

Reference with respect: How creativity can thrive today

Cannes Lions 2022 is shaping up to be one of the most exciting years in the award show's history, bolstered by the two-year hiatus it took due to the pandemic. But for all the talk of celebration and the industry's renewed energy, there are issues that still need to be addressed such as cultural appropriation, the subject of Nkanyezi Masango's talk at the festival.



Source: © lbbonline.com lbbonline.com Nkanyezi Masango will talk on cultural appropriation at Cannes Lions 2022

Group executive creative director at King James and associate director at Accenture Song, Masango is also a juror at Cannes this year and a member of the Creative Academy, that helps young talent reach their full potential at Cannes.

Truly historical event for the industry

Excitement is the defining emotion all the attendees are feeling this year, with a dash of uncertainty as to what exactly to expect.

A lot has changed in the past two years, and these changes better reflect and address where we are today as an industry, and as a society at large.

Attending the festival as part of the new Accenture Song is reflective of some of those changes as we're looking to the future and redefining what marketing and advertising can be, with a new name and identity.

It's a big statement to make but I think this will be a truly historic event for our industry, one we'll remember and refer to for years to come.

“ If you're in the creative business, this is for you. See you on Monday [@AccentureSong](#) [@KJGroupAfrica](#) 🎉🎉🎉🎉
[#CannesLions2022](#) [pic.twitter.com/71E44JJT6s](#)— Nkanyezi Masango (@MisterMasango) [June 16, 2022](#) ”

Cultural appropriation

Yet, despite the above, cultural appropriation remains a prescient topic of discussion because creativity is always in conversation with references and ideas found in other cultures.

No one is saying that we need to stop being curious and looking outside of ourselves for inspiration.

Rather, the question at hand is how to do it respectfully, so that the cultures we are inspired by are represented and rewarded appropriately.

I can think of countless examples where Zulu warriors or people from the Maasai tribe were cast in a car ad (car ads like to return to this idea often) with the view to 'celebrate' their culture, but all it does is use that culture to sell a product - without contributing to it.

The brands who engage in this surface level 'celebration' get to benefit from the aesthetics of that celebration, while the people whose culture is depicted do not.



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The line between celebration and appropriation

The purpose of my talk is all about getting creatives to think about the line between celebration and appropriation, to think beyond aesthetics, and to consider the tangible ways ideas contribute to culture.

Are we accelerating or hindering progress? Are we communicating authentically or using someone's likeness and culture for pure gain?

It's worth remembering that the original composer of The Lion King's iconic song, *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*, was Solomon Linda - a South African Zulu man who died penniless while the world enjoyed the fruits of his labour.

The movie itself claimed to celebrate African culture and wildlife - is Linda's treatment in line with what we understand as celebration?



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The thin line

The line between celebration, appropriation, and exploitation remains thin.

What we mustn't do is turn away from the difficult conversation or say that we won't look outside ourselves for inspiration.

As creatives, we have all the tools to address the issue today. For example, to ensure that references are respectful, the room of decision-makers should have representatives of that culture who can advise from the angle of their authentic lived experience.

It should also be stated plainly that in the world of commercials, money is a factor and there's a lot of it to be made at the expense of others.

Using someone's image to make money, while the people in question make nothing, should never again be seen as celebratory.

My talk will encompass all these points to empower the industry to think creatively and ethically at once.



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Danette Breitenbach 2 Mar 2022



A unique lens in SA

South Africans don't have the budgets that our counterparts in America or Europe do.

However, I think this makes for incredibly interesting work. Without all the resources, we have no tricks up our sleeves to disguise and distract.

What we do have are ideas - only the simplest, purest, most brilliant ideas make it to market, with nothing to hide behind.

This is the lens I'm bringing to Cannes Lions 2022 as I believe that that kind of pure creativity transcends cultures and budgets.

Cannes is the epicentre of creativity and at the end of the day we're not here to celebrate the glamour or the budgets - we're here to celebrate brilliant ideas.

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