

Yes, but what about Pablo Escobar's hippos?

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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I will get to the hippos later but first, pornography. I know, that sentence surprised me too.

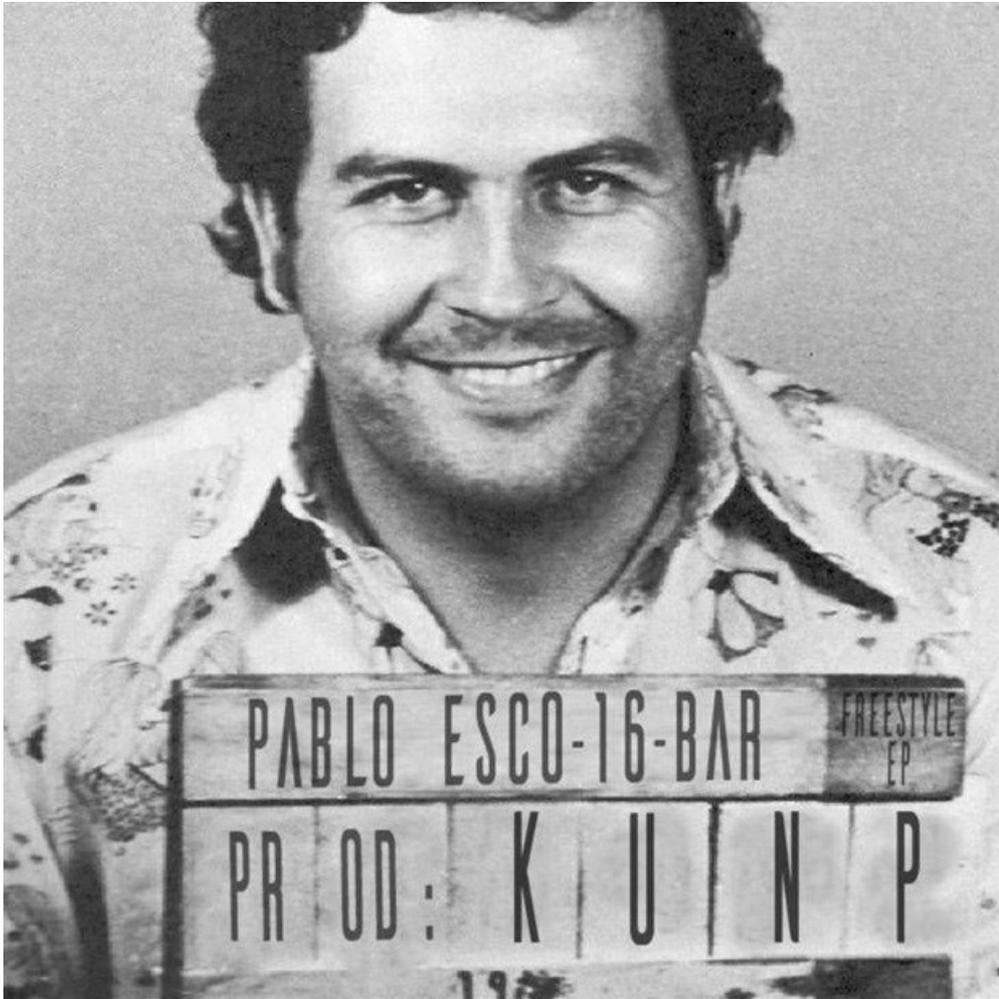


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Mark Ritson was on stage in Miami and had been telling a story about Veet. You know, the hair-removal cream. At one point, sales had gone up exponentially and the company had tried to find out why. What was causing it? Packaging? Advertising? Distribution?

No. Not even close. Men watching huge amounts of pornography online. It would seem the vigorous manscaping in these low-plot, high-involvement films had become a massive trend.

It reminded me of another unlikely story. Pablo Escobar's Zoo. At the height of his power, Signor Escobar was estimated to be worth 30-billion dollars from controlling all the drug trade out of Colombia. When you have that much money, what do you do? You open a zoo. Obviously.

Now, after Escobar's death there was the problem of what to do with all the animals at the zoo. Most were shipped away but Escobar's 'Cocaine Hippos', as they became known, were left to fend for themselves in a pond. They did way better than that. There are now dozens of them and Colombia has a large hippo problem. Because of a drug lord. Who had a zoo. Obviously.

“ As strange as those stories might seem, that is actually how life often works. Mad. Unexpected. Surprising. Qualities that seem a long way from what is pre-occupying our industry at the moment. Maybe we just need to remember some things never get old. They are the cornerstones of telling any great story. And people, you know, the ones we are talking to, like a great story. If you need to check, walk into a pub. ”

What these stories also tell me is that when it comes to our industry, anybody who says they know what's going to happen is likely to be extremely wrong. We have many false prophets that live in a bubble of certainty that can become incredibly dangerous.

If you look at the Fyre Festival debacle or the illusion that is Theranos, we have a whole lot of people who can explain and sell things very well.



Anybody want tickets to Fyre Festival?

Damon Stapleton 30 Jan 2019



In fact, for some, the brochure has become the beach. However, their perfect, precise and predictable explanations have very little to do with reality.

We all want to believe in precise predictability because it is easier. We like the idea of control and efficiency. It is safer. But like I said, life doesn't work that way. And neither do people. **As an industry whose primary objective is to communicate with human beings, it would be wise to never forget this.**

It is why creativity matters.

“ It is what creativity understands most of all: That you have to stay open to messiness. That you have to listen to the wrong words. It understands that efficiency doesn't mean much without ingredients. And for those ingredients, creativity knows you have to go where things don't make sense but could be interesting. Our industry needs to remember uncertainty is just as important as predictability. ”

Great stories and ideas are not about control and distance. They happen when you go towards the good stuff. You get closer to the strangeness of life and fallibility of people.

And very occasionally, Cocaine Hippos.

“I don't understand it, but I feel it.” – Yves Saint Laurent

ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Clio, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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