


# Into a phygital March Madness...

Esquire's resident design expert  
**CYRIL ZAMMIT** on the functionality  
of digital design



**DOES THE DIGITAL WORLD ERASE THE BARRIER BETWEEN FUNCTIONAL AND ARTISTIC? I BELIEVE SO**

**R**ecently I was in Riyadh for the Saudi Design Festival. Witnessing first-hand the creative energy that a new young generation is building and the rise of design platforms in order to connect them with the world. I enjoyed meeting an creative crowd that easily manage to be students, entrepreneurs and creatives all at the same time. It also gave me the chance to moderate a talk about the ever-changing boundaries between design and art.

A decade ago I had a firm position on leaving design firmly in the 'functional' side of thing, but I have never denied its contribution to a more aesthetic and eye-pleasing world—'artistic' some might say. But, like everything, the thick line between art and design is now gone. Generally, I'm finding this is because many (but not all) designers would often prefer to be called 'artists' in order to reflect the multi-faceted aspect of their work as architects, sculptors, crafts professionals etc. Does the digital world erase this barrier for good? I believe so.

Take someone like Andrés Reisinger—one of the new stars in the NFT space. Although he has been creating for 15 years, his adventure in the digital world started three years ago and his creations are now extremely sought after.

This month, at Gallery Collectional in Dubai, he will unveil a brand new 'phygital' creation. Wait, phygital? Yes, it is a legit new term being used in creative circles, meaning a physical piece that also has digital representation. The gallery is offering collectors the option to buy a complete design package including a limited-edition physical piece, the NFT and even its Metaverse version. A first for a design gallery.

It's a new world, and one that is still met with caution by many of us, but it is also a wave that is unavoidable.

Reisinger himself compares it to the start of MP3 in the early 2000s. "People looked at it thinking it would fail, but it simply evolved into what we know right now," he told me.

The world of NFTs is also somehow a chance for our planet. In general, when technology creates a demand, then reality tends to follow suit. And that is, to me, a positive revolution.

March is the region's favourite month, ushering a constellation of cultural events. Now that we have mostly regained our pre-pandemic speed, we can enjoy art in Jeddah with 21'39; in Sharjah with great exhibitions; and the March Meetings and, of course, 'Art Week' in Dubai with the best of exhibitions at Alserkal Avenue and Art Dubai.

This year's fair introduces a section for digital creations, showing how important this 'revolution' is proving to be. NFT artists (and content creators) are now receiving and controlling royalties for their digital creations, which is signalling the end of the (rather unfair) process that saw artists selling their work once, when collectors or dealers would resell it several times without sharing any profits. 'Monetisation' might be a vile word, but it is a crucial new way for artists to be part of the success of their creations and also maintain traceable authenticity. As indicated during a talk at Dubai Watch Week, the next major step will be the standardisation of NFT marketplaces being interoperable. If accessories are the ultimate touch of class in fashion, we all know how much the tech industry prefers various standards to enhance gains in accessories. ☺

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