# D&AD Festival champions human creativity and resilience amid AI disruption



As the design and advertising industries navigate a rapidly changing landscape, the recent D&AD Festival has emerged as a beacon of resilience and creativity. The festival, scheduled for May 21-22, 2025, in London's Southbank Centre, gathered over 80 international speakers to discuss the evolving role of creativity amid the rise of artificial intelligence. This year’s theme, “MAKE. CHANGE,” captures a significant turning point, as industry experts highlighted the need for innovation and adaptation in the face of technological disruption.

Reflecting on the historical context of the Swiss watch industry’s struggle against the quartz revolution, Leland Maschmeyer, co-founder of Collins, drew parallels between this shift and the current state of the creative industries. In his keynote, he recounted how the Swiss watchmakers, faced with the precision of the Seiko Quartz Astron in 1969, were compelled to pivot and emphasise their craftsmanship through unique complications. By 1983, the once-thriving Swiss watch sector had shrunk considerably, but those that remained succeeded by articulating their identity and value.

Maschmeyer proposed that today's design industry faces a similar existential challenge. He advocates for a straightforward approach in defining what constitutes brand identity, introducing terms such as "augments" — innovative methods to showcase brand capabilities within fixed boundaries. He noted, “The industry has been doing these things for a long time but it’s never had the credit because it didn’t name it.” The emphasis on performance and clarity could serve as a crucial differentiator as the industry grapples with the implications of AI.

Contrary to the prevalent pessimism surrounding the current economic environment for creative enterprises, Nils Leonard offered a more optimistic perspective. He argued that rather than adhering to traditional advertising methods, there is potential in focusing on tangible, meaningful creations — what he terms “narrative objects.” This shift in perspective allows for a broader embrace of creativity, as evidenced by his plans to engage in larger scale projects, including retail spaces and significant collaborations within the US.

The significance of craft and the human touch in creativity was a recurring theme at the festival. Teo Connor, Airbnb’s Vice-President of Design, alongside psychologist Dr Paul Marsden from the University of the Arts, asserted that a commitment to human-centred design is imperative. Marsden emphasised how craft communicates “competence and care,” suggesting that designers should strive to ensure that their work genuinely resonates with audiences.

In a separate session, Gavin Strange, director and designer at Aardman, passionately conveyed the joy of creating for its own sake. He urged attendees to discover excitement in their work, highlighting the magical elements of storytelling and character in design. His reflections underscored the notion that even mundane tasks can possess joy if approached creatively.

The festival also marked the dawn of a new era for D&AD under the leadership of its first American president, Kwame Taylor-Hayford. Taylor-Hayford has expressed a vision for D&AD to broaden its reach, fostering inclusivity and cultural diversity within the creative community. As the festival showcased award-winning works and provocative discussions, it became evident that a shake-up in the agency landscape is underway. Established norms are being challenged, opening doors for fresh approaches grounded in bravery and imagination.

Importantly, this year’s D&AD Festival did not shy away from the reality of AI's growing role in the creative sector. Instead, it embraced the technology as a tool for enhancing human creativity. The event served as a celebration of humanity in design, underscoring the value of clarity, definition, and emotional richness in the creative process.

As the creative industries face their own version of a metamorphosis, the insights shared at D&AD signal a proactive stance towards embracing change. The festival might just be the catalyst for a new chapter where innovation and authenticity forge a path forward amid uncertainty.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[2]](https://www.dandad.org/en/d-ad-creative-advertising-design-festival/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[3]](https://lbbonline.com/news/dandad-reveals-2025-festival-lineup-at-londons-iconic-southbank-centre-with-new-creative-look-and-feel)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://campaignbrief.com/dad-challenges-industry-to-make-change-with-the-return-of-in-person-festival-in-london-in-may/), [[6]](https://www.creativeboom.com/news/dad-design-award-introduce-a-new-creator-category-for-2025/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.dandad.org/en/d-ad-creative-advertising-design-festival/), [[4]](https://campaignbrief.com/dad-festival-returns-to-london-and-announces-full-program-awards-ceremony-details/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[7]](https://campaignbriefasia.com/2025/01/30/dad-awards-2025-announces-jury-and-jury-presidents-including-leaders-53-from-asia/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://lbbonline.com/news/dandad-reveals-2025-festival-lineup-at-londons-iconic-southbank-centre-with-new-creative-look-and-feel), [[4]](https://campaignbrief.com/dad-festival-returns-to-london-and-announces-full-program-awards-ceremony-details/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.dandad.org/en/d-ad-creative-advertising-design-festival/> - The D&AD Festival is a global event celebrating creative excellence in advertising and design. It features over 80 international speakers across two stages, offering keynote talks, masterclasses, and exhibitions of award-winning work. The festival aims to inspire and educate attendees by showcasing innovative ideas and discussions on the future of creativity. The 2025 festival is scheduled to take place at London's Southbank Centre, emphasizing the importance of craftsmanship and the evolving role of AI in the creative industry.
3. <https://lbbonline.com/news/dandad-reveals-2025-festival-lineup-at-londons-iconic-southbank-centre-with-new-creative-look-and-feel> - D&AD has unveiled the lineup for its 2025 Festival, set to occur on May 21-22 at London's Southbank Centre. The event will feature over 80 international speakers, including representatives from brands like Skyscanner, KFC, OpenAI, and The New York Times. The festival aims to explore themes such as AI, craftsmanship, design, advertising, and technology. Additionally, D&AD has introduced a new creative identity under the 'Drawn To' campaign, developed by Jones Knowles Ritchie, highlighting the magnetic pull of creativity.
4. <https://campaignbrief.com/dad-festival-returns-to-london-and-announces-full-program-awards-ceremony-details/> - D&AD's annual Festival is returning to London on May 21-22, 2025, at the Southbank Centre. The event will bring together global leaders in advertising, design, and art direction to discuss and celebrate creative excellence. The festival will feature over 90 international speakers, two stages, keynote talks, interactive masterclasses, and award-winning work insight sessions. The program will focus on the intersection of traditional creativity and technology, addressing themes like AI's role in the creative sector and its impact on the industry.
5. <https://campaignbrief.com/dad-challenges-industry-to-make-change-with-the-return-of-in-person-festival-in-london-in-may/> - D&AD is challenging the creative industry to 'MAKE. CHANGE.' with the return of its in-person Festival in London this May. The festival will feature talks, workshops, and the D&AD Awards, along with new talent initiatives like D&AD Shift. The program will explore topics such as neurodiversity, purpose-driven work, burnout, AI's impact on creativity, and supporting the Ukrainian creative industry. This will be the first D&AD Festival overseen by new CEO Jo Jackson, focusing on inclusivity and cultural diversity.
6. <https://www.creativeboom.com/news/dad-design-award-introduce-a-new-creator-category-for-2025/> - D&AD has introduced a new awards category for 2025, recognizing influencers and creators. Designers can submit their work across various disciplines, including advertising, branding, craft, design, and more. The D&AD Festival and Awards Ceremony will be held at London's Southbank Centre on May 21-22, 2025. The full list of judges for the new category includes industry leaders such as Melody Sylvester, Saulo Rocha, Johanna Neurath, and Johanna Roca, highlighting the evolving landscape of brand storytelling.
7. <https://campaignbriefasia.com/2025/01/30/dad-awards-2025-announces-jury-and-jury-presidents-including-leaders-53-from-asia/> - D&AD has announced the jury and jury presidents for the 2025 Awards, including 53 leaders from Asia. The awards aim to recognize creative excellence that drives commercial, economic, social, and cultural success. The D&AD Awards Ceremony will be held as the culminating event of the D&AD Festival on May 22, 2025. The festival will feature over 80 speakers across two main stages, with a program including jury insights, interviews, panel discussions, and keynotes from industry leaders.