

## 2023 Fak'ugesi Awards celebrate digital creativity

In a vibrant awards ceremony that illuminated the 10th-anniversary celebrations of the Fak'ugesi African Digital Innovation Festival, the Fak'ugesi 2023 Awards for Digital Creativity proudly unveiled the winning projects spanning animation, video games, visual arts, music, and XR (AR/VR) categories.



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The awards, now in its second year following a successful debut in 2022, holds the distinction of being the sole award of its kind on the continent, recognising exceptional digital innovation within Africa's creative landscape.

Commenting on the awards, Fak'ugesi's festival director Eduardo Cachucho says, "Over the past decade since our inception, we've witnessed and celebrated the phenomenal growth of African creativity in the digital space. This year's nominees showcased an exceptional standard, seamlessly blending multidisciplinary practices with digital creativity to celebrate the richness of African culture."

Selected and scored by esteemed panel of external judges, who are leaders in their respective fields, these visionary individuals are recognised for their groundbreaking achievements in their chosen fields and having masterfully infused creativity and digital art to reshape the landscape of African innovation.

### Animation

Arowan Parker - *The Present*

Arowan Parker, a South African animator, storyteller, and writer, is the creative mind behind *The Present*. This award-winning project explores the escape into fictional narratives, the rediscovery of human connections and finding beauty in the present moment.

#### Nkem Nwaturuocha - *The Song Maiden*

Nkem Nwaturuocha, co-founder and creative director of Disrupt DNA, is a passionate storyteller across advertising, film, and animation. *The Song Maiden* is a short, animated film depicting the struggles of a young girl caught between cultural norms, offering a compelling story of resilience and personal growth.

#### Lola Aikins - *Naledi*

Lola Aikins, a talented 2D animator and visual development artist, is on a mission to promote authentic African aesthetics in animation. Her debut short film, *Naledi* delves into the story of a star athlete who must confront her overwhelming grief to regain confidence and finish her race.

### **Video Games**

#### Kushal Jeethendra Sithlu - *The Null Factor*

Kushal Jeethendra Sithlu, a multifaceted creative as a game designer, writer, and founder of Pineapple on Pizza Studios. His latest project, 'The Null Factor' is an action-packed adventure in a post-pandemic world against a rogue AI.

#### Alkemaize - *Rapz!*

Alkemaize, a game development studio, is on a mission to create inspirational and educational games that challenge perceptions. Their latest project, 'Rapz!' follows the story of Rapulani, a young girl with a magical afro. The game aims to promote self-love, especially among young girls dealing with hair-related challenges.

### **Visual Arts**

#### Diane Cescutti - *Nosukaay*

Diane Cescutti, is a French visual artist of Cameroonian-Italian and French heritage. Her latest project, 'Nosukaay' explores the links between Manjak weaving and computer technology using a Manjak cloth as a keyboard.

### **XR**

#### Agnes Ndegwa - *Young Haven*

Agnes Ndegwa is an imaginative 3D artist, VR content creator, and Illustrator, whose brainchild 'Young Haven' ventures into the realm of virtual reality with a profound focus on children's mental health and emotional acumen. It serves as a sanctuary for children to play, relax, and communicate with their guardians, fostering open and expressive dialogues.

#### Aluta Null - *Phantom*

A Johannesburg-based digital artist and game developer, Aluta utilises various digital mediums, from extended reality to

video games, to convey their distinctive perspectives on politics, perception, and pop culture. Their latest project, Phantom, is a digital art endeavour that delves into the complexities of mental health disintegration employing extended reality as a means to draw parallels between the elusive nature of mental illness and haunting, ethereal apparitions.

### Baruu Collective - If Objects Could Speak

Hailing from Kenya, Baruu Collective is a dynamic production and creative agency on a mission to redefine and rekindle African narratives rooted in cultural heritage. 'If Objects Could Speak' follows daring filmmakers who unearth Kenyan artifacts from a German museum cellar, using immersive AR to revitalise them and embark on a journey to share this cultural treasure in Kenya's communities.

### **Music**

#### |Kx'am - !Habesi

|Kx'am, a non-profit organisation, is dedicated to researching, restoring, and promoting |Xam and Khoe knowledge systems, culture, art, and heritage through new media. Their multimedia exhibition, !Habesi (roots), showcases fine art, photography, poetry, indigenous instruments, and augmented reality, shedding light on |Xam and Khoe land rights and honouring Ouma Katrina.

“As we celebrate the outstanding winners of the Fak’ugesi Digital Creativity Awards, we recognise that their exceptional projects not only captivate local audiences but also resonate on the global stage. With opportunities for international residencies and participation in industry events, these innovators are poised to showcase their talents to the world. Recognition in these awards underscores Fak’ugesi’s pivotal role in shaping the future of digital creativity, while these projects stand as powerful examples of how local perspectives can speak to audiences across the African continent,” says Cachucho.

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