# Creative industries urged to pivot like Swiss watchmakers amid AI disruption



In the shifting landscape of the creative industries, the parallels drawn by Leland Maschmeyer during his address at the D&AD festival resonate powerfully. He likened the current challenges faced by the design and advertising sectors to the historical plight of Swiss watchmakers in the late 20th century. The launch of the Seiko Quartz Astron in 1969 marked a seismic shift in the watch industry, ushering in what is now referred to as the quartz revolution. This technological advancement rendered traditional Swiss watches, synonymous with precision, significantly less relevant. By 1983, the number of Swiss watch manufacturers had dramatically reduced from 1,600 to just 600, prompting those that survived to innovate and focus on unique “complications” — additional functionalities that not only highlighted their craftsmanship but ensured their relevance in an evolving market.

Maschmeyer’s message suggests that contemporary firms in the creative sector must similarly pivot in the face of disruptive technology, particularly artificial intelligence, which he equates to the quartz oscillator that changed watchmaking forever. His agency, Collins, advocates for a streamlined approach, labelling essential elements of branding as “augments.” These constructs help clients understand their identity and provide frameworks for creative expression while respecting the constraints imposed by modern market demands. The focus, Maschmeyer insists, should shift towards articulating the performance aspects of creative work, thereby reclaiming recognition for the inherent value that design can deliver.

Across the festival, other creatives echoed this sentiment. Nils Leonard presented a compelling counter-narrative to the pervasive belief that current times are detrimental for launching creative enterprises. He urged his peers to abandon outdated advertising paradigms and embrace innovative creations—termed "narrative objects." Leonard’s vision extends beyond traditional ideas, aspiring to enrich retail experiences and engage audiences with tangible, thoughtfully constructed works. This call to reinvigorate the craft aspect of creation interlinks with the broader themes discussed by Airbnb’s design vice-president Teo Connor and psychologist Dr Paul Marsden. They underscored the vital role of empathy and user-centric design in establishing a meaningful connection with consumers, drawing attention to the innate human qualities behind successful products.

Aardman director Gavin Strange took the stage to illuminate the joy of creation, advocating for personal projects that ignite passion and craft, regardless of client demands. He reminded the audience that fostering excitement in every task, no matter how mundane it may seem, is crucial. His approach exemplified the essential ingredients of storytelling that define Aardman’s celebrated animation style.

Further reflective dialogues were facilitated by Kwame Taylor-Hayford, D&AD's first American president, who emphasised the transformative shift occurring within agency structures. He highlighted how contemporary creative teams are forming relationships directly with brands, enabling a dynamic where imagination is not just encouraged, but necessary for survival in today's market. Taylor-Hayford’s insights were underscored by the thematic coherence of this year's D&AD event, where winning works prominently featured innovation and bravery, suggesting a renaissance in how creative talents are valued and engaged.

This year's discussions affirmed that rather than shying away from the impending influence of AI, the creative sector must embrace its inevitability while celebrating the irreplaceable nuances of human creativity. As the industry stands at a crossroads, the overarching message was clear: redefine and articulate the value of craft, storytelling, and empathy, as these elements will be the defining characteristics of the future in design and advertising. The gathering served not only as a forum for reflection but as a rallying cry for creatives to assert their identity amidst change, championing a narrative that blends clarity, definition, and emotional resonance in their work.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[3]](https://www.watchtime.com/featured/1969-seikos-breakout-year/), [[5]](https://www.watchonista.com/articles/history/1969-most-important-year-horological-history)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[2]](https://www.seikowatches.com/global-en/products/astron/special/story_qa50th_1)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.68watches.com/blogs/news/the-quartz-crisis-the-revolution-that-changed-the-watches-we-know-and-love-forever), [[7]](https://horologyne.com/quartz-crisis-history/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[3]](https://www.watchtime.com/featured/1969-seikos-breakout-year/), [[6]](https://www.68watches.com/blogs/news/the-quartz-crisis-the-revolution-that-changed-the-watches-we-know-and-love-forever)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[4]](https://www.gearpatrol.com/watches/a35132235/seiko-astron/), [[6]](https://www.68watches.com/blogs/news/the-quartz-crisis-the-revolution-that-changed-the-watches-we-know-and-love-forever)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/dad-festival-creative-industries-fight-back-against-doomsday-narrative), [[5]](https://www.watchonista.com/articles/history/1969-most-important-year-horological-history)

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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.seikowatches.com/global-en/products/astron/special/story_qa50th_1> - This article from Seiko Watches details the history and significance of the Seiko Quartz Astron, the world's first quartz wristwatch introduced on December 25, 1969. It highlights the technological advancements that made the Astron possible, including the development of a quartz oscillator and a hybrid integrated circuit. The piece also discusses the impact of the Astron on the watch industry, marking the beginning of the quartz revolution and setting a new standard for timekeeping accuracy.
3. <https://www.watchtime.com/featured/1969-seikos-breakout-year/> - WatchTime's article explores the pivotal year of 1969 for Seiko, focusing on the introduction of the Quartz Astron. It provides insights into the technological innovations behind the Astron, such as the use of a quartz oscillator and a hybrid integrated circuit. The piece also discusses the broader implications of the Astron's release, including its role in initiating the quartz revolution and its impact on the Swiss watch industry.
4. <https://www.gearpatrol.com/watches/a35132235/seiko-astron/> - Gear Patrol's article examines the Seiko Quartz Astron, emphasizing its revolutionary accuracy and design. It details the technical specifications of the Astron, including its quartz oscillator frequency and the resulting precision. The piece also discusses the broader impact of the Astron on the watch industry, highlighting how it set a new standard for timekeeping and contributed to the decline of mechanical watches.
5. <https://www.watchonista.com/articles/history/1969-most-important-year-horological-history> - Watchonista's article reflects on the significance of 1969 in horological history, focusing on the introduction of the Seiko Quartz Astron. It discusses the technological advancements that made the Astron possible and its impact on the watch industry. The piece also touches on the Swiss industry's response to the quartz revolution and the challenges it faced during this period.
6. <https://www.68watches.com/blogs/news/the-quartz-crisis-the-revolution-that-changed-the-watches-we-know-and-love-forever> - 68Watches' article delves into the Quartz Crisis, detailing how the advent of quartz technology, exemplified by Seiko's Quartz Astron, revolutionized the watch industry. It discusses the rise of Japanese watchmakers and the decline of Swiss mechanical watchmaking, highlighting the economic and cultural shifts that occurred during this period.
7. <https://horologyne.com/quartz-crisis-history/> - Horologyne's article provides an in-depth look at the Quartz Crisis, focusing on the impact of quartz technology on the Swiss watch industry. It discusses the industry's initial resistance to quartz, the subsequent decline in market share, and the eventual adaptation strategies employed by Swiss watchmakers to survive the crisis.