

Behind the art of Karabo Poppy

By [Emily Stander](#)

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South Africans often channel our boundless creativity to tell our stories. Art is an essential part of this creativity, and street artist and illustrator Karabo Poppy has taken advantage of her talent to be part of the South African story.



Image supplied: Karabo Poppy

Brand collaboration is an important part of this process for Poppy, and most recently she has worked with Halls to bring #BreatheForIt to life - a campaign that is meant to mentor South African artists and help them get their moment in the spotlight.

We caught up with Poppy to find out more about her background, the importance of brand collaboration and some advice for young artists looking to break ground...

How did you end up as a street artist/illustrator?

It was around the time that I was finishing my degree and internships – I decided to go freelance. Mainly because I wanted to build my own company – I wasn't entirely aligned with the mantras of larger agencies in South Africa – and wanted to partner with an agency that was dedicated to preserving the African aesthetic, while sharing it with the world in a contemporary way.

I feel very strongly about the importance of doing that work. Combined with that, I also value celebrating Black feminine voices within the creative industry. Once I realised what my goals are, going independent as a street artist and illustrator was the natural route to take.



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▣ ***How did you learn to express yourself through art?***

There's a subconscious element to it that connects to conscious thinking and feeling. I value the African aesthetic and take pride in our continent – the nuances and elements that really hold so much power to connect us. Sometimes these are aspects of life we take for granted – but because I'm focused on them – spotting and celebrating these features has become more natural.

My work always begins in my sketchbook – this part of my process helps me process visual references and my surroundings. These range from being quite abstract to literal interpretations. From there, I translate and develop my work into digital illustrations.

▣ ***What challenges have you faced as a street artist in South Africa?***

When it comes to starting any career, there are always logistical challenges. Depending on the profession, these teething phases can look like an apprenticeship, internship or learnership.

You don't earn that much – but you're driven to perform based on the purpose that drives you. For the most part, knowing who to partner with makes a great change and helps you stay on track.

▣ ***Has collaborating with brands helped you overcome these challenges? Why/Why not?***

Yes, in many ways. I think I've refined how I do business and how I work because of it. I know how to perform under pressure and who I need to partner with to support those business needs – this frees me up to focus on doing what I consider my speciality.

It also supports my goal to partner and collaborate with other people who share similar views on the creative industry.

▣ ***Tell us about some of the projects and campaigns you have worked on?***

I've had the privilege of working on several local and international projects and campaigns.

Currently, I'm really excited to be partnering with Halls. The mentorship programme we're working on has so much potential to pave the way for up-and-coming creatives. It started with me mentoring and has evolved to include four of my go-to specialists in four extremely valuable areas for any creative person to feel comfortable in legal, strategy, management and relationship building, as well as content and social media.



Image supplied: Karabo Poppy hosting a Masterclass with Halls

■ ***What is important to you when deciding who to collaborate with?***

Values and purpose. These two things need to align in order for the collaboration to be authentic. It also filters through to maintaining a respectful relationship where both parties regard the other as an equal.

■ ***What advice do you have for young artists in South Africa?***

Talent is so important – but it's not something that can stand on its own. Maybe it can, but let's say it works better when combined with business skills, dedication and collaborating with people who share similar views.

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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