

Zainab Mitha is a woman on a mission

 By [Maroefah Smith](#)

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FCB Durban junior art director Zainab Mitha forms part of the South African ad industry's new wave of change. Armed with honours in brand communications, she's ready to take on the ad world.



Zainab Mitha.

Since joining FCB Durban, Mitha has already racked several accolades, including a silver Pendorring (the only from her province to do so, BTW) and she placed third in print at the Creative Circle 2018 Annual Awards.

And there's no stopping her boundary-pushing streak, she'll be using her expertise as a judge at this year's Loeries.

She talks to us about inclusion in the ad industry, how her *hijab* makes her memorable and her plans after Loeries, which include a nap and creating a podcast.

■ What makes you different from all the other junior art directors in South Africa?

I think we're all just trying our best to prove ourselves in a very fast-moving and competitive industry. Unlike many other juniors, I ended up in an environment with very supportive people who want to see me succeed.



#CreativeMorningsCT: "Block out all the outside noise, the naysayers, the dream-killers"

Juanita Pienaar 5 Jul 2017



I have an incredible ECD who has refused to let me stay in my comfort zone since day one. As much as I enjoy complaining every time he throws something at me (not literally), it's something I've really needed and appreciate.

“ Congratulations to Zainab Mitha on being selected as [@loeries](#) judge! Making us proud [@fcb_durban](#) [pic.twitter.com/7RWJo2ooMI](#)— Brandon Govender (@brandongovender) [July 26, 2019](#) ”

Support like this from co-workers, ex-lecturers, friends and family has allowed me to focus on trying to meet my expectations of myself and work on becoming a better art director.

■ **How do you want to inspire other young girls who want to join the advertising industry but are afraid because they don't see themselves represented in the industry?**

My focus has always been on pursuing creativity, whether I saw someone like me in the industry or not.

It wasn't until I was in college that I looked up and realised I was the only *hijabi* and continued to be for the next four years.

“ I think my power to inspire lies in simply being in the industry so that when the next girl looks up she sees she's not alone, giving her courage to take the creative leap. ”

■ **Who do you look up to?**

I've always struggled to answer this question. It always felt like the correct response would be my mom or Will Smith. Recently I've come to realise that I look up to the people I've surrounded myself with.

They say you take on the personality traits of the five people you spend the most time with, so aren't we all just made up of a bunch stolen personality traits? A cheeky concept really, harvesting the qualities we aspire to hold. Just make sure you hang around the right people.

■ **How do you think the industry can be more inclusive?**

I do think I'll need to spend a little more time in industry before being able to truly answer this.

I have been lucky enough to end up in an agency that hasn't made me feel like I'm being held back by being who I am. Maybe ask me this again in a couple of years and I'll have more insight for you.

■ **How have people in the industry reacted to your hijab?**

Over the years I've used a loud personality to overcompensate for an outfit that stereotypically makes you seem

unapproachable. So I haven't really given anyone a chance to react negatively.



Olympian Ibtihaj Muhammad inspires first hijab-wearing Barbie doll

14 Nov 2017



I have noticed that it's great when it comes to being remembered. A couple of months back I bumped into an ECD that did a talk at college sometime back and tried introducing myself but didn't need to,

“ turns out a scarf is more effective than a business card! ”

■ You'll be judging at this year's Loeries. What are you most looking forward to?

All of it. I didn't expect this opportunity, especially at such a young age so I'm not taking it very lightly.

In my mind, I can't imagine why this would ever happen again so I plan on giving it my all and taking in as much as I can. I'll be interacting with some of Africa's best creatives, it would be a shame if I didn't take advantage.

■ What creative work inspires you?

I follow the work of creatives with a variety of styles. A few being Dan Mace's video editing, Daniella Clough's embroidery work and Julia Barminova's watercolour.

All have an incredible body of work to draw inspiration from, but there's nothing more motivating than seeing the amount of work that goes into each creative piece. It's very easy to forget that it takes a lot of work and practise to get to the level of these individuals.

That is why I find it so motivating to witness the growth, development and creative process of other creatives.

“

Motion graphics

Motion graphic ”

■ What'll you be up after Loeries?

My short-term goals are to take a nap.

Long-term, I'm not sure yet. I've been going with the flow, taking on every challenge that's come my way and it's been working for me so far.



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I'll also be doing the modern-day equivalent of starting a band in your mom's garage – starting a podcast. Titled 'Podvertising', it will be exactly that – a podcast about advertising. Look out for it on the FCB Durban account.

Check out some of Zainab's creative work on [Behance](#) and [Pinterest](#).

ABOUT MAROEFAH SMITH

Enthusiastic UCT graduate with a passion for fashion, film and words.

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