

Issue No. 02—Episode 1
Awarding AI Creative Excellence

Interviews with

JESSICA WALSH

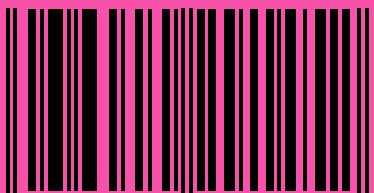
& other eagle-eyed Design
Industry Judges



&Walsh Founder and Cannes Lions Design Jury President, Jessica Walsh. Creative Director and ADC Awards Judge, Alex Naghavi. Former Global Chief Creative Officer and D&AD Judge, Malcom Poynton. Editor, Jessie Hughes.

SPILL MAGAZINE
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AWARDING AI CREATIVE EXCELLENCE
24 PAGES



KNOW THAT I'M JUDGING YOU

01

Awarding AI Creative Excellence

CANNES LIONS DESIGN JURY PRESIDENT

Interview with Jessica Walsh, Founder, &Walsh



Index



ADC AWARDS AI CATEGORY JUDGE

12

Interview with Alex Naghavi, Creative Director, Block

D&AD TRUSTEE & JUDGE



20

Interview with Malcom Poynton,
Former Global Chief Creative Officer, Cheil Worldwide

Awarding AI Creative Excellence

Words by Jessie Hughes



The Cannes Lions. D&AD Pencils. ADC Awards. These aren't just trophies—they're industry canon. And what's standing between you and that smug little award propped in the background of your next Zoom call? A judging jury—glasses perched low, criteria sheet in hand, task-ing with precision.

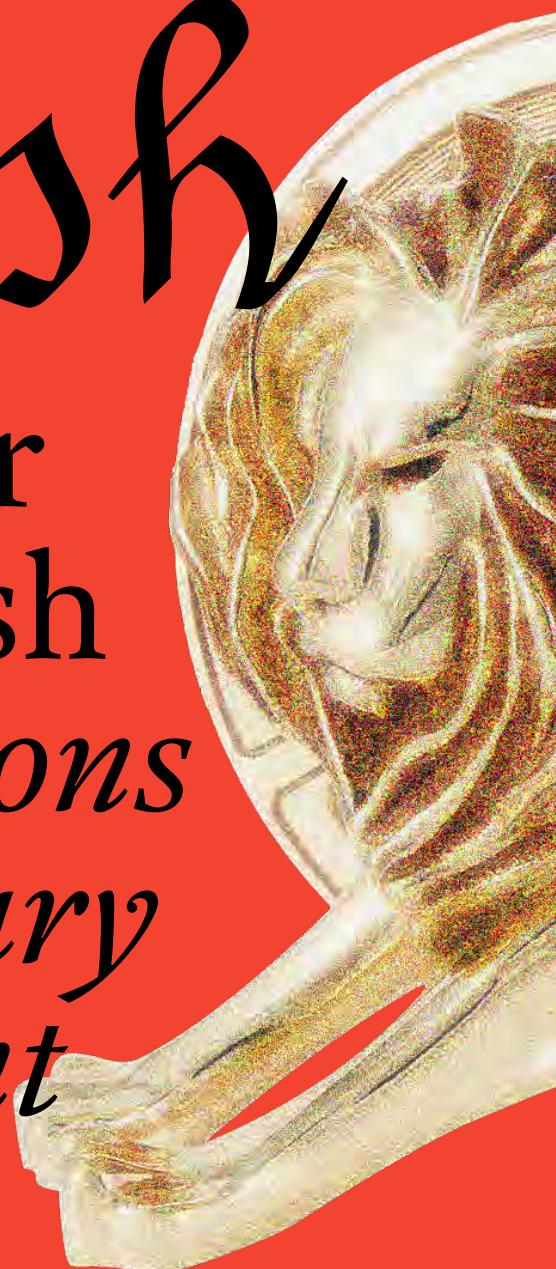
But now, the world's most prestigious juries are faced with a new kind of chaos: AI.

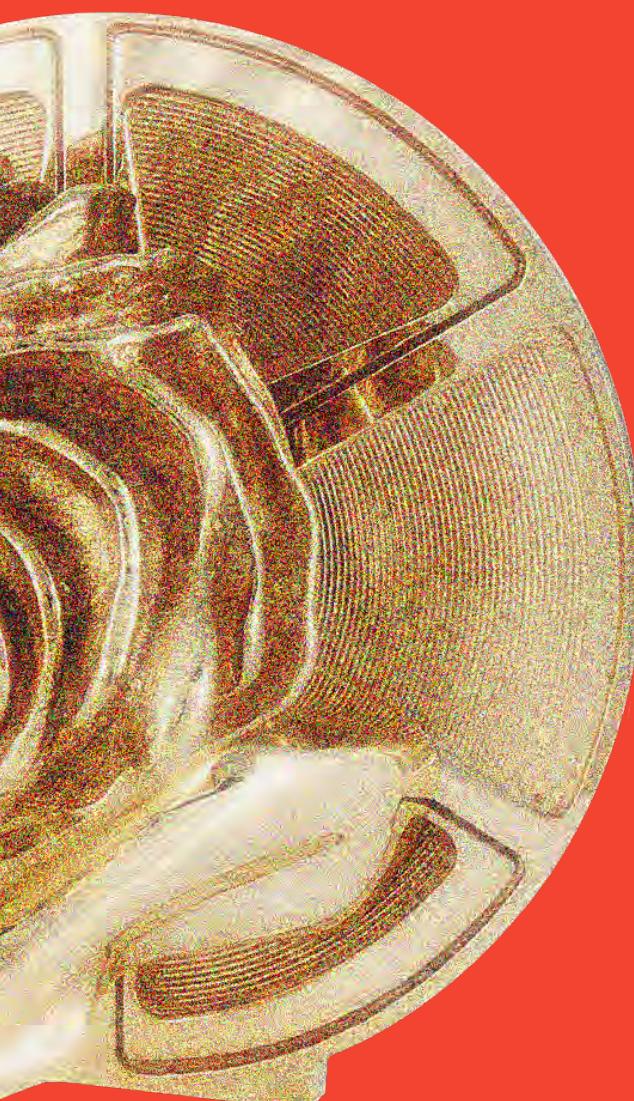
Creative excellence has always been subjective—but AI excellence? That's a whole new minefield.

The internet's been frothing at the bit—calling out AI slop with an acidic disdain and some creatives questioning their calling entirely. So the juries had to bring in the big guns: Jessica Walsh, Alex Naghavi, and Malcolm Poynton—tasked with sorting slop from sublime and writing a rulebook for a ruleless frontier.

Interview with Jessica Walsh

Founder
of &Walsh
Cannes Lions
Design Jury
President





Jessica Walsh is unforgivingly bold.

Awardedly so. She's a household name in the design community and a pinnacle of modern design. A marker of her craft and a track record that has designers whispering

please say it's good,

Walsh now takes the judging seat at Cannes.

J.W.

As the *Design Jury President for Cannes Lions*, my role is to guide the jury in recognizing and celebrating work that demonstrates exceptional creative vision, innovative execution, and a profound understanding of design principles, ultimately setting the benchmark for design excellence on a global stage.



Cannes Lions Design Jury President

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For Walsh, creative excellence is still about one thing: emotion.

J.W.

It's always been about evoking an emotional response with your audience. The rest—brand love, recall, purchase—follows. That hasn't shifted for me. But how we get there has.

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Cannes Lions Design Jury President

05

Awarding AI Creative Excellence

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And in an industry built on imbalance, she's not here just to play nice.

Jessica Walsh is part of the 0.1%—as in, the percentage of creative agencies that are woman-owned. At &Walsh, she leads a majority-female team in a field where 70% of design graduates are women, but only 5-11% hold creative director roles.

J.W.

AI has the potential to level the playing field, and we should celebrate projects that demonstrate this democratization in action. The ingenuity of independent creators working with limited means is incredibly exciting—it allows more diverse voices and ideas to emerge.

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AI may master creative visuals, but it doesn't originate intent.

J.W.

The initial spark, the strategic direction, the nuanced human understanding of context and emotion—that still comes from us. When judging AI-driven work, we have to look beyond the output and evaluate the human touch behind it.

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Walsh sees AI-specific categories as transitional.

J.W.

Eventually, ‘AI-integrated’ will become the norm. What will matter most is still the strength of the idea and how well it’s executed, no matter the tool.

“I want to see more conceptual depth. More emotional resonance. Use AI to tell a story. To say something that matters.”

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But don't just show technical flex.
Show heart.

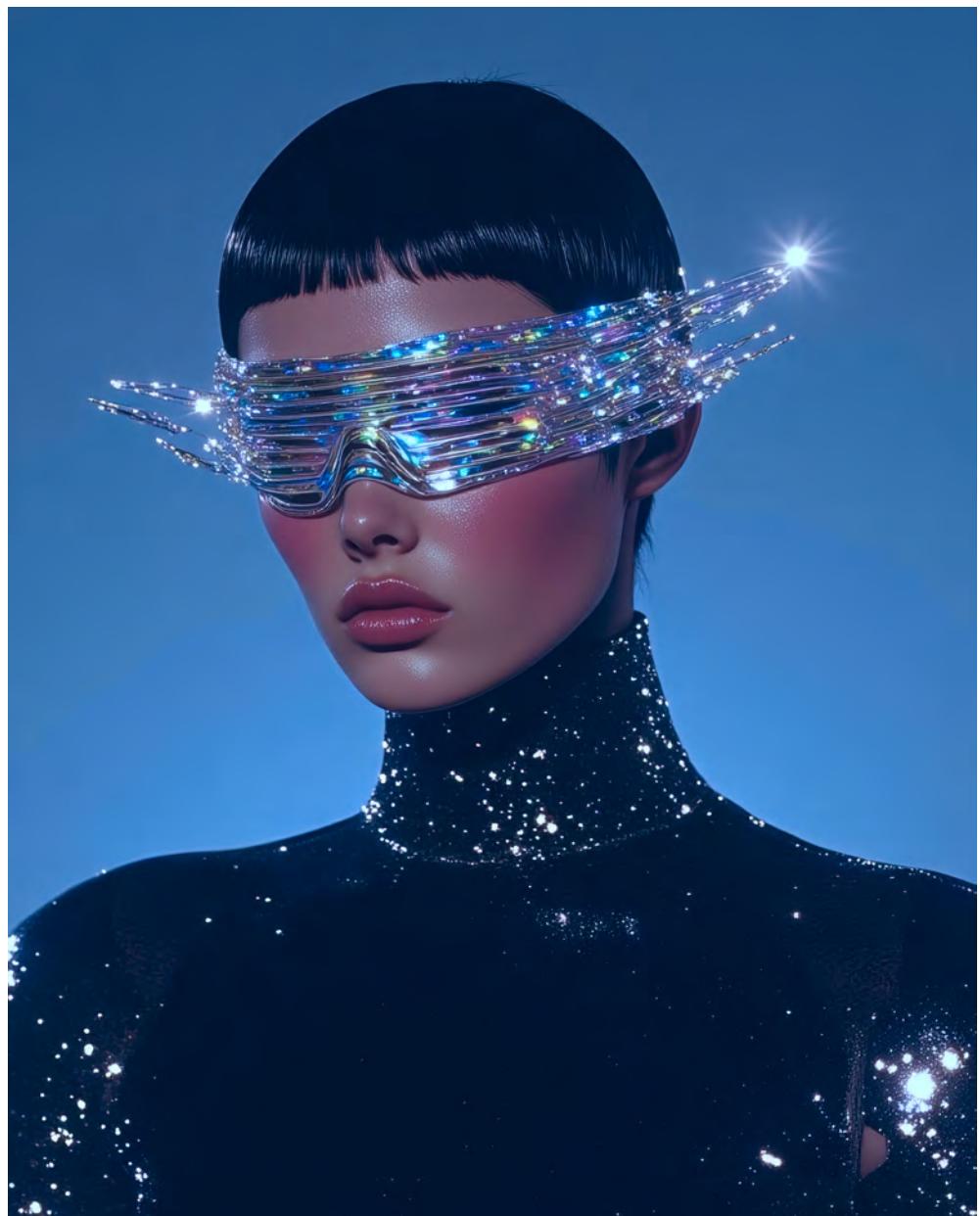
J.W.

We need work that uses AI to break down barriers—not just showcase what the tool can do. I want to see more conceptual depth. More emotional resonance. Use AI to tell a story. To say something that matters.

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Walsh is especially drawn to projects that explore new forms of interactive art or evoke unexpected visual narratives.



J.W.

The difference is always intentionality. If AI is just being used to automate or generate predictable outputs, it's less compelling. The best work uses AI's unique capabilities to explore uncharted creative ground.

“It’s pushing everyone to think harder about originality.”

J.W.

AI can be a powerful partner. But the vision, the intent, the emotional intelligence—those still belong to us. Don’t let the technology be the hero. Focus on your idea. Guide the tool. Shape the outcome. That’s how you create something truly original and impactful.

Interview with

Alex Maghavri

Creative
Director
ADCAwards
AI Category
Judge





“The beauty of AI is that it lowers the barrier to execution —but it raises the bar for taste.”

Alex Naghavi doesn’t flinch at disruption. Accolades-abundant and endlessly curious, she’s helping write the rulebook for AI-driven creativity as a judge for the ADC’s first-ever AI category.

A.N.

Great AI work isn't just aesthetic—it's inventive, intentional, and timely.

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In a new and nascent category of their own, grading for a new medium is no mean feat.

A.N.

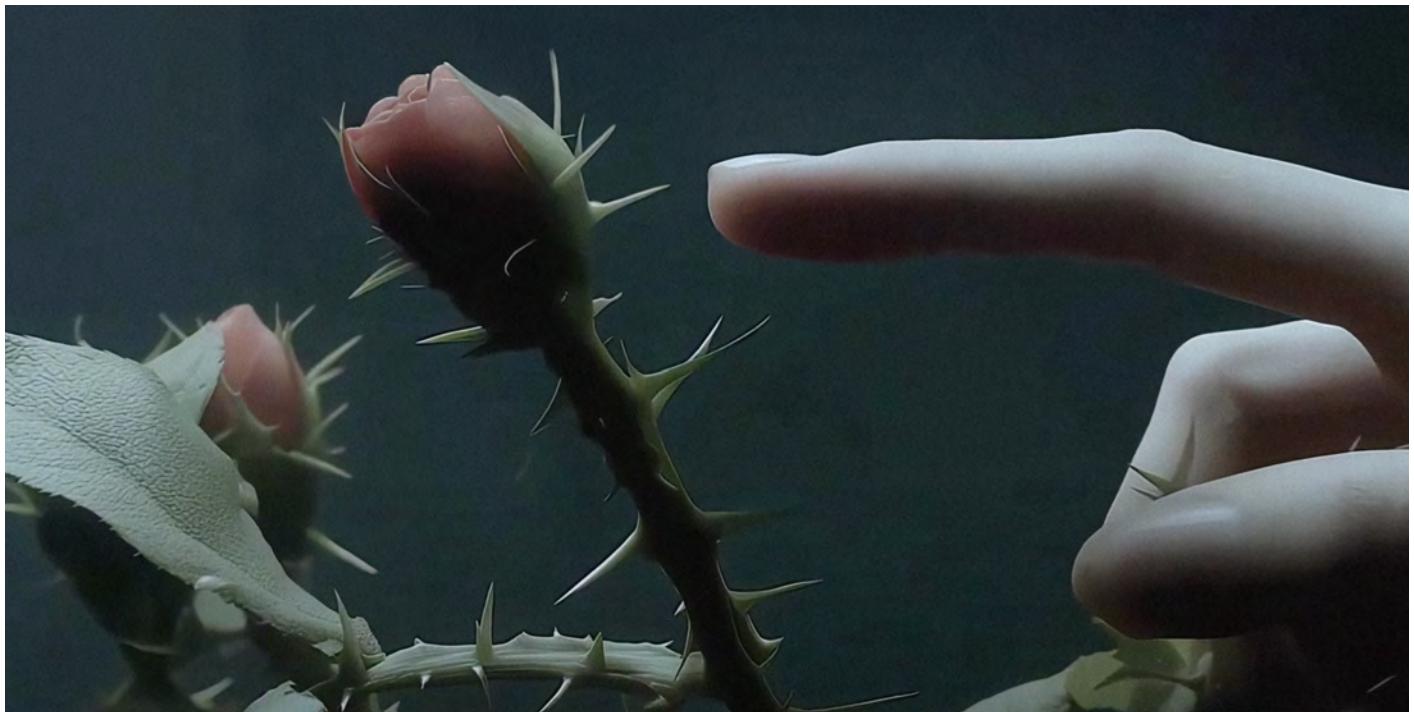
We're looking at multiple layers: conceptual clarity, technical fluency, execution, and innovation. We also consider the context—what tools were available at the time? What limitations did the creator work with? Some pieces made a year ago may feel simple now, but they were groundbreaking then.



ADC Awards AI Judge

“It’s not about novelty. It’s about why AI was used, and what it unlocked.”

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When asked if she considers AI a tool, collaborator or a creative in itself, she's strongly in the collaborator camp.

A.N.

Unlike legacy design tools, AI doesn't just respond to input —it generates options. It offers perspective. But that doesn't remove the role of the human. Taste still matters. Curation still matters. AI can't manufacture vision. It's the creative hand behind the tool that determines whether something resonates or not.



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What deems an award-winning piece of AI work?



A.N.

When you see it, you know. Work that pushes boundaries feels personal—it has a perspective. Whether it's a generative visual, a narrative film, or an AI system detecting diabetes through voice analysis, it's the creator's intent that shines.

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“Make us feel something.

When something makes you stop and feel something real, that's rare.

That's excellence.”



Interview with

Malcolm Poynton

Former Global
Chief Creative
Officer
*D&AD Trustee
and Judge*



Malcolm Poynton doesn't care for gimmicks. At D&AD, the bar's always been high—and AI isn't getting a free pass.

“The holy trinity of creative excellence entwines a robust strategy, with a fresh creative idea, executed exquisitely.”

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While other shows have birthed AI categories, D&AD embeds AI across disciplines—no novelty boxes here.



D&AD Trustee & Judge

M.P.

Entrants are asked to disclose if they used AI, where and how. We acknowledge its role, but the emphasis stays on conceptual brilliance and technical mastery.

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To Malcolm, AI is another Apple Mac moment, full of promise, but only as useful as the person driving it.

M.P.

I know several creators who treat AI like a collaborator. But from an industry perspective, it's still a tool. Just unlike anything we've seen before.

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And though the hype often touts AI as a democratizer, he's more cautious.

M.P.

Pro-level tools always deliver more, but they're only accessible to those who can pay. It's a stretch to say AI will democratize creativity more than any other tool we use.

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Still, he's curious to see what emerges—especially in film, where he says AI has yet to fully disrupt.

M.P.

AI is integrated into all categories at D&AD because its role can vary wildly. When the idea and execution are strong, the work will rise—regardless of whether the medium is human, machine, or both.

Issue No. 02—Episode 2

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can't make you
dangerous*
with

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EPISODE 1

EPISODE 2

EPISODE 3

