

SA judges thank creativity

By Leigh Andrews

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With the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity kicking off soon, we picked the brains of SA's nine judges for 2016 on what creativity means to them, as well as how they ensure they don't get overwhelmed by all the work they see when judging.



The SA Cannes judges for 2016, from left to right, top to bottom: Reddy, Gordhan, McLennan, Glover, Welsh, Carpenter, Beggs, Luckin, Taback.

Live-judging is a stand-out feature of Cannes Lions, but personal process differs vastly. The South African judges unpack their individual process below, and as the theme of Cannes Lions 2016 is based on [thanking creativity](#), they also shared the way creativity has enhanced their lives.

Nathan Reddy, chief creative officer and founder of Grid Worldwide: Design Lions

Creativity has always been his license to feel sane as his thoughts are truly twisted, so the ability to use “this license” has given Reddy much that he’s grateful for. His simple way of judging goes from: “Damn! I wish I had done that,” to questioning whether it’s a great idea, whether it is well-executed and –crafted, and finally whether it’s relevant.

Suhana Gordhan, creative director at FCB Africa: Direct Lions

“Creativity is a lot about wearing your skin inside-out, being able to notice the things not easily noticeable, and finding ways of expressing strange and beautiful human truths in unusual ways.” Gordhan is thankful to creativity for letting her learn new things all the time as it offers meaning and purpose, and even though the search for a great idea is often “elusive, sweaty and madding,” it is her sanity and where she makes herself at home. The judging process can thus be quite overwhelming,

not only because of the volume of work, but also because you feel a weight of responsibility on your shoulders.

As creatives themselves, the judges are conscious of how much work and sacrifice goes into an entry, so want to give each piece the respect it deserves. Great work that moves people has an emotional impact on you and makes you feel something, whether it's pathos, empathy, laughter or love. Gordhan waits for her instinctive reaction to a piece of work, then looks at the work from a deeper, more critical angle. She then measures it against factors such as simplicity, authenticity, previous work that has won in that category, relevance, sheer 'wow' factor, results achieved and the envy factor Reddy referred to. Gordhan also likes to develop a scale of brilliance and imagine the Cannes Lions Winner's Reel, questioning whether the piece of work deserves a place in the company of the other outstanding work.

Rob McLennan, creative founding partner of King James II: Film Lions

McLennan has been on the receiving end of over 30 Cannes Lions awards and says creativity has exposed him to so many different things and experiences over the years. He elaborates, "We get to work on everything and anything, and interact with so many awesome creative people from diverse creative industries. We're very lucky. It's the ideal industry to be in if you're a little attention deficit." This will be his third time judging at Cannes – last time around he was president of the radio jury. While he anticipated it would be really daunting – which the sheer amount of entries was – he also found it to be "such an awesome experience as you don't often get the opportunity to take a peek into the world's best creative brains and let them peek into yours." He advises to always look at everything with a fresh eye and trust your gut.

Jenny Glover, executive creative director for TBWA/Hunt/Lascaris: Radio Lions

Her reason for 'thanking creativity' ties back to the fact that, like so many creatives, she grew up as a bit of an outsider, because she had a set of skills and abilities that weren't necessarily mainstream, so she developed a love-hate relationship with her creative talent. Ultimately creativity enabled her to build a successful career out of doing what she loves, as well as an outlet for her somewhat unusual sense of humour and puts her lateral brain to work on solving real business problems, particularly in an industry that recognises creativity's power.

The fact that Glover has personally written and produced so much radio really helps her as a judge as she knows "all the shortcuts and formulas", as well as what's hard to write and what isn't. This means she spots poor craft and sloppy production a mile off. As radio is something she understands intimately, she's neither easily fooled nor impressed and is quite disciplined about how she judges, with a system that keeps her focused and consistent: Conceptual strength and overall originality are her first filters. If the idea is strong and the piece is fresh, she'll generally mark it through to the shortlist and in the next judging phase expects executional perfection as a hygiene factor for a piece to advance past shortlist and receive metal. She generally separates bronze, silver and gold based on her initial filters of concept and overall originality.

Eoin Welsh chief creative officer of Havas Worldwide Johannesburg: Promo & Activation Lions

Creativity has gifted Welsh with "a career that's thrilling, challenging, terrible and wonderful all at the same time as it allows – in fact demands – that I indulge my passions, use my brain and test myself every day," forcing an emotional response. On his judging process then, Welsh says it may sound like a cliché, but he puts the idea at the core of every piece, looking mainly for beautiful simplicity, brilliant insight, amazing execution and if it surprises in a good way, as something he didn't see coming. Overall, he's looking for everything in the communication to reinforce and complement the idea rather than overwhelm or obscure it.

Emma Carpenter, creative director at Accenture Interactive South Africa: Mobile Lions

Carpenter thanks creativity for providing her with the ability to empathise with people, explaining: "To stand in someone else's shoes and create something that makes their life easier is a real pleasure and makes you a more patient person as a result." As a practical person, she says she divided the number of entries allocated to her on the Cannes judging system by

the days available, then aimed to watch that number of case films per day. She explains, “Having been on the other side putting the entries together, I’m painfully aware of the days, or rather weeks, it takes to gather the results, storyboard the film, write the supporting material and wait for client approval, so I make sure I take my time reading and watching everything provided.” She adds that it’s been fun reviewing each piece of mobile work through the eyes of its intended audience and that the sheer number of different cultures and environments represented from around the globe has been inspiring.

Jonathan Beggs, chief creative officer for Saatchi & Saatchi: Print & Publishing Lions

Creativity has enhanced Beggs’ life in everything from survival to escapism. He’s very grateful for creativity, going so far as to place it “right up there with language and opposable thumbs”. When judging, Beggs digests the range of work before settling on his favourites. While the big winners are easy to spot, it’s the stuff in the middle that’s more subjective. “The first thing a print ad needs to do is stop you from turning the page. With thousands of entries, there’ll be a lot of jaded page-turning.” He’s on the hunt for innovation across the board – work that’s impossible to ignore, with fresh and provocative ideas.

Fran Luckin, chief creative officer of Grey Africa: Outdoor Lions

Luckin says creativity enhances all of our lives in more ways than we’re aware of. It manifests itself in those obvious ways, like in great music or beautiful photography, but can also be present in the most mundane interactions, such as when she ordered a cappuccino the other day and was told by the waitress who handed it to her that it would change her life. While it didn’t really change her life, the smile changed her morning. That’s why she says: “Creativity is probably one of the most democratic powers in the world. Actually, it’s not a power. It’s more like muscle. Something everyone has, that gets stronger the more you exercise it.”

Luckin adds that it’s impossible *not* to get overwhelmed by the work when judging as there are so many entries to get through, which is why live judging is so important: While she relies on ‘gut feeling’ in the early rounds, where it’s just about deciding if something gets considered for a finalist or not, in the later rounds, the discussion becomes valuable as sometimes there’s a perspective she hasn’t seen that makes her reassess the merit of the work, which is especially important with work from other cultures.

Marc Taback, CEO of Initiative Media South Africa: Media Lions

Taback agrees with Luckin that we most often think of creativity in terms of just art and music, but creativity is part of our everyday lives. Creativity has helped him solve problems, change behaviour, entertain himself and made him more social, enabling him to grow and mature. He has done live-judging many times before so knows the key is to focus, immersing yourself in the work and enjoying it.

They’ll certainly enjoy it, but time will only tell how they judge! [Click here](#) for more on this year’s South African Cannes Lions judges.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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