



# The Return of Creative Direction



## The shift

Brands are returning to creative art direction led by people. Real photographers. Real stylists. Real sets.

The presence of a human hand is what turns imagery into identity.

*Imagery: Santoni x Tony Kelly*

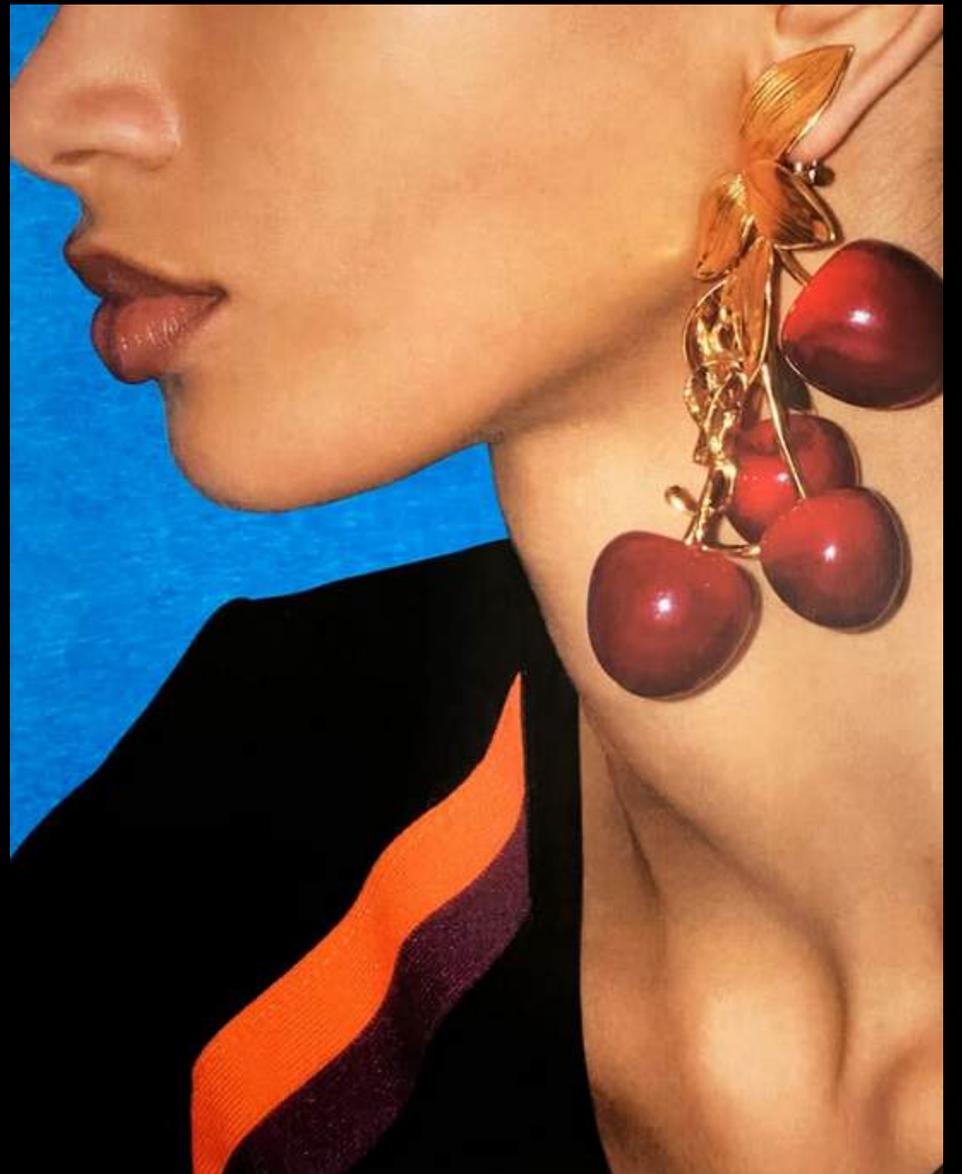
# Why brands are recalibrating

Some AI-led campaigns sparked hesitation.  
And in some cases, backlash.

Not because technology was flawed.  
But because the work felt disconnected from  
craft, taste, and decision-making.

The conversation was never about tools.  
It was about standards.

Brands are not rejecting innovation.  
They're refining where it belongs.



# Where creative direction is heading

AI supports the process.

But human creativity still defines the outcome.

Technology can assist.

Meaning has to be decided.

This is where art direction becomes essential again.

Not as decoration, but as distinction.

*Imagery: Saint Laurent*



## Light as art direction

Lighting is no longer just functional.  
It creates atmosphere.  
It defines the emotional tone.

Light becomes part of the narrative.

*Imagery: Nordic Knots; The Etiquette x Hector Saxe*



## Inside the frame

We don't show everything.  
We show enough.

Cropping creates intimacy.  
It draws the viewer closer.  
It invites a slower look.

*Imagery: Celine; Dries Van Noten*



## Perfect imperfections

Not everything needs to be sharp or  
that every frame needs to be clean.

A bit of blur.

A bit of grain.

A sense of movement.

That's what makes an image feel real.

*Imagery: Cult Gaia; Giorgio Armani*



# When campaigns feel editorial

These images don't feel like marketing.  
They feel like culture.

From the era of magazine-led storytelling.  
Before everything had to be immediate.

Meant to be noticed.  
And remembered.

*Imagery: Chanel; Hermes*



ysl True Romance  
by Anthony Vaccarello

Photographed by Jean Marques



dior Dior Spring Summer 2026 Haute Couture.

Creative direction Jonathan Anderson  
Photography David Sims  
Styling Benjamin Bruno



chanelofficial A relaxed style, from morning to evening.

Campaign photographed by Craig McDean.



sacaiofficial 2nd delivery of sacai Men's Spring & Summer  
2026 Collection Women's Spring 2026 Collection will be available  
starting this Friday, January 16 in stores and on sacai.jp.

Designer and Creative Director: Chitose Abe  
Image Director: Danny Demers  
[@dannymemers](#)  
Photo : Craig McDean  
[@craigmcdeanstudio](#)



jw\_anderson JWANDERSON AUTUMN WINTER 2026

Curation as practice, craft as language  
Creative Direction [@jonathan.anderson](#)  
Styling [@benjaminbruno\\_](#)  
Photography [@heikkikaski](#)  
Objects Photography [@louisdewynter](#)  
Set Design [@hellakeck](#)  
Hair [@tommystayton](#)  
Makeup [@kyledominicc](#)  
Nails [@charlyavenell](#)  
Production [@studioboum](#)



marni Dwelling with what you hold dear.  
Discover the bag collection online and in Marni boutiques.

Photographer: [@alessandro\\_\\_messina](#)  
[#marni](#)



celine CELINE Printemps 2026  
Rayssa and Gabriel photographed by Zoë Ghertner  
The Halfmoon Soft Triomphe



kiton The world can wait.

KITON  
Lensed by [@tonykellyworld](#)

[#Kiton](#) [#KitonSS26](#)

# When creative voices are visible

Photographers, stylists, and creatives are being credited openly.  
Not as a formality, but as a statement.

Because human-led photography and styling convey truth.  
Personality.  
Emotional tone.

This is where brand differentiation actually lives.



Creative direction gives imagery its point of view back. When people lead the work, it feels more expressive, more human, and more connected.

That's where culture begins to form.

HF

HANNAH FRANCIS & CO