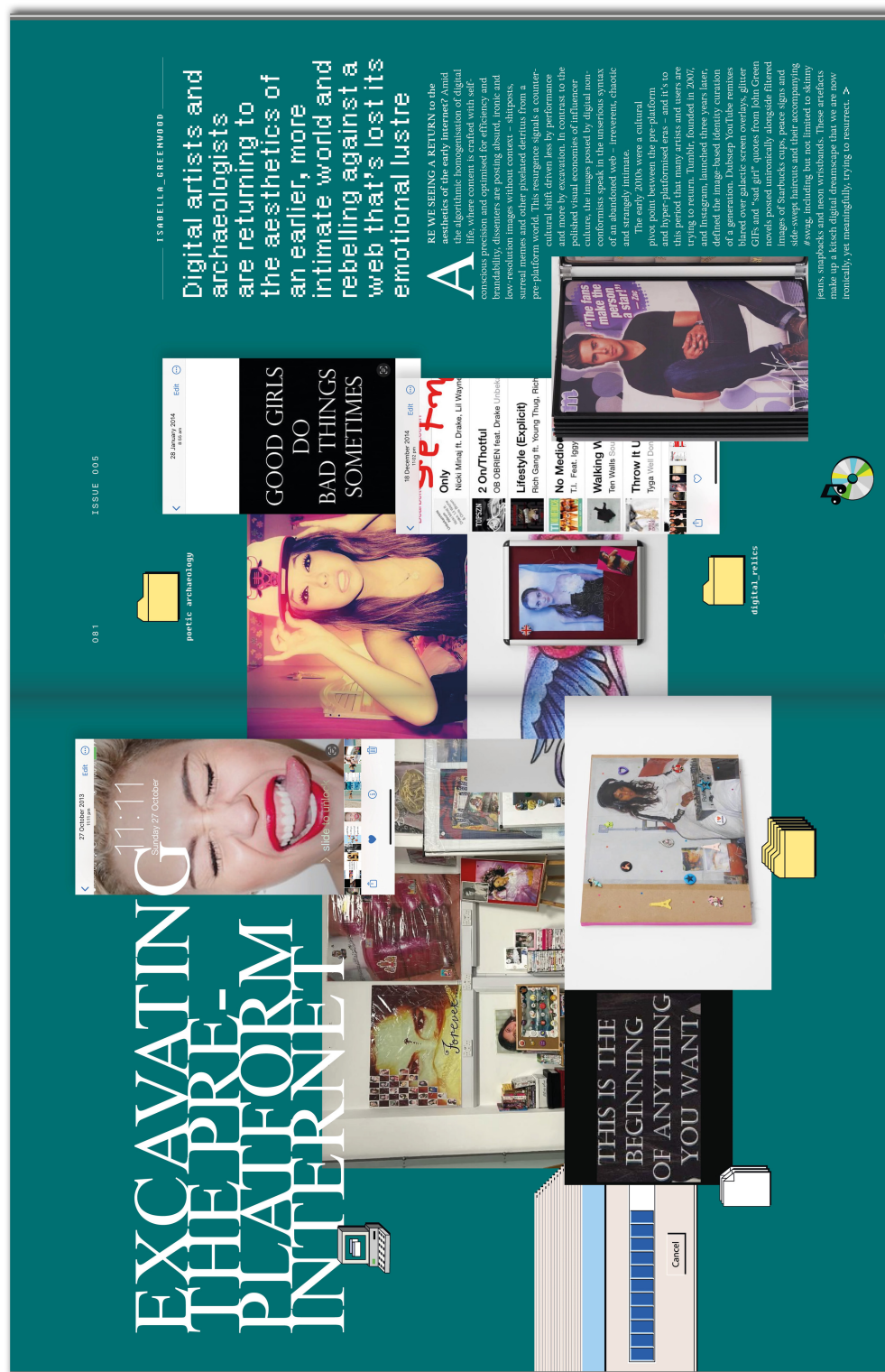
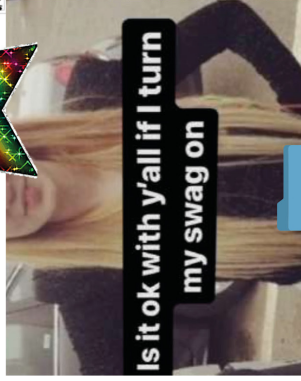




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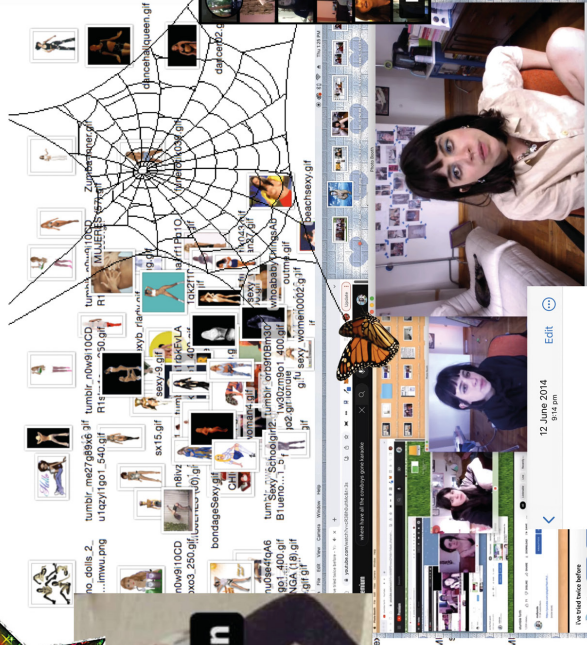


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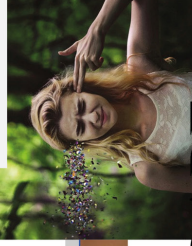
girl memes :)



082

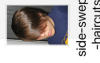
083

ISSUE 005



“HOW DARE YOU, YOU LIES TO PEOPLE, WE’LL YOU SHOULD LEARN THAT EVERYONE IS LYING ONLINE”

AMALIA ULMAN ARTIST & FILM-MAKER



side-swept -haircuts

DO_NOT_OPEN

Recent memory

The revival of 2010s imagery is less about stylised nostalgia and more about recuperating a way of being online that was unguarded, emotionally maximalist and unconcerned with algorithmic discipline. It speaks to a generation who came of age on platforms before they understood they were platforms, when self-documentation was intimate rather than strategic and when online identity felt exploratory rather than performative. There is a rawness to early web2 iconography that contemporary internet culture, with its emphasis on clarity, aesthetic minimalism and micro-visibility, seeks to smooth over. If the current online climate is about intense curation with the potential for profit, the early days of the social internet were its opposite: messy, kitschy and whimsically aimless digital experimentation.

By taking from the internet's past, artists mess with the distinction between sincerity and irony. We live in the algorithmic age, so being confronted by the earnestness of the early web is destabilising. This ambiguity reflects what cultural theorist Mark Fisher describes as hauntings: the persistence of lost futures and the return of cultural forms that no longer exist yet continue to shape the present. Within this framework, the digital traces left

behind by obsolete platforms still influence us, revealing how our identities and emotions are shaped by changing technology.

Artists such as New York-based Molly Soda have become archaeologists of the pre-polished digital world. Her practice centres on archiving the aesthetics and emotional textures of early social-internet gridhood. Her book “There’s a Star in My Future” takes the textual excess of the blogosphere and reframes it as theatre: Arial font dreams about ex-boyfriends and chainsaws, emotional melodrama is wallpapered in hyperlinked images and phrases, dancing emoticons, YouTube performances and digital folders filled with screenshots of hairpins and photo booth selfies. It’s designed to function as a trapdoor into the past.

Reflecting on the transient nature of digital content, Soda, in conversation with Claire Evans for *Foundation* in 2020, remarked: “I’m sad that I didn’t save screenshots of more of my early-internet interactions, because now I have to cobble it together via memory.” She also noted, in a 2018 interview with web3 marketplace Digital Objects, the challenges of preserving digital artefacts: “I’m still unsure about how digital work is valued in the ‘art world’. People want things they can touch or hang. There’s a lot of instability with files, especially as technology is rapidly changing and we’re not sure what the future is going to look like.”

These reflections underscore the intentionality behind Soda’s archival approach, positioning her work as both a preservation of and commentary on the fleeting nature of early internet culture. By embracing the ephemeral and the personal, she crafts digital spaces that honour the past while critically engaging with the present.

The same archival impulse is evident in the work of Amalia Ulman. In her 2014 performance, “Excellences and Perfections”, the Argentine-Spanish artist adopted a series of feminine Instagram personas to parody and critique the performance of femininity online – for five months, Ulman’s work, hosted on an outdated website with a static web aesthetic, reanimates the digital ephemera of the late 2000s and early 2010s to expose the constructedness of identity under late-capitalist media logic. The look is not simply nostalgic but strategic: it draws attention to the performance of authenticity within the platform economy.

In a 2015 chat with *Interview* magazine, Ulman said: “With ‘Excellences and Perfections’, people got so mad at me for using fiction. That was the main critique: ‘It wasn’t the truth? How dare you! You lied to people.’ Well, that’s because you should learn that everyone is lying online. I’m not the first one!” The internet has always, by virtue of being an alternative to the physical realm, been a platform of performance. ➤

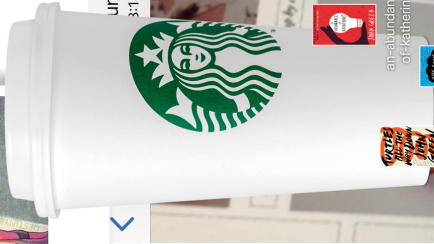
nothing is forever



084

ISSUE 005

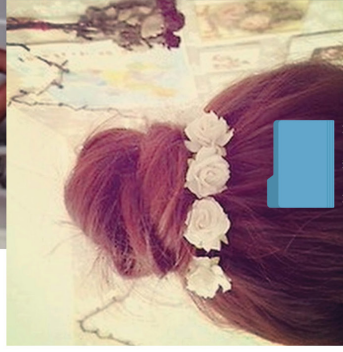
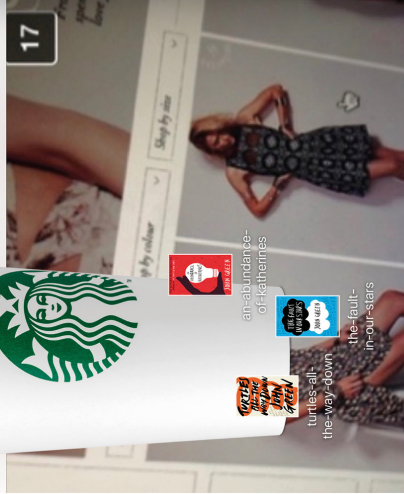
085



June 2014
3:18 pm

Edit

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Xx_selfies_xx



omegle-screenshots

British-Indian artist duo Athen Kardashian and Nina Mhach Durban also mine this early internet vernacular, collaging the ephemera of 2000s girlhood into a devotional aesthetic. Posters of Zac Efron, winged images of "Gossip Girl" actor Leighton Meester and bulletin boards filled with celebrity crushes serve as visual relics, exhibited in the likes of London galleries Soup, Forma and Indigo+Madder. Their work reframes these icons not as trivial fantasies but as the mythic figures of digital adolescence. This is but a kind of memory work, preserving not just objects but the world-building rituals of girlhood on the early web.

Isn't it ironic?

What unites Soda, Ulman and Kardashian and Durban is a poetics of digital intimacy. They are not merely indulging in nostalgia; they are constructing an alternative digital archive and challenging the logics of speed, polish and profit that define platform capitalism. HTML-only journals, glimmering desktop shrines and hand-coded websites communicate an aesthetic resistance to the homogeneity of social media. Not only do these artists resist streamability, they also use irony. As cultural theorist Linda Hutcheon suggests in her 1994 book "Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony", irony is both a form of participation and critique – a double-coded mode that enables distance and engagement. In the context of early internet and Tumblr-style imagery, irony functions not to detach but to protect. It is a buffer against the commodification of vulnerability. The glitter GIF, the melodramatic quote, the low-res meme – these elements wear their unseriousness as armour, exposing the absurdity of optimism culture while preserving emotional sincerity beneath the surface.

Similarly, kitsch – now recognised as one of the early internet's defining modes – becomes a political tool. As theorised by essayist and art critic Clement Greenberg, and later rehabilitated by cultural studies scholars, kitsch represents both mass cultural excess and emotional authenticity. Artists wield garish early internet visuals not with mockery but with reverence.

We can think of our nostalgic memories of the online world as histories of the future – a sentiment that echoes the cyclical temporality of the early internet's cultural revival. When we engage in nostalgic acts, we are not just remembering a past as it once was; we are projecting onto it the hopes, absences and possibilities of our present. In his 2003 book, "Present Tense: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory", German cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen notes how nostalgia often emerges most forcefully not in times of historical certainty but during moments of perceived dislocation. The past becomes a screen onto which we project our longings for futures that feel increasingly foreclosed.

I had this dream last night and in it I was really really beautiful. Like me but not me. Anyway, I was trying to kill my boyfriend with a chainsaw because I had decided I didn't like him anymore. My friends had all left for the movies, and I stayed behind at my boyfriend's house with him and then I killed him with another friend of mine. We ran out of the house and found my other friends and then magically, the next day at school my boyfriend was still alive. He was sitting on the floor of the gym across from me, and I realized he was cute and that I still liked him and didn't want to kill him anymore. So I acted like nothing had happened and we watched the kids run laps around the track.

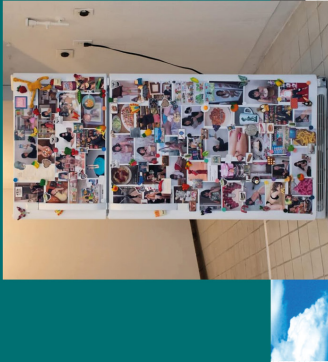
THE AESTHETICS OF EARLY INTERNET CULTURE ARE MEDIATED THROUGH LOSS, IMBUED WITH THE DESIRE TO ESCAPE THE PRESENT

Early internet nostalgia, then, is a historiographic tool: it generates speculative futures from half-imagined pasts. What we remember is shaped by what we fear we've lost – and what we desire to become.

Within this frame, the likes of MySpace, Tumblr and early message boards become emotional architectures as well as technical artefacts. They're remnants of perceived freedom, intimacy and uncensored identity that stand in contrast to the algorithmic enclosure of the contemporary web. Our affective longing for them functions as a kind of archive, animating what new-media scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun describes as the "enduring ephemeral" – the way digital media simulates persistence while being in a state of constant degradation and overwriting memory. Nostalgia is a way to resist that erasure.

Speculative nostalgia

Revivalist subcultures don't want to restore the past. Instead, through artists' desire for nostalgia, they remix and update it to make it more accessible. This way, images are able to linger and resurface uninvited, resisting the neat timekeeping of trend cycles. In this sense, these images are closer to hauntings than to happenings. ➤



Amalia's Website

Welcome to my website! Here you will find information about my work.

- ✓ Jenny's at Jenny's [Link](#)
- ✓ El Planeta [Link](#)
- ✓ Film Competition [Link](#)
- ✓ Social Scandal [Link](#)
- ✓ Buyer Walker Rover (Vivo) Also, Then There ART MUSEUM
- ✓ International Enigme at Online Culture
- ✓ Privilege
- ✓ Excellence & Perfection Archive
- ✓ Stock Images of War
- ✓ The Destruction of Experience
- ✓ Moments of Private
- ✓ The Future Ahead
- ✓ Buyer Walker Rover
- ✓ Promise a Future

March 2022

→ **"The End" XV SIT _AC_ @ Museo Nacional de Antropología**
The International Symposium on Contemporary Art Theory (SIT _AC_) is a periodical event organized by Patrimonio de Arte Contemporáneo (PAC) that aims to promote a critical discussion on contemporary art.

March 2022

→ **El Planeta Wins the Heterodox award @**
Cinema Eyn was founded in 2007 on three ideals of

The images circulate through social networks not as updates but as artefacts, actively disrupting the linear momentum of feed culture. As digital ghosts, they resurface within the present to unsettle its claim to novelty – insisting that the past is not behind us but encoded into the architectures of the now.

This return, however, is not always innocent. As art historian Hal Foster writes in 1996's "The Return of the Real", we often seek to revisit a historical past that has been mythologised, not as it was but as a future that never came to be. The aesthetics of early internet culture are therefore mediated through loss. They serve as "digital relics" imbued with the desire to escape the hyper-commercialisation of the present.

In the early 2010s, online arenas for identity exploration were largely unregulated. Platforms such as SnapSave exploited users' private images before legislation caught up. Eating-disorder content circulated with impunity, with forums like MyProAna ("pro-ana" refers to the promotion of anorexia) offering "thinspiration" tips disguised as community support and Tumblr tags like #anospo and #ana left unchecked for years. The likes of Kik, Ask.fm, LiveJournal and Omigle offered

TUMBLR REVIVALISM IS A RETURN FROM THE FUTURE AND A SURFACING OF THE REPRESSED



(<https://www.tumblr.com/reblo>)



2010s ephemer

no protection, their disclosures vulnerable to trolling or doxxing. Early YouTube confessionals, often filmed on webcams in bedrooms, revealed deeply personal narratives that could be co-opted, mocked or monetised. The absence of moderation made the internet a raw and fertile space for self-making but it was also deeply unsafe. Despite our aestheticisation of the early web, it was no haven. The myth of a "better internet" is an organising fiction designed not to retrieve but to reorient. Through this lens, digital nostalgia isn't regressive; it's speculative – a way of mapping desire and loss onto virtual terrain in the hope of revealing latent architectures for autonomy, resistance and more complex forms of relationality online.

We could consider the artistic practices of partaking in digital nostalgia – whether archiving the aesthetics and emotional textures of online girlhood, adopting personas and telling stories, or using irony and kitsch – as forms of poetic archaeology. The internet is not a neutral archive without perils and performances. To retrieve and recontextualise fragments of the early web is to find value in what has been discarded, to unearth humour in the chaos of what the online world has become. This way, digital relics are more than nostalgic tokens; they are ritual objects charged with meaning and memory. Tumblr revivalism and post-internet ironic aesthetics, then, are not a return to the regressive sense. Rather, they are, in Foster's terms, a return from the future, a surfacing of the repressed, a reactivation of the positive dormant energies in the digital unconscious.

The digital artists reflecting on past internet ephemera honour the weird, the failed and the unoptimised. Perhaps what draws these creatives to early internet relics and inspires them to rebel against the smooth, contemporary internet landscape are not just the aesthetics but the feelings they once held: the intimacy, the obscurity and the ability to perform online without worrying about having to curate an alternate, polished version of yourself. Haunted and ironic pre-platform relics do not just reflect the past; they offer an alternative timeline that runs counter to the linearity of platform evolution and the slick inevitability of algorithmic aesthetics.

Vulnerability and humour can co-exist in this space. This was essential to the early social internet but is something we seem to have lost during its development and corporatisation. These creators resist digital conformity not through spectacle but through the quiet persistence of re-enchantment, mining the margins, preserving the textures and reanimating what was once deemed obsolete. In doing so, they chart out a digital practice that is not solely nostalgic but is defiantly out of sync with what the contemporary internet expects of us. In their refusal to conform, these artists map new terrains for what digital life may still become. **Q**

Digital Relics, Cursed Images Post Internet Irony and Neo-Tumblr Revivalism: *A Poetic Archaeology of Our Return to Pre-Platform Internet*

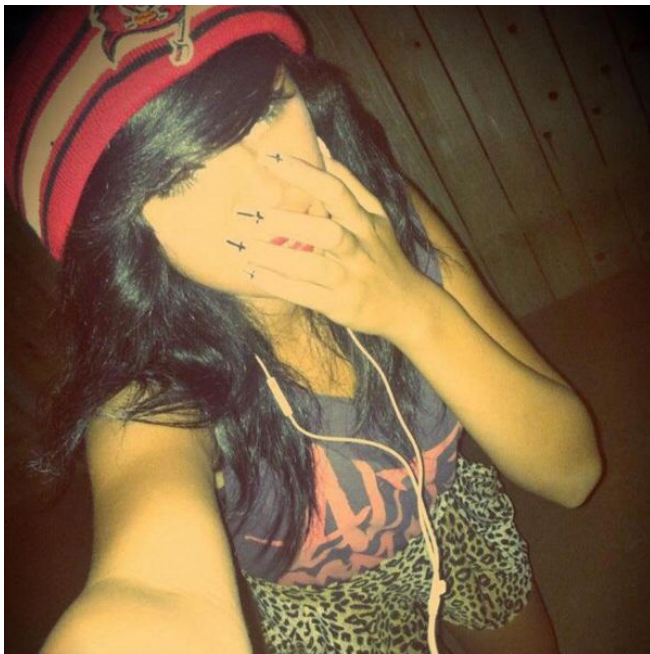
Isabella Greenwood [TEXT]

Amidst the algorithmic homogenisation of digital life, where content is crafted with self-conscious precision, optimised for efficiency and brandability, we're witnessing a return to "cursed images" of the early internet — ironic, low-res, contextless, and absurd; shitposts, jpeg rot, surreal memes, and other pixelated artefacts of a pre-platform world. Signalling a countercultural shift driven less by performance and more by excavation, this resurgence is led by digital nonconformists — artists and users who resist the streamlined aesthetics of today's web, returning instead to the pre-metric feed in search of something we may have left behind. In contrast to the polished visual economies of influencer culture, these images speak in the unserious syntax of a forgotten web — irreverent, chaotic, and strangely intimate.

The early 2010s — a cultural hinge between pre-platform and hyper-platformised eras — serve as the genesis for this return. Tumblr, founded in 2007, and Instagram, launched in 2010, came to define the image-based identity curation of a generation. Yet beneath the sheen of palm tree sunsets and Alexis Ren-style aspirational fitness culture (the aesthetic

precursor to today's "clean girl" or Stanley Cup-wielding Pilates influencer aesthetic) was a strange melancholia.

Dubstep YouTube remixes blared over galactic overlays, glitter GIFs and sad girl quotes from John Green novels posted unironically alongside filtered images of Starbucks cups, peace signs, rio-de-janeiro overlays, side swept haircuts and all of their accompanying #swag: neon wristbands, low resolution photo booth selfies, peace signs, snapbacks, pouting lips and rawr XD'ers. These artefacts remain frozen in a collective digital unconscious, a kitsch dreamscape we seek to – ironically – yet meaningfully, resurrect.



Courtesy of writers camera roll (2013-2014)

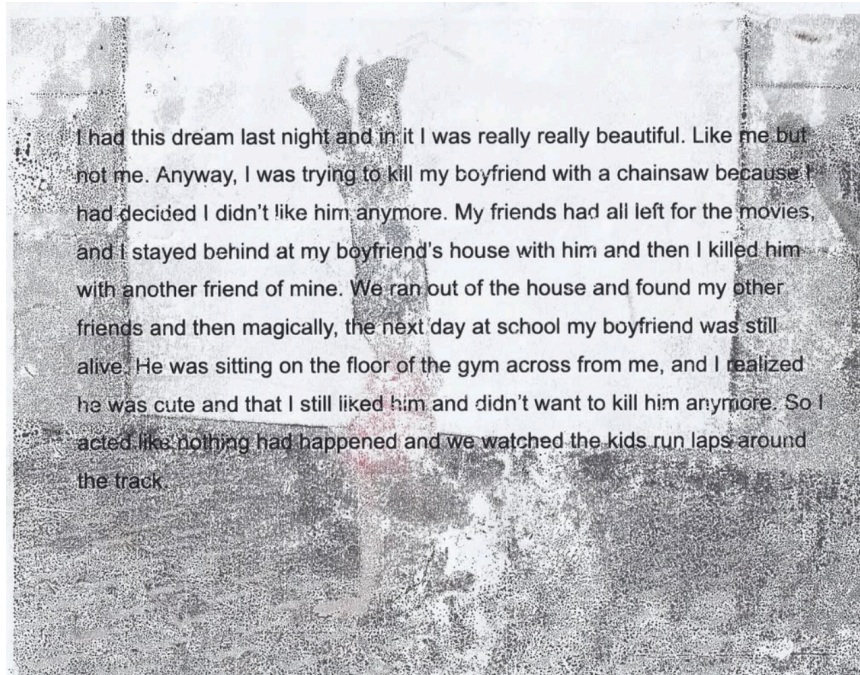
The revival of this era's imagery is less about stylised nostalgia, and more about recuperating a mode of being online that was unguarded, emotionally

maximalist and unconcerned with algorithmic discipline. It speaks to a generation who came of age on platforms before they understood they were platforms — when self-documentation was intimate rather than strategic, and when online identity felt exploratory rather than extractive. There is a rawness to early internet iconography, that contemporary internet culture, with its emphasis on clarity, aesthetic minimalism and micro-virality, seeks to smooth over. The return features nonsensical memes, low resolution imagery, return to 2010s figures, #swag and intentionally clunky graphic design. If the current internet climate is about intense curation, with the potential for profit, the early internet can be defined as its polar opposite: messy, kitschy and whimsically aimless, digital experimentation.

In drawing from the internet's past, artists and users alike enact a kind of digital hauntology — a refusal to let go of early internet relics. Their aesthetic gestures, saturated in glitter fonts and melancholic overlays, do not aim to recreate the past faithfully but to inhabit its unfinished moods. In doing so, they open up a speculative space — where sincerity and irony collapse into one another — and where new subjectivities can flicker through the ruins of platform memory.

Artists like Molly Soda have become archeologists of the pre-polished digital world. Her practice centres on archiving the aesthetics and emotional textures of early internet girlhood. Her work, *There's a Star in My Future*, takes the textual excess of the blogosphere and reframes it as theatre: Arial-font dreams about ex-boyfriends and chainsaws, emotional

melodrama rendered poetic. Soda's website functions as an intentional trapdoor into this past — hyperlinked phrases, dancing emoticons, lo-fi YouTube performances, digital dolls and, as part of a take on the Vogue what's-in-my-bag, files filled with screenshots of keys, hairpins, photobooth selfies and jpeg detritus.



MOLLY SODA'S GEAR

Flip Video Ultra Series
(Camcorder)
White/Pink F260P

Accessories
Camcorders
Audio
Backdrops
Batteries
C-stands, arms
Cables
Camcorders
Cameras
Cat feeders
Cell phones
Chargers
Computers
Dongles & devices
DSLRs & mirrorless
E-readers, kindle
Electronics
Extension cords
Fans
Hard Drives
Headphones
Humidifiers
Inkjet Printers
Keyboards
Laptops
Laser Printers
LEDs
Lightbulbs
Lights
Microphones
Monitors
Paper
Phones
Printers
Remotes
Seamless
Sound
Storage
Tablets
Televisions
Thumb Drives, USB
Trippods
Video & photo
Webcams

26" x 36"
53" x 18"
53" x 36"
88" x 18"
88" x 36"

WESTCOTT
Batteries & Stand
\$200.99

BR30 LED
\$18.00

B525
\$3.01

HP ProBook 645 G1 Laptop AMD A4-4300
\$379.00

Apple A11 Bionic A11 72 (10 NM) Red 4.7 in: unlocked, ios: 12mp RAM 2 gb
\$68.99

5.0 megapixel (12x zoom) 256mb
\$99.99

hue ; A19-E26 3-pack
\$134.99

Logitech C930E
\$21.98

webcam 1080P HD Video
\$21.98

960-000971
\$169.95

140x100
\$169.95

3.85mm
\$16.70

Apple Earpods Lightning Wired Earphones Headphones
\$9.98

USB-C to USB Adapter for Mac A1632 6.1 in
\$5.55

for Mac A1632 6.1 in
\$14.44

Verbatim 16Gb Pink 4906 usb Flash Drive 16gb
\$15.13

QuickCam
\$16.70

Sony ZV-1 4K HD Camera
\$101.99

Levoit LV600HH Ultrasonic Humidifier
\$89.95

logitech
\$11.00

Cat Mate C500 5 meal (feeder) automatic
\$54.99 (-17%)

127459 2x-ice packs
\$11.00

Handheld Vocal Microphone
\$99.00

Shure SM58 HL-L3210CW
\$169.00

Impact c-stand
\$168.00

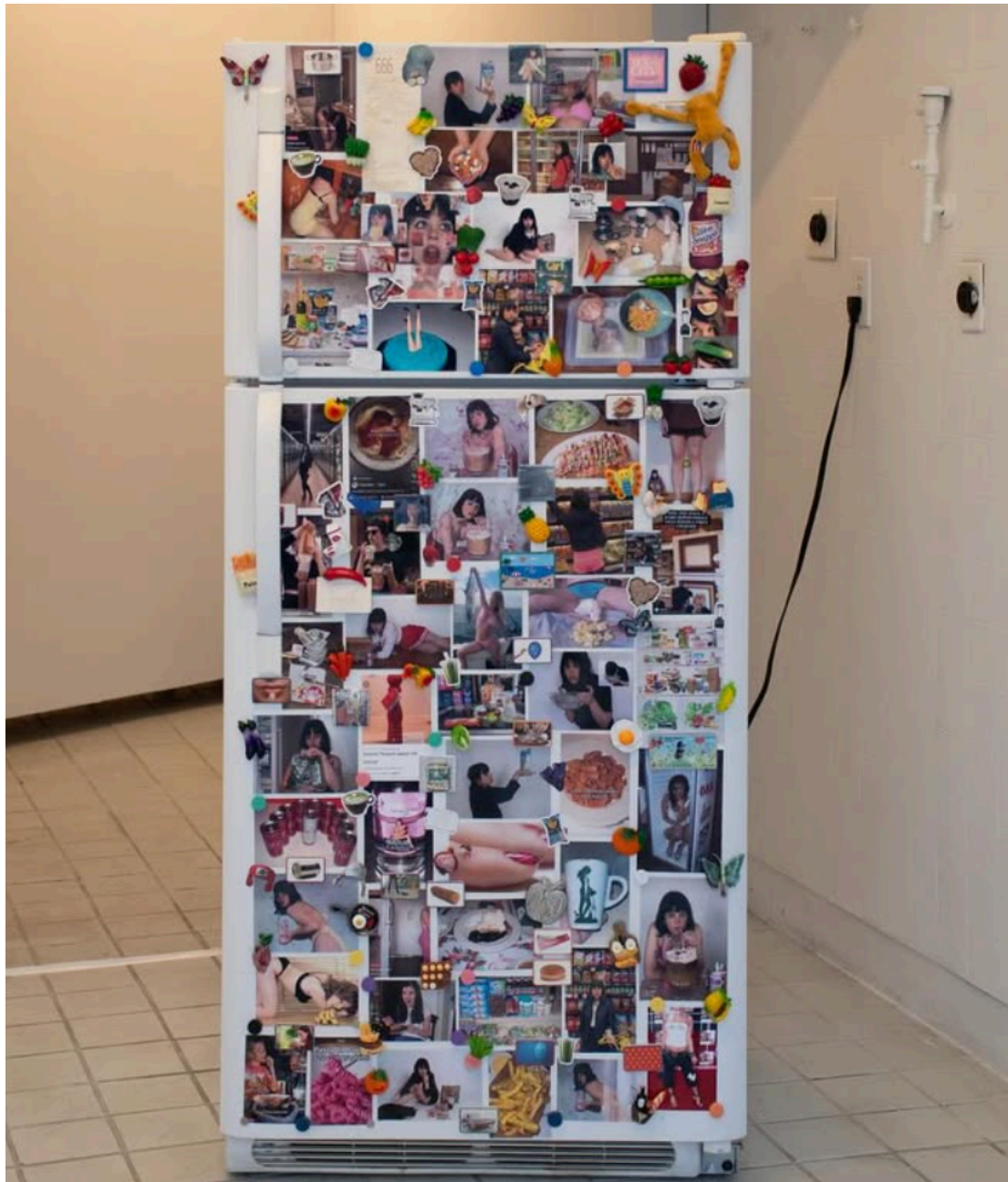
C920
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HD pro
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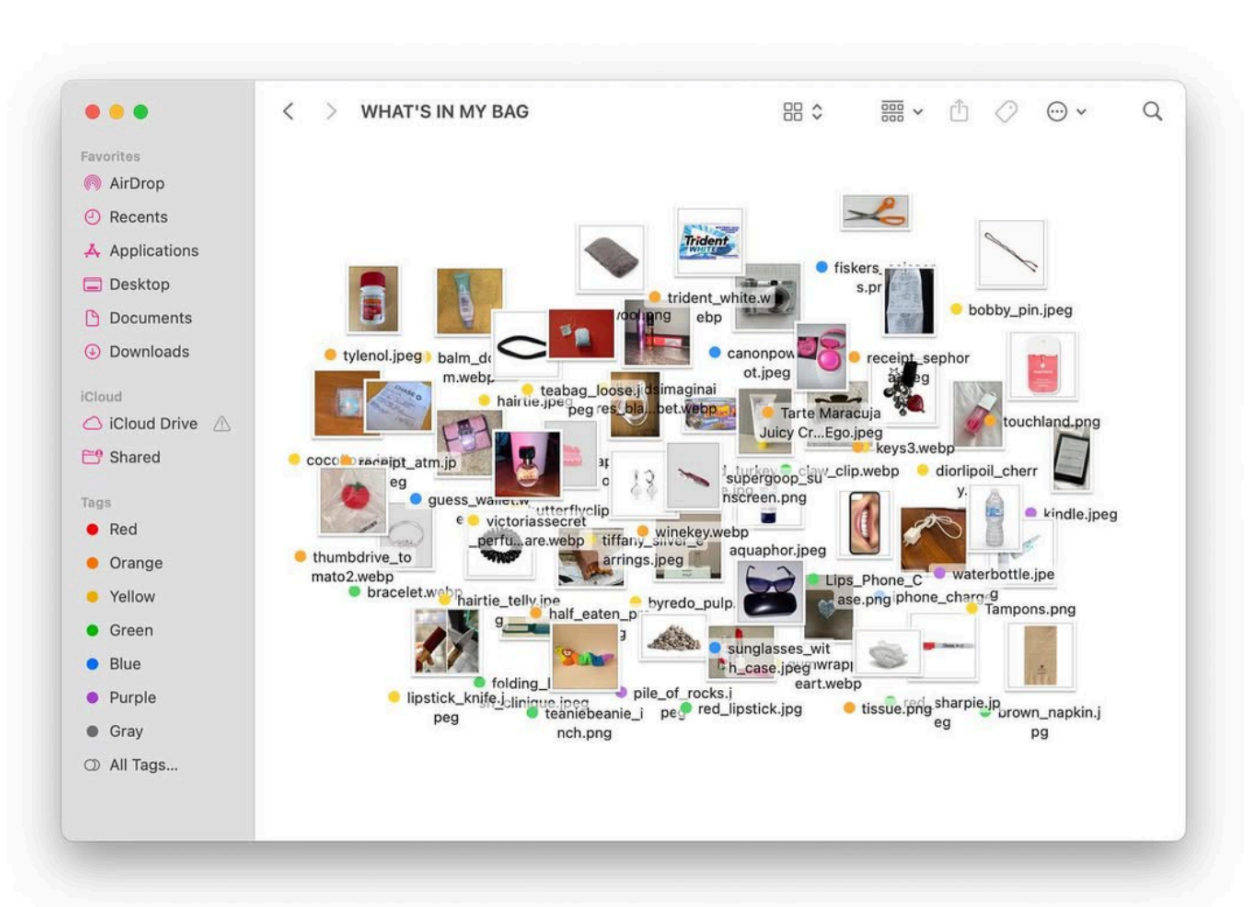
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L "there's a star in my future" publication/ R Molly Soda, *Toe Rag Technology Issue 2025*

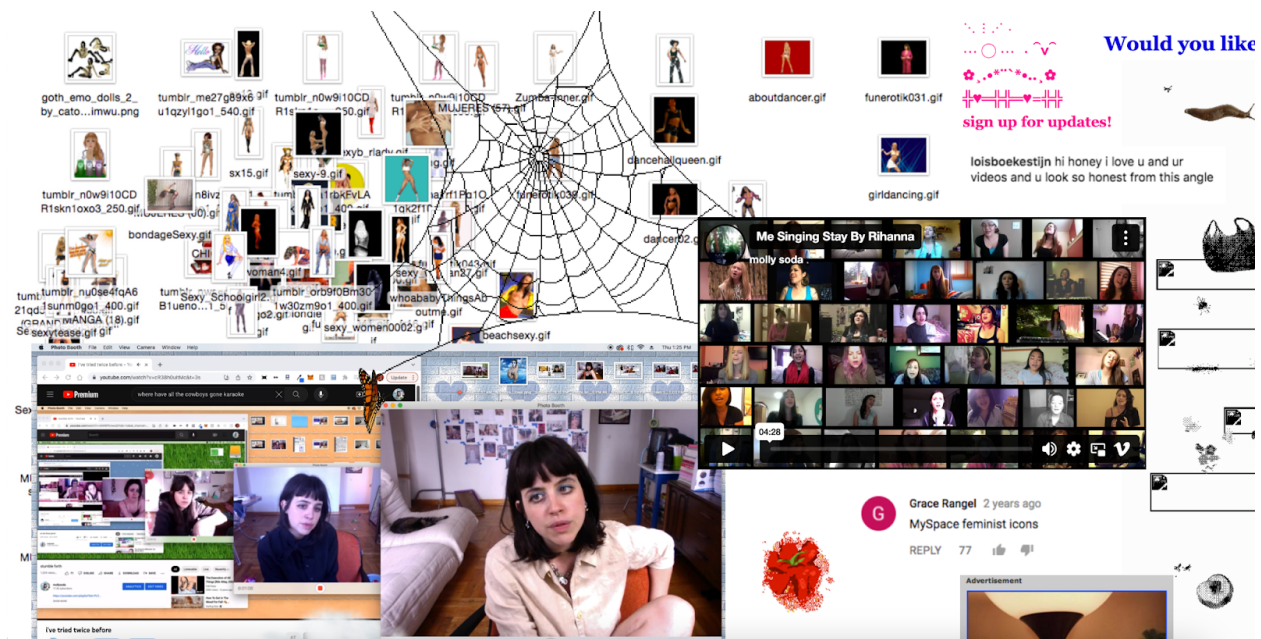




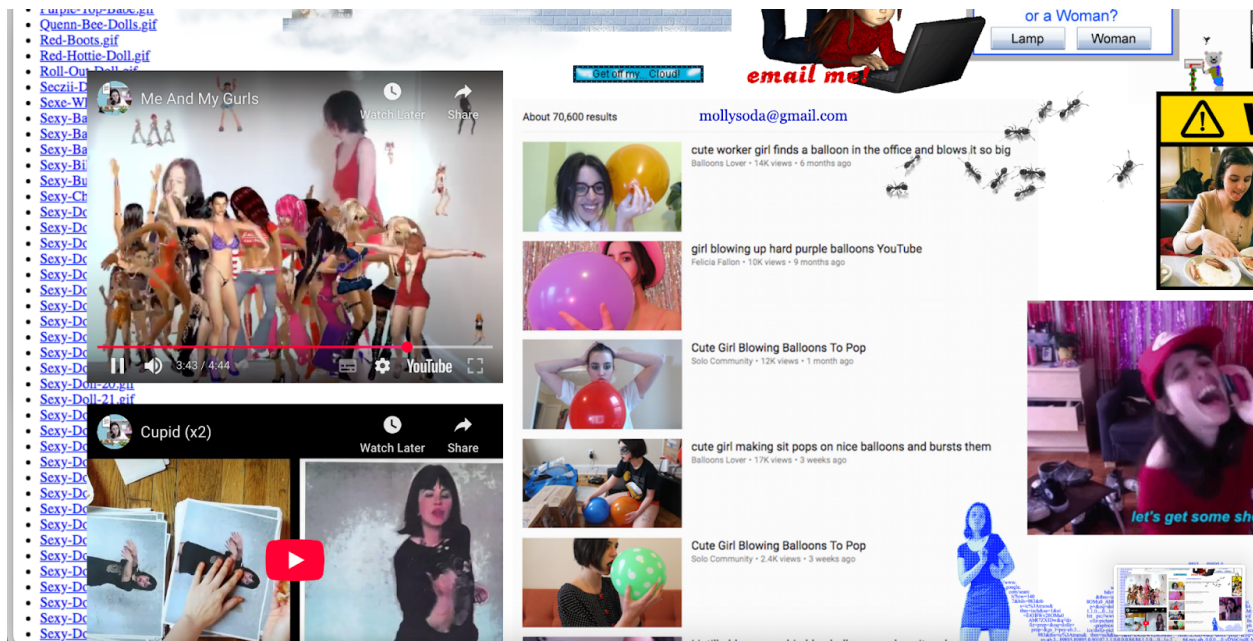
L Molly Soda @instagram 2024, R Molly Soda 'Fridge (Chick Magnet)' Inkjet prints, custom magnets 2024.



Molly Soda, 'What's in My Bag', @instagram 2024



Screenshot of Molly Soda's website, 2025.



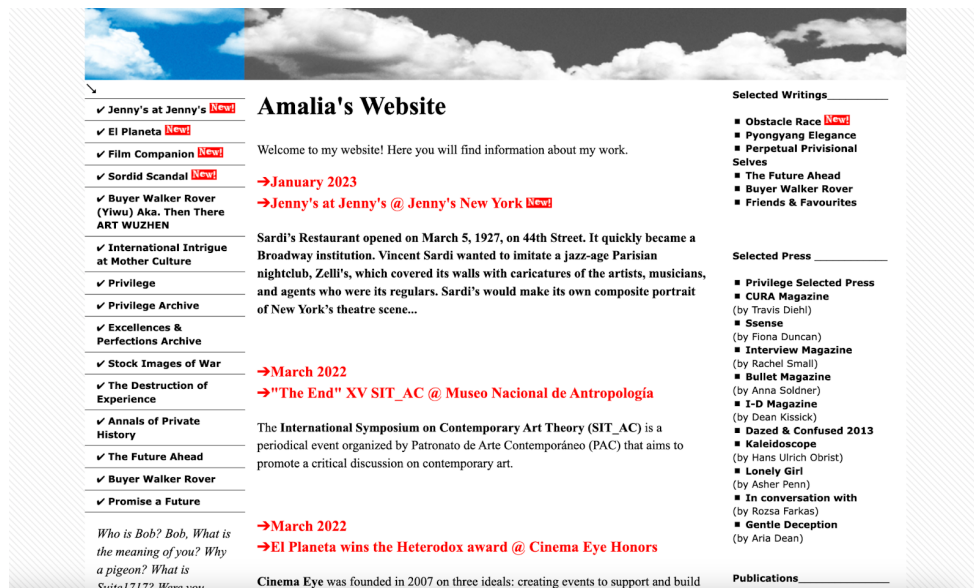
Screenshot of Molly Soda's website, 2025.

Reflecting on the transient nature of digital content, Soda, in conversation with Claire Evans for [Foundation](#) remarked, "I'm sad that I didn't save screenshots of more of my early-internet interactions, because now I have to cobble it together via memory." She also noted the challenges of preserving digital artefacts, stating, "A lot of the things I was making were really ephemeral. They were made for platforms that no longer exist." Discussing the emotional resonance of her work, Soda explained, "I'm interested in the idea of oversharing and how that plays into performance. There's a vulnerability in putting yourself out there, but also a control in deciding what to share."

These reflections underscore the intentionality behind Soda's archival approach, positioning her work as both a preservation of and commentary on the fleeting nature of early internet culture. By embracing the ephemeral

and the personal, she crafts a digital space that honors the past while critically engaging with the present.

The same impulse is evident in Amalia Ulman's 2014 performance *Excellences & Perfections*, in which the artist adopted the persona of an Instagram influencer to parody and critique the performance of femininity online. Ulman's work, hosted on a deliberately outdated website with simple fonts and web 1.0 aesthetics, reanimates the digital ephemera of the late 2000s and early 2010s to expose the constructedness of identity under late capitalist media logic. The low-resolution aesthetic is not simply nostalgic but strategic — drawing attention to the performance of authenticity within the platform economy.



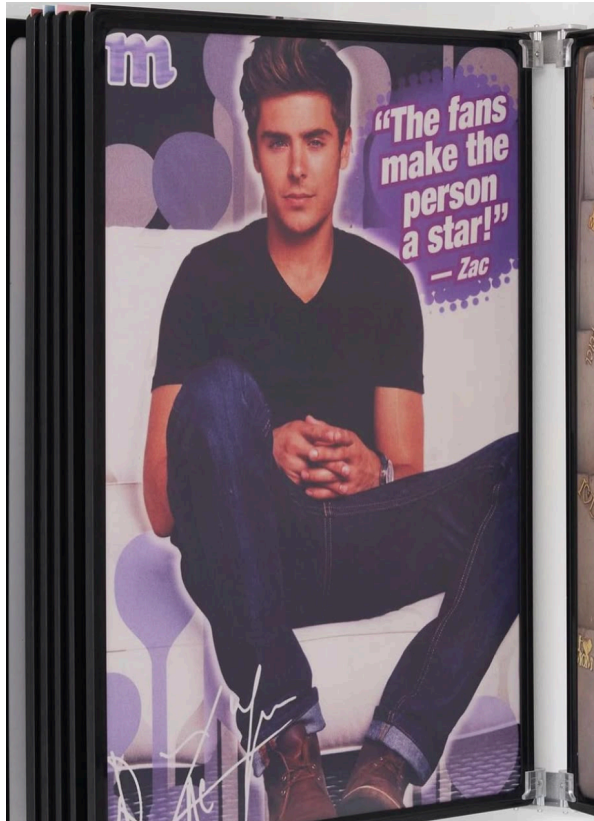
Screenshot of Amalia Ulman's website, 2025.

In an interview with [Interview Magazine](#) Ulman noted, "With *Excellences and Perfections*, people got so mad at me for using fiction. That was the main critique: 'It wasn't the truth? How dare you! You lied.' Well, that's because you should learn that everyone is lying online. I'm not the first one!". Even in its early genesis, despite being less self-conscious, the internet was by virtue of being an alternative realm to the physical domain, a platform of performance.

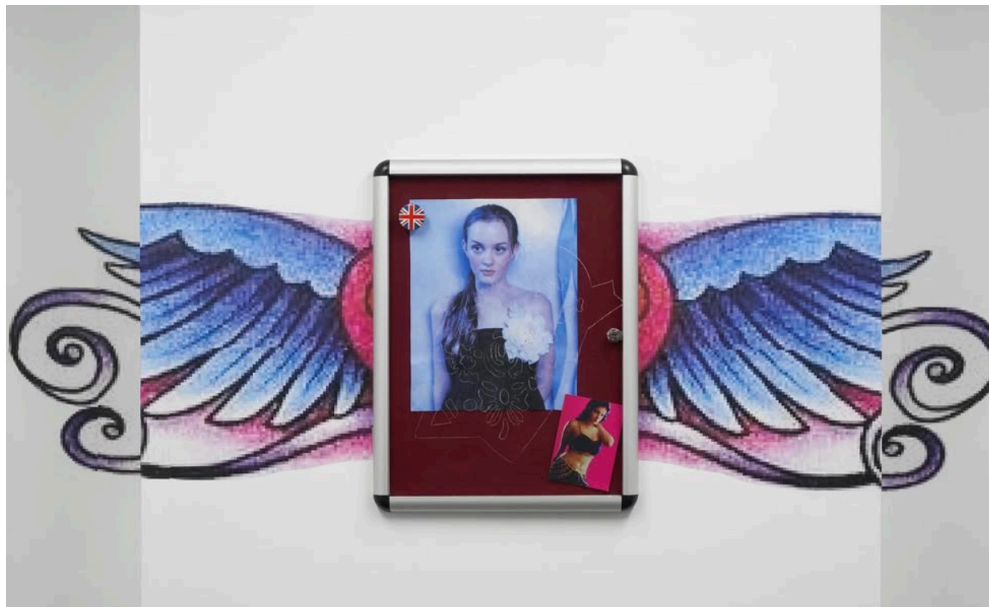
British-Indian artist duo Athen Kardashian also mine this early internet vernacular, collaging the ephemera of 2000s girlhood into a devotional aesthetic. Posters of Zac Efron, winged images of Leighton Meester, charm bracelets and bulletin boards filled with celebrity crushes serve as visual relics. Their work reframes these icons not as trivial girlhood fantasies, but as the goddesses and mythic figures of digital adolescence. This is a kind of memory work, preserving not just objects but the world-building rituals of girlhood on the early web.



Athen Kardashian, Sunshowers, 2024



Athen Kardashian



Athen Kardashian, Jolen(e), 2024

What unites these artists, or digital outliers, is a poetics of digital intimacy. They are not merely indulging in nostalgia — they are constructing an alternative (digital) archive. In doing so, they challenge the current logics of speed, polish and profit that define platform capitalism. HTML-only journals, glimmering desktop shrines and hand-coded websites signal an aesthetic resistance to the homogeneity of social media. Not only are they deliberately resisting streamability, but also engaging in irony, the aesthetic armoury of this movement. As cultural theorist Linda Hutcheon suggests in *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1994), irony is a form of both participation and critique — a double-coded mode that enables distance and engagement. In the context of post-internet and neo-tumblr imagery, irony functions not to detach but to protect. It is a buffer against the commodification of vulnerability. The glitter GIF, the melodramatic quote, the lo-fi meme — these elements wear their unseriousness as defence, exposing the absurdity of optimisation culture while preserving emotional sincerity beneath the surface.

Similarly, kitsch, the early internet's second chief modality, becomes a political tool. As theorised by essayist and art critic Clement Greenberg and later rehabilitated by cultural studies scholars, kitsch represents both mass cultural excess and emotional authenticity. The garishness of early internet visuals — sparkly fonts, neon pinks, lens flares — are re-employed not with mockery, but with reverence.

Nostalgic memories of the online world might additionally become more readily understood as histories of the future — a sentiment which speaks to

the cyclical temporality embedded within cultural revival of the internet. When we engage in nostalgic acts, we are not merely remembering a past as it once was; we are projecting onto it the hopes, absences and possibilities of our present. In *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003), cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen notes how nostalgia often emerges most forcefully not in times of historical certainty, but during moments of perceived dislocation. The past becomes a screen onto which we project our longings for futures that feel increasingly foreclosed.

In this way early internet nostalgia becomes a historiographic tool: it generates speculative futures from half-imagined pasts. What we remember, is shaped by what we fear we've lost, and what we desire to become.

Within this frame, platforms like Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest or early forums are not just technical artefacts but emotional architectures — remnants of perceived freedom, intimacy and uncured identity that stand in contrast to the algorithmic enclosure of the contemporary web. This affective longing functions as a kind of archive, animating what Wendy Hui Kyong Chun [describes as the “enduring ephemeral”](#) — the way digital media simulates persistence while constantly degrading, erasing or overwriting memory. Nostalgia becomes a tactic for resisting that erasure.

Crosshead - speculative nostalgia

In this sense, early internet memory itself becomes a glitch, and revivalist subcultures that seek not to restore the past, but are nostalgic for it, remixing it into a more livable digital imaginary. These images linger, resurfacing uninvited, resisting the neat timekeeping of trend cycles. In this sense, they are closer to hauntings than to happenings. By circulating through social networks not as updates but as artefacts, they interrupt the forward momentum of feed culture, acting as digital revenants — reminding us that the past is not behind us, but embedded within the infrastructures of the now.

This return, however, is not always innocent. As art historian Hal Foster writes in “The Return of the Real”, we often seek to revisit a historical past that has been mythologised, not as it was, but as a future that never came to be. In this sense, the aesthetics of early internet culture are mediated through loss. They function as “digital relics”, imbued with the desire to escape the hyper-commercialisation of the present.

In the early 2010s, identity exploration was precarious, often unguarded and unregulated: platforms like SnapSave exploited users' private images before legislation caught up. Eating disorder content circulated with impunity. Forums like MyProAna offered “thinspiration” tips disguised as community support, while Tumblr tags like #bonespo and #ana were left unchecked for years. Platforms like KIK, Ask FM, LiveJournal and Omegle offered no protection, their disclosures vulnerable to trolling or doxxing. Early YouTube confessionals, often filmed on webcams in bedrooms, revealed deeply personal narratives that were later co-opted, mocked or

monetised. The absence of moderation created both a raw, fertile space for self-making — and a deeply unsafe one. Despite its aestheticisation, the early internet was no mecca. The myth of a “better internet” becomes an organising fiction. Not to retrieve, but to reorient. Through this lens, digital nostalgia isn't regressive — it's speculative. A way of mapping desire and loss onto virtual terrain in the hope of revealing latent architectures for autonomy, resistance and more complex forms of relationality online.

Through this lens, we might consider these digital practices as a form of poetic archaeology. The internet is not a neutral archive without its own perils and performances. To retrieve and recontextualise fragments of the early web is to assert value in what has been discarded. It is to find humour in the chaos of the online world. In this way, digital relics become more than nostalgic tokens — they become ritual objects, charged with meaning and memory. Neo-Tumblr revivalism and post-internet ironic aesthetics, then, are not a return in the regressive sense. Rather, they are, in Foster's terms, a return from the future, a surfacing of the repressed, a reactivation of the more positive latent energies in the digital unconscious.

The digital artists reflecting on past internet ephemera, honour the weird, the failed, the unoptimised, rebelling against the more contemporary and polished internet landscape. Perhaps what draws these creatives back to early internet relics, is not just the images themselves, but the feeling they once held: the intimacy, obscurity, the more carefree performance, of acting online without the need to curate an alternative, polished, version of oneself. Cursed and ironic pre-platform relics do not merely reflect the past

— they offer an alternate temporal logic, one that runs counter to the linearity of platform evolution and the slick inevitability of algorithmic aesthetics.

Vulnerability and humour can coexist in this space, an actuality we seem to have lost as the internet developed but was central to its origins — for what is less funny and sincere than creating a digitised world where we can all meet, lose ourselves, and perpetually return? These creators resist digital conformity not through spectacle but through the quiet persistence of re-enchantment, mining the margins, preserving the textures, and reanimating what was once deemed obsolete. In doing so, they chart out a digital practice that is neither solely nostalgic, but defiantly out-of-sync — and in that refusal to conform, they map new terrains for what digital life might still become.