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Internet Celebrity, Digital Illustration, and Tradition: Rethinking Cultural Product Design For The Contemporary Age

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how traditional Chinese culture can be meaningfully integrated with digital illustration and the influence of internet celebrities to strengthen contemporary promotional strategies. Using the ‘Ballet Cat’ campaign by Great Wall Motors as a case study, the research adopts a project-based approach grounded in the author’s direct creative practice. The study considers cultural motifs, visual language, and the public persona of internet celebrities, and analyses how these elements interact in a commercial design context. Through iterative design development, collaborative feedback, and reflection on audience responses, the paper demonstrates how a culturally informed digital illustration can engage viewers, enhance brand identity, and sustain cultural resonance in a fast-moving digital environment. The findings highlight the value of uniting heritage and modern media, offering insights for designers seeking to produce digital cultural products that are both relevant and respectful of tradition.

Keywords: cultural product design, Chinese tradition, digital illustration, internet celebrity

Introduction

In an era inundated with digital transformations and the burgeoning culture of internet celebrities, the interplay between tradition and modernity in the domain of cultural product design is undergoing significant shifts. This project-based research posits a unique vantage point by juxtaposing the allure of internet celebrity culture, the artistry of digital illustration, and the gravitas of traditional ethos. While prior studies have independently explored each of these facets, this research delves into their confluence and its potential implications for modern cultural product design. The research problem this study addresses emanates from the observed disconnect between the swiftly advancing digital celebrity culture and the nuanced legacy of traditional design elements, particularly in the Chinese context. There is a gap in understanding how these digital-era phenomena can be harmoniously integrated with traditional design values to craft cultural products that resonate with contemporary audiences.

The need for this research is underscored by the accelerating pace at which digital platforms shape consumer perception and redefine cultural engagement. As visual content competes for increasingly limited attention spans, the ability to anchor modern promotional design in authentic cultural narratives has become both an urgent and strategic imperative. Without a deliberate integration of tradition into digital media practice, there is a risk that cultural heritage will be diluted or rendered invisible in the global digital landscape.

This results in a fragmented understanding that overlooks the potential synergies between these realms. Focusing on the project “Ballet Cat”, this study highlights an illustrative case of how such intersections can be conceived. “Ballet Cat” stands as a testament to the seamless fusion of digital illustration, the aura of internet celebrity culture, and deep-rooted Chinese traditions. By delving into studies that align directly with the thematic core of this project, we seek to offer insights into reimagining cultural product design for a generation at the crossroads of the past and the future. In encapsulation, this research not only contributes a fresh perspective on modern cultural product design but also sets a precedent for future explorations at the nexus of internet celebrity, digital artistry, and tradition.

‘Ballet Cat’ is a compact, retro-styled vehicle produced by Great Wall Motors under its Ora brand, launched with a distinct focus on female drivers. Its design draws inspiration from vintage European cars while incorporating elements associated with feminine elegance in Chinese visual culture. For the campaign analysed in this study, ‘Ballet Cat’ served not only as a product but also as a narrative focal point, around which a culturally infused digital illustration was created to merge traditional Chinese motifs with the aspirational and fashion-oriented aesthetics of internet celebrity culture.

Digital illustration has transformed visual storytelling and design pedagogy. Xiong (2024) illustrates the fusion of traditional Chinese painting with digital illustration in graphic design. Zhang (2020) integrates 3D interactive illustrations into art education. Hafsha (2020) and Zhu (2020) advocate for innovation in digital media art education, emphasizing adaptive teaching models. These works confirm digital illustration’s expanding role in visual culture and pedagogy.

Illustration acts as a cultural bridge, reflecting societal values through semiotic and aesthetic dimensions. Demir (2021) assert the illustrations’ ability to merge heritage with modern narratives. More recent research by Jin (2022) and Wang (2023) addresses digital integration of traditional arts in environmental design, product innovation, and museum graphics. The dynamic interplay between digital celebrity culture, illustration, and tradition highlights their collective potential in shaping contemporary Chinese cultural product design (Xuemin et al., 2024). These intersecting forces form a rich, evolving framework for understanding identity, consumerism, and creativity in the digital age (Pawar, 2025). The dynamic interplay between digital celebrity culture, illustration, and tradition highlights their collective potential in shaping contemporary Chinese cultural product design (Legino et al., 2021; 2024; Yuan, 2025). These intersecting forces form a rich, evolving framework for understanding identity, consumerism, and creativity in the digital age.

Framework for Cultural Digital Promotion

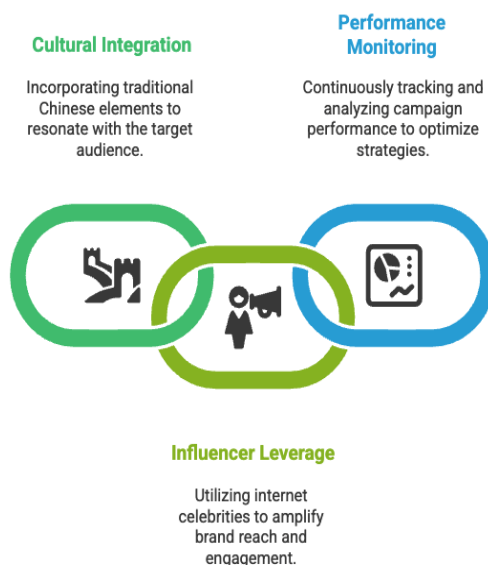


Figure 1. Methodological Framework for Developing a Culturally Infused Digital Illustration to Promote an Automobile Enterprise on Weibo. (You Xuemin, 2025).

Methods

As shown in Figure 1, this methodology presents a structured framework for developing a culturally infused digital illustration to promote an automobile brand on Weibo, a leading Chinese social media platform. It integrates traditional Chinese cultural elements with the contemporary influence of internet celebrities to engage Weibo's broad user base. Beginning with a literature review highlighting illustrations as cultural products, the approach emphasises the fusion of heritage and modernity. The aim is to produce a visually compelling and culturally resonant promotional illustration that effectively captures audience interest and enhances brand visibility.

The process of creating an illustration for an automobile enterprise's Weibo campaign integrates traditional Chinese elements and celebrity influence through a structured approach shown in Figure 2.

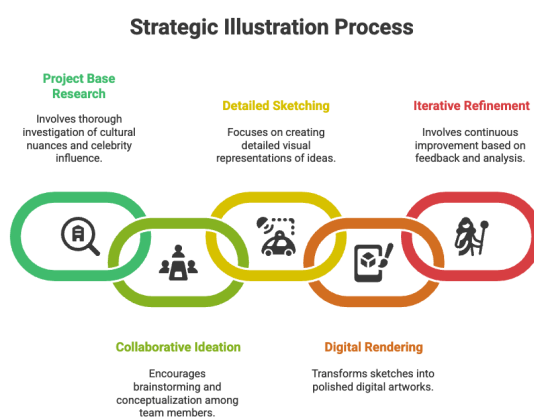


Figure 2. Strategic Illustration Process for Culturally Relevant Digital Campaigns. (You Xuemin, 2025).

This visual outlines a five-phase process for developing impactful digital illustrations: Project-Based Research, Collaborative Ideation, Detailed Sketching, Digital Rendering, and Iterative Refinement. Each phase emphasizes the integration of cultural nuances and celebrity influence, team-driven creativity, precise visual development, and continuous improvement to produce effective, audience-tailored digital artworks.

The project-based research involves studying key symbols, colors, motifs, and patterns integral to Chinese culture, alongside analysing the popular internet celebrities on Weibo who resonate with the automobile demographic. Ideation comprises collaborative brainstorming with design teams, marketing professionals, and cultural consultants, followed by sketching to visualize the fusion of traditional elements with celebrity aesthetics. In the design development phase, sketches are transformed into digital mock-ups using art software, adaptable for various Weibo formats, with iterative feedback from stakeholders and audience samples ensuring alignment with project objectives. The integration of the celebrity element involves incorporating a well-known internet celebrity's likeness or a style associated with them, along with engagement mechanisms suitable for Weibo.

Finalization includes refining the illustration to ensure cultural sensitivity and brand alignment, followed by securing approvals. The promotion strategy involves collaboration with the marketing team for a launch strategy on Weibo, leveraging optimal posting times and hashtags, and ideally, endorsement by the featured celebrity to amplify reach. Post-launch, the illustration's performance is evaluated using Weibo analytics to track engagement metrics, which were gathered from the various stakeholders. Reflection and iteration based on this feedback aim to improve future endeavours. The Project-Based Research phase was rooted in the author's direct involvement in the design process, beginning with a comprehensive literature review on cultural symbolism and digital marketing trends in China. This was followed by visual analysis of comparable campaigns, field observations of automotive brand showrooms, and monitoring of internet celebrity activity on Weibo to identify engagement strategies relevant to the target audience. The author collaborated with a core design team and cultural consultants to extract and catalogue traditional Chinese motifs, colour palettes, and compositional styles suitable for integration. The outputs from this phase included a structured cultural element inventory, audience persona profiles, and a visual mood board aligning traditional heritage with contemporary internet culture.

The combination of Chinese traditional culture, the magnetism of internet celebrities, and the expansive reach of Weibo offers a potent mix for the commercial promotion of the automobile enterprise. Through this project-based methodology, the aim is to craft an illustration that doesn't merely promote but celebrates the confluence of heritage and modernity in the digital age.

Finding and Discussion

The "Ballet Cat" promotional campaign for Great Wall Motors' Ora Brand, executed on Weibo, skilfully fused digital illustration with traditional Chinese cultural aesthetics, debuting on July 27th, 2022 (see Figure 3). It achieved substantial engagement, evidenced by its 1.66 million views and 3,409 likes, indicating a wide reach and a positive audience reception. This success was realized within a notably efficient 15-day production timeline, highlighting the campaign's effectiveness in concept development, design, iteration, and final execution.



Figure 3. “Ballet Cat”. Culturally-Infused Digital Illustration for Automobile Promotion. (You Xuemin, 2022).

This artwork blends traditional Chinese aesthetics with contemporary visual storytelling. Featuring a poised female figure styled with retro-modern elegance, the composition integrates floral motifs, architectural arches, and a classic car to evoke both heritage and modern luxury. The visual narrative aligns with internet celebrity aesthetics, appealing to Weibo audiences while highlighting cultural sophistication and brand allure.

Table 1. Ballet Cat Illustration Analysis

Ballet Cat Illustration Analysis	
Character Pose and Attire	Elegant stance with a fitted dress referencing 1950s silhouettes; conveys refinement and femininity, appealing to aspirational lifestyle values.
Colour Palette	Muted turquoise and soft cream inspired by Song Dynasty ceramics; signals cultural heritage and calm sophistication.
Floral Motifs	Peony and chrysanthemum patterns integrated into the frame; symbolise prosperity and beauty in Chinese culture.
Architectural Background	Archway with curved detailing reminiscent of Art Nouveau; creates depth and blends European vintage aesthetics with Chinese elegance.
Classic Car Depiction	Retro-styled vehicle as focal product; reinforces nostalgia while linking to modern brand identity.

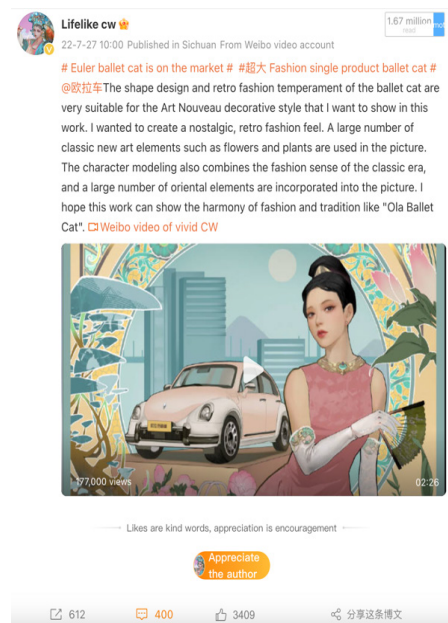


Figure 4. Weibo Post Featuring “Ballet Cat” Campaign Illustration. (You Xuemin, 2022).

This Weibo post showcases a digital illustration from the “Ballet Cat” campaign, blending Art Nouveau and retro fashion aesthetics (see Figure 4). As shown in Table 1, the character design incorporates traditional Chinese elements—such as floral motifs and Oriental architectural features—while showcasing a classic car model. The post emphasizes the harmony of modern fashion with cultural heritage, capturing the visual sensibilities of internet celebrity culture to engage Weibo’s fashion-conscious audience. The video gained significant traction with over 1.67 million views. Art Nouveau is distinguished by its flowing, organic lines—often called whiplash curves—derived from natural forms such as plants and flowers. These sinuous, asymmetrical lines are prominent in architecture and decorative arts, enhancing compositions with rhythmic and dynamic elegance (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025; Attia, 2019)). In contrast, retro fashion aesthetics draw upon nostalgia for mid-century styles, using vintage-inspired colour palettes, bold prints, and period-specific motifs to evoke cultural familiarity and authenticity (Ugrekhelidze, 2024).

The design’s inception was rooted in specific product information shared by the client: The Ora “Ballet Cat” signifies Ora’s commitment to “Love Women More.” It stands as the automobile industry’s pioneering vehicle, exclusively tailored for women. Through the distinctive features and configurations of the “Ballet Cat”, Ora aims to convey love in its multifaceted forms – a parent’s love for their daughter, a husband’s love for his wife, and the intrinsic love women have for self-pampering. Ora envisions the “Ballet Cat” to be synonymous with three quintessential items in a woman’s life: lipstick, handbag, and the Ballet Cat itself, heralding a romance renaissance.

The conceptual design for the targeted demographic, exclusively focused on women, adopts a revivalist aesthetic approach that harmoniously blends contemporary sensibilities with traditional elements. The aesthetic colour palette is inspired by the timeless beauty of Song Dynasty ceramics, which are globally acknowledged for their aesthetic excellence.

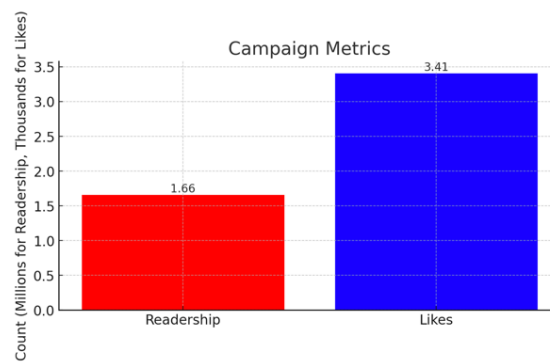


Figure 5. Campaign Performance Metrics on Weibo. (You Xuemin, 2022).

As illustrated in Figure 5, the campaign launched on July 27, 2022, received an outstanding reception, drawing a readership of 1.66 million and accumulating 3,409 likes. This success can be attributed to the strategic integration of traditional Chinese cultural elements with modern internet celebrity aesthetics, significantly enhancing the campaign's commercial promotion and product exposure.

The entire design, conceptualisation, and production process spanned 15 days, showcasing the team's efficiency and commitment to delivering excellence within tight schedules. The process is as follows: The project initiation and background study began with a comprehensive literature review focused on the intersection of digital illustration as a cultural product, particularly within the context of Chinese traditional culture. This was followed by identifying a unique gap in merging digital illustration, internet celebrity culture, and Chinese tradition for effective commercial promotion.

The development of the digital illustration framework entailed defining digital illustration in terms of art, techniques, and aesthetic value, understanding the transformation of traditional art into digital forms, and integrating artistic philosophies from Chinese traditional art, including colour theory and symbolic design forms. The incorporation of internet celebrity influence involved analysing current trends on Weibo, particularly those of internet celebrities, and developing concepts that blend these modern elements with traditional Chinese aesthetics.

The design iteration and prototyping phase included creating multiple digital illustration drafts for the automobile enterprise's promotion, engaging in a feedback loop with stakeholders, and refining designs based on this feedback. Finalising the design for commercial promotion involved integrating the digital illustration with the automobile enterprise's branding elements and developing a comprehensive promotional strategy on Weibo. This strategy encompassed audience analysis, collaboration with internet celebrities, creation of a content calendar for phased rollout, organisation of engagement activities, and allocation of budget for paid promotions on Weibo, all aimed at resonating with the target audience and maximizing engagement.

In the post-campaign review, lessons learned were meticulously analysed, including the evaluation of success metrics to identify content types and collaborations that resonated exceptionally well with the audience. Challenges encountered, such as less engaging content or technical issues, were also delved into for improvement opportunities. A comparative analysis with similar promotions offered a broader perspective on effectiveness. Stakeholder feedback was crucial, encompassing

insights from the automobile enterprise on ROI and brand visibility, post-collaboration reviews with internet celebrities for their unique audience insights, creative team insights on design constraints, and audience feedback compilation from Weibo for direct insights.

The refinement and forward planning involved evolving the promotional strategy based on feedback, identifying potential future collaborations, and considering new design directions for the next cultural product. Knowledge consolidation included archiving data and documenting strategies, while team reflection and growth focused on debrief sessions and skill development. Innovative exploration looked into integrating emerging technologies like AR, AI, and VR, and considering cross-platform synergy.

Finally, maintaining a feedback loop with stakeholders and celebrating successes helped strengthen long-term relationships and team morale. In summary, a post-campaign review isn't just about reflecting on what transpired but is an active exercise in forward-thinking. It's about recognizing the potent blend of tradition and modernity that digital illustrations as cultural products represent and ensuring that this fusion remains resonant, relevant, and revolutionary in the ever-evolving digital landscape. In the realm of modern design, digital illustration emerges as a versatile tool, offering flexibility, adaptability, and an expansive range of design possibilities. The project demonstrated this versatility through the integration of traditional design elements, such as a colour palette inspired by Song Dynasty ceramics, into a modern digital framework, exemplifying the adaptability of digital illustration tools. These tools facilitate rapid iterations and feedback, thereby enhancing the design's quality and relevance.

The power of tradition in modern promotion was clearly evident in the overwhelming positive response to the campaign. By grounding the design in the aesthetic principles of Song Dynasty ceramics, a balance was struck between familiar cultural motifs and contemporary design elements, appealing to a wide audience spectrum. The role of internet celebrity influence in cultural product design was also underscored, particularly in the "Ballet Cat" campaign. The association with online personalities on digital platforms significantly boosted the visibility and appeal of the product. Furthermore, the campaign achieved a synergy between commercial success and cultural resonance, presenting the "Ballet Cat" not merely as a product but as a cultural artifact that resonates with themes of femininity and tradition, thus merging business objectives with cultural expression. While the campaign was largely successful, it is important to recognize potential challenges, such as the need for careful integration of traditional elements to avoid oversimplification or misrepresentation.

Future endeavours could explore more nuanced aspects of traditional culture, delving into lesser-known motifs and narratives, thus presenting opportunities for even deeper cultural engagement. The "Ballet Cat" promotional campaign serves as an insightful case study in the realm of cultural product design within the digital age, highlighting the synergistic potential of combining traditional motifs with modern digital design methodologies. A key takeaway is the enduring charm and resonance of traditional aesthetics like those derived from Song Dynasty ceramics in crafting impactful digital narratives, which offer familiarity and connection to local audiences and novelty to international ones. The campaign's success on Weibo underscores the evolving role of digital platforms in promotions, demonstrating that targeted, platform-specific promotions can yield significant engagement. The focus on femininity in the "Ballet Cat" campaign offers insights into targeted product design and

promotion, showing that niche targeting can lead to broader acceptance if the narrative resonates authentically with the target group. Looking to the future, the integration of culture and tradition in product design and promotion emerges as a promising avenue for differentiation in a crowded market, turning products into narratives and experiences.

The campaign's use of internet celebrity aesthetics blended with traditional motifs, resulting in over 1.66 million views and 3,409 engagements, illustrates the effectiveness of this approach. Future cultural product designs can benefit from this dual approach of honouring tradition while embracing modernity, balancing cultural roots with contemporary relevance. However, the rapid design and production timeline of 15 days also raises questions about the depth of research and cultural sensitivity, emphasising the need for a balance between speed and depth to ensure cultural nuances are accurately represented. The "Ballet Cat" campaign, therefore, offers a template for future endeavours, highlighting the importance of genuine, well-researched, and respectful integration of cultural elements in digital age product design.

In the panorama of digital advertising, where attention spans are dwindling and competition is fierce, the "Ballet Cat" project emerges as a beacon of innovative strategy. It masterfully combines the rich tapestry of Chinese culture with the vibrancy of digital design and influencer aesthetics, crafting a narrative that is both deep-rooted and forward-looking. As we navigate the future of cultural product design, this campaign stands as a testament to the endless possibilities at the intersection of tradition and digital innovation.

In a world teeming with digital distractions and constant flux, the potent power of an illustration—a blend of art and cultural reflection—remains unparalleled. Throughout history, illustrations have played a central role in shaping and recording cultures, often wielding a silent yet profound influence. Through a discerning lens, let's delve into the depth of the role of illustration as a formidable cultural product. Consider the potency of a single image: it can speak a thousand words, influence opinions, and trigger deep introspection. Illustrations, whether in magazines, billboards, or online platforms, are not merely decorative elements. They are narratives in themselves, carefully constructed stories that reflect society's zeitgeist. They require no translation, break through language barriers, and can speak universally. An illustration from a 1950s American magazine depicting a suburban family provides invaluable insights into the societal ideals of that era, just as a caricature of modern urban life today might speak volumes about our current values and priorities.

Illustrations, by their very nature, are persuasive. They are crafted with intent. Propaganda posters from wartime eras or advertisements of global brands stand as testimony to the idea that illustrations are used to influence public perception and behaviour. Their efficacy lies in their immediate impact; an illustration can capture complex narratives in a single frame, making them more digestible and relatable to the masses. Perhaps the most captivating facet of illustration is its ability to intertwine tradition with modernity.

The revival of traditional art forms within modern contexts serves as a testament to the adaptability and timelessness of illustrations. Contemporary artists drawing inspiration from ancient scriptures, folklore, or indigenous art forms give new life to ancestral stories, seamlessly blending them into our current narrative. This serves a dual purpose: paying homage to cultural roots while ensuring their relevance in today's discourse.

The economic impact of illustrations is undeniable. The realm of illustration isn't restricted to artistic expression alone; it has robust commercial implications. From brand logos that become global icons to animated movies that generate billions, illustrations drive commerce. They shape consumer perceptions, influence buying behaviours, and foster brand loyalties. In the ever-competitive market landscape, a memorable illustration can set a product apart, making it instantly recognizable and appealing. Digital advancements have given illustration new wings. Digital art, with its array of tools, has made it possible to conjure visuals that were once beyond imagination.

But more than that, the digital space has democratized illustration, making it accessible to all. Today, every meme shared, every infographic designed, and every digital artwork created is a nod to the expansive realm of digital illustration. In the annals of history, when future generations seek to understand the past, illustrations will play a crucial role. They will serve as windows into bygone eras, offering insights into societal structures, beliefs, aspirations, fears, and milestones. In essence, illustrations are time capsules, preserving moments in their raw, unfiltered essence.

In summary, Illustration, as a cultural product, is both a mirror reflecting society and a compass guiding it. Its power lies in its simplicity, its universality, and its ability to communicate without boundaries. As society evolves, so will the art of illustration, forever capturing the heart and soul of culture. To underestimate its impact would be to overlook the very threads that weave the fabric of our shared history and future.

Conclusions

This study has addressed its three stated objectives through the case of the 'Ballet Cat' campaign by Great Wall Motors' Ora brand. First, in assessing the influence of internet celebrities on modern cultural product design, the findings confirm that celebrity-associated aesthetics significantly enhance visibility and audience engagement when carefully aligned with brand and cultural narratives. The integration of internet celebrity appeal into the campaign design contributed to a distinctive visual identity that resonated strongly with the target demographic.

Second, in examining the role of digital illustration as a bridge between the old and the new, the study demonstrated that a deliberate combination of traditional Chinese motifs—such as floral patterns and colour schemes derived from Song Dynasty ceramics—with modern stylistic influences like Art Nouveau and retro fashion can create a compelling hybrid aesthetic. This synthesis not only preserves cultural authenticity but also ensures contemporary relevance in competitive digital spaces. Third, in proposing design strategies that integrate both traditional and contemporary trends, the research identifies the value of a project-based methodology that foregrounds cultural research, collaborative ideation, and iterative refinement. The recommended approach involves grounding design concepts in heritage-informed visual inventories, embedding them within trend-conscious compositions, and validating outcomes through targeted audience feedback.

Overall, the study reinforces the potential of harmonizing tradition and modernity in cultural product design, particularly within digital marketing contexts. It offers a replicable framework for designers and brands seeking to craft digital cultural products that are both commercially effective and culturally respectful, ensuring that heritage remains a living and evolving presence in contemporary creative practice.

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