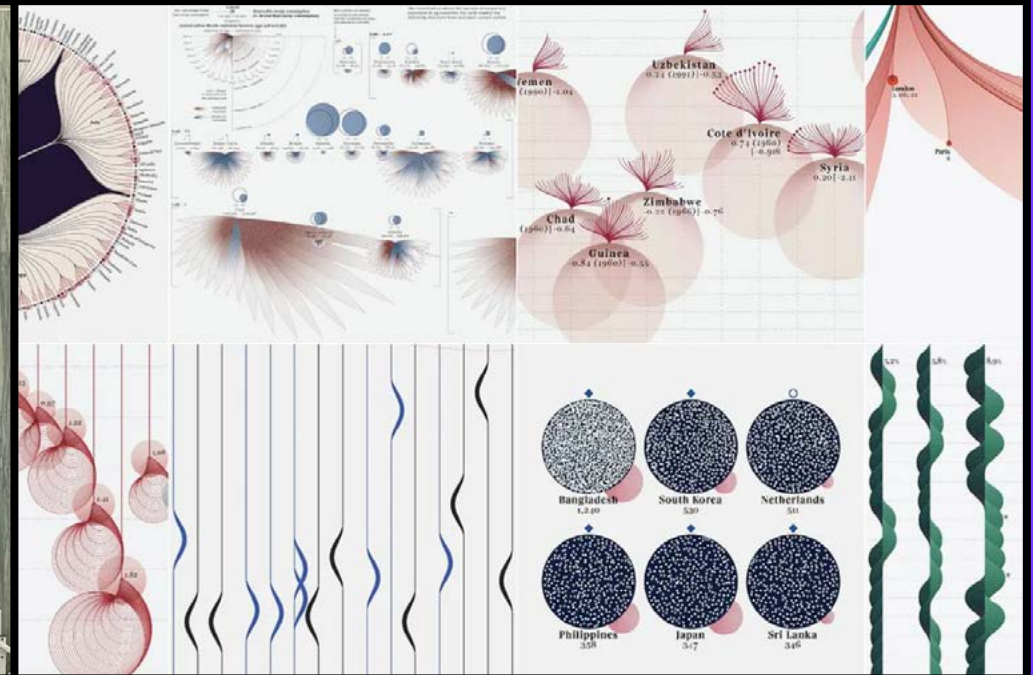
Aesop — Illustration, Packaging & Campaign Artwork (via A Practice for Everyday Life)

Aesop's visual world integrates hand-drawn illustration, material textures and painterly marks across packaging and campaigns. The result is a tactile, considered aesthetic that signals quality through restraint and craft. What makes it powerful is its ability to slow

the viewer down. Texture becomes a premium signal—creating sensory memory rather than just visual recognition, and reinforcing the product's physicality in an increasingly digital landscape. The impact is measurable. Textured, mixed-media visuals can increase viewing time by up to 40%, while premium brands using tactile imagery command up to 20% higher perceived value.

Triennale Milano

Material Ecologies



Why we love it

Watch the Interview



Federica Fragapane — Shapes of Inequalities, Triennale Milano

Federica Fragapane's *Shapes of Inequalities* reimagines data visualisation as something soft, organic and almost tactile—transforming complex datasets into flowing forms that resemble petals, waves or living systems. Presented at the Triennale Milano, the work translates issues like economic disparity and

climate crisis into a visual language that feels both precise and deeply human.

What makes it so compelling is its material sensibility. Rather than rigid charts, Fragapane uses texture, colour and form to evoke the lives behind the data—encouraging viewers to slow down and engage emotionally.

Red Hot Chili Peppers

Material Ecologies



Why we love it

Ryan McCann's motion design for Red Hot Chili Pepper's 'Our Brother, Hillel' documentary transforms archival storytelling into a richly textured, collage-driven visual experience. Drawing on scrapbook aesthetics—layered paper, analog photography, handwritten elements and tactile composition—the work builds a visual language that feels raw, intimate and deeply human.

What makes it so powerful is the materiality. The use of collage and mixed media doesn't just illustrate the story—it embodies it, reflecting memory as something layered, imperfect and assembled over time.

The result is a compelling example of texture as narrative. By leaning into imperfection and physicality, the work creates a sensory connection that digital polish alone can't achieve—proving that material-driven visuals don't just communicate stories, they feel like them.



Watch the trailer



International Women's Day

Material Ecologies



Why we love it

Sarah Jarrett — International Women's Day

For International Women's Day, Sarah Jarrett creates a richly layered collage that brings together botanical forms, archival imagery and painterly textures into a single, immersive composition. Drawing on her signature blend of analog and digital techniques, the work feels both intricate and deeply personal—rooted in her ongoing exploration of nature, femininity and symbolism.

What makes the piece so compelling is its material richness. Fragments of flora and texture are carefully assembled to form a unified whole, evoking strength through softness and complexity through layering. The visible process and tactile quality invite the viewer to slow down, discovering new details with each look.



LA Times x Sian Roper

Material Ecologies



Why we love it

Sian Roper — Los Angeles Times Editorial Illustration

For the Los Angeles Times, Sian Roper brings editorial storytelling to life through her signature collage style—combining cut-paper textures, photographic fragments and hand-drawn elements into playful, layered compositions. While digitally assembled, the work retains an analog, tactile quality, with visible edges, overlaps and imperfections that give each piece a sense of physical construction.

What makes this approach so effective is its material honesty. Rather than hiding the process, Roper leans into it—using texture and layering to guide the viewer through complex ideas in a way that feels intuitive and human. The result is editorial illustration that doesn't just communicate information, but builds atmosphere and meaning through material depth.

[Read the Case Study](#) ↗

Airbnb x Artists

The New Nostalgia



Why we love it

Airbnb — Illustrated Local Guides & Campaigns (with artists including Jeannie Phan, Jennifer Hom, and collaborators)

Airbnb has consistently commissioned illustrators to create culturally specific visuals tied to place, memory and lived experience—moving away from generic travel imagery toward something more personal and grounded. Campaigns like Go Near and evolving illustration systems draw directly from real communities, reflecting the brand’s ethos of “belong anywhere.”

What makes this approach powerful is its specificity. Rather than relying on broad vintage tropes, these works capture the nuances of local culture—creating deeper emotional resonance and elevating the voices of the places they represent.

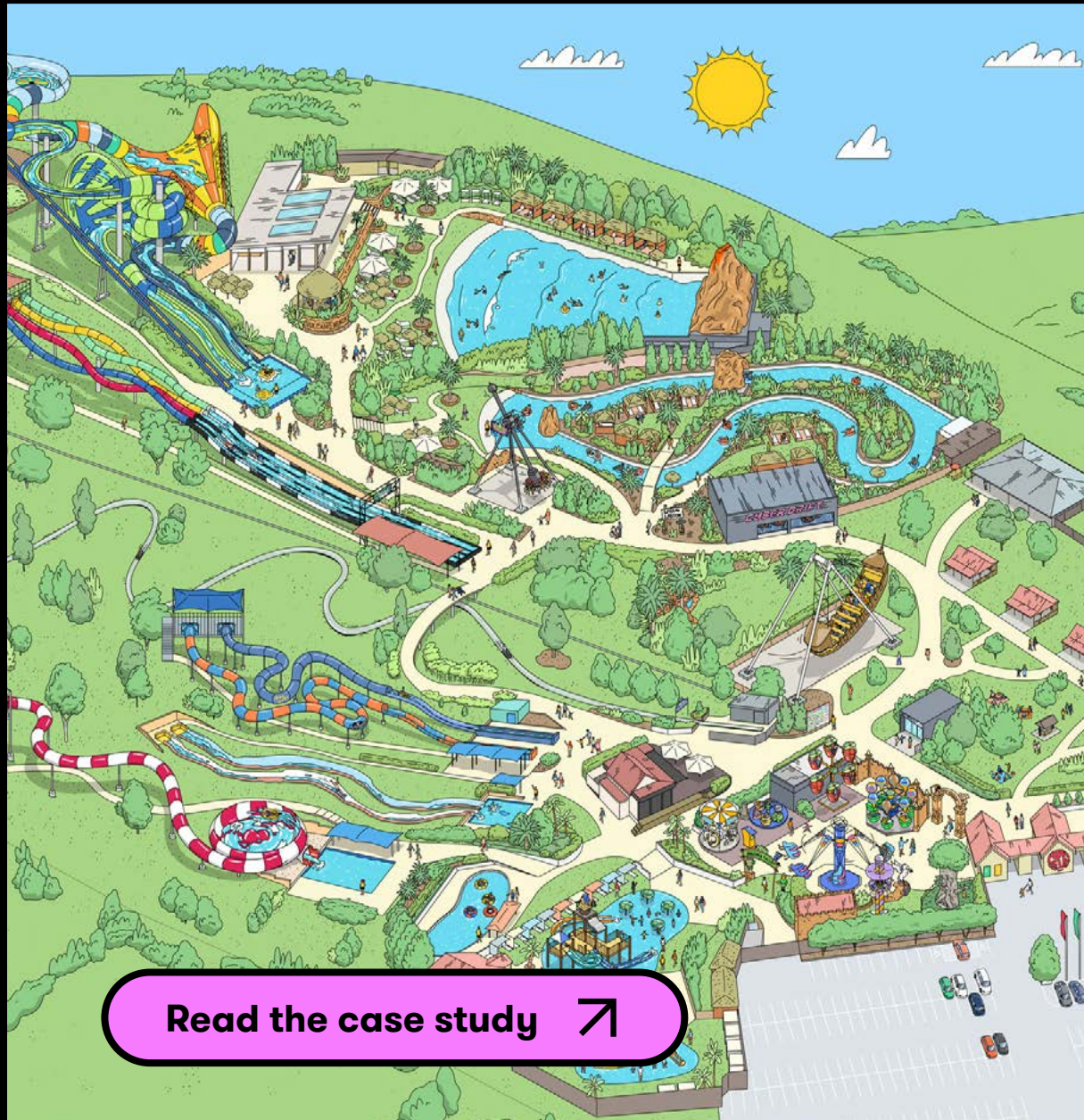


Watch the clip



Self-titled x Barry P

The New Nostalgia



[Read the case study ↗](#)



Why we love it

Barry P — Illustrated Map (via Self Titled)

For Funfields Theme Park, Self Titled developed an illustrated brand world that reimagines the experience of a classic Australian theme park through a nostalgic, hand-drawn lens. Drawing on retro amusement park graphics, playful typography and character-led scenes, the work captures the energy of a day out—sun, rides, food and shared moments—while grounding it firmly in a contemporary visual system.

What makes this approach so effective is its specificity—and its style. Barry P's illustrated map draws on a distinctly nostalgic visual language, combining isometric perspective with retro comic influences reminiscent of *The Beano* or *Jughead*. It's not a generic theme park—it's this park, rendered with personality, humour and a clear sense of place.

[Watch the making of ↗](#)

Gucci x Artists

The New Nostalgia



Why we love it

Gucci — Illustrated Campaigns (Artist Collaborations)

Gucci's illustrated campaigns embrace a form of nostalgia that feels both playful and subversive—collaborating with artists to reinterpret the brand through naïve styles, retro palettes and character-led storytelling. Rather than relying on traditional luxury imagery, these campaigns lean into imperfection and personality, creating a visual language that feels expressive, eclectic and distinctly human.

By drawing on illustration styles that feel referential yet unexpected, Gucci creates work that nods to the past without becoming trapped in it.

The result is an expression of New Nostalgia. By prioritising artist voice and narrative over convention, Gucci demonstrates how heritage can be reimagined—creating campaigns that feel emotionally resonant, culturally relevant, and unmistakably Gucci.



The New Yorker

The New Nostalgia



Why we love it

The New Yorker x Malika Favre — Illustrated Covers

Through collaborations with illustrators like Malika Favre, The New Yorker defines a modern form of nostalgia—rooted in observation, memory and cultural specificity rather than retro styling. For a recent cover on women in the tech industry, art director Françoise Mouly invited Favre to respond to an open brief—one that became increasingly complex as she began researching the subject and its nuances.

What makes this work so powerful is its precision. Favre distills layered, contemporary issues into striking, symbolic imagery—capturing shared cultural moments without cliché, and creating familiarity through lived experience rather than reference.

The result is a compelling expression of New Nostalgia, where illustration captures the spirit of a moment—creating work that is instantly recognisable, emotionally resonant, and enduring.

Hermès x Artists

The New Nostalgia



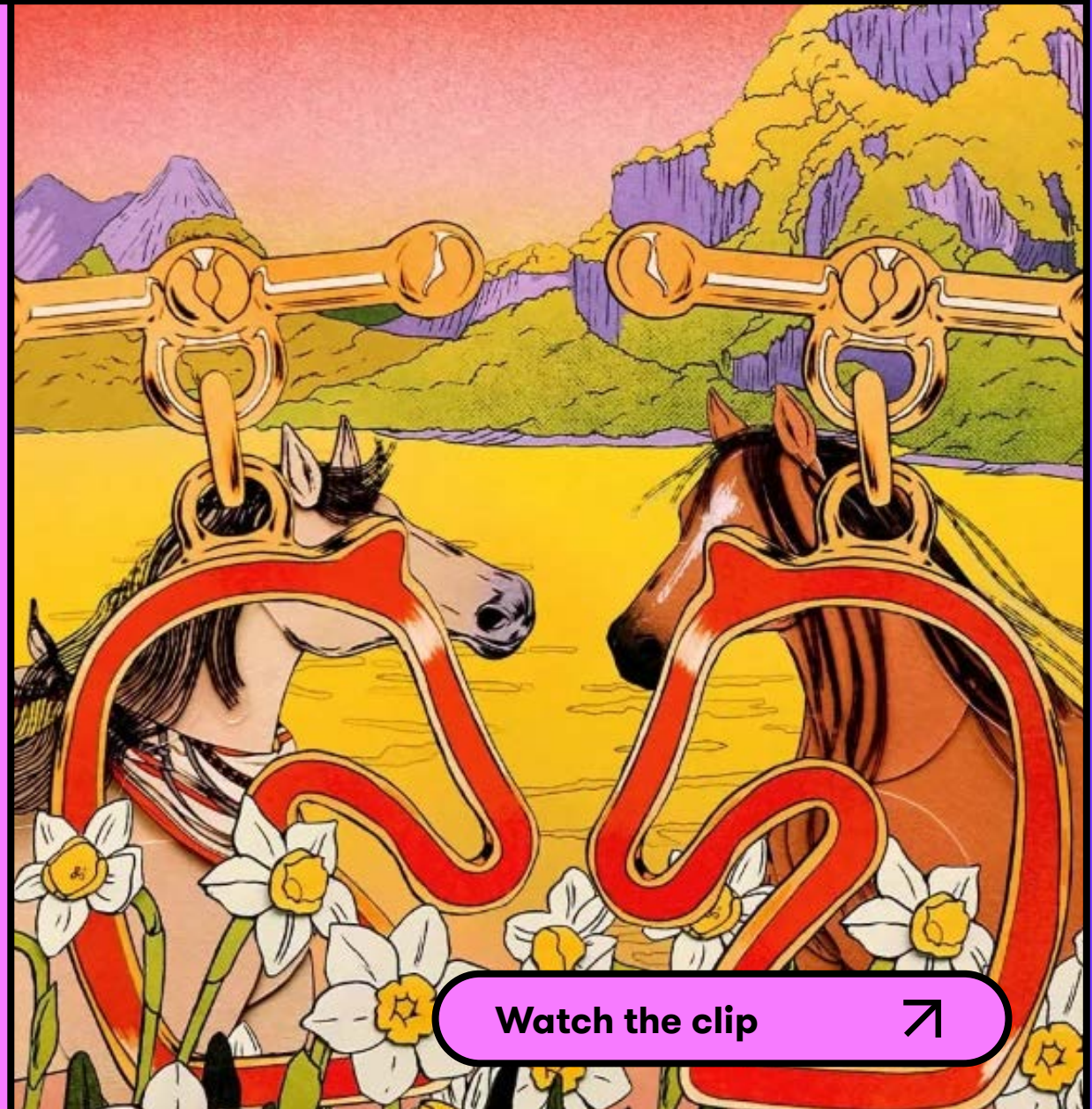
Why we love it

Hermès— Illustrated Campaigns (Artist Collaborations)

Hermès has embraced hand-drawn illustration as a core part of its visual language—integrating sketch-like imagery across campaigns, digital platforms and brand experiences. In an era increasingly defined by AI-generated perfection, the maison has made a deliberate shift toward the human hand, commissioning artists to create work that feels poetic, playful and visibly crafted.

What makes this approach so powerful is its philosophy. At Hermès, drawing is not just an aesthetic choice but the foundation of creation—where every line carries intention, history and craft.

By foregrounding the imperfect, the hand-made and the imaginative, Hermès redefines luxury as something deeply human.



Watch the clip



04

What Next?

The Drawing Arm's annual trend report explores the emerging forces shaping art and illustration today—and where they are heading next. Grounded in our ongoing exploration of the creative landscape, it brings together insights from across industries and markets to reveal where meaningful opportunities for differentiation, connection and growth are emerging.

At its core, this report reflects a clear point of view: that art is not just expressive, but strategic. Our role is to help organisations harness its power—whether to build stronger brands, create more engaging experiences, or unlock new ways of thinking and communicating.

If you'd like to explore how this year's themes can be applied to your own challenges—or how art can create a more distinctive, human and resonant brand—we'd love to start that conversation.



Artist: Chris Nixon

05

About The Drawing Arm

Founded and run by artist, community activist and award winning design agency owner Lara Allport, The Drawing Arm transcends the traditional boundaries of an illustration talent agency.

We fuse our passion for cutting-edge creative ideas, hands-on partnership, and meticulous execution to help businesses deliver unique campaigns that deliver results that truly matter.

We represent a collective of hand-picked, top-notch, contemporary artists and illustrators from across Australia and beyond. Our artists specialise in a wide range of styles—from vector magic to lovingly hand-crafted typography. So whatever you're after, we'll have someone to fit the bill.

We help our clients through every phase of the illustration commission process—from selecting the right artist to briefing, fine-tuning, and final application. We pride ourselves on delivering on-budget and on-time, ensuring that every project is handled with creativity and precision.

Contact Us

Learn more about our work and how we can help you.

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Art will save the world

Thank you

thedrawingarm.com