

WeTransfer

BRANDS AND CULTURE: WHY NOW?



culture
Culture

There are many words that have become ubiquitous in brand marketing language these days.

First off we had the catch all term “content”, then came “authenticity”, swiftly followed by last year’s big one, “community”. And now? It’s all about culture, baby.

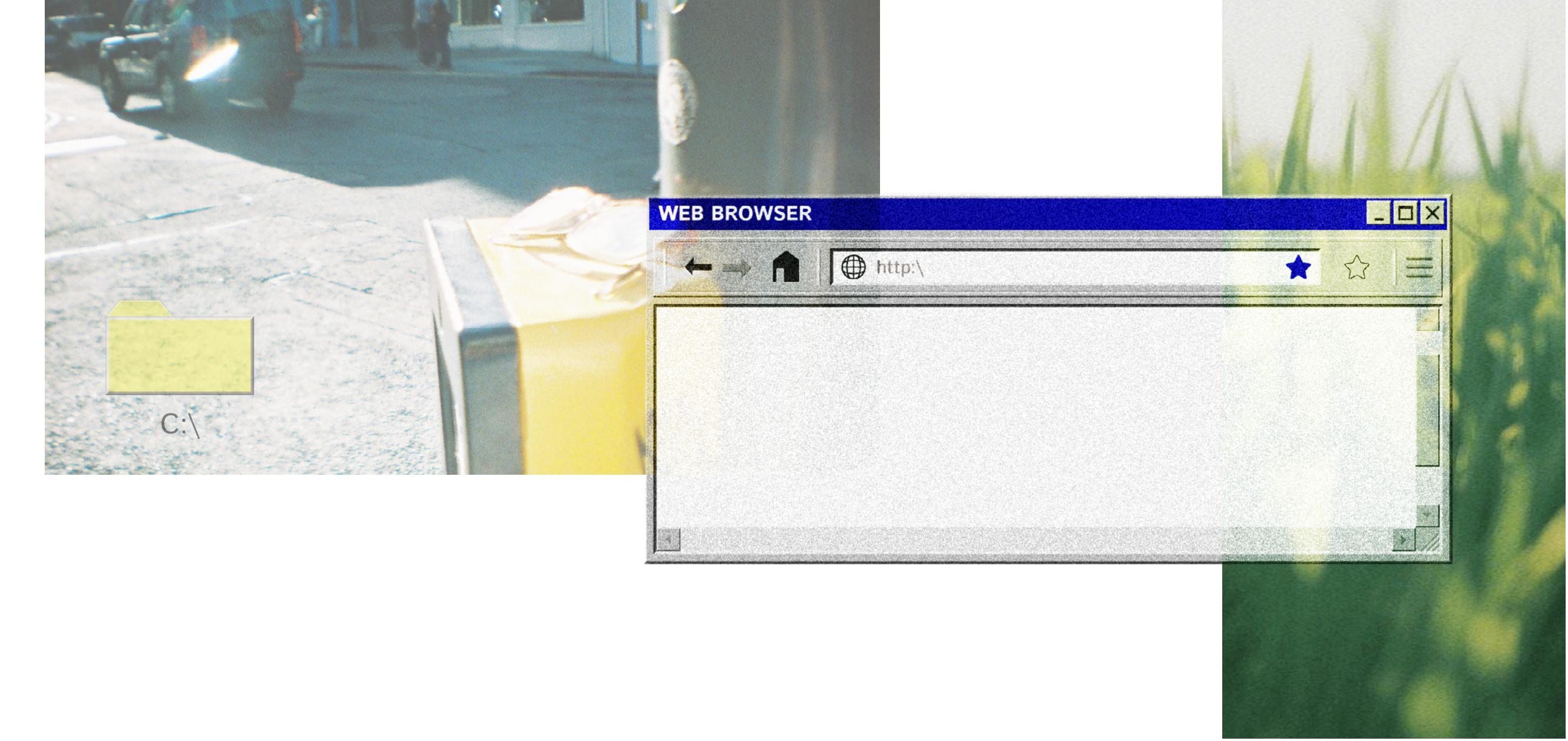
With the culture, for the culture, part of the culture, brands these days are clamouring for cultural relevance as a way to prove they’ve still got “it” — that finger on the pulse of what’s hot right now that keeps the attention coming. That’s why we felt it’s a good moment to publish this short report: 'Brand & Culture, Why Now?

Notes

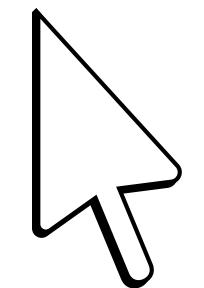
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WEB BROWSE

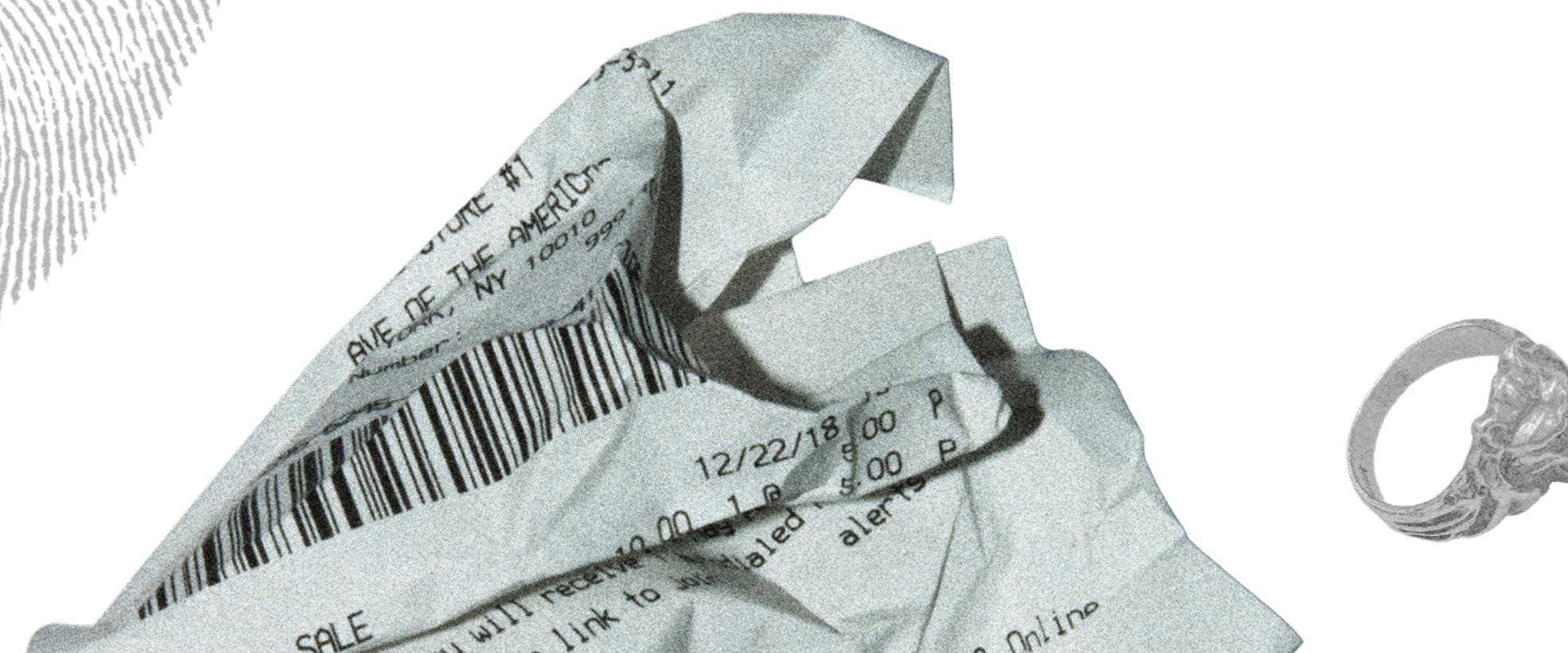
And if you're rolling your eyes at this because, really, the last thing we all need is another marketing trend, just wait a second naysayer. Yes, these buzzwords maybe feel a little performative when they're part of a deck preaching the benefits of the upper funnel, but – done intelligently – cementing your brand within cultural spaces that make sense to who you are, and what your customer base responds to, can have hugely positive implications for your business.



In 2025, while relevance for many brands is still measured in impressions and click-through rates there are some who are deprioritizing pure performance marketing and throwing money into the bottomless Meta well. There is a small cohort of brands emerging who really 'get' culture and for them the measure of success is the quiet nod of recognition for doing something that feels of the moment. Culture is the currency. And for brands that want more than fleeting attention, investing in culture isn't a side project — it's survival.



When a brand aligns with culture – music, art, fashion, film, gaming, whatever – it steps into a shared space with its audience. This isn't about sponsorship logos on festival stages or hollow virtue signalling. It's about demonstrating an understanding of the communities shaping stories today. By showing up authentically, brands build not just visibility, but equity — the kind of long-term value that makes people advocate for them when no one's watching.



AT WETRANSFER
WE BELIEVE THAT
CREATIVITY
IS CENTRAL TO OUR
EVERYDAY
LIVES.

Creativity is progress, it's innovation, it's intrinsic to us as human beings. People don't rally around a brand because it's the cheapest or most convenient; they rally because it sparks something unexpected. Creativity signals bravery, imagination, and care. It's what transforms a shoe from a basic product into an icon, or a tech brand from a utility into a cultural touchstone. When consumers perceive creativity, they perceive humanity. And that unlocks connection.



“Investing in culture and artists to build advocacy with our consumers has never been a trend, it's who we are.”

of our advertising inventory has been given away to support artists since day one.

WeTransfer invested in long term commitment through its art platform WePresent, where we collaborate with artists with the aim to create work that will cut through the white noise and if we get it right, maybe even mean something. The best creative work should be able to do two things: it should be able to reflect the moment in which it was made, and it should be able to make you feel something. And in the best case scenario it can even start important conversations or help to move the cultural needle.

This ethos is central to what we do at WeTransfer, and has been since the beginning. Not to pat ourselves on the back, but since day one we have given away 30% of our advertising inventory to support artists, and WePresent is almost a decade old. Paying it forward and investing in culture and artists to build advocacy with our consumers has never been a trend, it's who we are.

30%

WEPRESENT HAS
COLLABORATED WITH
OVER
1000 ARTISTS
FROM MORE THAN
125 COUNTRIES

Some of those collaborations could have been considered risky for a brand, but playing it safe is not an option if you truly believe in culture. WePresent commissioned "[The Long Goodbye](#)", a visceral short film by Riz Ahmed and Aneil Karia tackling rising racism in Britain in the wake of Brexit in 2020. It went on to win an Academy Award for Best Live Action Short, the first brand commissioned film to do so. Five years later Riz is back as our guest curator helming a range of projects under the theme of "stretching culture".

Earlier this year we commissioned a video series by Australian Palestinian artist and director Sarah Bahbah called [“Can I Come In?”](#) that sits between the worlds of cinema and podcasting and dives into the complexity of women’s stories. Across six episodes stories of trauma, heartache, abuse, healing and joy are explored in depth, never shying away from the messiness of life. And it resonates. Since its launch in June the series has been viewed a staggering 400 million times across social media, with one episode featuring actress Liza Soberano watched almost three million times within 24 hours on YouTube. We first collaborated with Sarah back in 2020 and maintained a relationship since then, but today bringing to life the work of a Palestinian woman giving space to other women to tell their stories feels even more urgent.

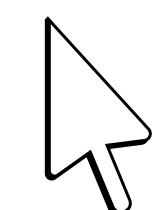
But of course, for every cultural collaboration that connects there is one that sparks outrage — and while this will still garner you short term attention, is a cultural dumpster fire really what you want to be known for? Earlier this year cosmetics brand e.l.f. (who usually gets it so right) wound up in hot water for featuring Matt Rife in a make up commercial, a comedian who makes “jokes” about domestic violence. Naturally their consumers took to social media to show their disdain with e.l.f. backtracking almost immediately.

But with so much to say, the marketplace is noisy, now more than ever. And that’s why having the right message, and a point of view on culture, matters. Competitors can copy features or undercut pricing. What they can’t duplicate is a brand’s unique cultural fingerprint. Investing in culture creates differentiation that feels alive and unrepeatable.

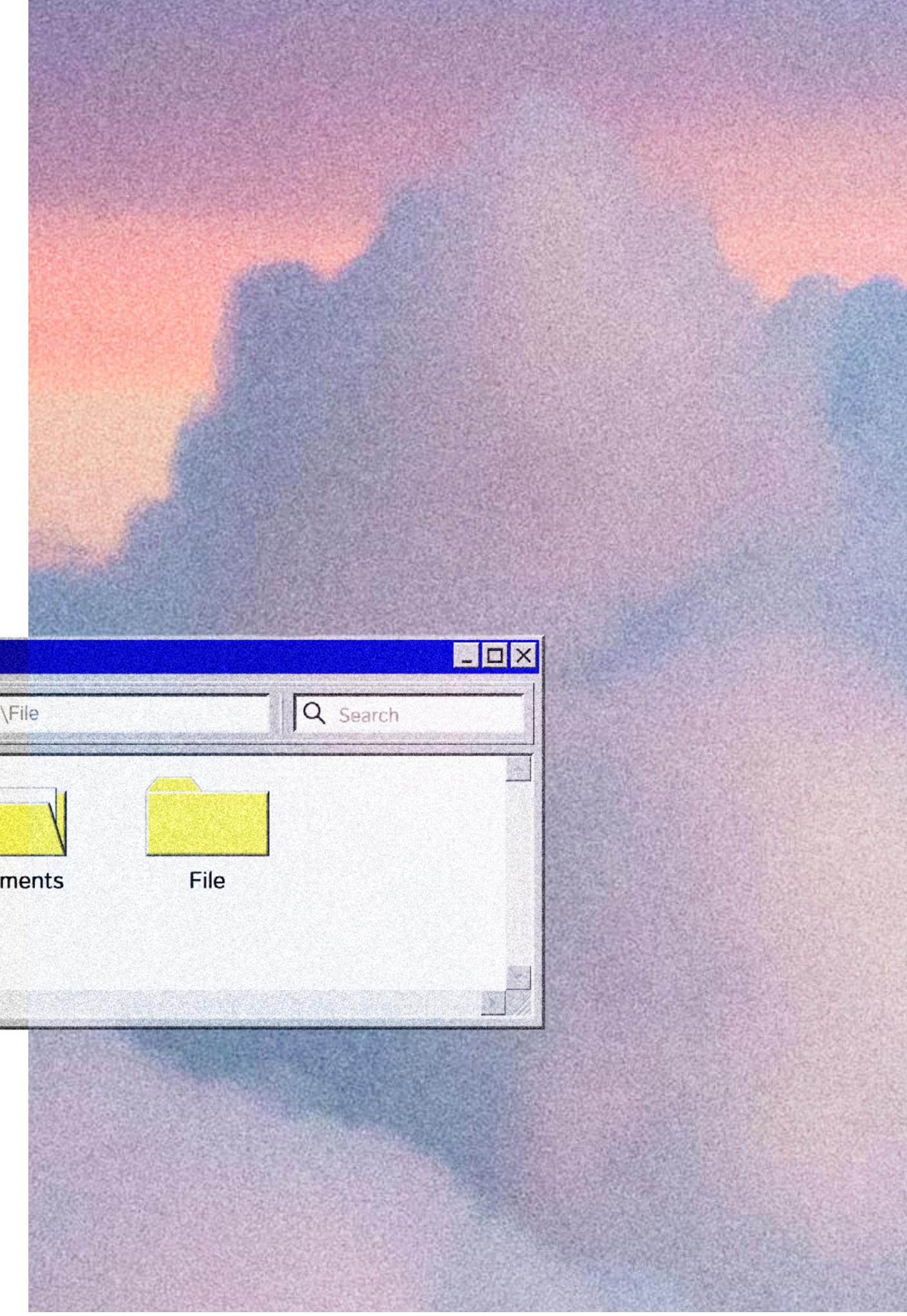
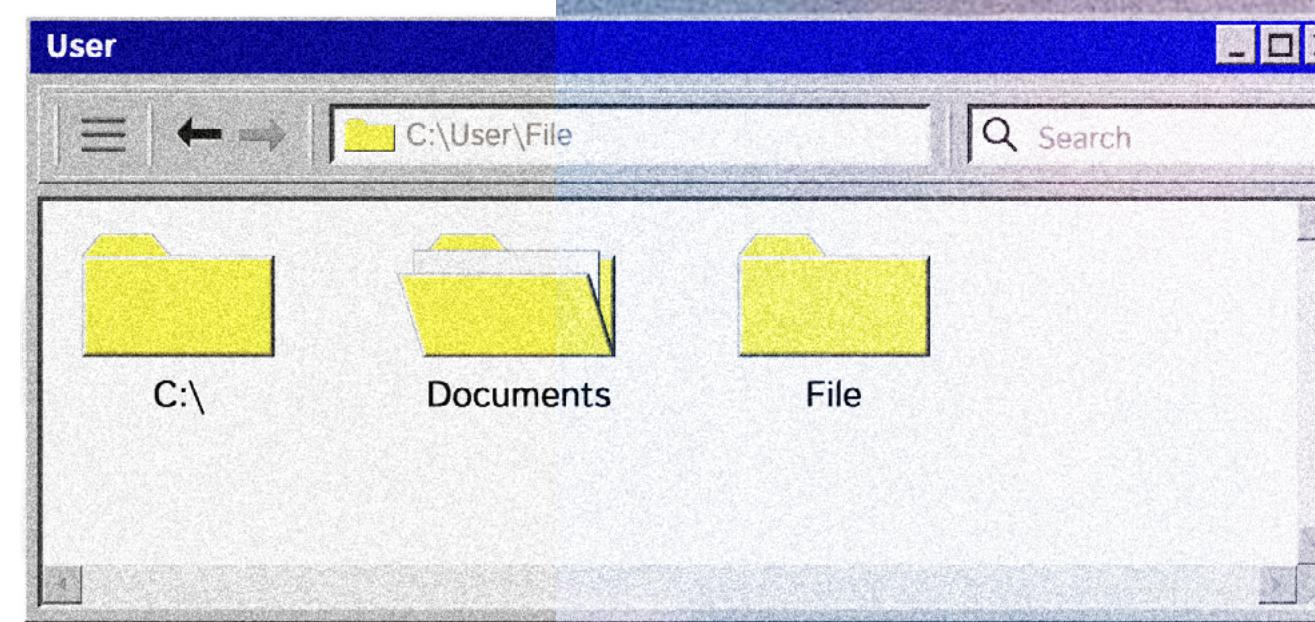
It says: we’re not just selling to you — we’re creating with you. And more importantly than that, creating and commissioning work that can start relevant conversations, or even act as a tool for progress, feels vital today. If you can use your brand to be a vehicle for that, then why wouldn’t you?

“Creating and commissioning work that can start relevant conversations, or even act as a tool for progress, feels vital today.”

SO WHAT’S NEXT?



Prepare to enter into an even more nebulous era. Trend forecasters say cultural campaigning in 2025 is evolving into an era defined by “vibe marketing”— an approach that starts with mood, emotion, or cultural texture rather than demographics — think Charli XCX’s Brat Summer. Get ready to lead with your gut because the future favours those with taste and emotional intuition. Now that’s a vibe we can get on board with.



The WeTransfer Approach

“This isn’t just a 9-5 for us.”

Of WeTransfer’s 80 million monthly users a huge amount identify as working in the creative industry, and of our subscribers we know that they’re predominantly filmmakers, photographers, designers and musicians. So for us it makes sense to invest in work that our audience doesn’t just care about, but actually creates as part of their livelihood. This feels much more fitting for our brand than a campaign around how our product works — they’re already well aware of that! We’re then able to use our WeTransfer wallpapers as a way to bring this work to millions around the world, furthering the reach of creativity. But our team too is one that is also made up of creatives in their own right — writers, curators,

musicians — and so is equally passionate about work that is culturally relevant and well, actually good. This isn’t just a 9-5 for us.

Crucially, we operate in a working environment that isn’t solely determined by performance marketing metrics. Of course we report on how many people have seen our creative work, whether it’s being engaged with and how that resonates with our brand, but there is also always an element of risk taking when trying to make work that connects with culture — and work like “The Long Goodbye” or “Can I Come In?” cannot be made without a certain amount of risk. But when risk pays off and you’re able to create something that truly speaks to people you build

something more important than short term gain — you start building a legacy.

This long term thinking has been a driving force at WeTransfer since we started. It has also led to longer term relationships with artists that are cultivated and nurtured over years, not just exploited for transactional gain for a single project. Placing trust in the creatives that we collaborate with has in turn led to them placing their trust in us as a brand, and many have gone on to recommend us to peers from within their network. But it’s hardly rocket science. Treat others with the care and respect you would want for yourself, and value their creativity, the lifeblood of artists and a necessity for the times we live in.



THE DO'S AND DON'T'S OF CULTURE MARKETING

Do

Know who you are as a brand, what you stand for and how you want to show up as part of culture for your audience.

Make it make sense.

Put your trust in the vision of the artists you collaborate with. It's a partnership, not a dictatorship and **they know their work better than you.**

Listen to everyone in your team and ask for opinions. **Culture should not operate based on a hierarchy.**

Make sure that stepping into culture feels authentic. Do you have any right to occupy that space? How are you adding to the conversation, and does anyone care what you have to say?

We've all had enough of performative brands.

Remember that culture is inherently linked to current affairs and macro societal factors so be prepared to have a point of view, even when topics feel challenging. **Art has always been political.**

If you want to work within culture, then you should love culture. Engross yourself in it and surround yourself with a team that is passionate about it. **It doesn't stop when you close your laptop at the end of the working day.**

THE DO'S AND DON'T'S OF CULTURE MARKETING

Don't

Don't try and boil success down to a quick KPI. Sure you can look at engagement, shares and earned media from your campaign but aligning with culture should form part of a long-term strategy.

Brand advocacy is built over years.

This is your legacy, not your Q4 report.

Don't forget to do your research. Whether it's on who you're partnering with, the niche you want to operate in or the campaigns before yours, make sure you know what you're talking about. **It could come back to bite you if you don't.**

Don't take artists or collaborators for granted. Pay creators fairly for their work and time, **creativity is not free.**

Don't be afraid to take risks, and don't solely rely on data. Remember, data only looks at what has been before. Take an art and science approach and **don't be afraid to lean on your intuition.**

Don't just plan for digital and social. Events and IRL experiences build powerful emotional connections and help your brand foster a real life community. **We're sociable creatures after all.**

AMPLIFICATION THROUGH ADVERTISING

If you're a regular WeTransfer user, you'll be familiar with our wallpapers – the full-screen content or advertising that surrounds the transfer window. Many of the world's most influential brands use this unique canvas to engage our **80m+ global users**. It's not only marketers who build their brands on WeTransfer, though – we also leverage the format to amplify our own projects.

A good example is our partnership with [Olafur Eliasson](#), our 2024 guest curator. The announcement and digital artwork generated millions of clicks, extending the project's reach and engagement far beyond what organic buzz alone could have achieved. While the collaboration resonated strongly on its own, the use of WeTransfer's wallpaper ads ensured we reached our core audience — influential voices in the creative community and beyond.

“The use of WeTransfer’s wallpaper ads ensured we reached our core audience”



Why Paid Media Matters in Culture Marketing

1 AMPLIFICATION OF CULTURAL SIGNALS

Culture marketing often begins with something inherently resonant – a collaboration, a story, a stunt. Paid media ensures it travels beyond the niche where it originated and reaches a mass audience. Without amplification, even the best cultural moments risk staying confined to in-groups. Paid media translates cultural relevance into cultural scale.

2 LONGEVITY AND REACH

3 MEASURABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Paid media gives marketers control over reach, frequency, and targeting, allowing them to better measure the impact of culture-driven initiatives (awareness, brand lift, attention metrics). Advertising transforms cultural relevance into brand equity and business results.

In short, cultural marketing doesn't always amplify itself. Paid media ensures that a cultural spark can grow into a cultural fire – moving moments that matter from the margins into the mainstream.

Culture moves fast. Even when brands “get it right,” the conversation fragments across platforms, feeds, and subcultures. Paid advertising guarantees visibility in places where algorithms or organic virality can't be relied on. It also extends the life of a cultural moment – sustaining relevance and helping build memory structures with audiences.



CASE IN POINT COS AT NEW YORK FASHION WEEK



“The show itself was a cultural moment, but COS didn’t stop there”

COS AT NEW YORK FASHION WEEK

COS is a strong example of how paid media can elevate a cultural play. The brand is repositioning itself from “just another high-street label” to a cultural tastemaker, using architecture, celebrity association, and strategic brand choices to claim a seat at the broader fashion and lifestyle table.

At New York Fashion Week, COS took centre stage, a slot usually reserved for luxury houses. The front row reflected this dual positioning: mainstream prestige with Gwyneth Paltrow, Naomi Watts, and Lauryn Hill, paired with underground credibility from Honey Dijon, Chloë Sevigny, and Hari Nef — tastemakers whose presence signals cultural fluency.

The show itself was a cultural moment, but COS didn’t stop there. They amplified it through WeTransfer’s full-screen, shoppable ad formats, reaching a global creative audience and turning inspiration into immediate action. This combination of cultural cachet and frictionless commerce demonstrates how paid media can transform a single moment into a multi-layered campaign with lasting impact.

The WePresent Way

WEPRESENT

WeTransfer's arts platform, has spent almost a decade collaborating with creatives that make it their mission to uplift culture and use their work to start necessary conversations. Their ideas are championed and brought to life by WePresent and then amplified globally through WeTransfer wallpapers to bring even more attention to their work and ideas. As a brand, we are proud of using our platform as a mouthpiece for artists. Not familiar?

Here's a closer look at what we've been doing lately.



“CAN I COME IN?”

BY SARAH BAHBAH

“CAN I COME IN?”
EPISODE THREE:
NEMAHSIS



I chose myself.
That should be a love story too.

What is it?

Commissioned by WePresent "["Can I Come In?"](#)" is a pioneering video series created by artist and director Sarah Bahabah that centres women's stories. Part podcast, part documentary but wholly cinematic, the six-part series sees Bahabah build visually arresting worlds for each of her guests to tell personal stories in, often those of trauma, abuse, healing or heartbreak. Released over a three month period in 2025, the series connected with audiences instantly; the trailer was viewed five million times in 24 hours when it dropped on Instagram, and to date the entire series has received almost 400 million views on all platforms combined, amplified globally by WeTransfer wallpapers. The best performing episode, featuring actress Liza Soberano, racked up three million views on YouTube in a day and became an instant news story upon its release.



"CAN I COME IN?"
EPISODE ONE:
MIA KHALIFA



“CAN I COME IN?”
EPISODE FIVE:
LIZA SOBERANO



“CAN I COME IN?”
EPISODE ONE:
MIA KHALIFA

Why did it work?

The series covers topics that resonate with viewers, and while some parts of the episodes may be an emotional watch, that is part of their appeal — they’re real. A talented interviewer as well as artist, Sarah gets her subjects to open up to her, many in ways they’ve never done before, and in the process creates art that is completely authentic but also vulnerable, raw and honest. This emotional connection draws viewers in and keeps them coming back, episode after episode. And at between 30 and 60 minutes each, the longer form episodes gives viewers the chance to connect with the protagonists on a deeper level than is possible in, say, a 30 second TikTok. Each of the women featured may have global fanbases, but viewers are able to see themselves in the subjects they’re discussing and the stories that they’re sharing. And at a time when women around the world are still fighting for their voices to be heard, a series exploring the complexity of womanhood is not just conversation worthy, it’s important.

“

WORKING WITH WEPRESENT WAS TRULY THE BEST COLLABORATION EXPERIENCE. THEY OFFERED THOUGHTFUL, REASONABLE FEEDBACK THAT NEVER COMPROMISED MY CREATIVE VISION.

They gave me the freedom to be an artist while still providing valuable insight, and their trust allowed me to create with full authenticity. It was the perfect balance of support and creative independence, and I look forward to continuing to collaborate with and support them as I grow as an artist.

”

Sarah Bahbah

WE MOVE IN CIRCLES



RUSSELL TOVEY
X WEPRESENT

WE MOVE IN CIRCLES
RUSSELL TOVEY X
WEPRESENT, 2023



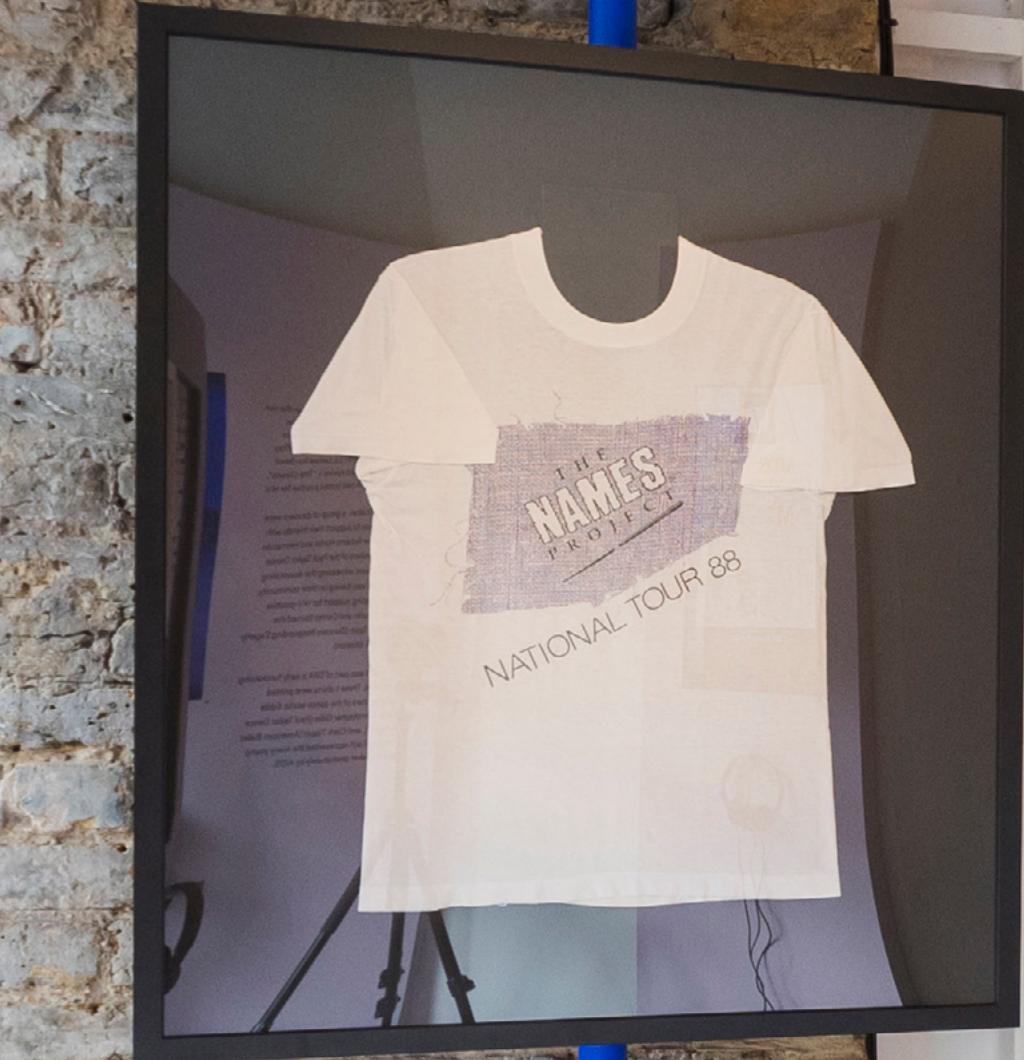
What is it?

When WePresent partnered with actor, podcaster and curator Russell Tovey as our [guest curator](#) for 2023 he made it his mission to highlight the significance of queer artists lost too soon during the AIDS crisis. Part of this year-long project (which also included a documentary about artist David Robilliard and a theatre production of Derek Jarman's BLUE called BLUE NOW) was a four day exhibition called "We Move In Circles", in which we examined the cultural impact of t-shirts as works of protest art. Collaborating with Tovey and curator duo PAST, we hunted down original t-shirts worn in, or created for, AIDS protests during the early 90s and exhibited these [along with the story](#) of who they were made for, highlighting many creatives who have since gone largely unheard of. Alongside the exhibition we programmed free talks with queer artists and activists, and a poetry night featuring the work of Travis Alabanza, Joelle Taylor and Jay Bernard, all of whom had also taken part in BLUE NOW. The exhibition was covered extensively by the press, starting with a Vogue exclusive, and generated over \$1million in earned media, while 1500 visitors attended over the course of the activation.



WE MOVE IN CIRCLES
RUSSELL TOVEY X
WEPRESENT, 2023





The NAMES Project
AIDS Memorial Quilt



WE MOVE IN CIRCLES



Say it with your heart

Why did it work?



WE MOVE IN CIRCLES
RUSSELL TOVEY X
WE PRESENT, 2023

There were several factors that went into making this project - and Russell's entire curatorship - a success. First and foremost was his passion as both a curator and advocate for fellow queer artists, and his unwavering commitment to ensuring that their stories were heard. Throughout his curatorship Russell used both his platform and WeTransfer's in order to do just that — resulting in the work being seen by millions. It was important that this project was authentic and informative; a key aim throughout was to not just spotlight the significance of queer artists lost too soon to AIDS, but to also educate a new generation of creatives about the work of their queer elders. To do this we ensured that the project was brought to life and helmed by people that could speak authentically to the experiences of those artists, and the LGBTQIA+ community. And while the exhibition was held in London in order to galvanise Russell's local community, we wanted the work to be seen globally, with the hope that it would start much needed conversations in places where homosexuality is still criminalised. WeTransfer's global reach ensured that we were able to do that, with the digital version of the exhibition seen the world over.

“

WETRANSFER QUITE SIMPLY MAKES DREAMS A REALITY. SINCE OUR COLLABORATION BEGAN, WETRANSFER HAS ALLOWED ME TO FULLY REALIZE PROJECTS THAT HAVE BEEN BOUNCING AROUND IN MY HEAD FOR AGES.

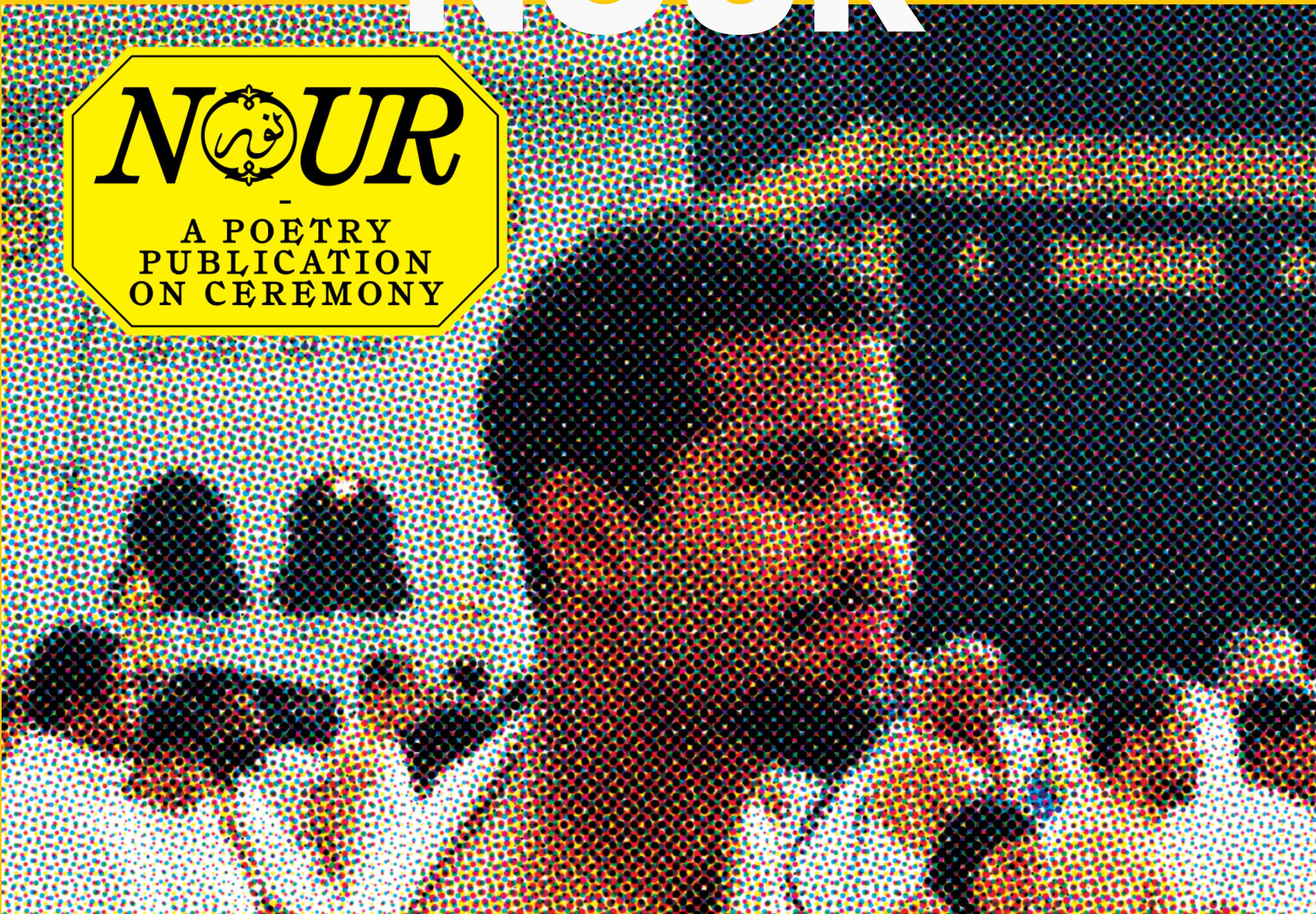
With detail, care and a very unique nurturing approach to every project, I am able to tell stories about artists who mean so much to me, in the hope that they can matter to everyone.

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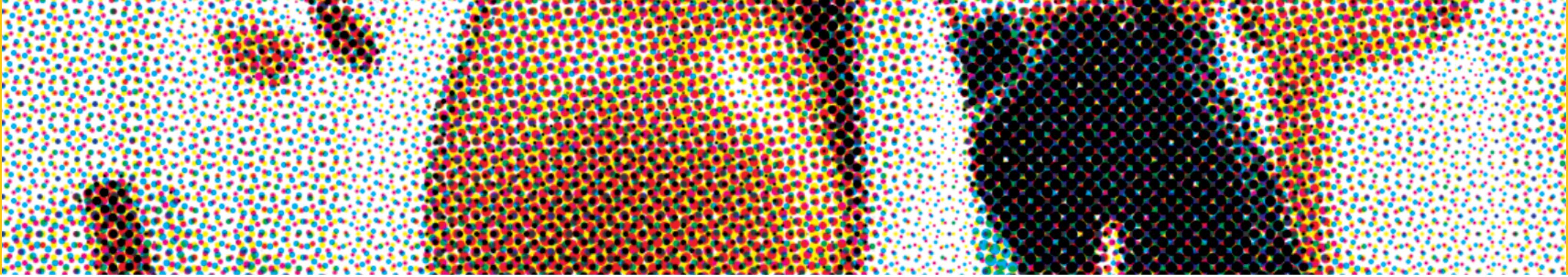
Russell Tovey

NOUR

A POETRY BOOK BY MUSTAFA
AND WEPRESENT

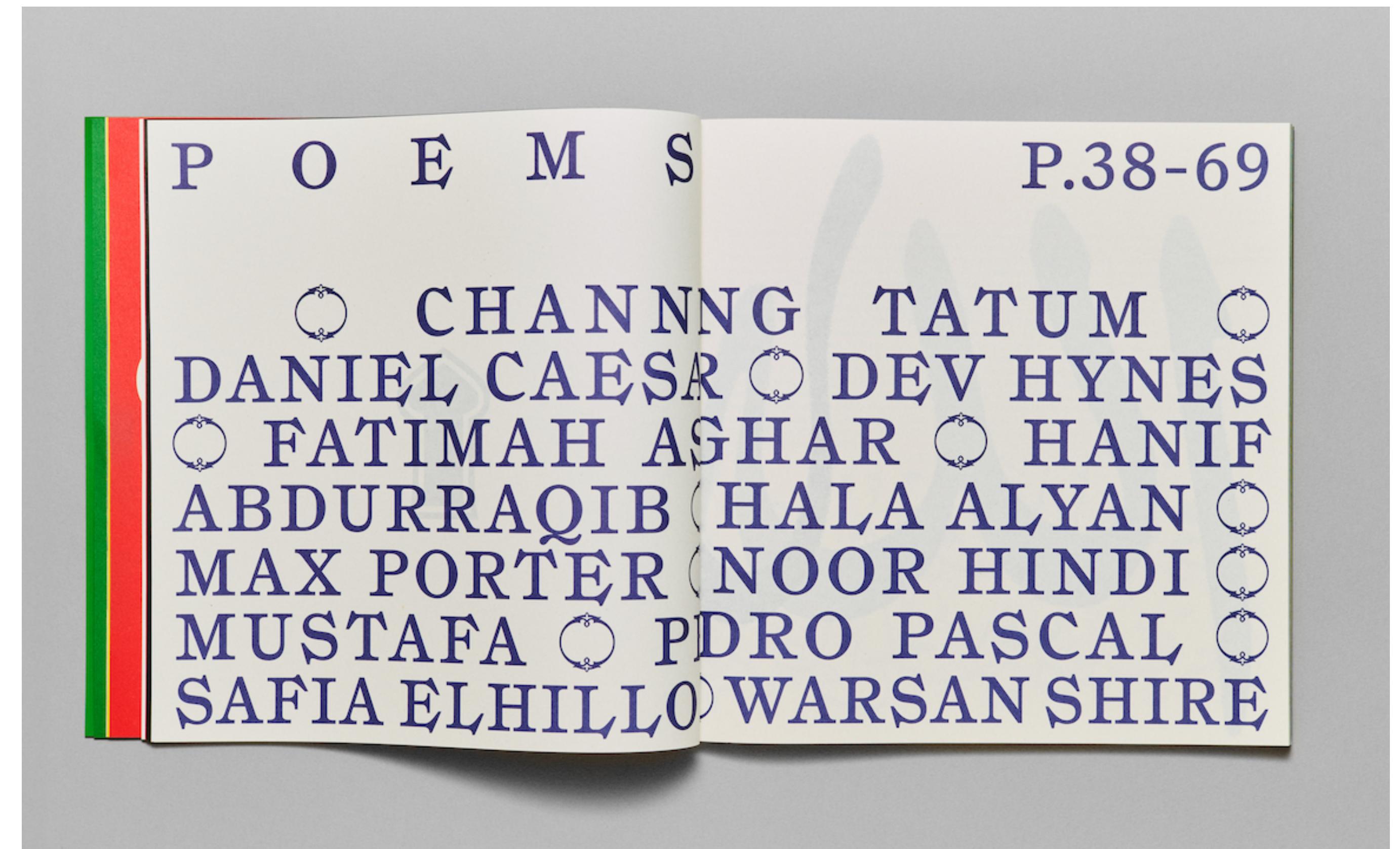


NOUR
MUSTAFA X
WEPRESENT, 2025



What is it?

Created in collaboration with WePresent [NOUR](#) is a poetry publication centred on ceremony by artist Mustafa, that brings together original poems by his friends and inspirations including Warsan Shire, Pedro Pascal, Hanif Abdurraqib and Channing Tatum among others. Alongside these sit an in-depth conversation between Mustafa and author George Saunders, and a photo series following Mustafa's annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Upon its release in May 2025 a limited number of the physical books were printed and given out for free at Climax bookstores in London and New York, while a digital version was available as a download from WeTransfer. NOUR was launched at an intimate in-conversation event in which Mustafa and his close friend Daniel Kaluuya discussed the themes of the book in front of an audience of 300 fans, with all ticket proceeds going to War Child. Within its first weekend of release, amplified by WeTransfer wallpapers, NOUR had been downloaded over 20,000 times, and was shared on social media by Mustafa's friends and collaborators including Dua Lipa, Channing Tatum and Pedro Pascal.



NOUR
MUSTAFA X
WESENSENT, 2025



Why did it work?

Mustafa is an artist who supports and uplifts his community through his art, and that was the central mission of NOUR throughout its production. The publication was produced by WePresent with the help of Mustafa's community of friends and collaborators. Because of this, each entry felt authentic and personal. This in turn resonated with his fans, but it chimed with the cultural climate too. The poetry throughout the book was emotional, raw and ultimately felt very human at a time when many are searching for empathy in our society.

NOUR

MUSTAFA X
WEPRESENT, 2025

INDUSTRY POVS

Especially when you don't have big internal teams or when you might try and move into new spaces, it's always a great idea to seek advice and work with people in the industry who are deeply embedded in cultural marketing.

“

BEING CULTURALLY RELEVANT DOESN'T MEAN APPEALING TO EVERYONE ALL THE TIME

Brands are under increasing pressure to show up in culture, but culture doesn't wait for brands, it is built, shaped and moulded by its architects, otherwise known as everyday people. “Being culturally relevant” is often misunderstood, especially by businesses that approach the world with an “everyone is our consumer” mindset.

Cultural relevance doesn't mean appealing to everyone at once. In fact, the opposite is true, it's about creating a signal or a code that resonates deeply with a specific community, tribe, or audience segment- sometimes micro and sometimes mammoth. When that community feels

seen, the message naturally spreads outward and that's when a brand truly “lands in culture.”

The challenge and the opportunity for brands lies in having the right to play in a cultural space. This permission doesn't need to be conventional (e.g., heritage, product fit). It can be earned through strategic thinking, creativity, and most importantly, genuine investment in understanding the community you're engaging with.

For me there is a big distinction between online and offline insights. Too often, brands rely solely on online

insights or social listening. But online behavior doesn't always reflect how people actually live, interact, and identify offline. Without grounding strategy in both worlds, brands risk a disparity between the intention set in the boardroom and what truly resonates on the ground. I encourage brands, marketeers and agencies to go and speak to those communities and hear about their experiences first hand, you are likely to land your brief on a more human level than relying on cookie cutter algorithms.”

By Paris Parmar, senior creative strategist at Attachment

“

At **CultureLab** we think about brands contributing to culture on three levels – mirroring, platforming, and investing. Inevitably many brands want to flex in the short term and end up at the shallow end – mirroring. The brands that we work with – some of the world's best – are those that invest in culture. They build infrastructure, provide long term support, enable true collaboration. Which brand do we use as an example of how to get it truly right? **WeTransfer** and **WePresent**. Every. Single. Time.”

By Jed Hallam, co-founder and managing director, CultureLab

ABOUT

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WeTransfer

WeTransfer, the most creative file-sharing platform, makes it easy for professionals and creators to distribute content and collaborate with teams. With an average of 80 million monthly active users in 190 countries, WeTransfer has long been a champion of using business as a force for good. Since its founding in 2009, the company has donated up to 30% of its advertising real estate to raise awareness for artists, creative work, and the world's most pressing issues. In 2021, it launched the Supporting Act Foundation to support emerging artists through bursaries and grants.

WePresent

WePresent is WeTransfer's award-winning arts platform, acting as the company's cultural torchbearer to a monthly audience of approximately 3 million in 190 countries. Collaborating with emerging young talent to renowned artists such as Marina Abramović, Riz Ahmed, FKA twigs or Solange Knowles, WePresent showcases the best in art, photography, film, music, literature and more, championing diversity in everything it does. The platform's commissions range from editorial features to films, illustrations, photography series, events, and exhibitions, with an aim to offer a fresh take on the magic and mystery of creative ideas. In 2022 WePresent were the commissioners of the Academy award-winning short film *The Long Goodbye*, by Riz Ahmed and director Aneil Karia.

WeTransfer Advertising

WeTransfer Advertising helps brands stand out, not fit in. Through our unique full-screen formats and curated creative environment, we give advertisers the highest attention in digital media. With more than 80 million monthly users worldwide, and 30% of our ad inventory dedicated to supporting artists, WeTransfer connects brands to influential creative communities in a way that feels seamless, respectful, and impactful. From Gucci and Bottega Veneta to Paramount and Heineken, the world's most ambitious brands trust WeTransfer Advertising to spark cultural relevance and drive measurable results.

[Get in Touch](#)

weTransfer

