

Silver jubilee shines with Department of Audacious Projects launch

By Leigh Andrews

26 Feb 2020

"Hello Cape Town, how're you doing?" With host Lebo Mashile's enthusiastic greeting on stage and Lucas De Man sliding down from the rafters, Design Indaba's 25th edition held fast to the motto of changing the world through creativity, with the introduction of the Department of Audacious Projects 'think tank do tank', headed by 'minister' Ravi Naidoo.



Image snapped by Andrews, from Design Indaba 2020.

Many international festivals set for 2020 have been cancelled because of the spread of the coronavirus, but this year over 30 of the top design global minds featured on the programme at Design Indaba, which hosts Mashile and De Man said speaks a lot to South African resilience.

Looking to the audience, one attendee proudly popped up a hand to prove they had seen all 25 editions of Design Indaba, with many more attending for the first time ever, and a smattering from the rest of the continent, Europe and even Asia. Little wonder that we basked in the glow of being called a "generous, accommodating audience!"

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Very exciting 3 days ahead! #designindaba2020

A post shared by [CraigandRuth Poulton](#) (@craigandruth) on Feb 25, 2020 at 11:34pm PST

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Social commentator and performer Mashile shone in her third year as Design Indaba MC while Belgian TV personality and theatre director Lucas De Man manned up for a second year straight and called for applause of sponsors Mercedes-Benz, Woolworths and SA Tourism for making Design Indaba happen, yet again.

Before moving on to introduce the much-anticipated speakers, Mashile and De Man introduced Sisa Ntshona, CEO of SA Tourism, who made a special announcement...

Where politics and creativity meet

With this Ntshona's first time attending Design Indaba, he congratulated their 25-year milestone, and said that looking at Design Indaba from the outside in, he knows that something special happens in the room that really changes things.

SA Tourism wanted to be part of this creative society, as a true example of what is possible when great minds get together.

“ South African Tourism CEO Sisa Ntshona addressing the audience at the official opening of [#DesignIndaba2020](#) [@ArtscapeTheatre](#) auditorium in Cape Town [pic.twitter.com/0yrNTF4FCH](#)— Department of Arts & Culture (@ArtsCultureSA) [February 26, 2020](#) ”

Ntshona reiterated that Design Indaba is more than just a conference - big things happen here, like having Thomas Heatherwick first speak at Design Indaba in 2006, before going on to design Cape cultural gem, the Zeitz Mocaa.



#DesignIndaba2018: Thomas Heatherwick on designing with heart and soul

Ann Nurock 26 Feb 2018



Design Indaba's Arch for Arch project also started as a conversation in the room, as well as countless other truly inspiring simple ideas, which become iconic when put together.

Ntshona took a serious slant, asking attendees to wear their patriotic hats when thinking of South Africa. There's no denying that negativity pervades when rating agencies have us in negative and hold status, especially on the day of the Budget Speech.

The true state of SA economy

Unfortunately, our projected economic growth is at less than 1% and we have the world's largest Gini coefficient, as the gap between the haves and have nots keeps widening per year.

Take that into account with our unemployment rate, and it can seem like we're sitting on a ticking time bomb.



South Africa needs a fresh approach to its stubbornly high levels of inequality

Edward Webster 14 Dec 2017



But Ntshona asks, "Whose problem is it? You can't run a successful business in an unsuccessful country." It's time for the creative industry to step up to the plate.

Ntshona spoke of the power of America's campaign trail. Trump's slogan: "Make America great again" still hits home; Obama ran with "Yes, we can"; yet it's Bill Clinton's campaign slogan that resonates: "It's the economy, stupid,"

When we see the globally dominant trends of Brexit, the US-China trade war and the African continental Free-Trade Agreement, it's all about trade, as that's the only way we will see true economic growth.



AfCFTA creates optimism on the continent

9 Jul 2019



If we look at SA's trade ability, our claim to fame to the world lies in mining and manufacturing, yet it's becoming more difficult and expensive to succeed here.

That's why Ntshona wants to make a case for tourism, as he calls it the only sector with the hope of getting the economy going.

Time for tourism to shine

It's the fastest-growing industry globally, growing 8% per annum, and we've been blessed with such a beautiful country. We've been drunk on the commodities we had to offer for so long – until now.

“ Now, we need to bring in tourists to spend and boost the economy. ”

This was a key point in President Ramaphosa's 2019 Sona address, with tourism touted as the answer, and a target of 21m new arrivals to the country by 2030. That's a case of doubling the number of people coming to spend in our economy.



"We want to see a much more inclusive marketing industry in South Africa" - SA Tourism CMO

Jessica Tennant 26 Feb 2020



But how can we bring more people in?

Ntshona acknowledges that marketing alone cannot achieve this goal. We can speak of safety and security, remove red tape, but as the best-case scenario, we would only hit 16m of that target. He'd like the creative industry to help reel in the last 5m. Here's how...

Creative army, join the Department of Audacious Projects!

Ntshona asked the room to help South Africa close the gap, and what better place to say, "Your country needs you!"



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Leigh Andrews 24 Jul 2017



He mentioned that we tend to be armchair critics who point at the TV when things go wrong, now it's time for the brain's trust and creative army to get involved, to tap into the collective wisdom of the room.

Ntshona said he is effectively "starting a new ministry" called The Department of Audacious Projects, with Ravi Naidoo appointed as minister to help us get the economy back on track, a role that's not for the faint-hearted.

The 'think tank, do tank'

Naidoo made a rare appearance on stage to acknowledge that we feel all stressed about South Africa, but "it can't just be a whinge and cappuccino" - rather, we need to deploy a 'think and do' tank.

“ Congrats to [@ravinaidoo](#) on his new appointment! [#DI2020](#) <https://t.co/Ufi6gEpHZT>— Marketing & Media SA (@Biz_Marketing) [February 26, 2020](#) ”

Obviously, if tourism is the world's best industry, that's where we should start. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers can also be drafted in for projects, to tackle the unemployment problem and share the skillset.

“ For proper step-change to grow the economy, Naidoo promised that for next three years at Design Indaba, all attendees will be conscripted to come up with the most audacious projects. We don't want hygiene factors or simple Wi-Fi installations, we want to work in collaboration with others across the globe, as well as attendees past and present, with the opening gambit at this Design Indaba. We want that crazy project that will make our hair stand up. ”

The winning idea from this year's Design Indaba will be awarded R50,000 on Friday so send an email to dap@designindaba.com, or record a one-minute voxpop pitch live. Come up, we're enlisting you for national duty!



Exclusive! Design Indaba 25-year interview with Ravi Naidoo

24 Feb 2020



ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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