



AGENDA

Top of The Pops | Our Most Read Pieces of 2018

Catch up on everything you may have missed from throughout this year

By [Amuse Team](#) | Dec 27 2018, 12:00pm

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Photo: Benjamin McMahon

We can understand that, with such a constant barrage of pieces coming up on-site every day, that you may have missed a couple of gems. Never to fear! We haven't taken it personally. Instead, we've concocted the perfect antidote to any crippling FOMO you may be contending with: a run-down of our most riotously successful pieces of 2018. Sit back, catch up, and enjoy what the world has been reading this year - you won't be disappointed.

Adam Bloodworth meets an entrepreneur in [Peckham](#) to investigate the piquant red pepper spread, ajvar, which dominates the tables of the Balkans like Hummus does in the Middle East. Philip Evans, the man in question, is on a mission to make this [Macedonian](#) delicacy as ubiquitous as its Levantine rival, but does it have the potential to take the world by storm?

Way off in the Northern Cape of [South Africa](#), the intentional community of Orania houses close to a thousand white separatists, eager to avoid integration with the

rest of the now-desegregated nation. But they're not just stuck in the past, they insist - they now have their own cryptocurrency, and they want you to know about it.

The image of a beauty pageant conjures (rightful) sentiments of objectification, sexism, sleaze, and all-round unpleasantness. Well, maybe that's because we do them so poorly, and left men in charge of the whole process. [In northern Niger](#), they have a more radical conception of what a beauty pageant can be: an endless dance-off, led by women, where judges pick a winner and sleep with the victor of their choosing.



Eerie Americana | This is New England, But Not As You Know It

Photographer Patrick McCormack's stunning travel shots show a strange kind of Nowheresville, USA

 **Amuse** / Patrick McCormack / May 5, 2018

Patrick McCormack has a deeply intriguing photographic style - perhaps because his subject is so inherently peculiar. Prowling around the outer reaches of Nowheresville, and all the strange corners of [America](#) that bleed strangeness,

McCormack snaps the seemingly benign, revealing the implacable eeriness of cloudy New England.



This is Hedonism | Exploring Jamaica's Luxury "Adults-Only" Playground

A closer look at the Caribbean paradise where pleasure and freedom reign

 **Amuse** / Alex Temblador / Jun 22, 2018

Nude beaches, anything-goes jacuzzis, wipe-down furniture - Hedonism II is a destination like no other, I think it's safe to say. We sent Alex Temblador to investigate this [Caribbean](#) swingers' paradise, to see what all the fuss was about, and whether it justifies its reputation.



When Sex Ruled the Skies | Space Age Stewardess Uniforms That Wouldn't Fly Today

A look at the glamour and chauvinism of aviation's Space Age era

 **Amuse** / Clem Fiell / Aug 9, 2018

Air travel has lost all its glamour. There's nothing particularly fancy or luxe about the hours spent in a cramped, sweaty tin box being fired across the continents, quietly resenting the loud breathing of fellow passengers. But it wasn't always this way - air travel used to be cool; *damn* cool. And also astonishingly sexist.



Redrum | Inside the Hotel Which Inspired The Shining

From their rooms to their pet cemetery, we look at the hotel that scared Stephen King into penning some of his most influential works

 Amuse / Laura Studarus / Oct 19, 2018

It takes a lot to scare Stephen King, one would expect. But there was something so spooky, so troubling, so otherworldly about the [Stanley Hotel](#) that he took to penning not one but *two* books off the back of his stay: The Shining, and Pet Sematary. Watch out for the twin rooms.

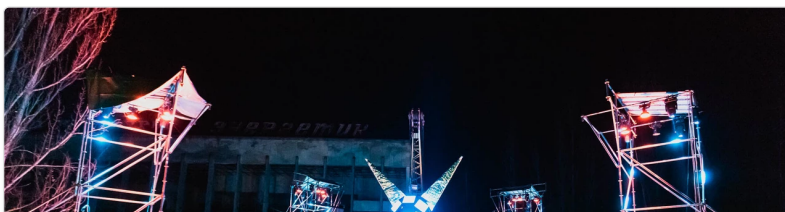


Perils of Fame | These Once-Beautiful Film Locations Are Victims of Their Own Success

A Star Wars and Game of Thrones Locations Manager tells us about the bittersweet pill of putting remote destinations on the map

 Amuse / Tabi Jackson Gee / May 3, 2018

Is tourism gradually killing all of the undisturbed beauty spots that have stood, pristine and lilo-free, for thousands of years? Is wanderlust a toxic impulse, which leads well-meaning travellers to extinguish the very kind of freedom and abandon that they seek? The answer is: yes, if you're not *extremely* careful.





The Nuclear Option | We Went to a Rave in the Ruins of Chernobyl

A group of Ukrainian artists are reclaiming the Exclusion Zone

 Amuse / Tom Seymour / Dec 3, 2018

Thirty-two years after the greatest ecological calamity in human history, Pripyat - the small [Soviet](#) factory city which housed the Chernobyl Nuclear Reactor - has finally, *finally*, hosted its first rave, with radiation finally coming down low enough to allow revellers and DJs to have a very, very time-restricted street party.



Stihia Festival | We Went to a Techno Rave in an Abandoned Ship Graveyard in Uzbekistan

Could this be Central Asia's answer to Burning Man?

 Amuse / Rowan Kennedy / Oct 12, 2018

Sometimes headlines really do speak for themselves. We sent Rowan Kennedy out to the dried-up remnants of what was once a thriving [Uzbek](#) port, to dive headlong into what they're calling the Burning Man of Central Asia. And once you read his dispatches from the field, you'll be planning your trip out there for next year.



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Editors' Picks | Amuse's Favourite Pieces of 2018

A selection of the stories we loved this year, as picked by the Amuse team

By [Amuse Team](#) | Dec 30 2018, 9:45am

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Photo: Dan Medhurst

In time for the closing of the year - and as an excuse to test the sumptuousness of whatever new gadget Santa brought you this Christmas - we've put together a list of some of our favourite pieces from 2018. Since our re-launch in May, we have brought you a surfeit of original, considered, and important work from all corners of the globe, reporting from some two-dozen countries in over three hundred pieces.

In the process, we've sent our intrepid writers down [tin mines](#) in [Cornwall](#), to [Vietnamese torture islands](#), across the [French Basque](#) coast in [Rolls-Royces](#), [down the slopes](#) of the [Caucasus mountains](#), to [haunted hotels](#) in [Colorado](#) - a piece in every continent (apart from [Antarctica](#); but we must leave *some* worlds to conquer). We even sent our editor off to [North Korea](#) for a week. Here are some of our favourites from what has been a fantastic year of writing. We'll see you in 2019!

Sometimes, in life, your second act can be as impactful as your first; but few people have had the considerable impact and influence on their national and regional culture that Roland Rittman has had in [Scandinavia](#). Our Junior Editor, Kieran Morris, spent a weekend with the genteel 71-year old master forager, for this feature-length profile of his life and legacy.

North Korea is at a critical juncture right now. Following the terrifying escalations of rhetoric between the DPRK and the [United States](#), which at one point looked to have the makings of nuclear extermination, the North Korean government have been keen to reintegrate with the rest of the world, and invite tourists to experience its way of life. Senior Editor, Tristan Kennedy, jumped at the chance, producing this considerable essay from his time in the 'Hermit Kingdom' - the largest piece that Amuse has ever published.

There are no mausoleums in [Italy](#) or [Germany](#) for Mussolini and Hitler - their points of demise, instead, are marked, or consciously unmarked, with the lack of pomp and ceremony that they deserve. So why is it that the body of General Francisco Franco, and the Falangist idol José Antonio Primo de Rivera, still lay, dressed with flowers, in a basilica larger than St. Peter's? Dan Hancox trekked to the Valley of the Fallen, outside [Madrid](#), to see the persistence of Francoist sympathy, in a nation that is tearing itself apart over its past and future.

Plastic surgery is at its most accessible, and at its most popular, on account of the warping of beauty standards across the world, and the demand to have the perfect features in order to get by within it. Tabi Jackson Gee took to investigating the strange, dark world of plastic surgery tourism, and the lengths that some people will go to for the ideal form and face.

Mads Nissen - the award-winning [Danish](#) photojournalist - has seen [Colombia](#) go through hell and back in his seven-year photo tour. Capturing the mundane and the surreal; the persistence of life around chaos; and the deleterious effect of cocaine and marijuana production in the country, Nissen's shots tell a story of survival, and the costs of maintaining it. Oliver Lunn sat down with him to speak about his time in Colombia, and to tell the stories behind some of his most memorable shots.

They formed their team without knowing the rules of their sport; they don't have a pitch so play on a volcanic beach; and their nearest competitor is Scotland, nearly 800 miles away - but the [Icelandic](#) Cricket Team could be the next big sporting superstars to emerge from their tiny but illustriously successful nation. John Silcox spent some time with the team, as they set about their plans for world domination (once they'd found somewhere to play).

In this piece, Dr. Kate Lister tells us about the Bauls - a religious sect in [Bangladesh](#) who, amongst many other customs, believe that menstrual blood is sacred (and, as such, consume it as a means of rejuvenation), and that a man ought not to ever ejaculate until a menstruating woman's needs have been met. The Bauls may be one extreme example of being progressive around menstruation, Lister argues, but theirs is an attitude very much unlike large parts of the world, who still associate menstruation with shame and uncleanness.

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[Berlin](#) has been, for as long as it has been a unified city - and for some time in its disunified state, at least in its Western iteration - a particularly buzzy lightbulb to which the world's arty moths are drawn. But it does not have the lockdown on [German](#) chic and style; no - deep in the country's West, spitting distance from the [Belgian](#) border, is [Cologne](#), a *true* artists' refuge. Our Social Editor, Clem Fiell, headed out to city to peruse its architectural marvels, and argue that Germany's true home of art and design is waiting for you to visit.

One of the few territories under American governance, but not with formal statehood, the [Marshall Islands](#) holds an unenviable title: 'the Most Nuked Place on the Planet', with some 67 nuclear tests being conducted upon its territory immediately after the Second World War. We sent Paul Evans out to the Islands both to investigate their strange relationship with the threat of mutually assured destruction that dominated the 20th Century, and to explore the new luxury surf lodge that has opened to rebrand the Islands as a surfers' paradise.

What does an 800-year old dessert have to do with the modern state of [Egypt](#), and the Middle East at large? Zahra Hankir visited [Cairo](#) for a veritable tour of Om Ali - the ubiquitous Egyptian dessert, made from puff pastry, raisins, pistachios, and sweetened milk - whilst exploring how this pudding brings some semblance of unity to the often-interminably divided people of Egypt, as well as how efforts to modernise the dish have been met with widespread and officious condemnation. In the process of her tour, she explains the fascinating history of Om Ali, whilst simultaneously capturing the enchanting, misunderstood city of Cairo.



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The Nuclear Option | We Went to a Rave in the Ruins of Chernobyl

A group of Ukrainian artists are reclaiming the Exclusion Zone

By [Tom Seymour](#) | Dec 3 2018, 4:36pm



"It is for your protection from I don't know what" our guide says, handing out white hooded jumpsuits. We all scramble round the back of the bus, trying to pull our protective clothing on.

On every side of us, amidst the trees, are huge Soviet blocks. They're empty, but full of the belongings the residents of the city left behind. This is Pripyat, once home to 50,000 people. Today, its population is zero.

"This is Pripyat, once home to 50,000 people. Today, its population is zero"

Emanating from the centre of the square of the abandoned city, coloured lights flash and writhe across the empty homes. In this setting, we're about to rave.

Festival-goers wearing hazmat suits inside Chernobyl's Exclusion Zone. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

Valeriy Korshunov, a multimedia artist from [Kiev](#), is running his sound checks on [Artefact](#), the 'digital sculpture' we are about to be treated to in the midst of Chernobyl's Alienation Zone.

The explosion of Reactor Number Four at 1.23am on 26th April 1986 fired approximately four hundred times more radioactive material into the atmosphere of Eastern Europe than the fallout from Nagasaki and Hiroshima combined.

Heading to the abandoned city, home to the worst nuclear disaster in history. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

Prior to that fateful day, Pripyat was seen as a model town and, for Soviet Citizens, was a desirable place to live. It was a new settlement - like Milton Keynes - specially designed for the workers of the nuclear power plant.

Chernobyl was considered a jewel in the crown of the USSR - a shining of the politburo's commitment to clean, green, safe nuclear energy. The living quarters matched up; a supermarket stocked full of hard to find foods, an ice rink, a swimming pool, and a carnival fair for the workers' children.

Inside Chernobyl's Exclusion Zone in the Ivankiv Raion of the northern Kiev Oblast. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

After the explosion, [Moscow](#) was silent. It was left to an operative at a nuclear power plant in [Sweden](#) - more than 1,000 miles away - to raise the alarm after their Geiger readings went haywire. The citizens of Pripyat were told there was nothing to worry about, and went about their lives as normal until, 36 hours later, the authorities decided to evacuate the town in just two hours. By the time they got out, Pripyat had already been soaked in the most harmful radioactive release in the history of humanity.

Whilst there's no unifying data on exactly how much damage the explosion wrought, a recent World Health Organisation study concluded that the disaster may have led to upwards of 4,000 premature deaths, as well as widespread birth defects and disabilities.

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As we walk towards Artefact, we come across the ghostly carnival. It was due to open four days after the explosion, but has instead stood frozen for more than 32 years.

The ghostly, abandoned theme park inside Chernobyl's Exclusion Zone. Photo: Courtesy of Unsplash

The Ferris wheel looms into view. It has become something of a dystopian trope in popular culture. In any number of post-Apocalyptic films, an unlikely hero walks through a town that seems deserted but may actually still be peopled by the living

dead. They always seem to linger by a Ferris wheel. Call of Duty built an entire game around it.

"I feel like I'm on a film set," I say to one of my companions. "Yeah. But this is legit," he says. "This is what it's all based on.

Beyond the Ferris wheel stand frozen bumper cars and then a merry go round. A fellow visitor grips and pulls at the carousel. A rumbling, cranking noise is followed by a long metallic whine as the axis starts to slowly turn. The tiny seats, painted red, revolve in front of us. I thought I could see dust pluming up from the old mechanisms of the carousel, and I walk away.

32 years later, and Chernobyl's eerie ferris wheel still lies dormant. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

Chernobyl has become something of a myth - a kind of nuclear bogeyman. Few people have visited, yet everyone knows of it, and is scared by it. There's an element of Godwin's Law to the name these days: Chernobyl is the man-made tragedy that hangs over every conversation about how we propose to provide for the ever increasing energy needs of six - soon to become seven - billion humans.

Fifty new nuclear reactors are currently being developed all over the world, including, in Murmansk, [Russia](#), a plant floating in the ocean. They're being built during an era of freak weather events and ever more frequent natural disasters. But while they do indeed provide clean, green energy, the prospect of "another Chernobyl" is enough to make every single one of these projects controversial.

It's morning when we arrive in "The Zone", following the Dnieper river from Kiev. As birch groves give way to pine forests heavy with snow, road signs warn of bears and wolves.

A lonely crucifix hanging outside the Soviet block. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

Finally, there's a break in the trees. A wall curving away on either side of us is suddenly visible. Military men in full camo gear tell us to get off the bus and show our identification.

A church stands by the checkpoint, its entrance marked by a golden cross and the picture of a Madonna. I peak inside. The church is full of chopped logs. Light shines through a decorative window shaped like a sunset. In the weeks after the explosion, Biblical scholars pointed to The Book of Revelations, which prophesies that star will fall from the sky and poison the world below. The star is called Wormwood, which translates into Ukrainian as "Chornobyl".

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But the organisers of Artefact insist on the safety of The Zone. After the explosion, it took half a million workers, the so-called liquidators, more than six months to encase the reactor in a huge vault-like structure called The Sarcophagus. With help from The EU, the work on The Sarcophagus was deemed complete in May this year (although workers admit it will need to be replaced again in 100 years time).

Geiger readings within the Exclusion Zone. Not normally part of your festival kit. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

At a press conference held in a square about a hundred meters from the reactor, Svitlana Korshunov, curator of Artefact, told us: "Welcome to the Exclusion Zone. For all people, the world knew this place for tragedy. But we have made Chernobyl less harmful for the environment. We are safe. We have come here to change the history of Chernobyl."

Uppermost in Artefact's organisers' minds is the issue of Fake News - it's the principle subject of their [artwork](#) / rave / happening - and not just because it's one of 2018's buzzwords.

"The Chernobyl catastrophe was not only a radiation catastrophe but an information catastrophe," Valeriy Korshunov tells me. He points out that at least five more generations of Ukrainians will feel the consequences of the accident, [according to scientists](#). "We hope that the activation of Artefact will be the first point to rethink the information tragedy of Chernobyl," he says.

Part of the Chernobyl Reactor building which includes the sarcophagus. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

There's little doubt that the Soviet reaction to Chernobyl was entirely cynical. There was radio-silence from Moscow until April 28th, when the politburo made a 15-second statement on the evening news: "There has been an accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant." It noted that "assistance has been provided" to those affected and that "an investigative commission has been set up".

A few days afterwards, Moscow News, an authorised publication of the politburo, ran a leader with the headline: "A Poisoned Cloud of Anti-Sovietism". The article railed against "a premeditated and well-orchestrated campaign" that intended "to cover up criminal acts of militarism by the USA and NATO against peace and security."

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"One of the main goals of the activation of Artefact in Pripyat is to think about how information can be manipulated, hidden or distorted," Korshunov says. "Because this can have the most terrible consequences."

Eerie green lights dancing across the abandoned city. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

He makes reference to the modern day 'hybrid' war between [Ukraine](#) and [Russia](#). "Today, propaganda on our television is no less strong than during the Soviet era," he says.

The activation itself is a sight to behold. A crowd dances to electro thumped out via speakers that have been wheeled into Pripyat's main square. Lights dance off the concrete blocks of deserted homes. Two screens play visuals that referencing Andrei Tarkovsky's classic Soviet film *Stalker*. Released in 1979, the film, set in a mysterious restricted area, seemed almost to foreshadow the disaster.

Inside Pripyat first nuclear disaster rave. Photo: Courtesy of Artefact

"I feel like I'm at Glastonbury and it's 4am," my friend says. "Apart from..." We look around. Beyond our cordoned-off area, the military huddle in the half-light. Some sway to the beat. A couple of locals head over and start to share a bottle of vodka, before receiving a very stern dressing down. The temperature drops - it's now minus

six degrees, but the [music](#) throbs and thuds through the square, the lights bouncing off kitchens and bedrooms and living rooms that will never be used again.

When I get back to my hotel, I wash my boots in the shower, and dream of a carnival full of children covered in dust, and the thud of electric beats.

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Tom Seymour is a London based freelancer. Keep up with him on [Twitter](#).



TAGGED: [MUSIC](#), [UKRAINE](#), [KIEV](#)