

Cultural Shifts Summer 2025

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Foreword

Welcome to Margaret's Cultural Shifts Summer.

Once again, we are taking the cultural temperature of 2025, reflecting on consumer sentiment and emerging trends, and we're seeing a common thread emerge: a collective longing for meaning, connection, and authenticity in an increasingly fractured world.

From the rise of Sacred Social spaces redefining nightlife as a source of ritual and community, to the movement reimagining human-centric hotel design, people are seeking environments that nourish the soul. This also manifests in an appetite for food experiences that tap into the growing desire to push against perfection and embrace joyful, community-led gatherings.

Meanwhile, sport is becoming a canvas for cultural expression and community building, and a folklore resurgence reveals how younger generations are reinterpreting ancient traditions to find belonging.

Emerging trends in public art demonstrate how technology, when wielded with care, can deepen shared understanding and catalyse collective imagination.

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Margaret is a global communications agency, creative studio and certified B Corp, specialising in arts and culture. Our mission is to craft meaningful, culturally relevant campaigns that stand for something. Working at the intersection of brands and cultural institutions, we gain unique insight into evolving global trends and consumer needs, enabling us to shape campaigns that truly resonate.

As ever, we'd love to hear what you think of this report: feel free to drop us a line at [**hello@margaretlondon.com**](mailto:hello@margaretlondon.com).

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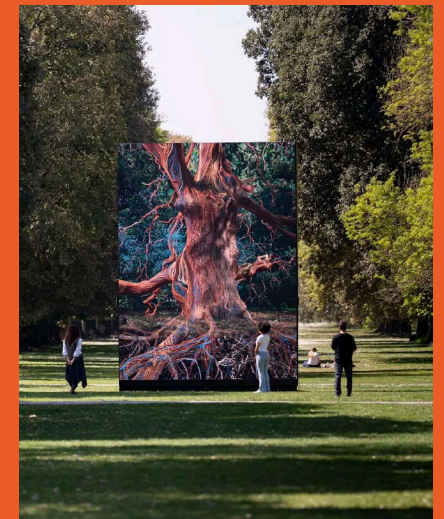
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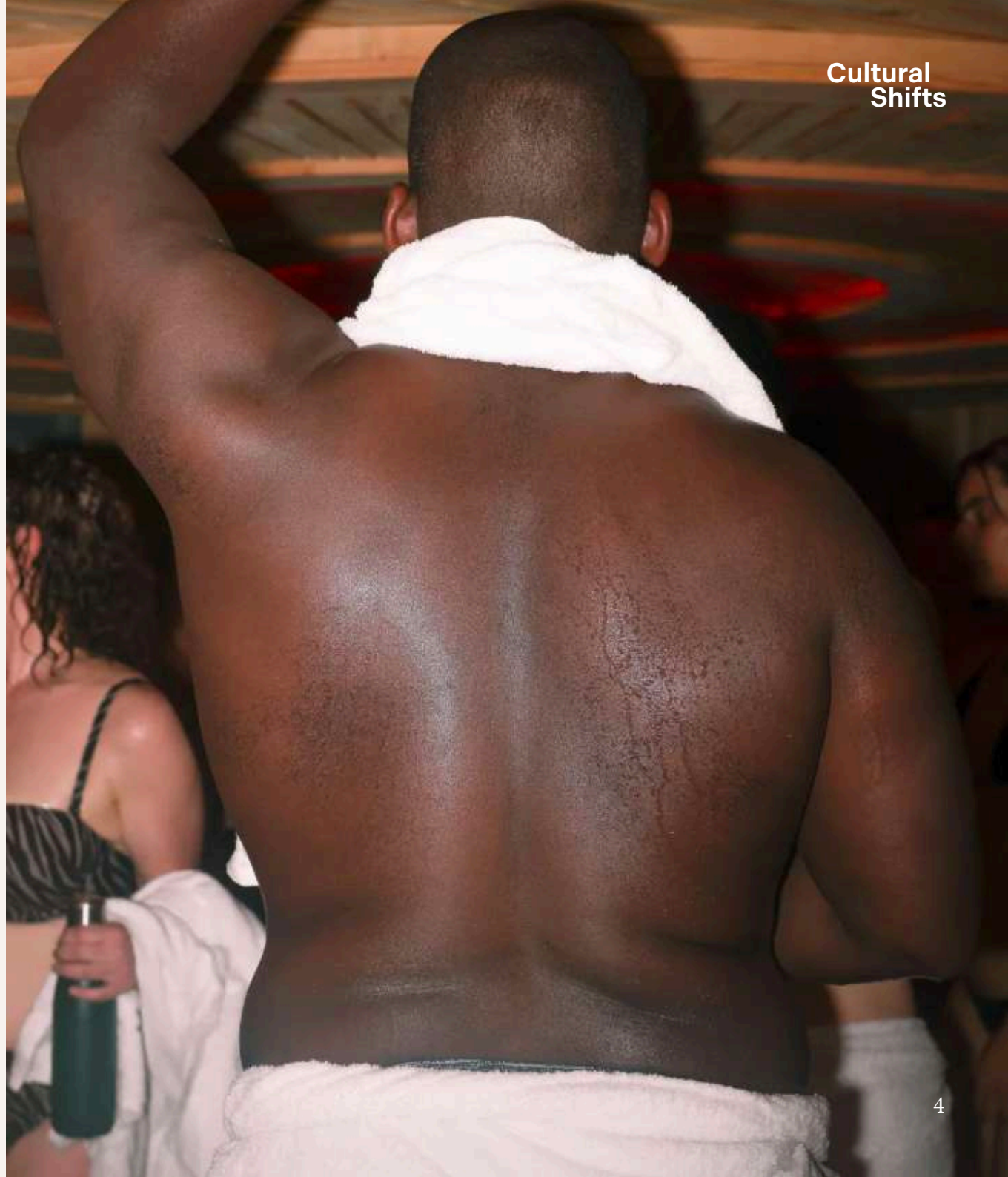
Nightlife isn't dead, it's going through a metamorphosis. Traditional nightlife as we know it is changing - 90% of UK venues are struggling with rising costs, and facing challenges to their survival. In a move that underscores the importance of the night-time economy, the Greater London Authority has announced a landmark pilot scheme that will give new licensing powers to the Mayor of London in an effort to support nightlife culture and the venues on which it depends.

This crisis is also creating something profound: the emergence of "Sacred Social" spaces that provide ritual, community, and transcendence without requiring religious belief.

Gen Z is driving this transformation, seeking meaningful gathering experiences as entertainment. They're moving beyond traditional "third places" toward intentional "fourth spaces" - curated environments that bridge digital passions with physical connection. From Service95's book tastings to sauna raves, these spaces offer collective euphoria through shared purpose. It's interesting to note how the creatives that are nurturing these 'micro-communities' are starting to emerge as an alternative to traditional, digital-focused influencers, explored in this Vogue Business feature:

"Micro-communities are increasingly gathering offline, transforming shared interests into shared experiences for consumers. With them, a different kind of cultural capital is taking hold, which is not focused on traditional influencers and social reach."

Amy Francombe for Vogue Business.





Initiatives like Save our Scene and grassroots campaigns like Sister Midnight (to open a community-owned live music venue and creative space in Lewisham), also demonstrate an appetite for the stewardship of cultural spaces. Notably, for the 50th anniversary of its Kick Hi boot (a design deeply rooted in music culture), footwear brand Kickers partnered with Save our Scene for the 'Stomping Grounds' campaign - a series of events with headline acts and local talent to raise awareness of the crisis facing grassroots music venues and creative spaces, with all proceeds being donated to the Music Venue Trust.

"As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Kick Hi, we wanted to honour the spaces that have shaped youth culture and the history of the brand as a result - places where our community has come together to celebrate music, self-expression and belonging. With venues under threat, it's never been more important to protect and reimagine these cultural touchstones. Partnering with Save Our Scene felt like a natural step, not just to raise awareness, but to help create moments that bring people together with purpose. Kickers has a strong heritage in music and youth culture, and we're proud to stand up for the future of it."

Alex Roberts, Head of Brand, Kickers





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The revival is also happening through bold adaptive reuse and community-centred programming. Exemplifying this is '[Shredenham's](#)' - the former Debenhams department store in Bristol's Broadmead has been converted by the not-for-profit Campus Skateboarding into an indoor skatepark, cafe and bar that "blends skateboarding and socialising, with quality coffee and beers in a space designed for both skaters and community connection".

And this also translates into nightlife - Rainy Heart Soundsystem's party '[Repeat Prescription](#)' in Manchester took over a derelict branch of Boots in Stretford Town Centre for a rave that blended music, art and high-concept production design to elevate the experience into a shared moment of creativity and connection.

Sacred Social

Brand Opportunity

Be a true partner in curating these new Sacred Social spaces, enabling authentic community formation rather than traditional venue sponsorship. Even better, take it further by bringing new life into a venue, as we did with our 2023 'Casa Brugal' campaign taking over an East London cafe and giving it a facelift as well as running a series of profile-building events.



Grounded Living

Grounded Living

The movement toward connecting with nature as an antidote to digital overwhelm isn't new. As early as 2018, GPs were prescribing time in nature to combat stress, and the benefits of 'Shinrin-Yoku' ('forest bathing') were being explored everywhere from The Guardian to the National Trust website.

Since then, the signals have been building: Gucci x The North Face x Flock Together brought birdwatching to luxury fashion, Patagonia pioneered "regenerative travel" programmes and House of Hackney put nature on its board and introduced "Nature Fridays".

The trend has even spawned new social media movements like "Girl Mossing" - young people sharing their forest wanderings and nature connections online.

The longevity of this movement suggests that the need to connect with nature runs deeper than a passing trend; it represents a biological human need and a fundamental shift in how we relate to the natural world.

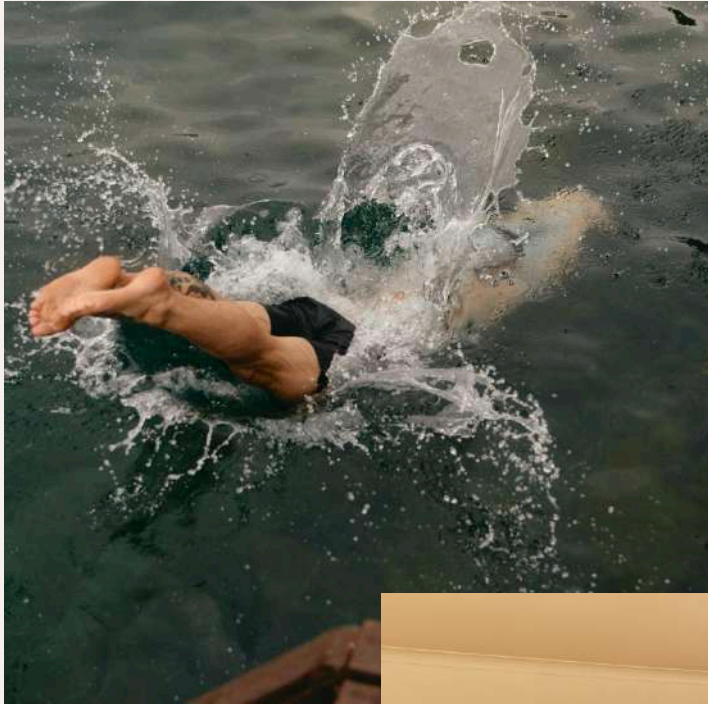
This connects to the Symbiocene, environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht's 2011 term for a future era of harmonious human-nature coexistence, and "multispecies thinking" - an approach that moves beyond human-centred perspectives to consider our interconnectedness with all living organisms.

All of these signals point to a significant conclusion: humans have become increasingly disconnected from nature, and we have reached a critical juncture where a fundamental shift in how we operate and exist on the planet is necessary to secure a sustainable future.

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Insights by Philippa Wagner



One particular area where we're tracking considerable shifts is travel and hospitality.

Creative Strategy Director and Founder of [PeoplePlacesSpaces](#), [Philippa Wagner](#) works with us on brand strategy and guest experience - and brings deep insight from her work with leading hospitality brands, operators, developers and design teams around the world. Her insights on this trend, which are to follow, are rooted in her people-first and futures-driven approach

Hospitality has been chasing wellness for years - there was a time when every new hotel needed a DJ; now its wellness programming beyond the spa. The Ranch properties provide "[complete reset](#)" experiences, and [The Bothy at Heckfield Place](#) promises to allow guests to 'reconnect with nature'.

But herein lies a critical challenge for the industry - by creating these manufactured 'experiences', there is a risk of creating a disconnect with discerning travellers wary of greenwashing and commodifying calm. The global wellness economy is projected to grow at 7.3% annually* from 2023-2028, but only for those who can navigate authenticity.

Forward-thinking properties are discovering that the opportunity isn't in creating nature or wellness programming - it's actually in getting out of the way, and reimagining their role as ecosystem facilitators rather than masters. Margaret and Philippa are working on the upcoming launch of [Crafted](#), a series of 'life-friendly hotels' that seeks to find this balance by adopting a nature-first approach.



Insights by Phillipa Wagner

Realigning the nervous system through natural connection is becoming a new form of luxury, and for hotels, part of this is giving guests permission to disconnect without guilt. We're seeing experiments with phone-free zones and WiFi removal from outdoor spaces, creating authentic environments for uninterrupted calm.

The most authentic approaches involve partnerships with people already doing the work, facilitating access to local rewilding projects, citizen science initiatives, and land-based knowledge keepers; indigenous knowledge systems have intrinsically understood multispecies thinking and can offer priceless insights into how to move beyond human-centric design entirely.



Grounded Living

Brand Opportunity

Travel and hospitality are shifting from consumption to contribution and connection. Guests want to leave places better than they found them while feeling better themselves. Practically, this means extending checkout times for unscheduled wandering, designing spaces that fade into the landscape (low-impact architecture), creating zones where nervous systems can actually regulate both in nature and biophilic-inspired architecture. Let guests contribute to actual conservation work rather than consume manufactured experiences. The hospitality brands that understand this fundamental human need will capture this market. The opportunity is massive, but only for those who resist the urge to productise the longing for nature and instead create conditions for authentic connection with nature and ourselves to flourish.

Maximalist Appetite

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Maximalist Appetite

We're noticing a shift towards maximalism in food culture, where minimalist aesthetics are taking a back seat in favour of theatrical, joy-driven experiences that blur the lines between dining and visual art, leaning into cultural participation and artistic expression.

From Naughty Nonnas' OTT dessert installations to Laila Gohar's bed-shaped cakes at Milan Design Week, brands are embracing spectacular food experiences that immerse audiences in gastronomic worlds. Rimmel's butter candelabras, Margaret's fashion commission with Vanessa McKeown for the launch of Popworks crisps and Jacquemus' banana-themed fashion campaign also demonstrate how food is becoming a legitimate creative medium across industries.

This trend reflects a post-pandemic hunger for dramatic joy, social media sophistication demanding cinematic experiences, and consumer willingness to pay a premium for genuine transformation. In uncertain times, maximalist food offers controlled chaos—spectacular and overwhelming, yet ultimately nourishing, safe and imperfect!



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Brand Opportunity

Commission food artists and creative directors to transform products into temporary art installations and dining into cultural events, positioning brands as enablers of joyful, theatrical consumption experiences.

"We've become known for our chaotic dessert table finales - at the end of each supper club, we build three puddings from scratch in front of the guests. It's a bit of a spectacle: layering custards, dripping sauces, crushing nuts, dusting cocoa or icing sugar through a sieve.

There's so much pressure now to present perfection: on the plate, online, in life - but we think there's real power in embracing the opposite. We're not interested in dainty portions or delicate smears. We want flavour, colour, noise - food that makes people feel something. There are nods to Dinnerladies, to our Nans, to trifle disasters and family-style chaos. It's nostalgic but also freeing.



So much of today's food culture is wrapped up in restriction, diet culture, shame, and weird syringes and pills that promise to shrink us. Naughty Nonnas is a reaction to all of that. It's about celebrating, eating, gathering, and joy."

**Jade Berry, Founder
& Head Chef,
Naughty Nonnas**

Performance as Identity: The New Athletic Aesthetics

Performance as Identity: The New Athletic Aesthetics

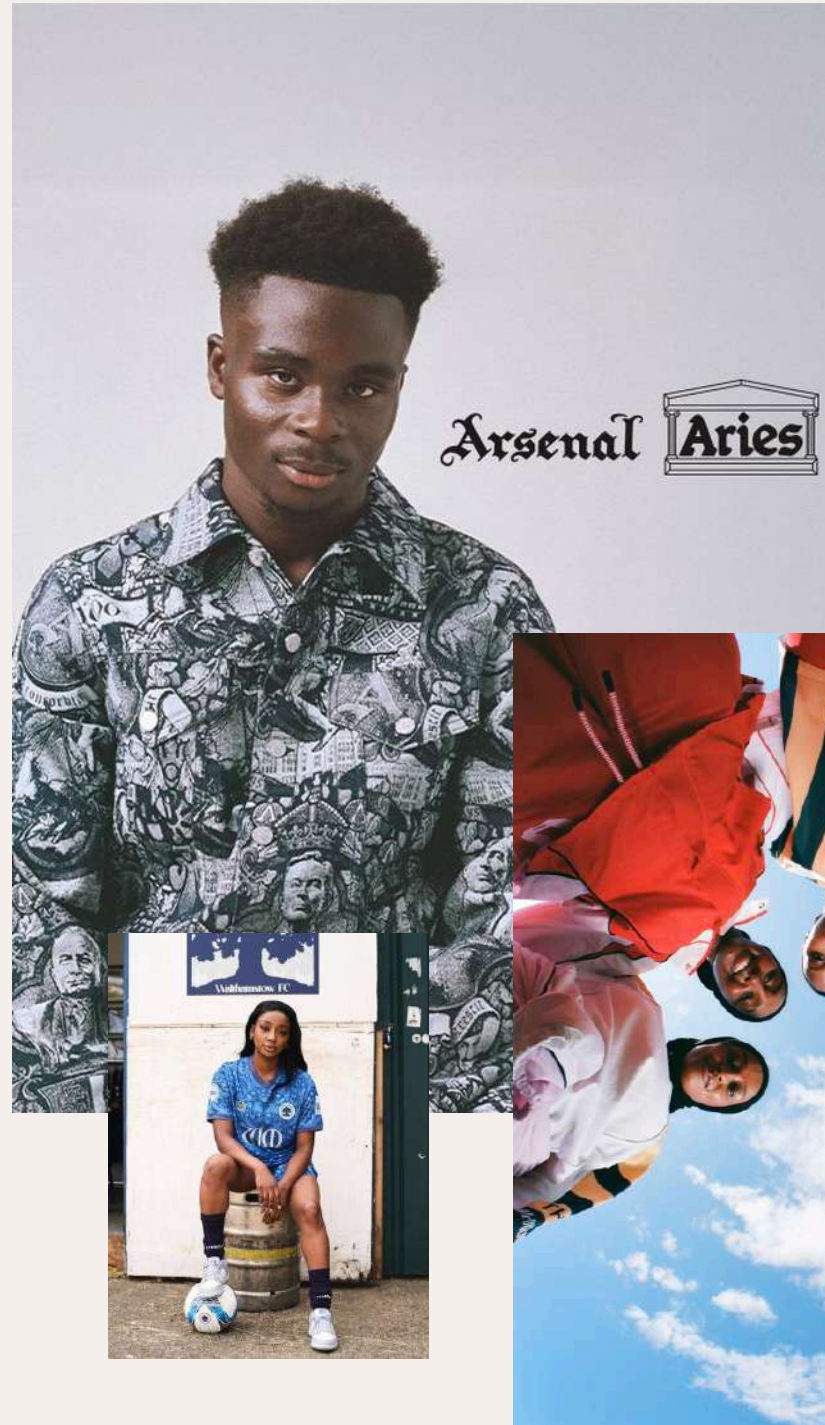
The collision between fashion and sport has evolved far beyond simple athletic endorsements into something much more profound - sport as lifestyle identity and performance as personal expression. Grace Cook's observation in the FT that "*Marathon week is the new Fashion Week*" perfectly captures this shift, with the explosive rise of running clubs making fashionable clothing and community engagement a key area of focus for brands. But it's not just about looking good while exercising - sport is becoming a canvas for cultural expression and community building.

This isn't a new thing, Margaret worked on the launch of Glorious, a digital media brand for women whose lifestyle connects with sport, art and culture during the pandemic, but we're seeing it become a bigger movement.

We've also noted collaborations such as Aries x Arsenal, William Morris x Walthamstow FC, Stine Goya x Umbro and Asics x Story mfg that represent a deeper cultural shift towards self-expression and a seamless blend of style and function.

Running clothes and shoes have become streetwear statements, but more importantly, they represent a lifestyle philosophy. Unlike traditional streetwear's often passive consumption of culture, athletic wear embodies active participation in wellness, community, and personal achievement.

Cultural
Shifts



Performance as Identity: The New Athletic Aesthetics

The business implications are significant too. Sportswear is growing faster than fashion overall, with challenger sportswear players like Acid Running, Deckers (owner of Hoka) and Asics capturing 3% of overall market share from large incumbent brands between 2019 and 2024, suggesting that authenticity and performance credibility now matter more than legacy brand power.

What's emerging is "Athletic Authenticity" - where your gear needs to tell a story about how you actually live, not just how you want to be perceived. The marathon fashion moments, the designer football collaborations - they're all part of a broader cultural moment where sport has become a credible form of self-expression, combining aspiration with actual achievement, community with individual identity.



Performance as Identity: The New Athletic Aesthetics Brand Opportunity

There is a watch out for brands; the tipping point where commercial involvement in authentic communities can cancel out what made them such a cultural force in the first place. Running club leaders are increasingly "shying away from brand partnerships" due to concerns about maintaining community integrity. The golden rule for brands is "support, don't sell" - brands should enhance the community experience rather than exploit it.



"My advice to brands looking to partner with communities is to immerse yourself in the community activities on a ground level first. Real life experiences will tell you things that the Instagram highlight reel can't tell you. Always strive to empower the communities you work with with the skills and resources they need to grow once your partnership has ended. Look for long term relationships, not smash-and-grab. Most importantly, listen to the experts in the room; there is no point in partnering with a community or individual if you refuse to listen to the advice and insights they share. They have managed to reach the people who are most difficult to reach without resources or a marketing plan, which means they must know something you don't know."

Charlie Dark MBE

Neo-Rituals & Folklore Resurgence

Neo-Rituals & Folklore Resurgence

For the past few years, we have seen a noticeable trend towards embracing ritual and folklore as a way to find meaning, connection and resilience in a world perceived as turbulent and uncertain, and it's showing no signs of abating. Rather than a revival of old customs, this is a reimagining and reappropriation of traditions in a more modern, diverse society - individuals and communities are looking for ways to reconnect with their own unique cultural identities.

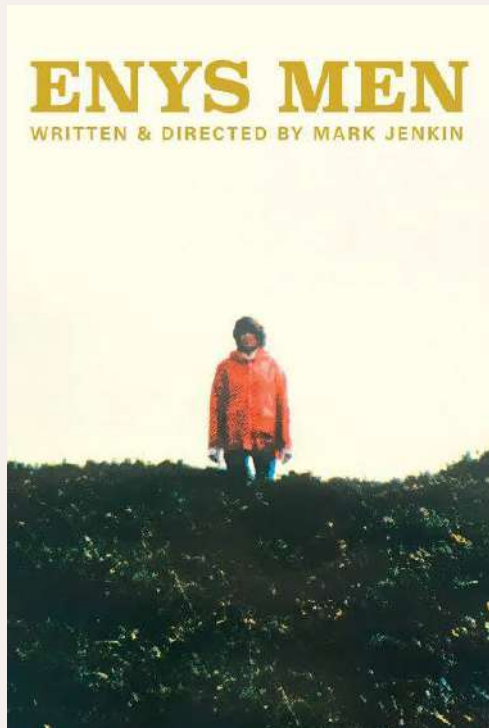
This is embodied by Weird Walk Zine, a printed journal focused on exploring the British landscape and its folklore through walking and rambling, Boss Morris, a group of female creatives who share an artistic and progressive vision of morris dancing as a means to increase social engagement, artist Chila Kumari Singh Burman, whose neon Diwali installations blend traditional iconography with contemporary British contexts and artist Corbin Shaw, whose 2022 exhibition Nowt as Queer as Folk at East London's Guts Gallery, displayed signature printed slogans hung on medieval-looking hessian scrolls, saying things like "SAD LADS IN THE STICKS" and "VILLAGE IDIOT TURNED VILLAGE CELEB".

We've also seen this evidenced across the cultural spectrum, from the release of Lally Macbeth's book The Lost Folk which explores the important role it plays in our communities and as a source of cultural and artistic inspiration, to the British Academy's 'Folklore imagined' season, and the cult Neo-Ancients festival in Gloucestershire (where artists like Jeremy Deller, Sue Webster and Stanley Donwood are breaking convention). Fashion is another area where Folklore's influence can be seen, with designers like Wales Bonner and SS Daley citing ritual, heritage and mysticism amongst their key influences.



Neo-Rituals & Folklore Resurgence

This has also spilt into more mainstream culture with the release of recent films such as *Enys Men* by Mark Jenkin, *Harvest* by Athina Rachel Tsangari and Elizabeth Sankey's *Witches*. BBC documentary Charlie Cooper's *Myth Country* takes folk to the masses; packaged up for entertainment, with Cooper's trademark comedic charm and knowing looks to camera, nonetheless, the series is rooted in Cooper's genuine interest in folklore and the underlying reasons it's seeing a resurgence in modern culture:



"We're in a void, aren't we? We are disconnected. We're spending more hours indoors and on screens and less time out in nature. We're disconnected from our environment in a way. The fact that there is a revival in (folklore), particularly with young people, is so comforting. It's about feeling a connection"

**Quoted from an interview with Charlie Cooper by
Tradfolk**



Brands are also getting on board - with Fern recently launching their '[Folk Foundation](#)', an annual £50k grant to 'to illuminate British Folk and support its practitioners and to progress their work and bring it to a wider audience' and natural beauty product brand [Bathing Culture](#) positioning itself as a conduit to ritual and connection: *"Bathing is a return. To self. To nature. To something shared. A quiet ritual that connects us across identity and origin. Immigrant or native. Seen or seeking. You are worthy of that return"*

She's Lost Control, an East London community and wellness space, is a 'conscious lifestyle brand that serves a higher purpose' - the brand sources products responsibly, promotes positive change, and challenges conventional thinking. Founder Jill Urwin felt the calling to leave her 10 year career in Fashion Buying to create a world that authentically reflected her own journey and growing passions in alternative wellness, spiritual growth and ancient wisdom.

"It's all about connection - lived experiences that foster real community. Ritual has been normalised, and as more people lean into authenticity and integrity, we're seeing a rise in folklore and ancient traditions. What feels fresh is how these practices are now crossing into fashion and music. The so-called outsiders are finally in the spotlight - and rightly so"

Jill Urwin, Founder She's Lost Control



Neo-Rituals Folklore Resurgence Brand Opportunity

For brand leaders and creative professionals, this folkloric resurgence signals a fundamental shift toward authentic cultural engagement over performative appropriation. Audiences are responding to brands that facilitate genuine connection rather than simply borrowing aesthetic elements. The opportunity lies in recognising that people aren't just consuming culture but actively creating new forms of meaning. Brands and creatives who thrive will be those who serve as generous facilitators of this cultural creation, respecting source material while making it relevant to contemporary contexts.

The Evolution of Public Art



The Evolution of Public Art

In an era marked by unprecedented global uncertainty and social fragmentation, public art, in all its diverse forms, has emerged as a tool for rebuilding connection and shared understanding, and in its best form, a catalyst for community bonding and transformation.

But public art is undergoing a period of profound evolution as public discourse continues to delve into post-colonial narratives on the slave trade, statues, the legacy of public art and who it is for. Coupled with this, as rapidly evolving digital technologies merge with traditional forms of artistic expression, critical questions about accessibility, sustainability, and the very nature of public engagement with art are raised.

In 2025, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), projection mapping, and data-driven artwork continue to transform public art and cultural placemaking by adding interactive layers to physical and virtual spaces. As the lines between digital and physical worlds blur, we are seeing more hybrid public art installations that blend physical sculptures or murals with digital AR overlays, such as the recent community-focused Priory Court Unity Mural project from Insa x The Digital Story Company x Wood Street Walls, which used digital technology to create a “GIF-Iti” animated artwork, accessible via a dedicated app. Other notable examples include an AR-enhanced East London mural created by car brand Genesis with Korean artist Joonho Brian Ko to celebrate its sponsorship of the V&A's Hallyu! The Korean Wave exhibition.

Both Meta and Snap Inc. have recently announced the upcoming release of their wearable AR smart glasses enhanced with AI technology, which points to AR integration becoming more commonplace and seamless. Leading institutions such as the BFI and SXSW are also placing emphasis on digital futures in their artistic programming, foregrounding immersive public art commissions via LFF Expanded and SXSW XR Experience.

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The Evolution of Public Art



Transforming complex data into immersive public art through the use of projection-mapping, AI and other technologies has also emerged as a powerful trend at the intersection of art and information design. Environmental and climate change data have become particularly fertile ground, with installations often looking to engage audiences more deeply in the subject matter to educate and, where relevant, encourage action (see [SOIL](#) at Somerset House). Projects like '[Of the Oak](#)' at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew; Marshmallow Laser Feast's groundbreaking outdoor digital artwork that employs LiDAR scanning, high-resolution photogrammetry, CT scanning, and Ground Penetrating Radar to reveal the hidden world of the Lucombe Oak's root system and inner workings through a towering 6-meter LED Portal. This 'digital double' transforms abstract ecological data into an immersive experience that invites visitors to forge a visceral connection with the tree's story and its ecosystem role.

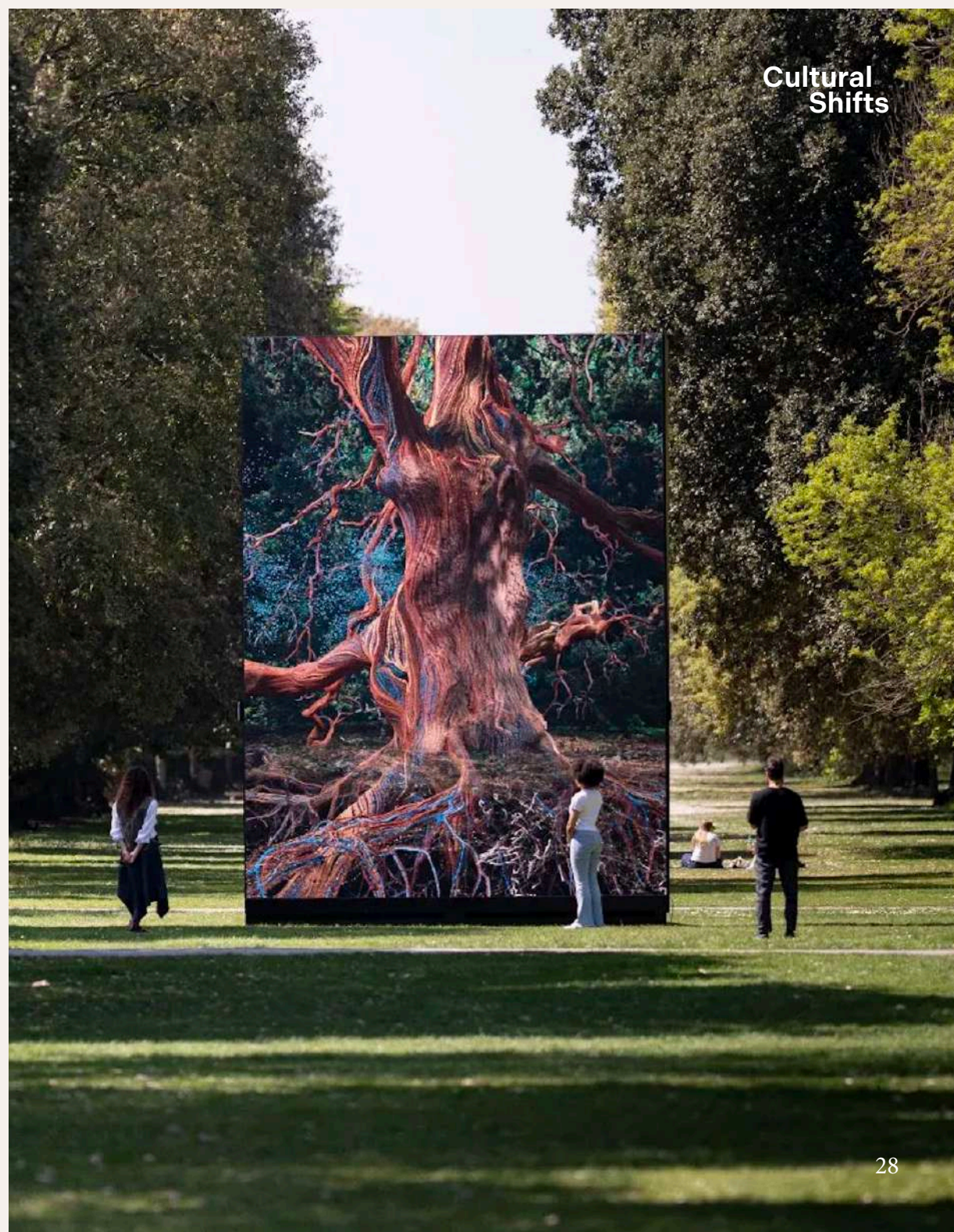


Similarly, [DATALAND: Rainforest](#) pushed these boundaries further by introducing the world's first large nature model as an AI-based installation at the Serpentine's North Gallery, transforming the space into an AI interpretation of global rainforest ecosystems using data from over 16 locations worldwide. Artists Shezad Dawood & Daisy Hildyard's [Ambiguous Machines](#), meanwhile uses AR to explore the future of UK marine and coastal environments, by imagining Scarborough underwater due to rising sea levels. The work is part of the new 'Wild Eye' sculpture and nature trail along the north Yorkshire coast.

The Evolution of Public Art

However, this rapid technological evolution in public art is not without significant challenges and critics. The environmental implications present the most glaring contradiction; the irony of using energy-intensive technologies and AI to create artworks with environmental or societal awareness at their core isn't lost on thoughtful practitioners, raising questions about whether the message justifies the medium.

There's also a concern that an over-reliance on digital technologies threatens to diminish the emotional resonance and authentic human experience that make public art powerful (read the British Council's newly published report, [Why technology needs artists: 40 international perspectives](#), for an extensive deep dive on this).



The Evolution of Public Art Brand Opportunity

The challenge for artists and public art commissioners is to use these powerful technologies to amplify human stories rather than replace them, incorporating more sustainable practices and materials where possible, to create experiences that speak to the fundamental human need for shared meaning and connection.

We'd love to hear from you

Here ends our latest research on shifts in the cultural zeitgeist. If you've enjoyed reading this and are interested in a bespoke trends report or briefing session for your brand, or would like to talk to us about a culturally authentic campaign, get in touch with us at [**hello@margaretlondon.com**](mailto:hello@margaretlondon.com).

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