



VENUE

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EDITORIAL-

Polly Dye
Venue Co-Editor

It is safe to say that these past few weeks have definitely been the most challenging, yet the most exciting, of my undergrad. Stepping into the role of Venue-co-Editor was not something I ever envisioned myself doing and, to be honest, it still feels slightly strange! In these past few weeks, I have slowly started to overcome my grandma-like fear of technology by grappling with InDesign (emphasis on slowly). We also conducted an interview at the sex shop in town, which was an incredibly enlightening experience as well as a lot of fun! These challenges and opportunities have proved to me that I am capable of more than I thought, and have really encouraged me to push myself.

Elle McKinnell-Michael
Venue Co-Editor

Editing Venue has been loads of fun so far! I feel like the work I have done until now with Concrete and since January with Venue has taught me more than any job or study... maybe there's room for a lifestyle story there: 'The state of secondary schools, where are the skills?' I'm just spitballing... The highlight of February, for me, was meeting and interviewing Helen in her shop. She had so much experience and wisdom to share with us. Make sure you give the interview a read after you check out the sex survery results! See you in March!

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Interview with 'Sinsins' owner:
Helen Shepherd (Page 14)



Finding A Deeper Well: How Music Shaped My Journey Through PMDD

Photo Credit: Edie Davies

By Edie Davies

Contrary to the beliefs of T S Eliot, April is not the cruellest month. In November, the darkness of my bedroom made me yearn for Spring; I needed warm breezes, flowers, rebirth, change. I was diagnosed with Pre-Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder that month. PMDD, like the days in November, consists mostly of darkness. Two weeks of mood swings, abdominal pain, anxiety attacks, extreme paranoia, and brain fog. Then, a glimpse of sunlight as the cycle slows, and I grab at the brief moments of peace that are granted to me before the night slips in again. When the doctor confirmed that my weeks of scouring the internet for a solution to my problem were not futile, everything made sense. It felt like Spring. It sounded like music.

Like in July, at Latitude Festival, where I found peace in a voice on the main stage following a seemingly random emotional breakdown during a 14-hour shift at the merchandise table. Waxahatchee was a name

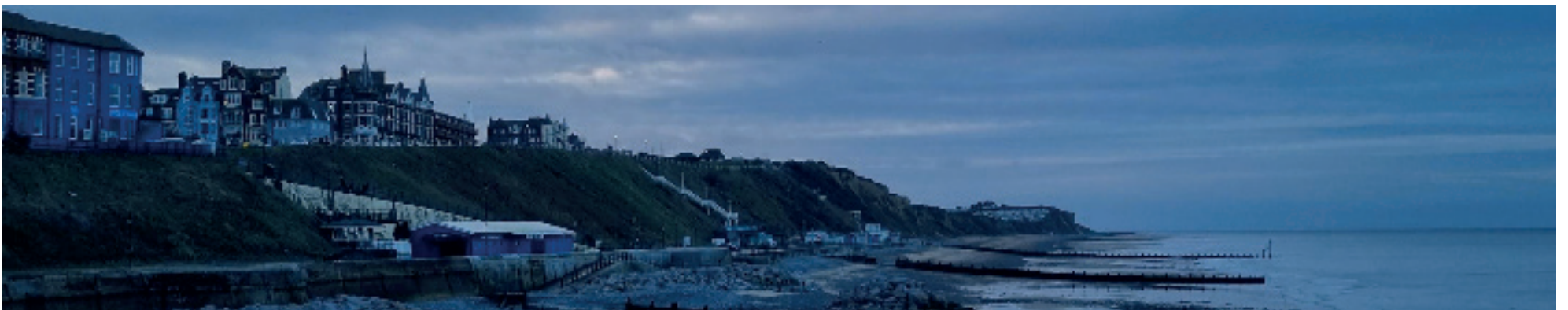
I was familiar with; Katie Crutchfield's name had appeared on Americana music blogs that praised her album *Tiger's Blood*, but I hadn't heard anything yet. The simplistic two-part harmonies of "365" struck an emotional chord with me that hadn't been hit by a new artist in a while. Crutchfield sings about letting go of things that do not serve you and I swayed along, my tears drying as I thought of all the ways to quit my job.

Like in October, at UEA Medical Centre, where I waited anxiously on a patient bed to have the coil fitted, humming to distract myself. A few months prior, I had cried watching Kacey Musgraves perform her newest album, *Deeper Well*, live. Musgraves' music has been present through almost every milestone of my teenage years, and *Deeper Well's* roots in folk music and lyrical themes of freedom similarly resonated as a newly independent person. She soothed me as I reminded myself that this operation, despite the pain, was "Nothing to be Scared of."

Like in January, at home in Birming-

ham, where I privately celebrated a month on anti-depressants during dinner with my family, my boyfriend nodding politely as my dad praised the record spinning in the living room. Laura Marling's *Patterns in Repeat* is, in a word, vulnerable, the song "Your Girl" expressing all the words I wanted to say to the people around that table. I felt our shared anxiety about my mental health dissipate as we laughed together, with Marling's soft voice and simple guitar melodies enveloping it all warmly.

Now, as we approach the Spring, I have found that the moments of peace that quickly slipped away in November are now firmly in my grasp. The relatability of Waxahatchee, the fearlessness of Kacey Musgraves, and the vulnerability of Laura Marling has created a musical bandage for me, and although I will never be miraculously healed from PMDD, I am ready to face the cruellest months this year. I found a deeper well.



Album Review: 'Hurry Up Tomorrow' by The Weeknd

By Charlotte Ward

Having followed The Weeknd since his 2015 album *Beauty Behind the Madness*, I - like many - eagerly anticipated his latest release, *Hurry Up Tomorrow*. With billboards leading up to its release declaring 'THE END IS NEAR', The album delivers on its apocalyptic promise, completing the trilogy that began with *After Hours* in 2020.

Hurry Up Tomorrow is an album that draws attention to The Weeknd's artistry, refusing to sacrifice intricate creative expression for riveting pop moments. The result is an album that maintains the brilliance of older albums, but not for lack of ideas as its length - whilst admittedly slightly bloated - invites the listener to enjoy an immersive cinematic experience - an epic odyssey chronicling the rise and fall of The Weeknd. With electronic instrumentals grounding a journey through a futuristic cityscape, we are left hanging onto The Weeknd's every word, with the exhilaration in his vocal performances providing a divine guide through this album's epic journey.

The album opens with haunting synths in 'Wake Me Up', setting a precedent of nihilistic doom. Tesfaye's vocals, filled with weary foreboding, reinforce the album's theme of finality: "All I have is my legacy... No afterlife, no other side". There's no mistaking that this is the swan song of his alter-ego.

Of course, it wouldn't be The Weeknd without his signature electronic seduction: São Paulo's Brazilian electro-funk delivers, a classic example of an upbeat moment underscored by tension. "I can't sing, I can't fucking sing"; the track's introduction hauntingly reminds the popstar of his traumatic So-Fi Stadium incident where he lost his voice. The track is monotonous and messy - but that's the point - he is desperate to escape self-destruction.

The album comes to settle into an atmospheric haze, with 'Baptized in Fear' exploring the lingering anxiety and pressure to continue, as Tesfaye sings "Voices tell me that I should carry on / I've been baptized in fear, my dear". The mood is one of tortured exhaustion, bleeding into the subsequent tracks. In 'The Abyss', Lana

Del Rey lends her ethereal vocals to a haunting farewell to the Stargirl and Starboy, embracing the inevitable passage of time with aching beauty.

As we move into the album's titular final track, The Weeknd proclaims he is "drowning in the same tub where I learned how to swim", a tragic full circle moment. At the end of the track this notion is then cemented as the track appears to seamlessly transition into the beginning of 'High For This', the first track on The Weeknd's 2011 debut, *House of Balloons*, ending the character of 'The Weeknd' in the cycle of self-destruction he came from.

Hurry Up Tomorrow may not be packed with the same algorithmic hits that permeate The Weeknd's earlier albums, but it is conceptually rich. Long-time fans are sure to find cathartic beauty in the conclusion of his persona's journey. It could be shorter, but Abel Tesfaye has cemented his legacy in the industry, earning the creative freedom to experiment in this way.

NEW NOISE! showcases Norwich's emerging music scene

By Sankavi Naresh

Norwich's live music scene is thriving, and NEW NOISE! is at the forefront of championing young original talent. A monthly initiative in collaboration with Access Creative College Norwich, Norfolk Music Hub, Play Produce Promote, and Pica Pica Promo, NEW NOISE! provides a platform for emerging musicians aged 14-25 to showcase their work across all genres. The artists featured are hand-picked by industry professionals, ensuring a high standard of creativity and originality.

NEW NOISE!

Raising musicians aged 14-25

On the 10th of December, I had the chance to experience one of NEW NOISE's live

nights at Voodoo's Showroom (who also do incredible pizza!). The lineup featured Narcolepsy, The All Tomorrows, Seasonz, and Chest. From the moment I stepped into the venue, it was clear that this event was something special. The atmosphere was intimate yet high-energy and the anticipation was palpable. The audience was a diverse mix of all ages and backgrounds, cementing the fact that great music transcends demographics.

Chest, an Indie band hailing from Norwich, took to the stage as the headliner, and I have to say – it was my favourite performance of the night! The band's vocalist, Joel, exuded infectious energy, completely immersing himself in the music and feeding off the crowd's enthusiasm. A raw, genuine enthusiasm for performing can be difficult to find in live performances nowadays but this was certainly Chest's strong point. Chest are a band to watch out for, their songs are both anthemic and introspective, with dynamic builds that explode into euphoric choruses. Their stage presence was nothing short of magnetic, and the synergy between band members made for an electrifying performance that left a lasting impression.

Narcolepsy, consisting of NUA students,

kicked off the night with a striking performance. Their set brought a refreshing sound that immediately drew my attention. Their ability to blend dynamic instrumentals with powerful vocals created a hypnotic effect, setting the perfect tone for the evening.

Next up was Seasonz, an artist from East London, who cited London-based rap collective D-Block Europe as one of his influences. His fusion of melodic rap and atmospheric beats provided an interesting contrast to the last act, keeping the audience engaged with polished sound and confident stage presence.

NEW NOISE! is doing something truly special for Norwich's music scene, offering a much needed platform for young, original artists to share their work with a wider audience. The event not only highlights incredible local talent but also fosters a real sense of community. If you're passionate about discovering new music and supporting upcoming artists, I highly recommend catching one of these nights. You never know, you might just witness the rise of the next big act!

Check out @newnoisenorfolk and @picapicapromo on Instagram for more info!

A Konnichiwa retrospective: Skepta's blueprint for connecting with America

By Adam Teschner

Nowadays, most Americans' British impersonations will invariably mention "peng tings from the ends" and leave the letter 'T' unpronounced. You can thank Central Cee for that, the international mainstream's current UK ambassador. But rewind a few decades – when all we were known for was tea and crumpets – and you'll see why the toughness of London's rap scene failed to cross the pond.

This language barrier would be broken in 2016, when an open letter to the US came out of North London signed not with hello, but *Konnichiwa*. Skepta's commitment to the UK grime sound on *Konnichiwa* is staggering: the same hard-hitting beats of classic gang anthems would also soundtrack love ballads – grime runs alongside haemoglobin through Skepta's veins.

It's easy to recognise the brilliance of this sound – 'Shutdown' doesn't pack such immediate rawness if not cobbled together by simple out-of-the-box sound effects – but to the untrained ear, this simplicity easily reads as lazy and crude. Fortunately for Skepta, his

reputation one of grime's founding fathers had earned him connections with a few American artists who understood the brief – Skepta was instrumental in constructing Kanye's iconic BRITs gatecrash a year prior.

Hence, *Konnichiwa* gets its message across by tuning itself to American palettes: two A\$AP mob members are enlisted to sink 'Ladies Hit Squad' into a flirtatious east-coast club sound, while Pharrell's explosive contribution to 'Numbers' reeks of Southern trap more potently than the contemporary songs of that genre.

It would not take long for London's streets to treat Skepta with messianic regard, an apt denomination considering his gritty vocal tone that was more akin to an enraged political activist than an emcee. A skit playing a recording of a vulnerable phone call shows that Skepta was conscious of the responsibility such a role carried, overwhelmed by the balancing act between authenticity and stardom.

This gravity makes the biting textures of *Konnichiwa*'s world so much more profound: a hilarious taunt-off between a flamboyant American Call of Duty player and his fed-up Londoner



opponent, and outward rejections of consumerism ("I used to wear Gucci / I put it all in the bin 'cause that's not me").

"Rather than 'breaking' America, I just want British rap to be treated as just another state", Skepta told The Fader, "Britain is just another place that raps". His feature on A\$AP Rocky's long-awaited third album garnered this recognition, a co-sign which was pivotal in encouraging open-mindedness not just to his own sound but also to classic UK artists like Dave and Stormzy.

Ultimately, the sleek drill sound is far more intuitive to American tastes, hence Central Cee's pop appeal and success. But the curt British accent could not simply be snuck into their soundscape – Skepta knew it needed a proper introduction. And that is why *Konnichiwa* opens with a gong crash and the slash of Samurai swords.

Photo Credit: Unsplash

The Writers' Bedroom Playlist

Soundtracking Romance

'Museum of Idiots' by They Might Be Giants

There are metal tubes that pump cold air into The Junction in Cambridge. There are spotlights with sharp edges, ones that lit up They Might Be Giants last year. I held my boyfriend's sweat-free hand and danced to his favourite dorky music. 'Chop me up into pieces if it pleases, if it pleases. When the chopping is through, every piece will say, I love you'. – Elle McKinnell-Michael

'Drain You' by Nirvana

What can I say about my favourite song of all time? Nirvana rarely made love songs but when they did, they were damn good. With one of the best melodies in all of grunge, Drain You highlights a romance bound in obsession, lust & immense admiration supported by Kurt Cobain's magic power chords to pull you in and drain you! – Elliott Lecointe

'Rule #34' by Fish in a Birdcage

Those familiar with what Rule #34 means will have an inkling as to what this song is about, but it isn't as crass as you'd imagine. Fish in a Birdcage uses their powerful violin accompaniment to set a dark, moody background for smooth and intimate vocals. A great listen, so long as you aren't put off by the subject matter. – Andi Gill

Sexy Films Highlights

By Elle Mckinnell-Michael

Not that kind of film, naughty! In no particular order, these are five sexy/romantic films to watch after you read the sex survey results!

Secretary (2002, Steven Shainberg)

Secretary plays with ideas around BDSM and sex with a cheeky grin. With a dominant lawyer (James Spader) and a submissive secretary (Maggie Gyllenhaal), the film delights in showing you the foibles of its characters, the brilliantly timid sparks in the lawyer, and the vindictive pettiness of the secretary. Effortlessly witty, sexy, and sharp.

Three Thousand Years of Longing (2022, George Miller)

A romantic fantasy drama about a professor (Tilda Swinton) and the djinn (Idris Elba) she unleashes from a bottle. Miller deals with desire, fantasy and loneliness with honesty and love. There are some really special beats in this movie: beautifully erotic, funny, and real!

Nosferatu (2024, Robert Eggers)

Gothic horny nonsense, artful cinematography, and a moustached vampire.

The Holiday (2006, Nancy Meyers)

What could be more romantic than the impish, charming Jack Black playing you a personalised piano tune in the lead-up to Christmas? In my opinion, the chemistry between Kate Winslet and Jack Black was much better than that between Cameron Diaz and Jude Law; their slow-burn romance is so delightful. The Holiday is a perfect winter romance flick to return to every year.

Chef (2014, Jon Favreau)

This film proves that there is nothing sexier than a man who can cook. Carl Casper (Jon Favreau) tours America in his new food truck while patching up his relationship with his son and his ex-wife (Sofia Vergara). You will leave hungry, horny or both!

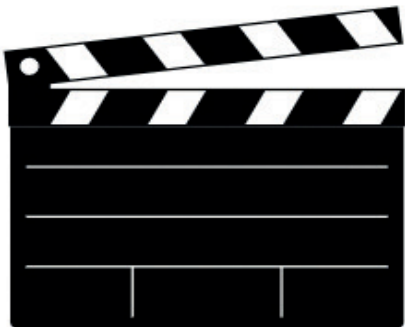
Isaac’s Highlight

David Lynch

‘If you are truly wild at heart, you’ll fight for your dreams’ - The Good Witch in Wild at Heart (1990, David Lynch)

On January 15th, writer, director, painter, and, most importantly, artist David Lynch unfortunately passed away at 78 years old, leaving behind a legacy like no other. Writing about Lynch’s impact on cinema is challenging as it is all-encompassing and undeniable. Without Twin Peaks (1990-91) or Blue Velvet (1986), the crime genre wouldn’t be the same, and without Mulholland Drive (2001) or Inland Empire (2006), modern indie cinema as we know it would be obsolete.

Inspired filmmakers and close collaborators with Lynch rushed to commemorate not only him as a film director but also the human being whose art changed their lives for the better. Actress Laura Dern, a friend of Lynch and leading lady in many of his works, labelled him ‘art’s greatest dreamer.’ which perfectly sums up why audiences adore him. If David Lynch taught us anything, it is that good truly can defeat evil, and even when it doesn’t feel that way, love is what makes the world go round. On the surface, his work might be strange and cynical, but pockets of hope unveil a longing for a better world that is devoid of the irony you may expect. Do yourself a favour and watch a David Lynch film. You won’t regret it.



Morbius: The Movie of All Time

By Steven Whitear

Sony and Marvel - it’s a tale as old as time. At this point, Sony’s reputation when it makes movies in collaboration with Marvel is clear. They are utterly incapable. Any character that is unfortunate enough to have a Sony-Marvel movie made in their name is destined to have their reputation utterly smashed.

The main Sony-Marvel production that highlights these failures is Morbius (Espinosa, 2022). Currently, the Sony-Marvel universe consists of the Venom trilogy (2018-2024), Morbius, Madame Web (Clarkson, 2024) and Kraven the Hunter (Chandor, 2024). The Venom trilogy has been generally well-received. It reached a climax with Venom: The Last Dance (Marcel, 2024) - the definition of a 5 out of 10 movie. We either love the Venom films, or we’re stunningly bored. Morbius, as the first non-Venom Sony-Marvel production in this cinematic universe, should have been innovative and refreshing. So many of us will remember Morbius releasing like our ancestors remembered the Somme. Tales of reshoots, going drastically over-budget, being strained behind the scenes, creative differences and rushing, rushing, rushing are all commonplace.

Morbius had such a jumbled and destructive development that it is used as a case study on how not to create a film. Members of the crew and assistant director described working on this project as the least fun they have ever had in the industry. So, the development of Morbius was deplorable, but that’s often the case with superhero ‘slop’ movies in the modern age. A final product that can win fans over is often enough to

make everybody forget about the chaos that caused it to exist - but such is not the case.

Ultimately, Morbius watches terribly! It attempted to link itself with pre-existing continuity by showing Michael Keaton’s Vulture in a post-credit scene - a drastically reduced role that featured in the trailer Keaton had appeared previously in Spider-Man: Homecoming (Watts, 2017) and had been dormant for half a decade at the time. There’s only one problem - the post-credit scene, the only scene linking Morbius to another entity, is scripted like it was scribbled in crayon five minutes before it was spoken.

Keaton’s Vulture has travelled universes, moving from the MCU to the Sony-Marvel Universe. No reaction at all. They attempt to set up a Sinister Six villain ensemble with the cringe-worthy lines; “I’m not sure how I got here. Something to do with Spider-Man, I think. I’m still figuring this place out, but I feel like a bunch of guys like us should team up.” Yeesh. Needless to say, no Sinister Six has ever happened.

Morbius will likely never appear on screen again, and just to round it off, it’s dragged Vulture down with it. In fairness, Morbius does have a few things going for it. It’s so bad, it’s good. It’s so unfunny; it comes full circle. It’s a guilty pleasure and has the advantage of being easy to take the mick out of. None of this applies to the horrors of Sony’s own Madame Web (2024).

All of Us Strangers: To Be Seen is To Be Loved

By Charlotte Ward

With Concrete’s issue on sex and relationships coinciding with LG-BTQ+ history month, All of Us Strangers (2023, Andrew Haigh) bridges both themes, bringing an important conversation to the foreground. It delves into the intricacies of human connection, love, and loss – set against the backdrop of queer identity and the enduring echoes of the past.

It is easy to get caught up in the kaleidoscope of emotion stemming from physical connection. However, Adam (Andrew Scott), the central protagonist in All of Us Strangers, appears disconnected from this world. The film transforms sex and relationships into something spectral – a ghost story of profound loneliness, where the presence of love is overshadowed by an aching absence.

The story follows Adam, a struggling screenwriter, as he negotiates loneliness and returns to his childhood home to forge a new relationship with his long-deceased parents as an adult. Meanwhile, Adam seemingly forges a new romance with Harry (Paul Mescal), who appears to be the only other resident in their otherwise hauntingly empty building. However, the film is not particularly concerned with the logic of the narrative – its dreamlike quality invites ambiguity. The story’s emotional resonance takes priority within the liminal space between reality and fantasy, allowing the minimalistic cast several deeply heartfelt moments.

Shot on 35mm, the film uses an analogue palette for Adam’s parents’ home, creating a soft hue of nostalgia for something that never was. Departing from a recent tendency in modern queer films for the parents to express full embrace and understanding, Haigh opts for more raw and nuanced parental confrontations. The film drives home a

message that one can feel like a ‘stranger’ in their own family, ‘coming out just puts a name to that difference that’s always been there’, as Harry states at one point. Yet, it is important to note that queerness in itself is not the root cause of Adam’s loneliness. Rather, it is societal prejudices that have made him feel different. The film affirms the idea that to be seen is to be loved, and being queer is just one facet of this. Adam’s parents may be confined to preconceptions of queerness from outdated ‘80s prejudices, but the film’s main fixation is on finding catharsis in the reconciliation behind this lack of understanding. Adam imagines conversations that he and many others don’t have the closure in replicating, thus providing solace to a queer audience who have perhaps yearned for something similar. His parents may not completely understand, but they can accept and see Adam.

Meanwhile, Adam’s relationship with Harry provides a fleeting sense of connection in their full understanding of one another. Although, the real tragedy comes in the film’s ending in the finding that even their relationship was built only upon the false yearning for this reality. We can never truly know each other, but All of Us Strangers highlights the importance of the attempts for connection and the detrimental loneliness in the absence of human connectivity.



Was 2024 the Best Year for Horror?

By Elliott J. Lecoite

2024’s range of brilliant horror films proved the genre to be amidst a renaissance. From Osgood Perkins’ demonic thriller, Longlegs, to the latest Alien reboot, the consistently high quality of horror films released in the past year takes the cake for possibly the best year in horror film history, so let’s take a look at some of the standouts.

Longlegs combines a chilling FBI murder mystery with a supernatural twist. We follow Lee Harker (Maika Monroe), a rookie agent investigating the cryptic murders haunting her town. Alongside her, we learn these murders follow a devilish pattern that leads to the frighteningly twisted killer, Longlegs. Played by Nicolas Cage, he gave a career-best performance. Perkins balances an intense narrative that keeps you on the edge of your seat with a tight script reminiscent of The Silence of the Lambs (1991, Jonathan Demme).

Coralie Fargeat’s sickening body horror The Substance was everywhere in 2024, now earning itself five Oscar nominations, including Best Picture and Best Actress. Demi Moore and Margaret Qualley electrify the screen as they showcase the pain caused by the pressures of beauty and youth, taking such commentary to a vile extreme. Body horror is a notoriously difficult subgenre to nail, as it requires a delicate symmetry between the disgusting but mesmerising visual effects and a plot with substance (wink, wink!). Fargeat, however, does this masterfully, creating an entertaining commentary on Hollywood. It may not be for everyone as it’s more than slightly on the nose, yet audiences have found themselves sick to their stomachs and wanting more.

Deservedly so, the prospect of another Alien reboot was met with scepticism but Alien: Romulus’ (Fede Alvarez) promise of returning to Ridley Scott’s roots whilst exploring new ground was kept and very successful at that. With a cast of promising young actors (Cailee Spaeny, David Jonsson, etc.), we follow scavengers fighting for survival against the iconic xenomorphs in this action-packed sci-fi horror mashup. Benjamin Wallfish’s powerful score was a standout, pulling the audience into terror. Alien: Romulus may be the best instalment in the franchise other than the original, proving itself to have plenty of scares left.

Lastly, this is cheating as it was released in early 2025 for us in the UK, but why not? Nosferatu, directed by horror legend Robert Eggers, is the latest in a history of Nosferatu films, starting with the 1922 silent version and Werner Herzog’s Nosferatu the Vampyre (1979) and now Eggers’ rendition. This gothic tale is entrancingly both gorgeous and horrific. Let the darkness consume you as you watch an incredible ensemble cast (Lily Rose-Depp, Nicholas Hoult, Bill Skarsgard, etc.) transport you to a blackened world. Depp and Skarsgard will blow you away in a cursed romance.

2024 also saw memorable entries to the genre, such as MaXXXine (Ti West), In a Violent Nature (Chris Nash), and I Saw the TV Glow (Jane Schoenbrun). This next year is looking just as exciting with The Monkey (Osgood Perkins), Presence (Steven Soderbergh) and more soon to grace our screens. Here’s to a horrific 2025!

Upcoming Films

You can catch these across different cinemas in Norwich

Bring Them Down (dir. Christopher Andrews)

7th February

Memoir of a Snail (dir. Adam Elliot)

14th February

I’m Still Here (dir. Walter Salles)

21st February

The Monkey (dir. Osgood Perkins)

21st February

The Last Showgirl (dir. Gia Coppola)

28th February

Mickey 17 (dir. Bong Joon-Ho)

'Community': Six Seasons and a Movie.

By Guy Sutton

'Community' is one of those shows that, despite its turbulent run and often underwhelming ratings, has solidified itself as a cult classic with a fiercely devoted fanbase. The show, created by Dan Harmon, debuted in 2009 on NBC and quickly established itself as a subversive, meta-humoured series that took aim at pop culture conventions, the structure of sitcoms, and the very idea of television itself. Yet, despite critical acclaim and a loyal following, the show's run was far from smooth. From its early days, 'Community' faced cancellation threats, behind-the-scenes drama, and an uncertain future – yet it never seemed to lose its spark or dedicated fan support.

The first few seasons of 'Community' were a critical darling, praised for its sharp writing, unique visual style, and deep pop culture references. The show's premise was simple: a group of misfits at a community college form a study group. But it was the execution that set it apart. Each episode was a blend of absurd humour, clever parodies, and heartfelt character moments, often pushing the boundaries of traditional sitcoms.

However, NBC's treatment of the show was never consistent. While 'Community' had a passionate following, it struggled with ratings, especially in its later seasons. Despite high critical praise, the network didn't seem to fully understand the show's unique brand of comedy, which often led to irregular scheduling, long hiatuses, and a general lack of support. NBC kept 'Community' on the air, but each season felt like a battle for survival.

Controversially, creator and show-runner Dan Harmon was fired after the show's third season due to creative differences with NBC. His departure certainly left a sizeable hole in the show's writing. Many fans, me included, feel that the fourth season is a major step-down, in terms of the quality of both the plotlines and humour. NBC brought Harmon back for the fifth season, but the damage had already been done, NBC cancelled the show immediately. Due to overwhelming fan outcry the show was revived a few days later by the beloved streaming site: Yahoo! Screen. Safe to say that the show was not a huge success in its new home, leading to its cancellation once again.

'Community', however, never really died despite its cancellation. The show was constantly discussed on social media with fans adopting the rallying cry, "Six seasons and a movie", a reference to the season two episode, 'Paradigms of Human Memory'. The show found new life on streaming sites such as Netflix and Peacock, not only allowing fans to blissfully remember the show's former brilliance but also allowed newcomers to discover what a wonderful show it was.

This resurgence in popularity and its consistent presence in contemporary meme culture led to a feature length movie being announced in 2022. This long-awaited project will give fans the closure they've been craving, though it's not without its challenges.

Credit: Unsplash.



The busy schedules of the show's cast members, particularly Donald Glover, who found additional success under the Childish Gambino moniker and with shows such as Atlanta, have led many to wonder if it will truly happen. All the cast members have constantly reiterated their interest in returning for a movie, including Glover, and their reunion for a table-read over zoom during the pandemic served as a warm reassurance that the cast's chemistry is still intact after all these years.

'Community' has become more than just a show; it's become a comedic touchstone of meta comedy with a fanbase that refuses to let it fall into obscurity. The movie embodies the years of hope and perseverance of the fandom as they fought online to get executives to understand how much the show means to them. It's a quirky, endlessly rewatchable gem that has fallen under the radar for far too long now. Let's just hope this movie gets finished.

Welcome (Back) to the World of Tomorrow.

By Guy Sutton

'Futurama', created by Matt Groening, has always been a show caught between love and frustration, both from its creators and its fans. The show's relationship with FOX (The network they originally broadcast on), was tumultuous at best, with the show's writers constantly fearing cancellation. The unsure ground the writers were treading on led to the show ostensibly getting 4 finales.

It never matched the success of Matt Groening's more notable 'The Simpsons', making the show entirely dispensable for FOX. They aired episodes out of order, sometimes not airing it on certain weeks, and they notoriously kept rotating its time slot on a weekly basis making it impossible to keep up with the show. FOX simply had no interest in the show and wanted to remove it and made it their goal to quietly put down the show, leading to its cancellation in 2003.

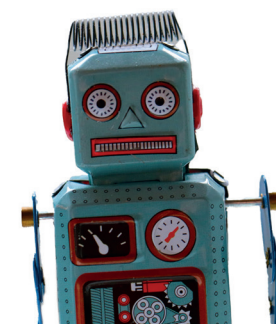
After numerous revivals and potential finales, it seemed the book had closed on the world of tomorrow in 2013 with the excellent 'Meanwhile', a stirringly sweet and wonderful way to send off the show. However, after 10 years the show has been brought back for an 8th official season (11th broadcast season), a remarkable testament to the enduring fanbase the show has accumulated over time no doubt, but it came with a lot of baggage for fans. Speculation that the revival would continue the downward trend of declining qual-

ity that fans perceived during the Comedy Central years of the show (it's original revival), gave a hint of doubt about the merits of another revival.

This new Season, released in two parts on Hulu or Disney Plus in the UK, unfortunately, does not capture the quality of the show's golden age, instead, conjures memories of it. That's not to say it was all bad. There were certainly some top-notch episodes in the first half of the season. 'I Know What You Did Last X-Mas', 'Related to Items You've Viewed', and 'All the Way Down', were all fantastic additions to the 'Futurama' library, truly capturing the balance of humour, heart and social commentary reminiscent of the show's golden years. However, many episodes strain to resemble a similar authenticity, coming closer to a desperate imitation than a fully fledged reboot. Many episodes, especially in the second half of the season, are forgettable, lacking a memorable plot or jokes.

Many fans have cited the seasons overreliance on topical references and humour, a tendency the Comedy Central run frequently indulged in. The season references NFT's, Cryptocurrency, COVID-19, (3 years after quarantine!), cancel culture and Amazon – a wealth of topics which already seem irrelevant to most viewers and unfortunately, the writers couldn't do anything particularly humorous or imaginative to make it feel timeless. Instead, it largely misses the mark and already feels outdated.

Credit: Unsplash.



The season was capped off with an underwhelming finale, 'Otherwise', which while being a decent episode, didn't reach the romantic or sentimental heights of previous finales. But despite the mixed bag of episodes, it's great to hear the entire voice cast return, to mine whatever charm they can from the material, even if their voices have notably aged in the ten-year gap. The show does admittedly recapture the charm ever present in the show, so you can almost overlook the season's various problems. But it's hard to shake the feeling that the show is becoming a nostalgic blast from the past offering comfort when needed, rather than the hilarious, intelligent and daring show that it began as. It gives way to an interesting form of melancholia that occurs when a beloved show starts losing its teeth. The inconsistent quality of the season may draw up questions about whether it was worth reviving this classic, but it's nice to have these characters back, while it lasts.

‘Traitors’: Triumph or Failure?

By Lilia Colledge

Since it first appeared on our televisions in 2022, ‘The Traitors’ has become a firm favourite in many households. Concluding its third season on the 24th of January 2025, there has been much debate about whether the show was a success or disappointment. Looking back across the season, there were many points of excitement, starting with the train journey that had three players getting off before reaching the castle. While their return was somewhat predictable, the way they did so was certainly not, with them being caged and waiting to be saved by other players, making it an interesting addition that embodied the risk-taking that is essential to the game.

Another addition that certainly added to the thrill of the show was the “Death Match”. Returning to a favourite staple of the show, they got the traitors to kill (or plan in this case) in plain sight, which is always successful in creating anticipation. With the potential for a traitor to have been included and the fallout it created, namely suspicion around Leon and Alexander, “Death Match” proved to be a very welcome addition, adding something fresh to the show. As with other seasons, the people involved greatly determine the level of interest in the show.

Following big personalities like Harry and Paul from Season 2, it was going to be hard for this season to compare, but between Linda’s head turn in the first episode, her comments at the round table, and Dan’s eyerolls that caught great attention on social media, the personalities of this year’s cast still managed to draw audiences in.

One of the most contentious points of the show was the introduction of the “Power of the Seer”. This twist initially created a lot of excitement, with the endless possibilities of who could earn this gift and who would be chosen to reveal their identity, creating an opening for the show to go in an unexpected direction. However, the way it unfolded in this season was disappointing. It led to the early reveal of the last remaining traitor’s identity, dwindling her previous high chance of winning.

Another dampener to this season was the reappearance of a traitor voting out another previously unsuspected traitor as they leave the game, causing their downfall as first seen in the final of Season 1. The addition of not revealing their true identities in the finale certainly seemed to be in response to this problem but instead seemed to peak paranoia in the faithful. The last twenty minutes of the finale were somewhat disappointing with the absence of a traitor, leaving audiences watching the distrust of the game play out without the excitement of previous finals, perhaps putting a dampener on the season.

Ultimately, I think there were great efforts to make additions to this season to keep the show exciting and fresh, as reflected in 7.4 million people tuning in for the final, the highest viewing the show has ever had, certainly making it a triumph, rather than a disappointment.

Credit: Unsplash.



The Golden Globes 2025: Is there any hope?

By Guy Sutton

The 2025 Golden Globe Awards have come and gone, but the snubs and omissions from this year’s ceremony have sparked further questions about the relevance of these awards in today’s ever-evolving television landscape. The Golden Globes almost feel completely irrelevant, a dress rehearsal for the far more glamorous Emmy and Oscar ceremonies. Their dismissal of many of the most important cultural shows of the past year are what’s really clued viewers into their growing irrelevance.

One of the most significant snubs of the 2025 Golden Globes was ‘The Last of Us’ (HBO). Widely regarded as one of the most compelling TV adaptations of a video game, ‘The Last of Us’ received praise for its storytelling, direction, and performances, particularly from Pedro Pascal and Bella Ramsey. The series was expected to be a major contender at the Globes, given its cultural impact and critical success. Yet, despite its widespread acclaim, the show was shockingly absent from the nominations, leaving many to question the Golden Globes’ ability to accurately gauge what has truly resonated with audiences. In a year where ‘The Last of Us’ became a cultural phenomenon, the snub only highlights how out of touch the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA) has become.

‘Pachinko’ (Apple TV+) faced a similar fate in 2025. After its groundbreaking debut, the series had been heralded for its exceptional performances, particularly from Lee Min-Ho and Youn Yuh-Jung, as well as its delicate and powerful storytelling. Yet,

once again, ‘Pachinko’ was left off the list of nominees, despite its critical acclaim and representation of important cultural narratives. The shows snub solidifies a common critique with this year’s ceremony: it’s becoming predictable. Every nomination feels entirely safe and accessible, stripping interesting and challenging voices the chance for bedazzled recognition. ‘Pachinko’’s absence from the nominations felt like a glaring oversight, particularly considering how much of a cultural moment the show had created.

Another major oversight this year was ‘The Bear’ (FX), which had a significant impact on television in 2024, drawing praise for its intimate portrayal of a chef navigating the pressures of running a family restaurant. Jeremy Allen White’s performance as Carmy was one of the standout performances of the year, yet the series failed to earn a nomination for Best Drama. The snubbing of ‘The Bear’ not only seemed like an oversight but a missed opportunity to recognize a show that perfectly encapsulated the complexities of family, ambition, and personal growth. ‘The Bear’’s omission suggests that the Golden Globes, once a beacon for television excellence, are now more focused on favoring glossy, star-driven projects than on rewarding compelling and innovative storytelling.

The snub of ‘The Bear’ brings attention to a larger issue with the Golden Globes: their inability to accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of today’s television landscape. Shows like ‘The Bear’ and ‘Pachinko’ represent groundbreaking storytelling that pushes boundaries and explores narratives that don’t fit neatly into traditional

categories, yet they are often overlooked in favour of safer, more commercially driven content. With the Globe’s snub of ‘The Bear’, their disregard of comedy is once again brought into question. People are beginning to point out their traditional methods of classification and categorization have become outdated in the face of more progressive and complex shows which have become systematically disregarded with each year. It’s clear that the Golden Globes have lost their way in recognizing the true breadth of talent and creativity in television today.

Ultimately, the 2025 Golden Globe nominations serve as yet another reminder that these awards have become increasingly irrelevant in the world of television. By consistently snubbing some of the most innovative and culturally significant shows, the Golden Globes are proving that they are no longer in touch with the audience’s tastes or the medium’s creative progress. The ceremony may still be broadcasted and watched by millions, but with each passing year, the Golden Globes seem to slip further into obscurity, overshadowed by the more relevant and meaningful voices in television criticism and recognition.

Credit: Unsplash.



"In February, there is everything to hope for and nothing to regret."

- Patience Strong

Glorifying Toxicity: Young Adult Fiction and the Romanticisation

By Andi Gill

Content Warning: discussion of sexual and emotional abuse and sexual assault

"There is no such thing as bad people. We're all just people who sometimes do bad things."

Colleen Hoover penned this line which, out of context, seems like a fair assessment of any situation. Yet in the context of her novel, *It Ends With Us*, it becomes a monumentally irresponsible sentiment to disseminate among her (often young) readers. It's a small example of her efforts to pardon the behaviour of Ryle, the love interest-turned-husband of the protagonist Lily Bloom, but his actions aren't of the excusable variety. "What," you may ask, "did this male lead do?" Well, if you had taken a guess, I'd bet the answer wouldn't be graphically sexually assaulting his wife, knocking her unconscious, and repeatedly beating her to the point of her needing to go to the hospital. **(Spoilers)** His actions are the whole reason why the average reader cheered when she left him at the end of the book. Yet Ryle, as a violent and sexually abusive monster, is given an undeserved benefit of doubt and allowed to have custody of their daughter, and this decision is treated like it was the right thing to do. And since Lily leaves him and ends up with Atlas, her childhood crush and the most perfect man ever (minus the tiny detail that he had sex with her while she was a minor), the decision to leave Ryle is portrayed as a choice between the two men instead of her choosing to leave for herself.

Hoover's writing glorifies the abuser whilst weakening the female character's development.

This isn't uncommon in the young adult genre now. Many other authors make similar efforts to portray the toxicity of abuse and end up romanticising it instead. DomesticShelters.org has a great article going in depth into *It Ends With Us* and the damage of these portrayals, especially since they're becoming more common, but what really concerns me is the impressionability of the people reading them. "Young Adult" as a genre typically aims at ages 12-18, but I'd argue that the appropriate age range for books like Hoover's or Sarah J. Maas (whose books were and arguably still are marketed as YA, although they've been reclassified as New Adult), are more for the 16+ market. "New Adult" is a much more recently defined genre, so it's often grouped in with YA, which means that the reclassification of books like Maas's *A Court Of Thorns And Roses* (ACOTAR) doesn't mean much by way of the audience exposed to it. And to be clear, I am stating that my concern is with the audience, and I'm not trying to advocate for the censorship of books like these.

All too frequently are authors like Hoover and Maas (and Yarros, and Mafi, etc) discounted from conversation because they're "feminine fodder." I despise this reasoning. I think authors in the YA genre are worthy of discussion, but that also means that they are worthy of criticism. What I mean is: I'm not saying Hoover's books are bad because they're pandering to women or self-indulgent; I'm saying they're bad because they undermine every feminist point she poorly attempts to make. It leads directly into my concern with her audience, who

are too typically young and lack the experience and understanding to realize how disturbing Hoover's message is. It's not like Hoover does anything to mitigate this either, as she's been very open about her decision not to label her books with content warnings. To me, that's irresponsible. Many parents buy her books for their preteen children because they're in the YA section, and if your bookish child comes up to you in Waterstones with a flowery novel, advertised as a romance, with no content warnings in the front pages, then you couldn't be blamed for not being suspicious of it.

That's how 12 to 14-year-olds end up reading about graphic sexual assault without any critical lens through which to view it. They cannot read about Ryle's actions and understand the horrific reality, so are more likely to believe that he should have been forgiven. Or worse, that his chilling statement about needing to do it to "prove how much I love you," is romantic. It's a concerning thing to see in the Goodreads reviews as I scroll through and see the arguments about why Ryle was going through a hard time, and why he's still a good person. Or why Rhysand from ACOTAR was right not to tell his wife about the risk of her dying due to her pregnancy because he didn't want her to terminate it despite the threat to her life. A thousand examples of the glorification of not just toxic relationships, but the romanticisation of the abusers themselves, pile up in the reviews of books in the YA genre. It worries me how many of them are attached to profile pictures of girls in school uniforms.

Experience UEA Live: UEA's Literary Festival

Alpha Boakye

Stories thrive on community. Since the dawn of time, storytelling has always been at the heart of human connection. Stories bind us. Stories challenge us. Stories remind us that we are never truly alone. Stories have the power to transform. One way to experience the collective power that lies in the nucleus of stories is through curated events—gatherings made specifically for story lovers (bookworms) and story creators (writers). Conclaves designed to spark conversations, celebrate stories and bring like-minded persons together. That is why UEA Live exists.

For writers and book lovers alike, UEA Live provides a space where stories can live, where voices can be heard and where creativity is celebrated. As a literary festival based on campus, UEA Live welcomes some of the world's finest writers and thinkers to Norwich yearly. This year is no exception. There is a lineup of astounding writers from February 12 to May 15.

The first author, **Emma Healey**, will be on campus on **Wednesday 12th February**. She is a UEA alumni and best-selling author of *Elizabeth is Missing*. Healey studied her MA in Creative Writing at UEA in 2010 and went on to write *Whistle in the Dark* and *Elizabeth is Missing*, which was a Sunday Times Bestseller, won the Costa First Novel Award, and was made into a BBC film.

Her homecoming to campus to discuss her new novel **Sweat** will also be an inspiration to student writers who dream of having their works published.

'Stories remind us that we are never truly alone.'

Other incredible writers lined up this season are:

Writer and broadcaster **Simon Mayo MBE** following the release of his latest novel **Black Tag**. Mayo's previous books include the Sunday Times bestseller *Knife Edge*, the Times Thriller of the Year *Tick Tock*, and the *Itch* trilogy, which was adapted into a TV series in 2020. Known for hosting *Top of the Pops*, Simon now hosts 'Drivetime' on Greatest Hits Radio and 'The Take', a film-review podcast with Professor Mark Kermode.

This event is on Saturday 1st March.

Natasha Brown follows soon after for an in-conversation about her newest work *Universality*. Named one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists in 2023, Brown's debut novel **Assembly** was shortlisted for awards including the Folio Prize, the Goldsmiths Prize and the Orwell Prize for Fiction.

More Than Just Words: The Need For Feminist Fiction

By Lois Graham

Women have always been writers, even if their work wasn't always published or recognised. In the past, much of women's writing went unnoticed or was undervalued, but it's important to acknowledge that the act of writing itself has always been a form of resistance. In societies where women's voices were often silenced, the mere act of creating and sharing stories was revolutionary. Whether or not the content was explicitly feminist, women's writing was a challenge to the dominant narratives of their time.

But what exactly is a feminist novel, and how does it differ from other forms of literature? To understand this genre, we must first explore both the meaning of feminism and the nature of the novel itself. What does it mean to be a feminist, and how can that perspective shape the stories we tell? The answers to these questions may not always be clear-cut, but they're central to understanding the intersection of literature, gender, and societal change.

At its core, feminism advocates for the equality of women, ensuring that women have the same rights and freedoms as men. This includes not only freedom from sexual violence and control over their bodies but also the ability to live in a society where they are not restricted by gender-based discrimination. Feminism, however, is not just about gender equality—it's about broader equality. It recognizes that women's lives are shaped by many factors, such as race, class and sexuality. These intersecting identities must be considered in any true feminist movement, as equality cannot be achieved unless all aspects of a woman's life are valued and respected.

When it comes to the feminist novel, this intersectionality becomes crucial. A feminist novel is more than just a book about women's lives—it is a work that centres women's stories whilst also engaging with the larger social issues that affect them. These novels delve into the complexities of women's experiences, shedding light on struggles that are often ignored or overlooked by mainstream narratives. However, a feminist novel doesn't just highlight women's challenges—it also aims to create change. It calls attention to the systems of power that oppress women and advocates for a world where women are free from these constraints.

Some of the most well-known feminist novels include Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. These works go beyond simply telling the stories of women—they expose the ways in which patriarchy, racism, and social inequality shape the lives of their characters. By giving voice to these experiences, feminist novels challenge readers to reconsider the societal norms that perpetuate inequality and oppression.

One of the key challenges of writing a feminist novel is balancing the desire to make a political statement with the need to craft an engaging, well-told story. Whilst the feminist message is important, it should never overshadow the narrative. A feminist novel must be first and foremost a good story, with well-developed characters, an intriguing plot, and thought-provoking themes. If a novel fails to capture the reader's attention or fail to engage emotionally, it falls short of its potential, no matter how strong its

feminist message might be.

It's also important to recognize that not all books about women are feminist novels. For example, *Fifty Shades of Grey* may revolve around a woman's romantic and sexual experiences, but it is often criticised for presenting a problematic view of women's agency and autonomy. A true feminist novel, in contrast, is one that challenges harmful stereotypes, addresses issues of inequality, and highlights the importance of women's voices and choices.

So, what makes a novel feminist? A feminist novel is one that not only tells the story of women but also actively challenges the societal norms that limit women's freedom and agency. These novels critique gender and power structures, call for change, and make unapologetic political statements in support of women's rights. They push readers to question the way society treats women and encourage new ways of thinking about gender, equality, and justice.

In the end, the feminist novel is more than just a literary genre—it is a tool for social change. Through storytelling, these novels give women a voice, raise awareness about issues of inequality, and inspire action. They challenge readers to think critically about the world around them and imagine a future where women's rights are fully recognized and protected. In this way, the feminist novel plays a vital role in the ongoing fight for gender equality and social justice.

Why Aoyama's *What You are Looking for is in the Library* Is The Perfect Introduction To Japanese Fiction

By Lara Parsons

If you need a cosy read this winter, *What You are Looking for is in the Library* is a faultless choice to devour before spring arrives. It's filled with fresh, comforting perspectives and a reassuring outlook to take into 2025.

With the success of *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*, Japanese fiction is becoming increasingly more popular. If you haven't already picked up a Japanese Fiction book, try it out. Test the waters. Soak up something heartwarming.

The best way to describe *What You are Looking for is in the Library* is through the art of the journey. Several intertwining stories feature characters visiting the same librarian to seek purpose.

Aoyama's characters advocate for small victories. In a big world and an age defined by comparison, small victories are often forgotten rather than championed. Aoyama notes that career envy and the social ladder is 'an endless merry-go round.' However instead of submitting to this ideology, Aoyama questions and satirises it. 'But isn't that funny?' she writes, 'that each person should be chasing the tail in front of them, when no one is coming first or last.' I'm unsure currently what the future will have in store for me – but maybe that isn't such a bad thing. Some advice given to one character resonated with me, when she was told, 'You managed to find employment, you go to work every day and you

can feed yourself. That's a fine achievement.' If I'm tired, stressed, overworked or anxious I'll reflect on those words - *that's a fine achievement*. Even for the smallest things, to make life a little brighter.



Wikimedia Commons.

Another of my favourite lines is, 'If I can draw just one picture that leaves a mark in somebody's life and is remembered, then I can find a place for me.' Authors who value creativity and art are the kind of writers whose books I am drawn to; they are the ones that leave a lasting impression on my life. I value the concept of legacy in creativity as it resonates with my feelings about my own writing. I could write a million short stories or make up a hundred characters, but if I can write one story that someone remembers and cherishes, I can find a place for myself.

The nature of the dream made me reflect upon New Year's resolutions. I try not to say *one day*, or *I'll start in January*, or *reset in February*. Mrs Komachi, the librarian, says, 'As you continue to say the words "one day," the dream is not over... it may never come true.' It drives me to work harder on my own projects and my degree, so that 'one day is going to become tomorrow.'

As a short book with simple sentences, *What You are Looking for is in the Library* is easily digestible – especially alongside the upcoming semester's workload. The stories are easy to follow, making it a perfect read to tackle a reading slump. The characters' problems may well reflect your concerns for the future as a university student, so reading it could put your mind at ease. It's also perfect for those attached to the feeling of never being enough, despite trying. Or for people who feel like giving up. It gives you gratitude from small things that help you to appreciate life. To keep going, like the characters do.

If you need another reason to pick this up, there's a library setting. There's a kind of love in being surrounded by words and opportunities. Cherish the fact that so many people, even fictional ones, can take refuge in the security of words, and that you can too.

February's theme was **Valentine**. If you're interested in submitting to us, you can join the Concrete society through the UEA SU website to get added to the Concrete Writers team, where next month's theme will be posted on 4 March. We look forward to reading your work!

The Heart is a Box of Destruction

Zoe Molloy

No one can
Ignore it already!
Falling, failing, flailing at one
Suggestion of belonging
Keep the world spinning round and round and
Back and forth as the pendulum of your
Heart swings
Bruising the walls of your soul, knowing
We are ever so close
To sinking
 But forever is not
 So scary
 When it has been
 Day in day out
 A lone shell
 of human I have become.
And it is just another year,
it is just Another. Deeply. Enraged. Fight. For
Anyone else?
Answer me please.
Alone is never lonely
Or never was
Not until I was shadowed with the curse of feeling
An alternate universe
Wrapped in my hands,
Grazing affection, smiling promises
A box of chocolates
All to be devoured,
Destroyed
As my feelings for you.



*Box of tulip and hearts motif
in book form, 1714, Gift of
Lynn and Bruce Heckman*

Swan Song

Anonymous

Heart-shaped want swells in my chest, teething
on a poem I am making up for you inside my head. The strings
attaching it to my throat are snapping, one by one,
in descending arpeggio. A kiss for a verse;
I'll write a hundred just to hear the music. We can break
a wishbone over the chorus, swear
with lover's spit under a paper moon. A paper moon
to dance under, to fold into a billet-doux. *Darling, dearest,*
I'll hate you for this someday. Here comes the rattling breath of the crescendo.



*Cupid and the swan, 1652,
etched by Wenceslaus Hollar
after Giulio Romano*

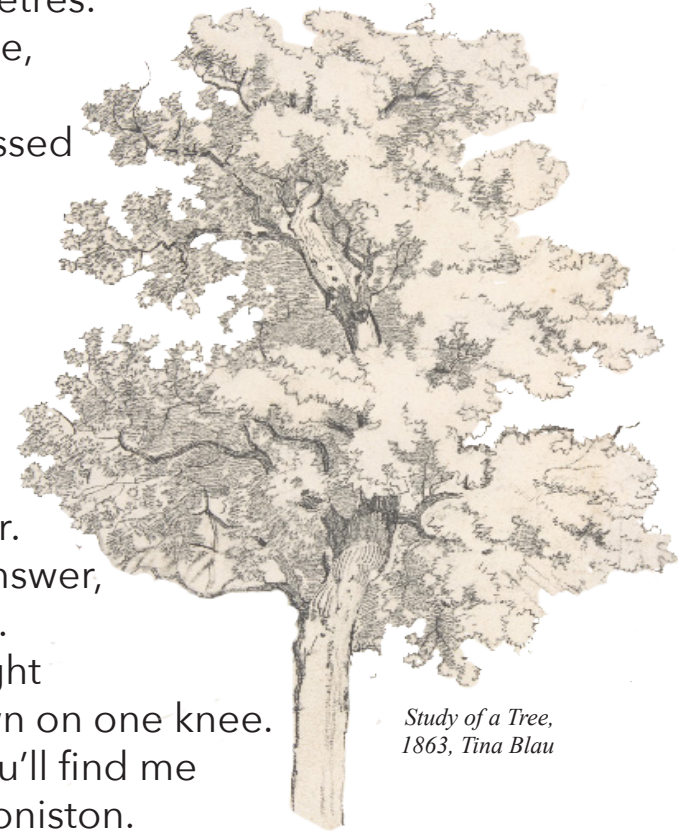


Map, 18th century, Gift
of Nancy Ford to the Met
Museum, 2002

Landranger 97

Lilia Colledge

We met under the ivy tree,
at the bottom of Walna Scar Road.
The branches reaching for our heads –
our height measured in bough, not metres.
We raced up and down the long tongue,
clinging to the hard crag like wet clothes
to bodies. The Forge was next, but we missed
it with all our dreaming of Endmoor.
We danced past High Hay Bridge,
broke down on Low Hay Bridge.
You screamed to the void in Arthur Wood,
walked alone by Appletree Holme.
You felt the ghost of my hands as you
scaled Furness Fells, wondering if you
would make it back out of Height of Winder.
By moss side, you called me, but I didn't answer,
too busy with stones and lips at Potter Fell.
You laid down in Littlewood, as you thought
of Great Wood and the day you got down on one knee.
You sigh as you realise, the only way you'll find me
is in the water upon the Old Man of Coniston.
And even then, it is only a past phantom
that cannot keep you company, like I did.



Study of a Tree,
1863, Tina Blau

Sunday Morning

Ben Heiss

Second drafts, used pens that bludgeon sea-sick overcast,
easier than peeling off that glimmering super glue on your hands

A chain-saw cow swirls around in black drink, staining
requests for things that allow you to think,
bleeding blooms lavender-skinned around the sacrificial lamb

Two pairs of jeans, Kline-style on the carpet leaves,
you want a horse, I want a sheep, still the lake-bench
grows opal eyes like ants

I make breakfast, eggs,
you show me a meerkat on your phone
I reach for the pen that breathes ink down my bones
sit asleep like a bleached brush cleaning your hands

Veterans rise, medicine is mixed
Advisory calls lost in the cariad twist
Blotted, soaked and skinned, I drop
breadcrumbs like Gretel to lose
sight of where I stand,
cracked and brittle, falling into fractals
across the forest floor
and back onto the mahogany mattress again.

Serving Breakfast, from "Elles", 1896,
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec



Interview

Venue Co-Editors Elle & Polly

Helen Shepherd, Manager of Sinsins Norwich.

By Elle McKinnell-Michael and Polly Dye - Venue Co-Editors.

We sat down with Helen Shepherd, manager of Sinsins Boutique of Love in Norwich City Centre. We met in the shop itself, surrounded by a colourful array of weird and wonderful sex-positive objects. This created the perfect environment for us to talk openly about what running a sex shop is *really* like, and to reflect on the broader ways in which sex impacts our society and its culture.

Introduce yourself! What is your business, what is Sinsins?

Okay, well, I'm Helen, I took this shop, Sinsins, which is a Norwich institution, about seven years ago. It's been here about 21 years. I was at the time an artist belonging to the guild of erotic artists. I had an exhibition in the old shop, which is how I was in the area, and then I just took it on when it became available.

[At this point, a regular came in to buy poppers.]

Would you say that poppers are your most popular product?

I've got lots of them. Yeah, I'm somewhat of a connoisseur. I spend a lot of time on Reddit, 'popper pigs'. Like, it's a difficult one because obviously, I try not to sell them. You'll probably see me not sell them if you stand there long enough. Because if people don't know what they are, I'm always going to say [no]. I'm never going to promote these, invite you to have these. Like, we can't even really discuss what you do with them. Yeah, it's, you know, it's a difficult thing. But like, you know, my customers are grown-ups, yeah? And, you know, they know what they do, but yeah, I'll talk at least one person out of buying them a day because they're not good for you in any real sense. You know, they serve a purpose.

It seems from your website and shopfront that inclusivity and activism is important to your business. What's the philosophy there? Do you find that marginalised groups are a big audience for you?



Credit: Thomas Lewis.

I've got 'trans friendly' on the window. I'm kind of like, part of pride every year. It's a really important thing, especially in this current world, I think, to to push back. When I took the shop on, it wasn't doing very well. I think perhaps the previous owner hadn't understood the way the world had moved on, and it was still all painted pink, with this bunting. It was like: 'you can't call it a sex shop'. The world has moved on and become more sex positive. Norwich, especially, is, like, an incredibly, maybe not like, racially diverse city, really, but in all kinds of other ways, it's a very diverse city. So, when I took it on it had virtually nothing in it, over these seven years, it's become the shop that Norwich wants. Not only that, but it's a neurodivergent shop, all the staff and customers, lots of customers, are neurodivergent. It's a different vibe here, I think, than it was before.

Do you view your shop as a form of allyship to the queer community?

Well, I myself and all my staff consider ourselves queer one way or another. We're all in that kind of melting pot, you know. If you were to stand here, you'd see everybody. People really do consider it a safe space. Like, that's pretty good. It's a good place to come and know that you're accepted and able to ask questions that you perhaps wouldn't be able to ask somewhere else. This is one of the last surviving independent shops like this in the country. It makes a difference, like, because I am this shop. This shop is me. I live and breathe it. This is what my veins look like. You know, I'm viscerally a part of it. It's like a Stephen King novel, the shop lives, and I live to serve it. Feels very much like that.

It does say 'shop open for over-eighteens' out there. That is really key. On Saturdays you'll get idiots come in. Middle aged, straight men come after the football. Nothing I can do about them.

Would you say that a lot of your clientele are singles?

It's really everybody. I do get singles coming in. The way that the history of it has gone, obviously, Anne Summers did its thing about 20 or 30 years ago, and women got used to talking about sex toys with their friends and stuff. Men are kind of moving slower and still have a little bit of shame.

But like, I mean, I've got like, a couple who come in who are in their 80s, still buying stuff to help them move things along. You then have young people who come in in big mixed groups, which is amazing to see you know, where it's like, no problem at all going through stuff going 'I like this!'. That feels like a development over this last 20 years.

Where do you think that shame comes from, especially from single men?

Just like, past times, and the judgmental world that you can see around you. It's quite a worrying time in history right now. So, you've got the weight of that, that's hard to manage. I've got men come in and they go: 'Oh, I'll never compete with that'. And I say: 'You've got to think of it as a teammate, not as competition!'

Credit: Thomas Lewis.



I'll talk openly to some people, and then I'll have people who'll come in, and I can see them mostly over there [behind a display], waiting for everybody else to go before they'll come and talk to me. It's still kind of difficult to have a sort of proper openness, I think guys would make fun of other guys, whereas I think that really doesn't happen with the women. Shy people, that's a different thing. Shyness is a different thing to shame.

What do you love about running an adult shop?

I love the problem solving. I love finding out new things. I have ADHD, so I love opening the parcels. I love doing thousands of pounds worth of orders, and then, opening all the boxes.

I do own the shop next door as well. [Elysium - alternative clothing and accessories] I did a few days there and I didn't love it. I like this because it feels much more useful, much more rewarding, much more important. Like a guy came in last week, his wife had a motorbike accident, she's like 'gone' from the neck down. A lot of examples like that, where people have gone to the doctor and tried to talk about the sexual part of their relationship, and been shut down. It feels like a good thing to

Credit: Thomas Lewis.



be doing. Like, you know, the guys come in from other countries where the things aren't quite as open and as here. They'll think that they have got to have this, and they've got to have that. I sort of send them out, I tell them: 'you're alright, just go and be nice'!

Many venue readers are interested in fashion and culture - do you see more bdsm/fetish gear in fashion in 2025?

Yeah, I suppose. Because, I used to have the underwear in here, and then obviously I started the new shop, and there's definitely harnesses going into everyday wear. That's the main thing, I think. The harnesses, which would have been in the back room, now they mix seamlessly with the stuff in the front room. You have the other kind of 'party wear', it's not far off some of the fashion stuff in the rest of the shop.

Do you like that sort of fashion?

Yeah, I used to do art. I used to take the pictures and do the papers and everything. So, I've always kind of had an interest in that whole scene, especially, sort of, visually.

It's great, you know, the real kind of crossover, like, you know, when you kind of start getting brilliant customers come in, all dressed up. They've got their ears on, and they've got their tails on, properly dressed up in a mixture of things. That's absolute joy to me, when they come in here, like 'Oh god, look at you go!'

Do you have any advice about sex, relationships or toys for Concrete's readership?

I would say there's a few things to work out. That's how the shop works, it's organ based rather than gender based, but there's a little wonderland in the middle where there's toys for everybody, toys that can be used by everybody, likes for massages and stuff...

It's really about knowing your anatomy in the first place. That's a really important part. People come in and they just don't even know what's where, or what they're supposed to be aiming for. Work that out first.

Toys have moved on so much, if you know what you want, you can work from what you want to achieve. Like, you know, not everybody wants a buzzy toy. Like, there's toys which mix buzzy and a lower frequency for people who like, sort of, grinding. There's the frequency, or the softness of

something. People pick everything up, and somewhere you'll go, yeah, that's it. That's the thing. You just kind of have to see the thing. There's toys for everybody. There's gaps being filled in in all kinds of ways.

Like for example, for female to male trans people, finding a toy that works through the transition. There's always going to be something there. I'll pick two toys up, and one's going really fast and one's going really slow, I'll kind of watch how they react to it and go: 'Right then, we'll go here, we'll start here!'

They definitely don't look like the toys that there were, like, 25 years ago, where there was a real, kind of basic... either a straight plastic thing, or a horrible, you know, not body safe thing.

Do you think there has been a recent boom in sex toy technology recently?

Absolutely. There's always something new. I'm not an AI lover, really, but that kind of AI aspect is moving into things. I do the trade fairs in Europe. They sort of sat me down, and I had this whole headset on, and it was to show how, like, The Masturbator would work. This girl whispered in my ear, and then she put her hand on my knee, and it was as real as real. They're kind of working out that there are gaps to be filled, and every time they do something they get a little bit closer to 'real'.

Do you think AI is going to be a threat to your industry?

Yeah, I'm a bit of a luddite, like I left items on the checkout this morning because there wasn't somebody on the checkout. I'm one of those. I'm not frightened of computers, per se, or anything, but I think there's a lot of threats through the supply chain. Like Amazon, there's threats coming through to everything. There's good and bad to the artificial nature of it, people are having like virtual girlfriends. There's a lot, yeah, there's a lot to worry about, for sure. But I offer real talk, and expertise, and guidance.

Do you think there are misconceptions about sex in the media? How do you think film, TV and books affect how we see sex?

You know, 50 Shades didn't really do a great deal of good. It's just like, you know, whatever kind of sells, isn't it? People like to judge; people like to laugh at other people. They're just, they're selling [media] to your Daily Mail readers, people who don't want joy, and they don't want anybody else having joy, not on any level. You're always gonna have that. I can't see that going away, really.

Do you think the misconceptions about sex are helping to contribute to this sort of shame?

Yes!

Did you name the shop? What's the story there?

No, I didn't actually, but it's French for without - like 'Sans Sin'. So, it's called 'Sinsins', but it's 'Sans-Sin' really.

So, is the message behind that like - sex is without sin [not sinful]?

Yes, exactly! I didn't call it 'Boutique of Loveee' either, the amount of times you hear that from people walking past reading the sign, it drives me mad! I want to go up to the door and go 'I didn't name it!'

Did you want to plug anything so the readers can find you?

Search for Sinsins, our Instagram is relatively active. It's like, you know, you can't promote anything because of the nature of the goods. I guess I'm preaching to the converted really. You know, if you follow me, then you'll see my things, otherwise you never will, because it has to be over eighteens on everything. You know, it's there!

To find out more about Sinsins, you can find them on Instagram @sinsinsboutique. Or, their website is www.sinsins.com.



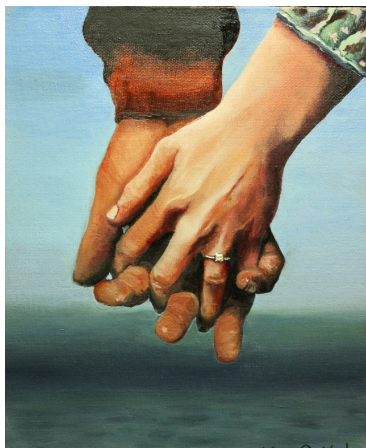
Credit: Thomas Lewis.

Brushstrokes of Passion: An Interview with Student Artist Maria Belderbos

By Annabel Knill



“Carmen With a Pearl Earring”



“Min and Gavin Engagement”



“Papa and Poppy”

Amidst the hum of campus life, where deadlines and summatives dominate, student artist Maria Belderbos finds solace in paint and canvas.

A first-year English Literature and Creative Writing student, Maria’s work has been gaining attention for its evocative use of colour and composition. I sat down with Maria to discuss her artistic journey, inspirations, and the challenges of balancing creativity with academics.

Discovering art when she was only three or four, Maria expressed how she had “always loved it,” with A level art becoming a “learning curve” in her artistic development. Her gap year supplied her time to dedicate herself to art, allowing Maria the chance to further her work and time as an artist, taking on bigger paintings and projects; including taking part in exhibitions and launching her own website.

While Maria specialises in oil portraits, which makes up a significant part of her work, she uses a range of different media, such as watercolour in her cityscape collection. She strives for every piece to be “different from a snapshot” and for each unique piece to be an “experience of the individual” subject of the painting.

Maria’s ‘Self-Portrait: At Home’, is a piece in her arsenal that has influenced her growing collection. Determined to capture the many sides and interests of herself, Maria’s self-portrait presents an interesting commentary of the multifaceted personality of a singular person.

The realism in the work creates a dreamy yet vibrant effect on the contorted composition through the bold, stylistic choice of blending. The layering and use of concentrated colours create an arguable atmosphere of surrealism that can be found throughout her paintings. The of perspective in this work draws the eye in to the figure, as the feet stand out in the foreground demanding the attention of the view to focus on her mismatched shoes.

The shadow cast in her self-portrait further actualises a nod to the storytelling impressionists who inspired Maria, as the shadow creates the shape of a side profile further implying a sense of the many personalities and sides to herself still hidden away, which captures an essence of surrealism in her compositions.

As we can all understand, being a uni student is particularly demanding, with time filled not only from academics to life, but getting to grips with the independence of the uni lifestyle. However, art and paint for Maria has become a constant in her routine.

Armed with “tea and hot water bottles” Maria finds the time to paint whenever she can in her studio/garage. Her time painting becomes a much-needed mental divide, a “headspace change” enabling an undisturbed environment for creativity.

Aside from pursuing her art further, Maria also hopes to continue her writing—another strong passion—as she works toward becoming a published author. Having already



“Self-Portrait At Home “

written her first coming of age novel Write My Name in Water, Maria hopes to take this to agents and see her work in bookshops some day.

As our conversation wrapped up, it was clear that Maria’s passion for art is as vivid as her paintings. Whether on canvas or in conversation, she reminds us that art is not just an escape—it’s a language of its own, one that continues to evolve with every brushstroke.

To find out more about Maria Belderbos’ work visit her website mariabelderbosart.com or follow her on Instagram at [maria_belderbos_art](https://www.instagram.com/maria_belderbos_art)



“Immy’s Bloom”

Calling All Student Artists!

For the up coming screening of “Bend it like Beckham,” orginaised by venue’s TV section, we are looking for an aspiring student artist to create a poster advertising this event. Whether you are a watercolour, oils, pens or even charcoal focused artist, this is an amazing opportunity to show off your talent and have your work used as the poster which will be given out and put up to advertise the event.

If this is somthing you think you could do, email A.knill@uea.ac.uk for more information.

Madame X: Sargent's Scandal of 1884

By Andi Gill

Pale, luminous skin characterises the Portrait of Madame X. The painting, currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and done by John Singer Sargent during his time in Europe, depicts the Parisienne socialite Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau, elegantly dressed in a black off-shoulder gown with jeweled straps.

She was married to a French banker, and was constantly in the spotlight of high society, and so at surface level her portrait seems like a logical decision on Sargent's part.

She was beautiful and well known, so easily recognized in fact that despite not being named in the title of the portrait, many viewers guessed that it was her upon seeing it. However, upon further inspection of Gautreau's situation, Sargent's painting seems strategic, as does her decision to pose for it.

Gautreau wasn't well known for nothing, after all. She was infamous for her multiple affairs, and general lack of conservatism. Sargent had painted one of

her known lovers prior to requesting a sitting with her, and had depicted him in a similarly intimate way. Yet when the Portrait of Madame X was unve

iled at the Paris Salon, it drew an unprecedented level of outrage from the Paris elites. While Sargent may have considered his painting a celebration of Gautreau's beauty, the public saw it as a celebration of her infidelity and salaciousness.

The criticism was so overwhelming that Sargent went back and repainted one of the straps of her dress, which had originally been hanging off her shoulder. Such was the ire of Paris high society in the face of such a sexually provocative painting.

Most articles written on it (and there are quite a few if you're interested) will say that this was disastrous for Gautreau, and that she was disgraced. She very well may have been, as she allegedly beseeched him to remove it from the Salon.

Yet, amid cries to have him banned from the art world, Sargent refused to remove the portrait. Now, of course, the Portrait of Madame X is his most celebrated work, and so an easy takeaway from the story is strength in the face of censorship, but I have a theory about Sargent's decision to paint the controversial social butterfly.

I think he did it on purpose. He was a newcomer to the European art scene, and his previous attempts to establish himself had failed. Gautreau was a fellow immigrant, an American with French Creole roots, fighting for her place. The pair would have known that presenting her so provocatively would draw some anger.

It makes me believe that it was a calculated risk taken between the two in order to solidify each other's notoriety in the public eye. Some of their contemporaries thought so as well, accusing Sargent of "a wilful exaggeration of every one of his vicious eccentricities, simply for the purpose of being talked about and provoking argument."



"Madame X"

By John Singer Sargent
Wikimedia Commons

The Naked Truth: Male and Female Nudity in Art



"Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe" By Edouard Manet
Wikimedia Commons

One of the most influential paintings in the history of art can be said to be Edouard Manet's "Le déjeuner sur l'herbe." And yet this painting, with its loose brushstrokes and dusty colour palette, holds none of the previously admired rich details of a Van Eyck or the dramatic chiaroscuro depth of a Caravaggio. Rather, it is praised for its revolutionary simplicity. Capturing not the wealth of the gods and nobility, but rather the modesty of the average man, Manet's painting stood apart for its truth and realism. And yet with all this said there is one vital aspect of this painting which goes unsaid: The nameless naked women staring out of the painting. While mimicking Botticelli's compositions in "Venus and Mars" it is the striking pale and luminescent skin of the naked women which juxtaposed the clothed Venus. The naked women simply be-

come another depiction of the artist's desire and nothing more. Female nudity has dominated art history, with Manet's painting being no different, as the female body becomes idealised, eroticised, and objectified. Nudity in art has been a powerful means of exploring beauty, vulnerability, and identity, yet a striking disparity exists in how male and female bodies have been portrayed. Male nudity comparatively held a symbolic strength in paintings and sculptures opposing that of the passive vulnerability so often presented through the female depiction.

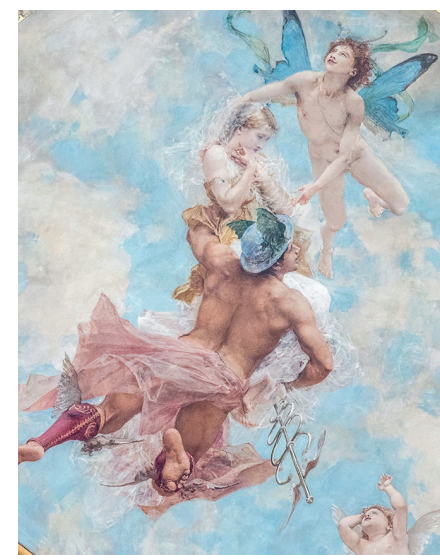
From the classical to the Renaissance, nudity flourished within the art world, with male nudity portrayed as a heroism and a divine perfection. Statues like the Discobolus or Michelangelo's David showcase the male body for its athletics while Leonardo da Vinci and

Michelangelo continued to explore male anatomy as a study of form and strength. Artists such as Titian and Botticelli often portrayed female nudes in mythological or allegorical contexts, emphasising their beauty and erotic appeal. The "male gaze," a term later coined by feminist theorists, highlights how women were often represented for the pleasure of the viewer rather than as independent subjects. Female nudity became a vulnerability and weakness of the women, not just in art but the cultural traditions and mythologies.

It is through the exploration of body politics and the self-representation of artist such as Tracy Emin, Frida Kahlo and Cindy Sherman that a contemporary shift in nudity has taken place as their depictions have become more diverse and subversive. The male nudes, once reserved for heroic or religious contexts, became more vulnerable, even sexualised, in the works of artists like Egon Schiele and Lucian Freud. In contemporary art, nudity continues to provoke discussion about gender and power. While social media often censors female nudity more strictly than male nudity, museums and galleries have begun to confront historical imbalances. Artists like Emma Watson and Spencer Tunick use nudity as a form of protest, while movements such as the #FreeTheNipple challenge outdated double standards.

As the landscape of art continues to evolve and expand, the representation of nudity remains a crucial dialogue between tradition and progress. It becomes vital,

therefore, not forget the works that once portrayed nudity as a vulnerability or eroticised for a particular gaze but rather but learn and develop the intersection of art, gender and cultural preceptive as continual process of unity and expression.



Credit: Unsplash

How Rocky Horror Transformed Queer Representation on Stage

By Polly Dye

The stage musical *The Rocky Horror Show* (which later inspired the 1975 film of a similar name), remains one of the most iconic theatrical expressions of queerness. From its camp aesthetic to its transgression of social norms, *Rocky Horror* holds a pivotal role in LGBTQ+ representation, not just on the stage, but across the arts in general.

Before we delve into what makes *Rocky Horror* so profound in its expression of LGBT identities, we must consider why theatre itself is a vital way of portraying queerness. The answer is this: live settings allow viewers to become intertwined in the spectacle before them, blurring lines between actors and audiences. When watching a film, for example, viewers are presented with a very rigid border between themselves and the action on screen – audiences are in a completely different setting — a completely different dimension, if you will. However, watching a story unfold in a theatre creates an immediate connection between performers and their audiences, allowing viewers to witness authenticity in a way film (or other media) cannot replicate. This makes the stage fertile ground for showcasing marginalised identities as audiences are more likely to connect with the struggles and celebrations of queerness narrated directly in front of them.

If the stage makes everything performed on it so special, why is *Rocky Horror* considered to go above and beyond in this respect? There is no simple answer, but it seems logical to start with whom is considered the play's most iconic character: Dr. Frank-N-Furter. Undeniably magnetic, the flamboyant Frank-N-Furter subverts the 'villainous queer' trope historically used in the arts to depict LGBTQ+ characters as perverse and/or morally corrupt. Though he acts 'badly' in some moments of the play (such as in his manipulation of Brad and Janet), Frank-N-Furter has an unapologetic authenticity and unbridled creativity that means it is difficult to categorise him as a villain. Instead, he is portrayed as a complex anti-hero, someone that audiences can admire and celebrate due to his unashamed embodiment of gender fluidity. Moreover, his final moments on stage expose a vulnerability within his eccentric personality. His performance of "I'm Going Home", a song where he yearns for belonging and acceptance, generates sympathy from audiences, likening him to a tragic figure rather than a character built out of pure antagonism. This glimmer of weakness offers an explanation for his somewhat villainous actions: his 'badness' is nothing to do with his queerness, but is rather a product of societal rejection. Through Frank-N-Furter, *Rocky Horror* transforms harmful stereotypes into a compelling emblem of

queer empowerment. Rather than fostering fear among audiences, viewers are encouraged to celebrate Frank's individuality, making him an irreplaceable theatrical queer icon.

Another crucial aspect of *Rocky Horror* that makes it the renowned celebration of queerness that it is today is its extraordinary camp aesthetic. Meaning "heightened artifice, affectation, and exaggeration, often with a playful or ironic element", camp is historically rooted within LGBT culture and *Rocky Horror* uses this like no other. The characters' costumes are constructed around fashion trademarks of camp: corsets, fishnets, stockings, etc. These are used to blur gender binaries, subsequently fostering a joyous and subversive celebration of camp fashion and queer culture. These wild and innovative costumes add an extravagant flair to the play's dance numbers, creating a flamboyant visual spectacle that is hard to replicate anywhere else. By going full-throttle with its campiness, *Rocky Horror* allows itself to explore queerness in a way that is empowering, disputing heteronormative ideas that LGBT identities should be palatable in order to be respected. It is this unique aesthetic that transforms the play from a mere, slightly bizarre, narrative into an exuberant honouring of cultural defiance that thrives on the stage.

Since its first performance in 1973, *The Rocky Horror Show* has had a lasting cultural impact, becoming iconic in wider society as well as within the queer community. Before even hearing of *Rocky Horror*, I vividly remember dancing to 'Time Warp' at my primary school discos! *Rocky* was a part of my life before I even knew it, fundamentally attesting to its theatrical greatness. Ultimately, *Rocky Horror*'s timelessness can be attributed to its unashamed desire to be itself. The play revels in its queerness, it does not apologise for its chaotic plot, its absurd characters, or its radical rule-breaking. It is this very quality that not only makes *The Rocky Horror Show* an astounding play, but also the best expression of queer culture on the stage.



Credit: Unsplash

Portraying sex on stage safely

By Hannah Foley

Sex and relationships are depicted on stage: this is not surprising. However, slightly less known, is the role working behind the scenes to make these portrayals possible: Intimacy coordinators work on stage or screen productions to choreograph intimate scenes.

Whilst the role has existed for some time, the demand surfaced during the #MeToo movement. The hashtag began gaining prominence in 2017, after actress Alyssa Milano used the phrase to respond to a tweet regarding sexual abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein - a Hollywood producer. Victims of sexual harassment and abuse were encouraged to speak out, and this included celebrities. The surfacing allegations against various Hollywood figures called for urgent change within the industry to help protect actors. It became apparent that the use of intimacy coordinators as a third-party could help to ensure a safe environment for actors, particularly in scenes involving nudity or simulated sex.

As part of their role, they ensure that staff and actors are aware of the context of the intimacy, and that avenues for reporting harassment are available. They will check that actors consent to all scenes of intimacy, and will coordinate movement between actors. Scenes will be performed according to this previously-agreed choreography, meaning actors will not be taken by surprise, and they can feel more comfortable. Coordinators can also advocate on behalf of actors when talking to the production team, since the power dynamics in productions may leave actors feeling unable to speak up. Their role includes training in consent, anti-harassment, movement coaching, proper use of modesty garments and barriers, and mental health first aid. They can use tricks such as cushions, or even a half-inflated netball as used in *Bridgerton*, in order to help actors replicate movements without making contact physically.

Some actors criticise having an external party present during intimate scenes, such as *Game of Thrones* star Sean Bean. In 2022, he described how coordinators "spoil the intimacy" as they prevent experimental and spontaneous work. When actor Toni Collette described her experience with intimacy coordinators, she also shared a negative view. Collette said: "It just felt like those people who were brought in to make me feel more at ease were actually making me feel more anxious," and asked them to leave the set as she felt they weren't helping.

Hollywood actor Katherine Heigl, worked for an intimacy coordinator for the first time during her role in Netflix series *Firefly Lane*. She initially felt awkward with being directed during intimate scenes, but later "ended up loving [her coordinator] so deeply, and being so grateful for her". She added: "she protected us in a way that I didn't realise how unprotected we were."

Whilst people want to be committed to their job, it is important that actors can maintain their boundaries in the workplace. Intimacy coordinators are a helpful option to ensure actors are kept safe and comfortable, and the role has become a vital element during production of both theatre and cinema.

A Review of Panto Society's Spiderman: The Pantomime!

By Sofia Fischer

I did not have very high expectations for the Panto Society's most recent performance of Spiderman; I went into it thinking that it would be amateur and cheap, good enough for a few laughs and nothing more. It's forgettable at best. So, I was very pleasantly surprised to find that I loved it. Don't get me wrong, it was still amateur and cheap; I don't think anybody could expect more from a student-led society. However, it worked in their favour to create a witty and relaxed atmosphere where one could effortlessly submerge into the satire of it all. The way they managed to sway me from my original bias was through the actor's interactions with the audience.



Credit:

The Theatrical Legacy of Redefining Relationships

By Polly Dye

Theatre has pushed boundaries since its birth. Blurring borders between reality and performance, the stage is an excuse to take things to extremes, encouraging audiences to question what they assume to be correct. The theatre is particularly radical in critiquing the rigidity of relationship norms, prompting viewers to question their connections to people around them, enabling them to see relationships in unexpected lights.

When thinking about theatre's history of challenging relationship norms, it is only right to begin with the father of the stage: William Shakespeare. His play, *Twelfth Night*, stands as his most unconventional exploration of relationships. The play follows Viola, a shipwrecked woman, who makes a new life for herself by climbing the ranks of the Duke Orsino's court. Ultimately, she becomes his most trusted advisor and attempts to help him win the affections of the beautiful Olivia. The twist? Viola spends most of the play dressed as a man, calling herself 'Cesario'. This creates a delightfully chaotic plot as Olivia develops feelings for Cesario, Viola for Orsino, and Orsino... is mainly just infatuated with himself, though recent performances of the play (like the Globe's 2017 rendition) hint at his subtle homoerotic longing for Cesario. These chaotic mistaken identities create a swarm of queer confusion within the play, disrupting heterosexual confinements. It is highly probable that this abundance of queerness created quite the scandal among Shakespeare's audiences, making the play particularly subversive when considering actors of the time were all men! Therefore, *Twelfth Night*'s comedic exploration of the fluidity of sexuality invites its audiences to challenge fixed societal

Although a key aspect of pantomimes is audience interaction, in my experience, this can often turn out patronising, repetitive and annoying. This is often the case for more popular pantomimes targeted towards families and performed on bigger stages. Yet, it was the best part of *Spiderman: The Pantomime!* Thanks to the respectable size of the UEA Drama Studio, along with great improvisation from the cast in response to audience reactions, it certainly felt as though the audience became a secondary character, even going as far as to interrupt the queer romantic story between Peter and Harry to include a third lover, none other than an audience member.

While the actors sold the audience onto the story's wild antics, it is clear to anyone paying attention that the author and producer of the pantomime know their audience well. With an age restriction of 'adults only' due to inappropriate language, sexual innuendos, violence and an open bar, they had the freedom (and the mind) to address the context of a majority UEA student audience. *Spiderman: The Pantomime!* was run by students for students. Criticising capitalism, inhumane working conditions, and our very own student union through flippant banter, along with fantastic renditions of *Holding Out for a Hero*, *SOS*, *Born This Way*, and *I Want It That Way*, the young adult audience was feverishly intoxicated with entertainment; loudly (and perhaps drunkenly)

taking every opportunity to respond to the actors and participate in the unfolding story.

Although I did pick up on stumblings during lines and choreography, they were quickly washed away from the mind as the story continued. However, I did feel at times that the primary storyline, following Peter and Harry as they find themselves on opposite sides of the battle, was largely overshadowed by the entertaining side stories. The audience lived for Aunt May's flirtatious attempts on an audience member, the worker's strike, a missing Spider Gwen, and Venom's regrets over a past relationship. The play never stalled but felt fresh and experimental at every turn. I want to end this review by congratulating the actors for their versatile performances in the face of a chaotic, excited and, yes, drunk audience. The play was unpolished, rusty and crude - making it all the more enjoyable. If you managed to experience the show for yourself, consider yourself lucky because this pantomime was by far the best I've ever been to. If not, be on the lookout for their next performance, if it is anything like *Spiderman: The Pantomime!* it'll be a good one. You can also expect the show to be posted at UEA Pantomime Society on YouTube.

Credit:



Credit:



Credit:



Queer Style and its Impact

By Robyn Srikandan

Queer people using clothing to express and show off their identity is no new thing. Anyone in the LG-BTQ+ community will have heard the many jokes regarding buttoned shirts, dyed hair and cuffed jeans. Though these things are not really a serious way to figure out someone's label, there is a long history of queer people communicating to other queer people through their outfits. This was especially significant in the past, since this was the only way they could express their identity without fear of prosecution. February is LGBTQ+ history month, which makes it the perfect time to have a look into the history of queer style and the influence it has had on both mainstream fashion and society in general.

One of the most famous and influential gay men in history was Oscar Wilde. He was one of the earliest known men who fulfilled the stereotype of a gay man that dresses and acts flamboyantly and became the leading figure of the aestheticism and decadence artistic movements, which were all about hedonism and self-pleasure. His unique and exciting sense of style was associated with a kind of flashy dandyism that later became synonymous with homosexuality. He supposedly wore a green carnation on his lapel as a discreet signifier of his sexuality, and this later became an insider symbol that meant the wearer was a gay man.

Glossier: Review

By Heather Wallis

Glossier mastered the 'clean girl' aesthetic before it had a name, with their promise to provide effortless "skin first, makeup second" beauty, ahead of the viral trend. With its dewy finishes, sheer pigments and skincare-infused formulas, the brand has become a widely-loved holy grail amongst beauty lovers amidst the popular rise of a natural, glowy makeup look.

From Glossier's Futuredew oil serums to their popular Cloud Paint, the brand is all about polished radiance: "an instant dewy glow that lasts". The brand hones in on long-wearing, nourishing formulas that enhance, rather than mask, natural beauty.

Despite critique that the brand's formulas lack performance over newer competitors, Glossier is constantly evolving and keeping on top of trends, refreshing its look, products and packaging. The collection continues to expand into bolder shades, whilst maintaining the minimalistic consistency of their dewy formulas.

A prime example? The new Black Cherry Collection. This launch blends bold, red packaging and deep berry tints to bring an enhanced, flushed glow to the Glossier lineup. It is a collection that taps into our senses with its juicy, cherry aesthetic, providing a fresh twist on the brand's signature aesthetic – could this be 'clean girl' aesthetic remastered?

The popular upper-class menswear fashion of Wilde's time also became the blueprint for the lesbian fashion of the twenties and thirties. This even reached the silver screen, with Marlene Dietrich, a bisexual actress, becoming known for her androgynous style and frequent wearing of menswear. Dietrich's influence on the fashion world to this day is undeniable, with countless modern red carpet looks paying homage to her. Perhaps her most iconic outfit was the tuxedo she wore in the movie Morocco, which inspired one of Yves Saint Laurent's most notable creations, 'Le Smoking', a trouser suit for women.

The twentieth century saw a significant number of queer male designers, including huge figures like Cristobal Balenciaga, Pierre Balmain and Christian Dior – all of which have become household names. Though it is hard to say if their identities had a profound impact on their designs, it is true that these designers have done a lot for the history of fashion. A lot of people might find it surprising that so much of the fashion world was shaped by queer men.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the world began to become increasingly open towards the LG-BTQ+ community. Events such as the Stonewall riots in 1969 sowed the seeds for significant social and legal change, and were led by drag queens, like

Marsha P. Johnson. The influence of drag artistry on the fashion world is absolutely immeasurable, and numerous designers have released collections that take a little or a lot of inspiration from it. A recent example of drag artistry and fashion intersecting is Chappel Roan and her incredible red carpet and stage looks, which she herself has said have inspirations in drag culture.

In the seventies and eighties, the music genre of glam rock became really popular, and many of its most famous musicians were bisexual, such as Freddie Mercury and David Bowie. Glam rock was synonymous with flamboyance (which seems to be a recurring theme amongst queer fashion), through its glitter, heavy makeup, high-heeled boots and just general androgyny.

Where does that leave us now? Luckily, we have come a long way from the times of Oscar Wilde, and queer people don't need to wear coded accessories like green carnations to let others know about their identity. American supermarket Target famously releases a collection of clothing that celebrates LGBTQ+ identities every year around pride, and though there is a significant group of people who are critical of it, it seems that they are a vocal minority. As time goes on, we can hope that this minority becomes smaller and smaller.

Shopping Saucy: The Best Places in Norwich to Buy Lingerie

By El Barrett

As the vice president of UEA Burlesque society, I have amassed a lot of lingerie over my time at university. I have a collection of about 30 lingerie sets from a variety of places, most of which have been bought in Norwich, so here are my suggestions for those looking to buy some for themselves.

Cheap options for lingerie include high street shops, especially Primark, however these can be very limited in size with most of their options being up to size D. If you are tight on time, supermarket shops often sell lingerie in their clothes sections, however these also tend to have limited options and can be rather basic.

M&S and John Lewis are great options for good quality lingerie with mid-range prices and relatively good size inclusion. These shops are great options for those who may not be comfortable entering shops that tailor towards lingerie and sex toys exclusively.

There are a range of shops in Norwich that focus exclusively on lingerie and things associated with them. Boux Avenue is my personal favourite, which frequently has deals when buying a bra rewards you with a free matching pair of underwear. Even outside

of the deals, the prices are still mid-range for lingerie, with a set costing around £50. Bravissimo is another great option for those with larger busts, with sizes going all the way up to L cup instead of stopping at G like most other places. However, these bras do tend to be a bit more on the expensive size with a single bra costing around £40.

Finally, Ann Summers has the largest range of styles of lingerie with some extra saucy pieces available. Not only do they sell lingerie, they have some sexy outfits as well like maid costumes and playboy bunnies if you are hoping to spice up your sex life this Valentines day. One item that Ann Summers excels in is their selection of stockings, hold ups and novelty tights. If you have visited a UEA Burlesque show, these are often what most of the dancers wear.

If you are interested in buying some lingerie for Valentines day, whether for just yourself, or to surprise your partner, I would most recommend checking out Primark, M&S, Boux Avenue, Bravissimo or Ann Summers, depending on what's best for your size and budget.

A Brief History of Lingerie

By Robyn Srikandan

The word 'lingerie' is taken directly from French, in which it simply means 'undergarments' – however in English, the meaning seems to have changed somewhat, referring to more specifically underwear that is somewhat visually appealing. The definition has clearly changed a lot since it first became a part of the English language, but how exactly did this come to be?

Underwear was, for a very long time, purely functional. For most of human civilisation, the only underwear people wore were loincloths, if they wore anything at all. In ancient Crete, not only was there no chest supporting underwear, but clothing was designed for the breasts to be fully exposed. The lower half of the body was still extremely modest, and this is something that didn't change for some thousands of years. Until the early nineteenth century, the only undergarment that women wore was a chemise or shift, which served the main purpose of not getting sweat on the outer clothing to make it last longer, rather than anything to do with preserving modesty.

In the Tudor era, we even see men wearing what is called a 'codpiece', a garment that originally served as protection for masculine nether regions but eventually became a decorative item that was supposed to demonstrate a man's sexual prowess and fertility. Luckily, Queen Elizabeth's ascension to the throne eventually brought an end to its popularity and it was never seen again.

In the nineteenth century underwear saw several drastic changes, such as the invention of 'drawers', which were like shorts, except the two legs were not

attached as to make going to the bathroom easy. Closed drawers came into existence not too long after when activities like cycling became popular, and things that were comfy, easy to move it, and fit under sporting clothes were necessary.

A lot of people might argue that visually appealing lingerie came to exist because of men that were fetishising women's bodies, but the concept of it that we know today largely came to be through a woman's invention. Lady Duff-Gordon, creator of couture brand Lucile, designed underwear with the aim of it being more freeing and less restrictive than garments like corsets. Prior to the 20th century, undergarments mainly served the purposes of altering a woman's physical appearance, but Lucile designed underwear that became less bulky and constricting, eventually leading to the invention of the bra in the 20th century by Caresse Crosby.

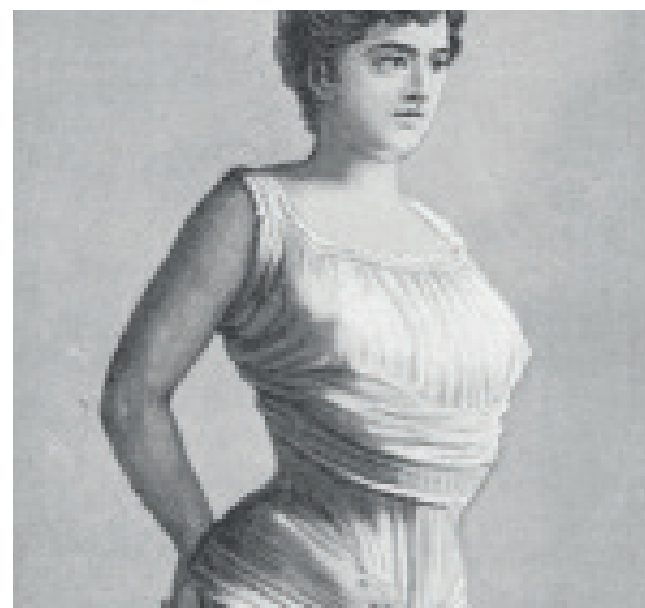
At the start of the 20th century clothing trends changed at a more rapid rate than ever before and having a wider selection of clothes in your wardrobe was possible for more than just the wealthiest of people. The underwear of the 19th century that was designed to alter your silhouette to fit that which was trendy was not really practical, so underwear became smaller and tighter as time went on, allowing it to fit under almost any types of clothes.

After the First World War, dresses also started getting shorter, meaning that legs were starting to become visible every day. This led to hosiery becoming an increasingly important part of someone's outfit, and a new social stigma about the appearance of your legs lead to shaving becoming com-

monplace. Legwear became such an important part of fashion that when women were unable to buy stockings due to rationing during the Second World War, they actually painted lines down the backs of their legs to mimic stocking seams. After rationing ended, stockings came back, and wired bras also became popular, which provided even more support. The next two decades saw even more types of bra being invented, including plunge bras and push-up bras.

The thong became a common item of clothing during the seventies and eighties, but in actuality they date back all the way to antiquity, to maybe as long as 75000 years ago, where they were a much more unisex garment than today. The seventies also saw the rise in fetishwear, thanks to Vivienne Westwood, who was a key figure in punk fashion. The punk subculture, being all about going against the mainstream, controversially brought intimate garments, such as underwear and leather chokers, to everyday wear, and Westwood brought this to the runway by incorporating fetish materials like latex and leather into very tight and revealing outfits.

Today, underwear and lingerie is still a key part of everyday life, whether we think about it consciously or not. Attitudes to it are changing, however. As the idea of gender being a spectrum becomes increasingly commonplace, underwear is slowly becoming less specific to either men or women. Our attitudes to modesty are also still changing, with more and more people opting to not wear bras or other types of underwear. That all being said, we still have a long way to go before our society can be as unrestrictive as our undergarments.



New Year, New-ish Me: The Ethics of Reinvention

By Jade Drever

New year, new me. The phrase that everyone will have said at least once in their lifetime. The new year rolls around and suddenly everyone is determined to create new and better versions of themselves. I personally took full advantage of the January sales and used my Christmas money to purchase some gym wear and build a new skin and hair care routine. It feels good to invest in myself, and I can already feel the positive mental and physical benefits; however, that does not mean that there are no negative side effects. But just how damaging is this mentality of reinvention?

With how commonplace social media is, trends and challenges are almost impossible to avoid. One particular trend that has received mixed responses is 'Project Pan,' where people stop buying new cosmetic and toiletries products until they have run out of the products they already have. While this has had the benefit of reducing spending and waste, it really highlights our society's issues of overconsumption and sustainability. Another trend is 75 hard, medium, and soft. This is where for 75 days you adhere to a strict diet and exercise regimen. But in order to take part, you are going to need a few things. To eat right you need to meal prep so buy some Tupperware. But you can't just eat anything. You have to ensure that you're eating 'clean', whatever that means. To exercise you'll need some new gym clothes and equipment, maybe even a membership. But all that exercising is going to affect your skin and cause breakouts, so buy a whole new skin regime. But who online do you listen to? With every so-called expert handing out

different advice, it's impossible to keep up with their conflicting advice. My TikTok for you page became flooded with these videos and honestly, it was overwhelming. I suddenly felt this immense pressure to take up one of these challenges, but it does not end there.

Alongside the sudden need to transform our bodies, our wardrobes also must adhere to the latest trends, which are not only damaging to our bank accounts, but also the environment as they encourage unsustainable shopping habits and waste. Last year saw the rise of several short-lived aesthetics including the mob wife, brat summer, and clean girls, and this year is sure to be no different. But what happens when these trends inevitably die out and we are suddenly left with a wardrobe full of supposedly outdated clothes? Charity shops are now finding that they are struggling to obtain good quality donations as more and more people are turning to second hand selling websites such as Vinted for their wardrobe clear outs. The donations that are being received are mainly from fast fashion retailers.

So how can we reinvent ourselves and achieve that 'new me' without breaking the bank or harming the planet? Well, I would like to suggest we change the language we use. You do not need to become a new person every January first, instead focus on productive ways that are going to genuinely better yourself in the long run, not just quick 'fixes.' Take the time to thoughtfully invest in yourself.

House of CB: Review

By Andi Gill

The House of CB has become synonymous online with basque waistlines and feminine silhouettes, but the brand started as a copier of big designs; they made a very well-known £30 dupe of the Hervé Léger bandage dress in the 2010s. They've worked hard to move past these humble origins by rebranding as a high-end UK brand, but contrary to their proud signs stating they're "Designed in London," they still outsource to China. Not to mention the materials, which are mostly plastic. It makes me wonder why the dresses are £300 now, despite there being no change in manufacturing or materials.

Game Awards 2024

By Kieran Jermany

Back on December 12th 2024, Geoff Keighley returned to host the 10th annual Game Awards, a celebration of the best recent gaming releases as well as a chance for developers to show off upcoming games.

This Game Awards nominations led to some controversy with the regulations being changed to now allow Downloadable Content (DLC) to be eligible for Game of the Year (the top award). This led to the Elden Ring DLC being nominated in this category. An Independent developer game Balatro also got nominated which sparked discussion online as to whether it was deserving to be able to win Game of the Year compared to the other, more high budget games. Sony saw success as their single player platformer game Astro Bot was able to beat the competition and win Game of the Year. The game has also received critical and public acclaim. It also won Best Game Direction, Best Action Game and beat out Nintendo to win Best Family Game.

In other categories, Sega/Atlus's latest entry/spin off to the Persona series Metaphor: ReFantazio won multiple categories including, Best Narrative, Best Art Direction and Best RPG. Square Enix's Final Fantasy 7 Rebirth surprisingly only won Best Score/Music despite how popular the game and franchise are. Fortnite once again failed to secure any awards with Sony's Helldivers 2 winning best Ongoing and Balder's Gate 3 winning Community Support. The aforementioned Balatro was able to win in all the Indie game categories as well as Best Mobile Game. In the realm of real life, Caseoh won Best Content Creator and Fallout won the new Best Adaptation (into a movie or show) category beating Arcane.

There was also several showcases of future games and updates with a first look at the highly anticipated 4th entry into the Witcher series. Tekken 8 also continued the tradition set by its predecessor by announcing a Final Fantasy crossover with content from FF16 being added to the game. There was also brief looks at Borderlands 4 as well as a new

Warframe game. Fighting game franchise Virtual Fighter also joins Fatal Fury by getting a revival in 2025.

Overall, I think this Game Awards may have potential to change game companies views on what they should be focusing on. It is no secret that there has been a push for far more 'live service' (online multiplayer) games, however, the top award winners were mostly single player games like Astro Bot. Sony is already changing pace, with them recently cancelling several 'live service' games that were in development including one based of God of War. I do however think there will still be focus on giving games DLC especially following the rule change allowing them to win more awards. The 2025 awards are likely to be completely dominated by GTA6 which is expected to be the best-selling game of all time, and it won the Most Anticipated Game award at these 2024 awards.

Nintendo's Trans Pioneer

By Abby Eastwick

Although having come a long way in recent years, transgender representation in video games is often considered lacklustre, one-dimensional and downright unclear. So it's no wonder that when Nintendo, a company who makes games for all walks of life, introduced Vivian in 2004's Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door, it was significant and ahead of its time.

Vivian is a companion in the game who defects to Mario's side after being mistreated by her sisters. The original Japanese dialogue and other foreign localisations would reveal that this conflict largely originates from the sisters' repeated misgendering of Vivian. While the original 2004 English translation disappointingly misses out most of these references, the Japanese and 2024 English version make no mistake in expressing that Vivian is transgender. Various supporting characters and narrative text often refer to Vivian using masculine terms, such as 'man' and 'little brother', whilst Vivian refers to herself using feminine pronouns. The Italian translation is perhaps the most explicit with its confirmation of Vivian's gender identity, stating that 'she used to be a man, but now she's a woman and proud of it'. In short, there is no other way to canonically interpret her character than as a transgender woman.

But beyond simply existing in her time, Vivian's representation is a pure, positive example of trans

representation. In a refreshing turn of events, Vivian's gender identity is nothing short of fully accepted by the main cast of protagonists, with even her sisters coming to accept her in all her purple glory. Her character arc throughout the game sees her also come to embrace who she is in the face of rejection and bullying, becoming more confident and outgoing in the process. Unlike many other trans portrayals, even in the modern day, Vivian is given depth, sympathy and agency.

However, Vivian was not Nintendo's first foray into trans representation. Widely considered the first transgender video game character, Birdo, also from the Super Mario series, was first introduced in 1988's Super Mario Bros 2. While being a more well known character, appearing in Mario Kart and other main Mario games up to the present, Birdo is not given the justice she deserves from the start like Vivian. The first mention of her gender identity comes in the manual of her debut game, stating: 'he thinks he is a girl and spits eggs from his mouth. He'd rather be called "Birdetta"'. In games for the Japanese-only Satellaview, Birdo is portrayed as an 'okama', often used as a slur for trans women, gay men and crossdressers. From the beginning, Birdo's 'ambiguous' gender identity is played for a joke.

Fortunately, Birdo is later embraced as a female counterpart for Yoshi, although Nintendo still

haven't acknowledged her gender identity as explicitly or warmly as with Vivian. Vivian remains a shining example in the modern day of how to treat your transgender characters with care, placing them alongside their co-stars as fully-fledged character with development, not solely defined by their hardships. Still, hope remains that Nintendo will build upon this in the future and treat Birdo with the same love as Vivian and maybe introduce more queer representation in future.



Credit: Unsplash, Wiki Commons

Deconstructing the sexualization of the female body in video games, one pixel at a time.

By Evelyn Oakes

Video games have evolved dramatically over the decades in terms of narratives, technology, and character design. However, one persistent issue within the industry is the hyper sexualization of female characters. From scantily clad warriors to impractically designed armor, the depiction of women in gaming has often catered to the male gaze rather than serving as a reflection of reality or strong character development. This article explores the roots of this issue, its impact on players and industry standards, and how gaming culture—particularly through fandom and Rule 34—both perpetuates and challenges these portrayals.

The sexualization of female characters in video games is not a recent phenomenon. Early arcade and console games often featured women as

damsels in distress—Princess Peach in Super Mario Bros. and Zelda in The Legend of Zelda as prime examples. Even those adorable characters have been adapted by players, on platforms such as DeviantArt, and turned into sexualised beings. As some players find this out, they are disturbed, with one person commenting that it is “ruining their childhood.”

As gaming technology advanced, so did the level of detail in character design, and with it came an increasing focus on exaggerated female bodies. Titles such as Tomb Raider (1996) introduced characters like Lara Croft, whose original design featured highly unrealistic body proportions, a move influenced by marketing strategies aimed at a male audience. She is the most famous and iconic female video

game protagonist – characterised as brave, ingenious, and knowledgeable about archaeology. Although Lara is given more depth than other female characters, players focus on her wide hips and slender waistline, emphasised by her signature tiny shorts, hiking boots and vest that reveal her cleavage and torso. One gamer comments, “Ever since she was in pixels, she was infamous in gamers’ libido. She still is to this day.” Lara’s athletic body type and large bosom contribute to her being one of the biggest sex symbols in gaming history.

During the 2000s, the trend continued with characters like Ivy from Soulcalibur, Bayonetta from Bayonetta, and Quiet from Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, all of whom exhibit overtly sexualized designs that often defy practical function. While these characters are frequently portrayed as strong, capable warriors, their aesthetic choices—skimpy outfits, exaggerated curves, and suggestive animations—often reinforce the notion that their primary purpose is visual appeal rather than depth or realism. Bayonetta is one of the most highly sexualised video game characters. The camera angles highlight her curvaceous features, slender frame and being well-endowed. She is dressed in revealing skin-tight outfits, that are emphasised in her sexual moves when practising the art of magic.

In fandom culture, the hyper-sexualization of female characters is both challenged and exacerbated. Rule 34, the infamous internet principle stating, “If it exists, there is porn of it,” plays a significant role in reinforcing the sexualized perception of women in gaming. Fan-created content exaggerates provocative character designs that normalises the objectification of female characters. At the same time, fandom can also serve as a counterbalance to the industry’s sexualization trends. Some artists and creators within fan communities reinterpret female characters in ways that emphasize their strength, intellect, and complexity rather than their sexual appeal.

The effects of hyper sexualization in video games extend beyond digital spaces. Studies suggest that prolonged exposure to sexualized female characters can shape perceptions of women in real life, reinforcing gender stereotypes and unrealistic beauty standards. For female gamers, these portrayals can contribute to feelings of alienation, particularly in multiplayer gaming environments where misogynistic attitudes are already prevalent.

Conversely, the push for more inclusive and diverse character design has gained momentum in recent years. Games like The Last of Us Part II and Horizon Zero Dawn have introduced complex, non-sexualized female protagonists who challenge traditional gaming norms. Developers are becoming increasingly aware of the demand for more authentic representations, proving that compelling narratives do not require objectified female leads.

The industry is beginning to acknowledge the need for change in the portrayal of female characters. Greater representation of women in game development has played a role in shaping more respectful and realistic character designs. Additionally, social media activism and critical discourse within gaming communities have put pressure on developers to reconsider outdated tropes. For gaming to continue evolving as an inclusive medium, it is essential to recognize the impact of representation. Moving away from hypersexualized portrayals does not mean eliminating attractive or confident female characters—it means ensuring that they are designed with depth, agency, and realism rather than for the male gaze. As the gaming industry progresses, it can break free from outdated depictions and embrace a future where all players feel represented and respected.

The sexualization of female characters in video games is a complex issue rooted in both industry practices and fan culture. While Rule 34 and fandom contribute to the continuation of objectification, they also serve as spaces for resistance and reimagination. With growing awareness and advocacy for change, the gaming industry has the potential to shift toward more inclusive and meaningful portrayals of women—one pixel at a time.





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Climate Week

CLIMATE-CONSCIOUS CAREERS AND SKILLS DAY

Climate-Conscious Careers Fair 17/03
Hive 10-4pm

Talks from:
BCAN (Critical Carbon Literacy and Q&A)
Asher Minns Tyndall Centre
NNUH (Sustainability and Medicine)
+Climate week takeover of blue bar Quiz!

CLIMATE-WELLBEING AND RESILLIANCE DAY

Climate Wellbeing and Resilience Fair 18/03
Hive 10-4pm

Talks from:
BCAN (Critical Carbon Literacy)
Dr Louise Edginton (intergenerational communication)
Headucate (Climate Wellbeing)
+ Artivism Workshop, Day walks (with SSN) and Yoga workshops!

SUSTAINBALE LIFESTYLE DAY

Sustainable Lifestyle Market 19/03
Hive 10-4pm

Talks from:
BCAN (Critical Carbon Literacy)
+ Repair workshop and cafe (REdo Norfolk), Plant-based food workshop (PBU), a Dance workshop and more!

CLIMATE POLICY AND CAMPAIGNS DAY

Climate Policy Q&A Panel (With Clive Lewis!) 20/03
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Talks from:
BCAN (Critical Carbon Literacy)
Greenpeace
Norwich city council
Stop the Wensum link
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