

Human myth vs AI machine

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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One of the most exciting aspects of this year's Design Indaba was a sense of camaraderie between designers of all disciplines from font to film. Perhaps due to the underlying fear of human redundancy due to AI, creativity's last stand is bringing out the best in us, in a celebration of the uniquely human gifts - consciousness, imagination, myth, movement and meaning - which are the base materials of joy...



Filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu in conversation with Terry Levin and Louise Marsland. © [Terry Levin](#).

One of the world's most respected and awarded Creative business leaders David Droga had closed the Indaba with this theme - of people's fear of diminishing jobs due to AI automation, reassuring us that the creative thinker would be the one job that would be hardest to get rid of...linear and logic might make the world go round, he said, but it's the creative people that make it worth living in.



#DesignIndaba2019: Droga: Make advertising that people give a shit about

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#DesignIndaba2019: "Find the emotional connection in a pure, authentic way" - David Droga

Ann Nurock 4 Mar 2019



The quest for Wakanda

Earlier in the week, to audience cheers, founder of Zipline drone delivery system Keenan Wyrobek had compared their Rwandan medical supplies launch operations to a Wakanda, the mythical African city-state seen in the Black Panther movie, that leads the world in health care, design and technology and which is in a way, its unsung hero.

#DesignIndaba2019: Bringing 'Wakanda' to life with life-saving drones





Reclaiming the sky

Design Indaba audiences take a live link-up between mythical-in-his-own-right, Virgil Abloh - artistic director of Louis Vuitton and CEO of the Milan-based Off-White label - in conversation with the legendary Dong-Ping Wong, director of NY-based Food architecture practice, in their stride.

Notwithstanding that the live chat takes place while Abloh is prepping for the LV Paris fashion show the next day, a meeting of minds resulted in Wong live-sketching ideas for the cities of the future, revealing blue sky ideas such as the need to go up, “High ground is wealth, with the best access to views and overviews, high ground is democracy” they agreed.

A similar quest for and celebration of a mythical motherland, perhaps a Wakanda, has been demonstrated via the fruitful [collaborations of Ikea with African designers and makers](#), where furniture and fabrics become imbued with soul, derived from ritual and diversity.

Earth mother, sky father

The work of Kordae Jafta Henry, architect and film-maker explores cinema as a form of research to speculate on myths of the near future. His music video *Earth Mother, Sky Father* embodies a profound theme - the manufacturing of electronic devices in China, how these aggregate meaning in our hands and pockets, changing and shifting power over the earth. In his film the excavation of rare earth minerals heals the earth, Africa controls its own minerals, and there is no separation between spirit and the source.

Unearthing old and new rituals around joy through film

Awarded Kenyan filmmaker and consummate storyteller Wanuri Kahiú spoke about the need to reclaim joy as key to African culture and identity. This is why she calls her film company AfroBubblegum.com - a pink and popping foundations on which to build an iconic empire with a fun, fierce and frivolous front!



#DesignIndaba2019: Wanuri Kahiú announced as speaker

Juanita Pienaar 14 Aug 2018



Describing the lake desert lakes of Turkana, she jokes it is a place somewhere East of Wakanda. She talks about the Burana Calendar consisting of 12 months of 29.5 days each to arrive at a 354-day year which existed 1800 years before the Gregorian calendar. How, situated on the Equator as they are, days and nights are the same length, how the constellations that rise before the moon give rise to a different name for every day of the month and the shadows cast by basalt pillars enable you to tell you what day and month it is.

Using examples of influencers such as [@pichamarangi](#), [@Xawaashking](#) and [@monicaobaga](#) she describes rituals of beauty that have nothing to do with ceremony but are about how as Africans we see ourselves and incorporating joy and beauty into our lives every day.



Africa's next generation influencers announced

3 Nov 2017



A Handmaid's Tale

No concept of beauty, costume, film or myth would be complete without mentioning the privilege of having heard Hollywood costume designer Ane Crabtree's on the Artscape stage. Her descriptions of the use of palettes and drapery to create immersive experiences for actors to live in that help inform their characters, such as the unforgettable red robes and white bonnets seen in award-winning *The Handmaid's Tale*, was definitely one of this year's Indaba highlights.

Using fashion for transformation of a different nature, the much-anticipated showing by Nigerian fashion designer and founder of Orange Culture, Adebayo Oke-Lawal, is reinventing masculine archetypes to global acclaim.

Mythical archaeology

Delving further into the realms of myth and imagination, perhaps as fuel for future African filmic odysseys, Kahiú tells of the lineage of the Jengu, the mermaid water spirits of the Cameroon and Ninki naka dragons, mythical creatures from Gambia with the ability to transform. She points out that the Xhosa culture also has a dragon spirit - the shape-shifting Impululu - who may be a witch's apprentice.

Call to joy

Perhaps the intention of stories and myths has always been transformative. How cool is Kordae Jafta Henry's mining metaphor to describe the literal unearthing of new myths and meaning, perhaps using them like the shape-shifting dragons

to reinvent ourselves as people of joy, an example to a world gone sad.

Do it for the data

Kahiu finishes with an appeal. Audiences deserve the movies that they watch and that if you want to hear more voices of diversity in your media, you have to buy the ticket. When you see a non-white male or a non-binary person make a film, she urges, buy a ticket. Do it for the data. There are many more stories to be told. Black Panther cannot be the only film to explain the reason why diversity matters.

The future designer is a dreamer

Scandinavian Olof Schybergson of Fjord design studio in New York, had pointed out that unlike science futurist vision videos, people are fun and idiosyncratic with emotions, mysterious, which makes design infinitely interesting.



#DesignIndaba2019: Olof Schybergson on embracing frustration and hope

Angie White 1 Mar 2019



He says that big business has “fallen in love with design”, citing President Cyril Ramaphosa’s presence at the World Economic Forum and the need to empower workforces not only with Stem (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education), but the importance of including Art in the mix as Steam - education for future sustainability.

He too questions the value of human time, asking what will be left of human work when technology is better at doing stuff that humans used to do, commenting that the optimist view is that this is nothing new, we used to have lift operators, manual typesetting and one day we will say we used to be people that sat in cars.

He says the future designer is more of a dreamer than ever and that Disney and others are working on reimagining the whole future of entertainment. Great news for all the incredible designers, architects and filmmakers who showed their work at this year’s Design Indaba and all talented and the visionary who will be inspired by their example in future!

For more:

www.designindaba.com

ABOUT TERRY LEVIN

Brand and Culture Strategy consulting | Bizcommunity.com COO at large. Email terry@offtheshelf.co.za, Twitter [@terrylevin](https://twitter.com/terrylevin), Instagram, LinkedIn.

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