# D&AD festival urges creative industries to embrace AI disruption with new language and craft



As the creative industries grapple with the implications of technological evolution, a sense of urgency has emerged reminiscent of the Swiss watchmakers' struggle against the advent of quartz technology in the late 20th century. At a recent D&AD festival, Leland Maschmeyer, co-founder of Collins, drew parallels between the disruption faced by Swiss watchmakers and the current challenges in design and advertising. He highlighted the introduction of the Seiko Quartz Astron watch in 1969, which reshaped consumer expectations around precision—once a hallmark of Swiss craftsmanship. By 1983, the once-thriving Swiss watch industry had shrunk dramatically, forcing surviving brands to innovate through "complications" that added functional value while appealing to a niche audience.

Maschmeyer articulated that AI currently poses a similar challenge to the design landscape, suggesting that the creative community must adapt in ways that clearly articulate their value and performance. Instead of simply creating, agencies are urged to define their offerings with precision, a process Collins refers to as developing "augments." These include innovative tools like 'sandbox' environments for brand expression and comprehensive design methodologies that enhance engagement through colour and clarity. “The industry has been doing these things for a long time, but it’s never had the credit because it didn’t name it,” Maschmeyer stated. He emphasised the necessity of finding a new language to convey the innovative aspects of creative work, a crucial step to securing recognition in an era increasingly dominated by AI technologies.

Echoing this urgent call for reinvention, Nils Leonard, a notable figure in the creative sector, dismissed the prevailing narrative that conditions are dire for launching new creative ventures. He encouraged a radical shift away from traditional methods, advocating for the creation of tangible, “narrative objects” instead. Leonard hinted at exciting developments on the horizon, including projects that intertwine various disciplines at scale, signalling a transformative moment in the industry. This forward-thinking mindset reflects a broader trend among creatives as they respond to contemporary challenges with imaginative solutions.

The importance of craftsmanship and the human touch within design was a recurring theme throughout the event. Teo Connor, Vice-President of Design at Airbnb, highlighted in a panel with psychologist Dr Paul Marsden that authentic engagement resonates with consumers. Marsden argued that demonstrating competence and care remains essential, emphasising a return to user-centric principles in design. “Make sure what you’re putting in front of people matters,” Connor advised, reaffirming that thoughtful design should prioritize audience connection.

Inspiring creativity beyond client demands was another message of the festival, as captured in Aardman director Gavin Strange’s presentation. He underscored the joy of creating for personal satisfaction, urging attendees to seek excitement in every endeavour, no matter how routine. Such personal projects, he maintained, cultivate the unique narratives that resonate with audiences, uniting humour, character, and storytelling—key elements of compelling design.

These perspectives align with D&AD’s mission to not merely adapt but to thrive amid change. As Kwame Taylor-Hayford, the first president from the US, remarked, the festival illuminated a shift towards bolder, more imaginative agency structures that empower creatives. With the D&AD awards expanding their scope to include emergent talent and innovative categories, the landscape appears ripe for fresh voices to carve unique pathways, leaning into craft as a source of strength rather than viewing technology as a threat.

Ultimately, this year’s D&AD festival celebrated not just the resilience of the creative industry but also its capacity for reinvention. It signalled a new era where creativity entangled with technology holds promise, urging professionals to embrace clarity and empathy in design. As the industry stares down the face of AI—often seen as a disruptor—there lies an opportunity to reaffirm the profound value of human-led creativity and the uniquely crafted experiences it delivers.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[2]](https://lbbonline.com/news/dad-challenges-the-creative-industry-to-make-change-with-return-of-in-person-festival)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[3]](https://campaignbrief.com/dad-challenges-industry-to-make-change-with-the-return-of-in-person-festival-in-london-in-may/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://lbbonline.com/news/dad-challenges-the-creative-industry-to-make-change-with-return-of-in-person-festival), [[6]](https://www.creativeboom.com/news/dad-design-award-introduce-a-new-creator-category-for-2025/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[4]](https://lbbonline.com/news/dandad-reveals-2025-festival-lineup-at-londons-iconic-southbank-centre-with-new-creative-look-and-feel)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[5]](https://www.marketing-beat.co.uk/2025/04/14/dad-reveals-2025-lineup-with-new-creative-look-and-feel/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[3]](https://campaignbrief.com/dad-challenges-industry-to-make-change-with-the-return-of-in-person-festival-in-london-in-may/)

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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://lbbonline.com/news/dad-challenges-the-creative-industry-to-make-change-with-return-of-in-person-festival> - D&AD has announced the return of its in-person festival in London, themed 'MAKE. CHANGE.', focusing on creative excellence and the evolving challenges in the industry. The event will feature talks, workshops, and initiatives like D&AD Shift, aiming to empower creatives to address emerging technologies and societal issues. Speakers from brands such as TikTok, Dove, Uber, and Microsoft will discuss topics including talent accessibility, mental health, and sustainability. The festival is scheduled for May 9-10 at The Truman Brewery, with the D&AD Awards Ceremony on May 24-25 at BFI Southbank. ([lbbonline.com](https://lbbonline.com/news/dad-challenges-the-creative-industry-to-make-change-with-return-of-in-person-festival?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://campaignbrief.com/dad-challenges-industry-to-make-change-with-the-return-of-in-person-festival-in-london-in-may/> - D&AD is set to host its in-person festival in London, themed 'MAKE. CHANGE.', emphasizing creative excellence and the industry's response to evolving technologies. The event will include talks, workshops, and the D&AD Shift initiative, featuring speakers from brands like TikTok, Dove, Uber, and Microsoft. Topics will cover talent accessibility, mental health, and sustainability. The festival will take place on May 9-10 at The Truman Brewery, with the D&AD Awards Ceremony on May 24-25 at BFI Southbank. ([campaignbrief.com](https://campaignbrief.com/dad-challenges-industry-to-make-change-with-the-return-of-in-person-festival-in-london-in-may/?utm_source=openai))
4. <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 at London's Southbank Centre, introducing a new creative identity under the 'Drawn To' campaign. The event will feature over 80 international speakers, including representatives from Skyscanner, KFC, OpenAI, and The New York Times. The festival aims to explore trends shaping the creative industry in 2025, such as AI, craftsmanship, design, advertising, and technology. The programme includes keynote talks, masterclasses, live jury insight sessions, and the D&AD Awards 2025 Ceremony on May 22. ([lbbonline.com](https://lbbonline.com/news/dandad-reveals-2025-festival-lineup-at-londons-iconic-southbank-centre-with-new-creative-look-and-feel?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.marketing-beat.co.uk/2025/04/14/dad-reveals-2025-lineup-with-new-creative-look-and-feel/> - D&AD has announced its 2025 festival lineup, returning to London's Southbank Centre with a new creative identity under the 'Drawn To' campaign. The event will feature over 80 international speakers, including representatives from Skyscanner, KFC, OpenAI, and The New York Times. The festival aims to explore trends shaping the creative industry in 2025, such as AI, craftsmanship, design, advertising, and technology. The programme includes keynote talks, masterclasses, live jury insight sessions, and the D&AD Awards 2025 Ceremony on May 22. ([marketing-beat.co.uk](https://www.marketing-beat.co.uk/2025/04/14/dad-reveals-2025-lineup-with-new-creative-look-and-feel/?utm_source=openai))
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 disciplines such as advertising, branding, craft, design, engagement, experience, entertainment, health, and impact. The final deadline for entries is March 12, with judging taking place from May 18-21. The D&AD Festival and Awards Ceremony will be held at London's Southbank Centre on May 21-22. ([creativeboom.com](https://www.creativeboom.com/news/dad-design-award-introduce-a-new-creator-category-for-2025/?utm_source=openai))