

The
MANTELPIECE

Issue 16

Literary Magazine

October 2024





*A jewellery brand with
a surprising history*



Vera Design

A Piece of Icelandic Saga



TAKE A PIECE OF THE ICELANDIC SAGA HOME WITH YOU

The design is classy, based on traditional symbols and has roots in Icelandic history.

Vera Design was established on the foundation of a jewellery line by Guðbjartur Þorleifsson, who has designed a large variety of jewellery in the last 70 years. His design has roots in Icelandic history and Vera Design's team is proud to build on his tradition.

We aim to design timeless and unique pieces of jewelry that can be passed down through generations.

Vera Design's jewellery is sold in 24 stores in Iceland and one in the Faroe Islands and on their website www.veradesign.is from where it is shipped worldwide.



www.themantelpiece.org

Table of Contents

Contributors

Lillian Heimisdottir is a writer and poet residing in Barcelona.

Eleanor Jiménez is a writer and professor of classical and contemporary literature from Barcelona, Spain. Her work has been widely published, both in Spanish and international literary journals, where she explores themes of identity, culture, and the human experience. As an academic, Eleanor is dedicated to fostering a deeper appreciation for literature, seamlessly blending classical influences with modern perspectives in both her teaching and her writing ([web](#)).

Brynja Haraldsdóttir is a writer and translator from Iceland, with a degree in literature and translation science from the University of Iceland in Reykjavik. Her work has been featured in numerous Icelandic and international literary magazines, earning her recognition for her evocative storytelling and deep connection to Icelandic culture. When she's not writing, Brynja works as a translator and tour guide, sharing her love of language and the beauty of her homeland with visitors from around the world ([web](#)).

Amanda Gustavson was born in Stockholm, Sweden, but now resides in Reykjavik, Iceland, where she works in the tourist industry. In addition to her professional role, she is a writer whose stories and essays have been featured in various English-speaking and Nordic magazines and websites. Her writing often reflects her deep connection to both Swedish and Icelandic cultures, blending her personal experiences with broader explorations of travel, identity, and nature ([web](#)).

Erren Kelly is a Two-Time Pushcart nominated poet from Lynn, Massachusetts. She received her B.A. in English-Creative Writing from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

Nicole Ardiel is a Canadian writer of poetry and fiction who often stays up too late reading novels. After graduating from Creative Writing at UVic, she took a 25-year break from writing anything other than diary entries. Upon returning to her craft, she was long listed for the 2022 CBC Poetry Prize.

Erik N. Patel is a writer and digital nomad whose work has appeared in various literary magazines. Constantly on the move, he draws inspiration from his extensive travels, weaving the landscapes, cultures, and people he encounters into his writing. His unique perspective as a global wanderer adds depth and richness to his stories, making his voice a distinctive one in contemporary literature. ([web](#)).

Walther H. Thompson is a retired middle-school teacher who now devotes his time to writing short stories. Drawing on years of experience in education, his stories often explore themes of childhood, growth, and human connection. His work has a thoughtful, reflective quality, capturing the subtleties of everyday life and the complexity of relationships.

Heimir Steinarsson is an Icelandic typographer and linguist.

Coverphoto: *MZaitsev / Adobe Stock*

The Mantelpiece (ISSN 2988-9405) © www.themantelpiece.org

Editor: Lillian Heimisdottir (lillian@themantelpiece.org)

Publisher: Markmal ehf., Hverafold 1-3, PO-Box 12066, 132 Reykjavik, ICELAND

Magazine layout and webpage design: *Heimir Steinarsson*

Submissions: The Mantelpiece is open to unsolicited submissions of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. We consider all submissions for both our website and online magazine. Please familiarize yourself with our submission guidelines at www.themantelpiece.org/submissions and send your work to submissions@themantelpiece.org

The Mantelpiece - Literary Magazine. Issue 16, October 2024. Copyright 2024 The Mantelpiece. All artwork and literature contained in this publication are copyright 2024 to their respective creators. The ideas and opinions expressed within belong to the respective authors and artists and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors. None of the contents of this publication may be reprinted without the permission of the individual authors or artists.

Editorial

Lillian Heimisdottir 4 The Road Ahead

The Arts

Eleanor Jiménez 5 Cultural Reclamations

Essay

Brynja Haraldsdóttir 8 The Podcast Boom

Amanda Gustavson 10 The Renaissance of Vinyl Records

Heimir Steinarsson 12 The Rise of Solitude in the Digital Age

Poetry

Erren Kelly 11 Under A Cajun Moon

Nicole Ardiel 13 Blocking the Plate

Commentary

Erik N. Patel 14 The Office Happy Hour Survival Guide

Fiction

Walther H. Thompson 16 Late Shift

The Light Side

Heimir Steinarsson 17 On Advertising

The Road Ahead

Literature as Our Compass Through Rough Terrain

As we stand at the threshold of the future, we find ourselves gazing down a road less paved, where the horizon blurs into uncertainty and the ground beneath is uneven. This is a road that has always been present in the human experience, one that every generation walks with varying degrees of optimism, fear, and resolve. For readers and writers alike, this image of a road ahead—marked by rough terrain and unexpected turns—is a potent metaphor for both life and literature.

In literature, roads have always symbolized journeys of transformation. From the epic travels in *The Odyssey* to the dust-choked highways of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the road is a space where characters encounter hardship, revelation, and change. It is often a road that leads through hostile, desolate, or mysterious landscapes, echoing the inner turmoil of the protagonists or the unpredictability of the times they inhabit. But these literary roads are not solely about the destination. Rather, they emphasize the process of moving forward despite uncertainty, the act of continuing even when the way ahead is obscured or perilous.

As we grapple with our own “road ahead” in contemporary life, marked by global crises, technological upheavals, and shifting cultural landscapes, literature provides a crucial compass. It reminds us that the road, no matter how rough, has always been part of the human condition. It is not the smooth, well-lit paths that define us, but the rugged, demanding ones that test our spirit and our creativity.

In our current era, the rough terrain we face is multifaceted. Climate change, political instability, and the erosion of truth in the age of digital media all cast shadows over our collective road ahead. The rise of AI and machine learning, while promising new horizons, also signals uncharted territory that can unsettle even the most visionary among us. There is a growing sense that the ground is shifting beneath our feet. The

road is not simply rough; it is unpredictable. In this context, literature plays an essential role in helping us navigate both the external and internal challenges of this moment.

Writers have long been the architects of possibility. They imagine worlds not just as they are, but as they could be, or as they should never become. As readers, we turn to literature not just for escape, but for insight. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, for instance, the literal journey through a post-apocalyptic wasteland mirrors a deeper meditation on survival, morality, and the persistence of hope. McCarthy's bar-

“Global challenges, from environmental crises to technological disruptions, loom large, making the road seem treacherous and unpredictable.”

ren landscape feels both otherworldly and hauntingly familiar in our time, a stark reminder that the road ahead can be brutal, but the human spirit endures.

The rough roads of literature are also where we witness characters—like ourselves—grapple with the complexity of choice. The uncertainty of what lies around the next bend is a space ripe for moral ambiguity and ethical reflection. It is in navigating these difficult roads that characters are tested, their vulnerabilities exposed, and their strength defined. As a result, literature offers not just mirrors to our struggles, but maps for understanding and confronting them.

The road ahead for literature itself is also in question. As publishing models shift, attention spans wane, and the pressures of a fast-paced digital world mount, literature

must adapt to survive. But just as characters in a novel persist despite overwhelming odds, so too does literature. New forms of storytelling, from hybrid genres to digital narratives, are emerging to reflect the complexities of our time. Just as the rough roads in literature challenge characters to evolve, the challenges facing writers and readers today push the boundaries of the art form, inspiring fresh modes of expression.

We find ourselves standing at the threshold of a new era, one defined by profound transformations and uncertainty. The terrain ahead may be as rough, if not rougher, than any we've encountered before. Global challenges, from environmental crises to technological disruptions, loom large, making the road seem treacherous and unpredictable. Yet, if history has taught us anything, it is that literature has always been our beacon in times of difficulty. It reminds us that even the most rugged and perilous roads are spaces of immense possibility and opportunity. Where the world is unclear, literature brings clarity; where there is doubt, it offers reflection; where there is despair, it sows hope. The act of reading, far from being a passive escape, becomes a tool for navigating our fears and uncertainties, offering not only solace but essential guidance.

Through reading, we immerse ourselves in stories that mirror our own struggles, giving us frameworks to understand the complexities of our existence. And in writing, we transform our anxieties and aspirations into something tangible. In this way, literature forms a communal path through even the roughest terrain, where every voice contributes to lighting the way for those who follow behind.

The road ahead is not one of ease or certainty, but it is one we can walk together. Literature, with its rich history of grappling with the human condition, continues to be our companion, our guide, and our witness. And though the terrain may be rough, the road itself, with all its twists and turns, promises growth, discovery, and the resilience to keep moving forward. □ *L.H.*

Cultural Reclamations

How Indigenous Artists are Redefining Modern Art

Eleanor Jiménez

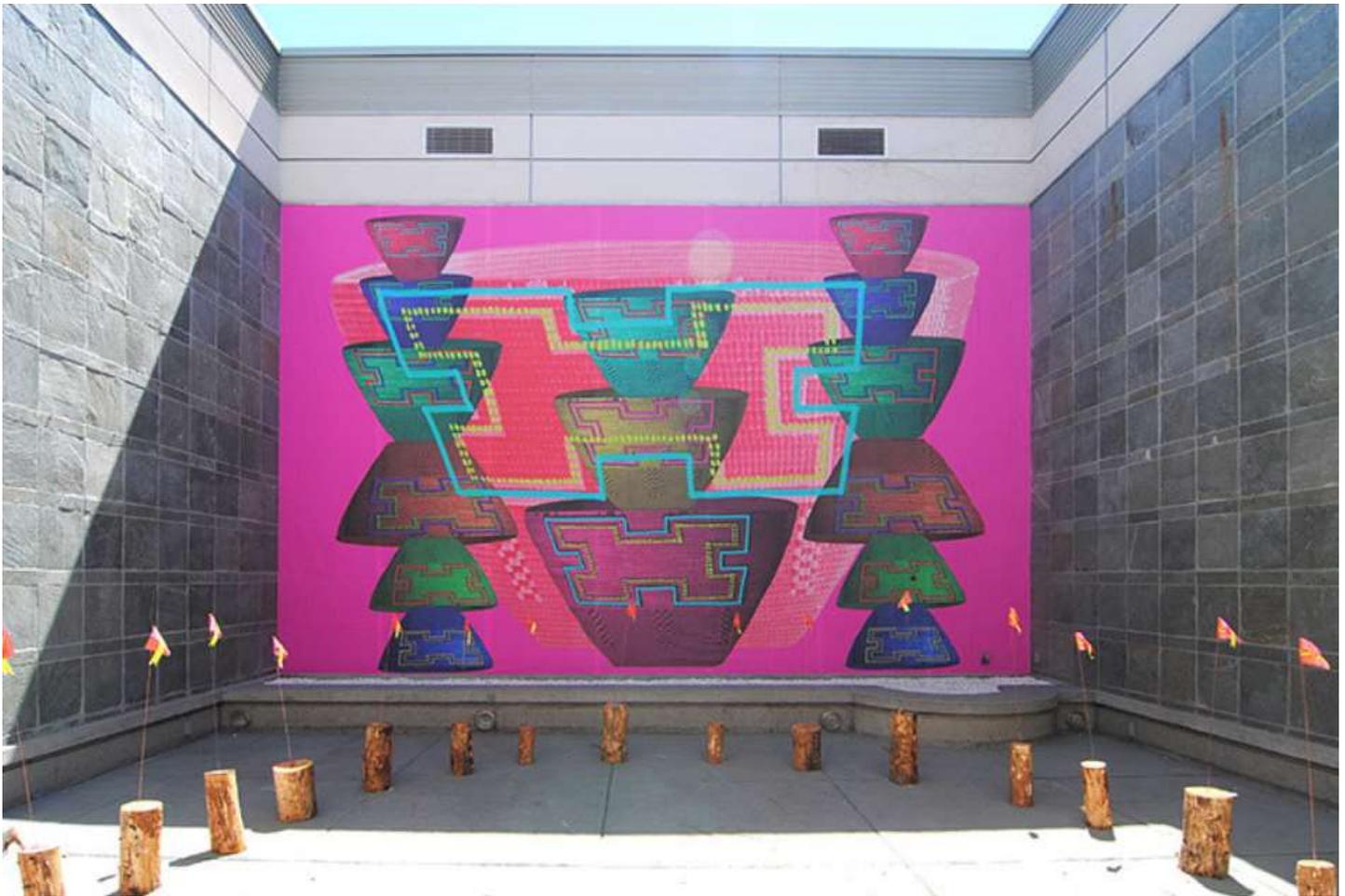


Photo: taniawillard.ca

Gut Instincts by Tania Willard. Digital mural on adhesive textile, laser cut silk and satin ribbon, copper welding rods, wood stumps. Kelowna Art Gallery, 2018.

For centuries, the narratives of Indigenous peoples have been largely shaped by those outside their communities. From the colonial gaze of early explorers to the exoticizing tendencies of anthropologists and modern art collectors, Indigenous cultures were often viewed through a distorted lens, presented as static relics of a bygone era. But today, Indigenous artists across the globe are rewriting this narrative. By blending tradition with innovation, they are not only reclaiming their cultural identities but also reshaping the very foundations of modern art.

The Legacy of Misrepresentation

To understand the importance of this reclamation, it's crucial to acknowledge the historical context. For centuries, Indigenous art was viewed as “craft” rather than “fine art.” Museums collected artifacts, treating them as evidence of a distant past, rather than acknowledging them as expressions of living, evolving cultures. In many cases, Indigenous cultural symbols and practices were appropriated by non-Indigenous artists, often devoid of their original meaning

Modern art movements, particularly in the 20th century, took inspiration from Indigenous motifs without engaging with the peoples or the histories behind those symbols. Pablo Picasso's fascination with African masks and Native American patterns, for example, is often lauded in art history, yet it reflects a long tradition of Western artists exploiting non-Western cultural elements for their own creative gain.

Today, Indigenous artists are actively pushing back against this history, reclaiming their right to define themselves, their cultures, and their art.

Blending Tradition with Innovation

Indigenous art is rooted in cultural traditions passed down through generations, often expressed through mediums like weaving, pottery, beadwork, and carving. However, many contemporary Indigenous artists are expanding the boundaries of these traditions, combining them with modern techniques, materials, and subject matter to challenge conventional definitions of “Indigenous art.”

Take, for example, the work of Jeffrey Gibson, a Mississippi Choctaw and Cherokee artist who combines Indigenous beading techniques with contemporary pop culture and text. His pieces often feature vibrant color palettes and powerful phrases like “I AM A RAINBOW TOO” or “THE FUTURE IS PRESENT.” By blending traditional craft techniques with contemporary themes, Gibson critiques both the commodification of Indigenous art and the broader Western art world’s refusal to recognize the relevance of Indigenous voices in modern contexts.

Similarly, Kent Monkman, a Cree artist known for his provocative paintings and installations, critiques colonial history by reimagining iconic Western art from an Indigenous perspective. In his large-scale paintings, Monkman places Indigenous characters—often his gender-fluid alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle—into scenes that challenge historical representations of colonization, sexuality, and power. Through



I Am a Rainbow Too by Jeffrey Gibson, Miami Beach 2019

Photo: artbase1.com



Photo: Michael Evans / Adobe Stock

First Contact by indigenous artist Laurel Nannup, Elizabeth quay in Perth, Western Australia 2019

his work, Monkman questions the accepted narratives of history and makes space for Indigenous voices to be heard.

The Art of Activism

For many Indigenous artists, art is inherently political. In reclaiming cultural symbols, artists are engaging in a form of activism—defying the erasure, misrepresentation, and marginalization that Indigenous communities have faced for centuries.

Art becomes a means of asserting sovereignty, not only in the political sense but in the cultural and spiritual realms as well. Organizations like the Indigenous-led Decolonize This Place movement have brought attention to how museums and galleries often reinforce colonial power structures, calling for Indigenous artists to have greater agency in how their cultures are represented in public spaces.

At the same time, artists like Tania Willard (Secwepemc Nation) use their

work to address environmental issues directly tied to Indigenous land rights. Willard's installations and prints often explore the relationship between land, body, and tradition, raising awareness about the impact of colonization on both cultural and ecological systems. By incorporating natural materials and referencing traditional practices in her work, Willard emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between people, culture, and environment.

Resisting Stereotypes and Breaking Boundaries

A key aspect of the modern Indigenous art movement is its resistance to being pigeonholed into the category of "Indigenous art." Artists are challenging the notion that their work should only be about their cultural identity or that it must adhere to certain aesthetics rooted in tradition.

The late Cree-Métis artist Kimowan McLain's photography and painting, for example, delved into deeply personal themes of memory and loss, blending abstract expressionism with elements of his Indigenous heritage. He resisted the notion that his work needed to be overtly political or easily categorized, instead allowing the viewer to engage with his art on multiple levels. This freedom to explore beyond the expected is central to the modern Indigenous art movement.

Moreover, the rise of digital platforms and social media has given Indigenous artists unprecedented access to a global audience. Artists like Caroline Monnet



Holding up the Sky by Caroline Monnet. Solo Exhibition Art Gallery of Burlington, Ontario 2023.

Photo: carolinemonnet.ca

(Anishinaabe/French) work in mediums ranging from video to sculpture, using these platforms to share their stories and disrupt mainstream narratives. Her short film *Mobilize* recontextualizes archival footage of Indigenous people with a modern soundtrack, turning history into an evolving narrative of resilience and survival.

Global Impact

The impact of Indigenous artists redefining modern art extends far beyond their communities. By asserting their right to self-representation, these artists are creating space for dialogue about the legacies of

colonialism, environmental destruction, and cultural preservation. They are challenging the global art world to rethink its definitions of art, culture, and history, urging institutions to become more inclusive and to recognize the contributions of Indigenous voices.

As major museums and galleries begin to reexamine their collections and practices, the presence of Indigenous art has become more prominent. Exhibitions like *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists* at the Minneapolis Institute of Art have garnered widespread acclaim for foregrounding the voices of Indigenous women, historically among the most marginalized in both the art world and broader society.

The Future of Modern Art

Indigenous artists are not merely reclaiming their place in modern art; they are redefining it. By blending tradition with innovation, challenging stereotypes, and engaging in cultural and political activism, they are creating art that is both timeless and urgent. This movement is not just about correcting past misrepresentations—it's about shaping the future of art itself.

As more Indigenous voices rise to prominence, they will continue to disrupt and enrich the global art world. They remind us that art, at its best, is a living, breathing force—an ongoing conversation between the past, the present, and the future, one that is enriched by the multiplicity of voices that contribute to it. The resurgence of Indigenous art is not just a reclamation; it is a revolution. □



Pattern for the People by Danilo Deluxo McCallum, Canada, 2022

Photo: T0images / Adobe Stock

The Podcast Boom

How Audio Storytelling is Redefining Media Consumption

Brynja Haraldsdóttir



In the past decade, podcasts have emerged as a dominant force in the world of media, reshaping how people consume content, engage with stories, and connect with ideas. What began as a niche platform for hobbyists has evolved into a multi-billion-dollar industry with millions of podcasts catering to every conceivable interest. From true crime thrillers to educational deep dives and fictional dramas to comedy shows, podcasts have grown into an essential part of modern life. But what lies behind this dramatic rise? And how has this audio storytelling format redefined media consumption?

The Appeal of Podcasts: Convenience and Intimacy

Podcasts have surged in popularity largely due to their unique blend of convenience and intimacy. Unlike traditional media formats such as television or film, podcasts allow listeners to engage with content while multitasking. Whether commuting, exercising, cooking, or cleaning, people can tune into a podcast and absorb information or entertainment while on the go. The on-demand nature of podcasts—where listeners can pause, rewind, or skip forward at will—adds to this convenience, putting users in control of their media consumption.

Moreover, podcasts offer a sense of intimacy that other media forms struggle to replicate. The direct relationship between the host and the listener, often facilitated by headphones, creates a feeling of personal connection. Unlike watching TV, where the viewer is more passive, podcast listeners are active participants, tuning into the voice and ideas of someone speaking directly into their ears. This fosters a sense of trust and loyalty, making listeners feel like they are part of a close-knit community or personal conversation.

The Democratization of Media Production

One of the most striking aspects of the podcast boom is how it has democratized media production. Creating a podcast, compared to producing films, radio, or television, requires relatively low overhead costs. All it takes is a microphone, some basic editing software, and an internet connection to publish content. This accessibility has opened the door to a diverse range of voices and perspectives that might not have found a platform in traditional media channels.

Independent creators can now bypass gatekeepers like studios and networks to directly reach their audience. This has allowed for the rise of niche content that caters to highly specific interests. Whether it's a podcast dedicated to 18th-century literature, discussions on board games, or a deep dive into the world of physics, there's something for everyone. This variety is one of the key drivers of the podcast boom—listeners are no longer limited to what major media companies produce; they have an almost infinite selection of content at their fingertips.

The Narrative Appeal: Why Storytelling is Central to Podcast Success

At the core of the podcast boom is the human desire for storytelling. Humans are wired for narrative, and podcasts have tapped into this innate appetite. Whether it's

an in-depth interview with a notable figure, a serialized investigative journalism piece, or a fictional audio drama, podcasts allow creators to explore stories in greater depth and complexity than most traditional media formats.

Take, for example, the wild success of *Serial*, the investigative journalism podcast that debuted in 2014. Hosted by journalist Sarah Koenig, the podcast unraveled the complex story of a 1999 murder case over 12 episodes, offering listeners an episodic, binge-worthy narrative that rivaled popular television dramas. *Serial* proved that podcasts could captivate audiences with sophisticated, long-form storytelling, setting the stage for a new era of audio-driven content.

The impact of narrative-focused podcasts like *Serial* has been profound. As with streaming television services like Netflix, which popularized binge-watching, podcasts encourage extended listening sessions, where audiences consume multiple episodes back-to-back. This has reshaped how people engage with content, making the experience of listening to a podcast more akin to reading a book or watching a television series.

The Rise of Podcast Networks and Monetization Strategies

With the explosion in popularity, podcasts have evolved from independent passion projects into a lucrative business. As listener numbers have grown, so too has the potential for monetization. Major podcast networks like *Wondery*, *Gimlet Media* (now owned by Spotify), and *Earwolf* have emerged, producing high-quality, professionally made content with robust financial backing.

These networks have refined the art of podcast production, employing professional sound engineers, editors, and writers to create polished, engaging content. For example, shows like *Dirty John* (produced by *Wondery*) and *Reply All* (by *Gimlet Media*) exemplify the high production values and storytelling expertise that podcast networks bring to the table. These podcasts often rival traditional media in terms of their quality and narrative complexity, further expanding the audience for audio storytelling.

Monetization strategies have also evolved as the podcast industry has grown. Advertising remains the most common revenue stream, with host-read ads being particularly effective. Because of the close relationship between podcast hosts and their listeners, host-read ads feel more authentic and personal than traditional commercials. Many listeners report that they don't skip podcast ads, a sharp contrast to other forms of advertising that people actively avoid.

In addition to advertising, podcasts are increasingly turning to subscription models and crowdfunding platforms like *Patreon*. These methods allow creators to maintain financial independence while offering exclusive content to loyal supporters. Spotify's push into the podcasting world, which includes its acquisition of *Gimlet Media* and exclusive deals with popular creators like *Joe Rogan*, highlights the growing corporate interest in the podcasting space and the potential for subscription-based podcast services.

The Influence of Podcasts on Mainstream Media

Podcasts are not only thriving on their own but are also influencing mainstream media in significant ways. The success of true crime podcasts like *My Favorite Murder* and *Criminal* has spurred renewed interest in the true crime genre across television, with several popular series inspired by or directly adapted from podcasts. For instance, the *Dirty John* podcast was turned into a hit TV series, demonstrating the fluidity between audio and visual storytelling in today's media landscape.

Moreover, many traditional media outlets—such as *The New York Times*, *NPR*, and *The Guardian*—have embraced podcasting as a key element of their content strategy. These outlets produce a variety of podcasts, ranging from daily news briefings to long-form investigative journalism. *The Daily*, a podcast by *The New York Times*, has become a flagship show for the newspaper, helping to attract younger audiences who prefer audio formats over print or online articles. The crossover appeal of podcasts into other media demonstrates their growing cultural relevance. As they continue to influence and intersect with film, television, journalism, and literature, podcasts are shaping the future of storytelling in powerful ways.

Podcasts and the Power of Niche Communities

One of the defining characteristics of the podcasting world is its ability to build niche communities around specific interests. Unlike mainstream television or radio, which often aim to reach a broad audience, podcasts thrive by catering to niche markets. Whether it's a show about astrophysics or a comedy podcast focused on the experiences of women of color, there's a space for everyone in the podcasting ecosystem.

This focus on niche content has created highly engaged and loyal audiences. Listeners often feel a sense of belonging to a particular community, whether it's through fan forums, social media groups, or live podcast events. Many podcasts

foster direct engagement with their audiences, encouraging listeners to contribute questions, share feedback, or even participate in episodes. This level of interaction deepens the connection between creators and their audiences, making podcasts feel more like interactive experiences than passive media consumption.

The Future of Podcasting: Innovation and Growth

As the podcasting landscape continues to evolve, several key trends are likely to shape its future. First, advances in technology, particularly the integration of voice-activated devices like *Amazon's Alexa* and *Google Home*, are making podcasts more accessible than ever before. These devices allow users to easily discover and listen to podcasts, further integrating them into everyday life.

Second, as the podcasting market becomes increasingly saturated, creators will need to find innovative ways to stand out. This could mean experimenting with new formats, such as immersive audio dramas or augmented reality podcasts, or incorporating live podcasting elements into traditional episodes.

Finally, the internationalization of podcasts is an area ripe for growth. While podcasts are already popular in English-speaking countries like the U.S., the U.K., and Australia, there is tremendous potential for podcasts to expand in non-English speaking regions. As more creators produce content in languages like Spanish, Mandarin, and Hindi, the global reach of podcasts is set to grow exponentially.

A New Era of Audio Storytelling

The podcast boom has redefined how we consume media in profound ways. By offering a unique blend of convenience, intimacy, and diverse storytelling, podcasts have carved out a space for themselves as a powerful form of modern media. They've democratized content creation, fostered niche communities, and even influenced traditional media formats like television and journalism. With an increasing number of podcasts delving into untold stories and underrepresented voices, the medium has also become a platform for amplifying diverse perspectives and driving important cultural conversations.

As the industry continues to grow, the future of podcasting looks bright, filled with innovation, global expansion, and even deeper connections between creators and their audiences. In many ways, podcasts are leading the way into a new era of audio-driven storytelling, forever changing the landscape of media consumption. □

The Renaissance of Vinyl Records

Nostalgia or a Genuine Musical Rebirth?

Amanda Gustavson



Illustration: Oleh / Adobe Stock

In a digital era where streaming platforms offer instant access to millions of songs, the resurgence of vinyl records might seem like a curious anachronism. Yet, against all odds, vinyl has not only survived but thrived. Since the mid-2000s, record sales have steadily increased, hitting a 30-year high in recent years. What's driving this vinyl renaissance? Is it simply a nostalgic longing for the past, or does vinyl offer something more profound—an authentic experience that digital formats lack?

The Allure of Nostalgia

Nostalgia certainly plays a role in vinyl's comeback. For many, records represent a tangible connection to the past, a reminder of a time when music consumption was a slower, more deliberate process. Baby boomers who grew up with vinyl find comfort in the format, while younger generations are drawn to its vintage aesthetic, often seen as an antidote to the intangibility of streaming

The ritual of listening to vinyl—selecting a record, gently placing it on the turntable, lowering the needle—has a tactile and ceremonial quality that streaming lacks. This process requires patience, and it encourages listeners to engage more deeply with the music. There's no skipping tracks with a simple tap; you experience the album as a cohesive work of art, the way the artist intended. However, dismissing the vinyl resurgence as mere nostalgia under-estimates the cultural and sonic dimensions of this phenomenon.

A Genuine Musical Rebirth?

At its core, vinyl offers a listening experience that many audiophiles argue digital formats simply cannot replicate. The analog nature of vinyl captures a warmth and depth in sound that's often lost in compressed digital files. While modern formats are convenient, many argue that they flatten out the nuances of the original recordings.

Under A Cajun Moon

Erren Kelly

You speak French
And it fills the air like
Perfume

We dance to the serenade
Of crickets
You glowing, dear as a candle
You and accordions and fiddles
Spell out our prophecy

Forever you would belong to me

Under a Cajun sky, you sigh
Lusty as dreams
Your skin shows the daylight
In you
Softly, you whisper a lullaby
To me.
From a heart that will
Never be more true
Lost in a Cajun dance
Your beauty makes
Me weep
Watching you bloom
My nightflower
Like a cat, softly
You sleep

Like God, you are
Forever
I take your hand
A white dress dances
Like a ghost in the
Night

It isn't hard to understand

Under a Cajun moon
A woman rises, she never
Falters, I hold her in my arms
Like dreams

And we love like thunder

“Listening to vinyl feels like the music is alive,” says indie musician Laura Peters, who recently pressed her latest album on vinyl despite the extra cost. “It’s not about perfection. You hear the pops, the slight imperfections, but that’s what makes it real.”

Beyond sound quality, vinyl’s appeal can be attributed to its connection to music as a physical medium. In an era dominated by intangible, subscription-based media, vinyl represents permanence. Records are collectable artifacts, often with elaborate album art and liner notes that add to the listener’s experience. The act of building a collection is a source of pride, a statement of personal taste and identity.

This tangibility extends to the music industry as well. Musicians, especially independent ones, have found vinyl to be a valuable tool in an industry where streaming royalties offer little financial support. Pressing an album on vinyl gives artists a tangible product to sell at shows and online, often at a premium price. Fans are more willing to spend money on vinyl, not just for the music, but for the aesthetic and sentimental value.

The Intersection of Trends

The vinyl revival also intersects with broader cultural movements. In an age of digital excess, the slow-living trend and a desire for more intentional consumption align with vinyl’s deliberate, immersive listening experience. As people seek to disconnect from constant digital distractions, playing a vinyl record serves as a moment of mindfulness, a way to slow down and fully engage with a single activity.

Environmental concerns, too, play a role. Though vinyl itself is made of plastic, which raises questions about sustainability, the throwaway culture of digital consumption—marked by temporary playlists, fast fashion, and disposable content—stands in stark contrast to the longevity of vinyl collections. A record is something you cherish and keep, often for decades, if not for a lifetime.

Is This a Long-Term Revival?

While vinyl’s resurgence is undeniable, questions remain about its staying power. Streaming platforms, with their instant accessibility and convenience, dominate the market and are not going away anytime soon. Vinyl remains a niche, albeit a growing one. For many, it will always serve as a supplement to digital music, rather than a replacement.

However, even if vinyl remains niche, its significance in the current musical landscape cannot be ignored. The renaissance of vinyl isn’t just about looking backward; it’s a cultural statement, a rebellion against the passive, fleeting nature of modern music consumption. It’s a reminder that, despite technological advances, there’s still a place for the analog world—a world where music isn’t just heard, but felt.

As long as people continue to seek authenticity and connection in their musical experiences, vinyl will have a place in the cultural conversation. Whether driven by nostalgia or a genuine appreciation for sound, the return of vinyl is a testament to the enduring power of music as both an art form and a shared experience. In that sense, vinyl’s revival is more than a trend—it’s a testament to the lasting impact of music, in all its imperfect, crackling glory. □

The Rise of Solitude in the Digital Age

Heimir Steinarsson

In an era dominated by connectivity, solitude, once revered as a state of reflection and self-discovery, has undergone a profound transformation. The digital age, with its instant messaging, social media, and constant notifications, has reshaped how we experience time alone. While technology offers new avenues for connection, it paradoxically diminishes the opportunities for true solitude, raising questions about how this shift affects our mental well-being, creativity, and sense of self.

The Traditional Value of Solitude

Solitude has long been regarded as essential for personal growth. Writers, artists, and philosophers have embraced it as a space for deep contemplation and creativity. Henry David Thoreau's retreat to Walden Pond is a profound example of seeking solitude for self-realization. In *Walden*, he writes of solitude as a way to escape societal distractions and focus on inner truths. Similarly, Virginia Woolf's call for "a room of one's own" emphasizes the need for personal space to foster creativity, particularly for women.

For centuries, solitude was seen not as loneliness but as freedom—a chance to connect with one's thoughts and feelings, free from societal pressures. It allowed for self-reflection and personal growth, serving as a vital counterbalance to the demands of social life.

The Impact of the Digital Age

With smartphones, social media, and constant internet access, solitude has become harder to find. We live in a hyper-connected world, where being alone no longer means being disconnected. Notifications, messages, and emails infiltrate quiet moments, turning potential opportunities for reflection into fragmented experiences. Many people fill their solitude with digital noise—scrolling through social media or watching shows—without recognizing the loss of deeper personal reflection.

This "constant connectivity" is driven by both societal expectations and technology. The pressure to stay digitally engaged—to respond to messages or maintain an online presence—leaves little room for genuine solitude. As a result, moments that might have been spent reflecting or creating are now interrupted by a constant stream of stimuli.

While digital connection can alleviate feelings of isolation, it often fosters superficial relationships. Online interactions provide fleeting connections that fail to satisfy our need for true intimacy or self-understanding.

“In a world of constant digital engagement, finding time for uninterrupted thought becomes increasingly challenging.”

Paradoxically, in an age of constant communication, many people feel lonelier, as digital connections replace deeper face-to-face interactions.

Solitude vs. Loneliness

It is important to distinguish between solitude and loneliness. Solitude, when chosen, is a nourishing experience that allows individuals to process thoughts and emotions. Loneliness, in contrast, is the painful feeling of disconnection, even when surrounded by others.

The digital age complicates this distinction by making it easy to avoid solitude. People can fill every quiet moment with online interactions, avoiding the discomfort of being alone. However, this avoidance comes at a cost. By constantly engaging with others digitally, individuals lose the ability to sit with their thoughts and engage in deep self-reflection.

Psychologist Sherry Turkle, in her book *Reclaiming Conversation*, argues that constant connectivity diminishes our capacity for introspection, necessary for developing empathy, creativity, and self-awareness. Without solitude, we lose the ability to fully understand our emotions because we never take the time to process them.

The Creative Costs of Losing Solitude

For centuries, solitude has been linked to creativity. Writers and artists have sought out solitude to produce their best work. Virginia Woolf, for instance, credited her most profound literary insights to time spent alone, away from society's distractions. However, the constant distractions of the digital age make it difficult to focus deeply.

Research shows that multitasking and constant connectivity reduce our ability to engage in "deep work"—the ability to focus intensely on cognitively demanding tasks. Computer scientist Cal Newport argues that solitude is crucial for deep work because it allows the brain to process information and generate new ideas without interruption. In a world of constant digital engagement, finding time for uninterrupted thought becomes increasingly challenging.

Reclaiming Solitude

Reclaiming solitude in the digital age requires intentional effort. It may involve setting boundaries with technology, creating time for disconnected moments, or embracing digital detoxes to re-establish personal space. Movements like mindfulness and meditation reflect a growing awareness of the need to cultivate solitude. Solitude remains essential for mental well-being, creativity, and self-understanding. While the digital age has transformed how we interact with others, it is crucial to recognize that true solitude—time spent alone with our thoughts, away from distractions—remains invaluable in a world of constant connectivity. □

Blocking the Plate

Nicole Ardiel

Found at the used sports store,
Dad guessed my size.
The palm weary, worn down
catching for the boys.

The mound between
head and heart line,
target to absorb the full force
of the pitch.

Brother's stinging throw
struck that spot,
jangled my hand,
sizzled up my elbow
like a prod
to the funny bone.

What it took
to play the game.

No extra protection
for my shins,
certain to bruise,
nose bound to be broken.

But elsewhere,
a place
we couldn't name,
didn't talk about.

The girl's chest
pad cut at the waist,
no elongated U at the crotch
like the boy's.

So instead
he offered a shield,
armour
for a daughter
he almost
saw.

His old jock strap,
washed and dried by Mom,
worn during league games
even though no girl
could huck
as hard
as my brother.

Until I dove
for a tipped ball,
landing full stretch
on the third base line.

Cracked
the up-ended turtle shell,
knocking
the breath
from my budding
ovaries.

The Office Happy Hour Survival Guide

How to Survive and (Barely) Thrive

Eric N. Patel



Ah, the office happy hour. That curious, time-honored tradition where coworkers gather after a long day of forced pleasantries, spreadsheets, and passive-aggressive emails to... pretend they're friends. It's an event that, on the surface, promises free drinks and a break from the daily grind, but in reality, is a social landmine waiting to explode. For those not adept in the delicate art of office

happy hour survival, fear not—I have created this essential guide to help you navigate this treacherous terrain with your sanity (mostly) intact.

Perfect the RSVP Maneuver

The first rule of the office happy hour is knowing how to respond to the invitation without immediately committing yourself to three hours of small talk. The key is strategic ambiguity. When Karen from HR enthusiastically

announces, “We’re all going to The Tippy Tap after work! You have to come!” your response should be something like, “Oh, that sounds great! I’ll see how my day goes.”

This line translates roughly to: I will do everything in my power to escape this, but if cornered, I will begrudgingly appear for 15 minutes. You’ve shown interest without locking yourself into an unbreakable social contract. Well played.

Master the Art of Arrival Timing

If you do find yourself unable to escape and are compelled to attend, timing is everything. Arriving too early means you'll have to sit through the awkward "who's going to be the first one to drink" phase, where everyone sips water and makes strained conversation about the weather. On the other hand, arriving too late might lead to questions like, "Where have you been?"—and worse, being left with the only available seat right next to your boss.

The sweet spot? Aim for a good 20-30 minutes after the official start time. By then, the drinks will have flowed enough for the ice to have broken, but not so much that people are oversharing about their personal lives. You'll get there just in time to seamlessly blend in with the mid-level buzz of coworker small talk.

Choose Your Drink Wisely

The pressure of drink selection at an office happy hour cannot be overstated. You're playing a careful balancing act: too much and you'll become the subject of next Monday's gossip; too little, and you risk being branded as the office killjoy. Beer and wine are generally safe choices—strong enough to dull the pain of superficial banter, but not so strong that you end up confessing to accidentally deleting the team's annual budget proposal.

Steer clear of anything with the words "flaming," "shot," or "bucket" in the name. And remember, just because it's called a "happy hour" doesn't mean you need to achieve peak happiness. Keep it moderate, stay hydrated, and, above all, resist the temptation to join Rick from accounting in a round of tequila shots.

Conversation Navigation

Once the drinks are in hand, it's time to wade into the murky waters of office small talk. You'll likely hear phrases like, "So, what do you think of the new copier?" or "Any big weekend plans?" This is where you must remain vigilant. The goal is to engage without fully committing. You don't want to give away too much, but you also need to show that you're a team player. Think of it as a verbal version of nodding along to a podcast you're barely listening to.

Stick to safe topics like traffic, weather, or mildly annoying workplace issues.

Avoid anything too personal—unless you want to learn more about Angela's upcoming trip to her nephew's gluten-free, pet-friendly, destination wedding in the middle of Nebraska. In fact, if you sense any conversation veering in that direction, it's best to excuse yourself with a swift, "Oh, excuse me, I think I left my jacket over there."

The Strategic Bathroom Break

The office happy hour can stretch out into an endless abyss of time. If you find yourself trapped in a particularly dull conversation or just need to breathe fresh air that doesn't carry the scent of Karen's gin and tonic, the strategic bathroom break is your best friend. Make sure to

“Keep it light, non-work-related, and pleasant. You might ask about their recent vacation or compliment their choice of drink.”

sprinkle a few of these into your evening to reset your mental stamina. Remember, it's all about pacing. You don't want to be the first to leave (rookie mistake), but you also don't want to be stuck there long after the point of no return, when people start uncomfortably oversharing about office romances and midlife crises.

The Art of Selective Engagement

Before you make your grand exit, there's one final move that can solidify your standing as a master of office social dynamics: the art of selective engagement. This is your last opportunity to make an impression without lingering too long. The key is to seek out one or two key people—preferably someone with influence or a higher position—and engage them in brief but memorable conversation. Keep it light, non-work-related, and pleasant. You might ask about their recent vacation or compliment their choice of drink.

This step isn't about sucking up, but rather about being seen as someone who can connect with different levels of the

office hierarchy. You're not aiming to become best friends with your boss or the department head, but a well-timed, low-pressure chat can leave a lasting impression. It's your last bit of strategic networking before your escape.

Once you've done this, nod to a few others as you slowly edge toward the door. This move adds a touch of finesse to your exit, ensuring you leave with just the right balance of approachability and professionalism.

The Artful Exit

Finally, the most crucial part of your survival strategy: leaving. The key here is subtlety. As the happy hour drones on and the office gossip reaches fever pitch, quietly gather your things and offer a casual, "This has been fun, but I've got an early start tomorrow." This line is non-confrontational, relatable, and—most importantly—believable. It's the perfect excuse to escape without looking like a social pariah.

And with that, sweet freedom is finally yours. You've done it—you've navigated the social minefield of the office happy hour and emerged unscathed. You smiled at all the right moments, nodded along to the unending stream of small talk, and even managed to contribute exactly one fabricated anecdote about your weekend plans—something vague enough that no one will follow up, but believable enough to pass for genuine. Maybe you mentioned a hike you never took or a trendy restaurant you never visited, but it worked. You performed your role with the finesse of a seasoned actor, and now, as you slip away from the dimly lit bar and into the cool night air, you can finally breathe a sigh of relief.

Now comes the best part: retreating to the sanctuary of your couch, where the only conversation you'll have to endure is whether to watch something on Netflix or simply bask in the silence. As you sink into the comfort of home, you can reflect on the fact that you've bought yourself some time—at least another month of peace and quiet before the dreaded next round of forced merriment appears on your calendar. You know it's inevitable. Karen, bless her relentlessly cheerful soul, will once again rally the troops for another awkward gathering at some mediocre pub. But that's a problem for future you. For now, relish in the fact that you've survived this round. You've played the game, and, for the moment, you've won. □

Late Shift

Walter H. Thompson



Illustration: Nikolay E. / Adobe Stock

The diner was mostly empty, save for a couple of truckers at the counter and an old man nursing a cup of coffee in the corner booth. It was past midnight, the kind of hour when people were either too tired to talk or had nothing left to say. Bonnie wiped down the same section of the counter she'd already cleaned twice and stared at the clock. Another hour before her shift ended.

The bell over the door jingled, and a man walked in, his face hidden under a baseball cap. He was tall, maybe in his forties, with a thick jacket that looked too warm for the mild night. He glanced around, nodded at the truckers, then slid into the booth near

the window. Bonnie tucked the rag into her apron and walked over.

"Coffee?" she asked.

He looked up at her, his eyes dark and tired. "Yeah. Black."

She poured him a cup, the steam rising between them. He didn't look at her again, just stared out the window as though he was waiting for something out there. Bonnie lingered for a moment, then turned back toward the counter.

The truckers were talking low to each other, the kind of talk that didn't invite eavesdropping. Bonnie busied herself with refilling the sugar dispensers, her back turned to the room, but she could feel the man's presence by the window, the way

some customers left a weight in the air. There was a tension in how he sat, his back stiff, like he was ready to move but didn't know where to go.

It was always the same faces this time of night. Regulars who came in because they had nowhere else to be, or because they needed a break from wherever they'd been. Sometimes Bonnie thought she could map out people's lives just by what time they walked through that door.

The old man in the corner raised his cup, and Bonnie topped it off with fresh coffee. He nodded, not saying a word. He never did. She caught the new guy by the window watching her, his hands wrapped around the mug but not drinking. When their eyes met, he smiled, just barely.

"Everything alright?" she asked

He blinked, like she'd startled him. "Yeah. Just... thinking."

Bonnie nodded. "Quiet night."

"Guess that's why I'm here."

She leaned on the edge of the booth, her hands gripping the back of the seat. "Passing through?"

"Nah, I live around here. Just needed to get out of the house for a bit." He hesitated, like he wasn't sure how much he wanted to say. "Wife and I... well, we're going through a thing. You know how it is."

Bonnie smiled faintly. "Yeah. I know how it is."

He stared into his cup. "Figured it was better to come here than sit there stewing. I can't fix it tonight anyway."

Bonnie nodded again. She had a feeling she could sit down right there and he'd spill his whole life story if she let him. It wasn't the first time someone had tried to pour their troubles into her, thinking she was some kind of confessor just because she worked the late shift at a diner.

But she didn't mind. It was part of the job, whether she liked it or not.

"I'm Bonnie," she said, breaking the silence.

"Frank." He looked up, managing another small smile. "You work here long?"

"Long enough."

On Advertising

Heimir Steinarrsson

Frank seemed to take that in, the way some men did when they realized she wasn't going to give them much more than that. He turned back to his coffee, fingers tapping lightly against the mug, then stilled.

"I've been married twenty years," he said, his voice softer now, like he was talking more to himself than her. "You think you've got everything figured out, then one day it's like you don't even know who you're living with."

Bonnie shifted her weight from one foot to the other, glancing over at the truckers who were still caught up in their conversation. The old man in the corner had fallen asleep, his chin resting on his chest. She looked back at Frank.

"It's not easy," she said. "People change."

"Yeah. They do."

He sighed, rubbed his hand over his face, and then took a sip of the coffee. Bonnie watched him for a moment, then reached for the pot.

"You want a refill?"

Frank shook his head. "No, I should probably get going. It's late.

Bonnie poured him another cup anyway. "On the house."

He looked at her, a little surprised, but took it without protest. "Thanks."

The bell above the door jingled again, and a couple of teenagers walked in, laughing too loudly for the hour. Bonnie stepped away from Frank's booth, grabbed two menus, and led them to a table near the back. They barely looked at her, too caught up in whatever joke they'd been sharing.

When she glanced back at the window, Frank was still there, holding his cup like he didn't want to let go. His eyes were distant again, staring past the parking lot, past the streetlights. Maybe he was seeing his house in the distance, dark and silent, waiting for him to return.

Bonnie wondered if he'd go back tonight, or if he'd stay a while longer, waiting for something to make sense in the stillness of the diner.

By the time she returned to the counter, the truckers were leaving, their heavy boots thudding against the linoleum. The old man in the corner had woken up, wiping his face with the back of his hand. And Frank, still by the window, raised his cup one last time before setting it down, untouched, on the table.

Bonnie went over to collect it, but he was already at the door, nodding to her in that quiet way people do when they don't want to talk anymore.

"Take care," she said.

"You too."

The bell jingled as he stepped out into the night. □

Sex sells. Just ask the people who are constantly attempting to get you to buy their merchandise at an unconscionable price.

They take some dumb celebrity and dress her up salaciously, so that the people looking at the ad go crazy for the brat.

That's how these bastards get us to spend all our cash on something new and useless we don't really need; just to appease their corporate greed.

Let this be a reminder that you should not stare intensely at half-naked girls of every race shove worthless rubbish in your face.

Read the domestic news instead, and try to wrap your simple head around the matters of the day; that will keep lustful thoughts at bay.



Scan to visit the website directly!



ONE STEP TRANSCREATION

When working with us, you take a creative approach to translation.

We recreate your advertising messages, brochures, printed and online catalogs, websites, videos, magazines, and other copy designed to promote and sell your products and services in your target markets around the world.

Send us your content and we'll deliver it translated and with the same look and layout as the original document - ready to print or publish online.

Markmál ehf. Translation agency | Reykjavik/Iceland

www.markmal.is markmal@markmal.is