

Iain S. Thomas, independent creative director and author

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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This week, we go behind the mask with independent creative director and author Iain S. Thomas.

At Loeries Creative Week, Thomas spoke about creativity from a philosophical, practical and critical perspective in the face of the current revolution in artificial intelligence, discussing his own work and where he sees our place in the world as creative people.



Iain S. Thomas

■ ***So tell us, what's really behind your mask (literally and/or figuratively speaking).***

A beard. An intense feeling that exists somewhere between hope and terror at the current state of the world.

■ ***Where are you locked down?***

Currently at home in Cape Town – we were supposed to emigrate to the US but our plane was booked about five days after our lockdown began and with the current state of things, we're very much taking a wait-and-see approach.

■ ***How are you finding working from home or physical distancing at the office / how has your way of working changed?***

I have a one-year-old and a four-year-old who I love dearly, despite their habit of bursting into Zoom calls to demand that I braid a doll's hair, so I work with other creative professionals out of the house, who I share a bubble with.

The biggest change for me is brainstorming over Zoom, and with Miro and other technology, I think there've been some really fascinating developments there. I love being able to brainstorm with creative teams in Belgium or Cape Town at the drop of a hat.

■ ***Describe a typical workday, if such a thing exists.***

There's no such thing right now. Between working on books in various stages, my business interests and working with various agencies on a freelance basis, everything is wonderful chaos. I pick three things each night to accomplish the next day and as long as I accomplish those three things, I consider the day a success.

■ **How do you maintain a good rapport with your teammates/clients?**

I do my best to remember that a lot of nuance is lost over a video call and to be as forgiving as possible no matter what, as it's 2020 and this does seem to be the end of the world.

■ **How do you socialise these days?**

The same as I always have: badly. I tried out VR Chat on my Oculus Rift the other day and it was pretty terrifying, and I don't think I'll be doing that again.

■ **What do you do to keep fit/healthy and/or sane (physically/mentally)?**

I play video games. I'm very into the new Star Wars Squadrons game in VR and I try to go cycling when I can. I also try to ensure that I'm doing creative things that have no potential to make me any money or bring me any benefit beyond the act of making them, whether that's art or music or writing.

■ **What new apps would we find if we scrolled through your phone?**

A lot of AI focused things. Portrait AI, for generating AI portraits from your selfies, Shortly, a short story prompt engine/platform and Replika, an AI chatbot.

■ **Share your favourite Covid-19/lockdown-related meme/gif with us.**

I don't really have any but I do miss the bread era of the pandemic. Those seemed like simpler times.

■ **What is the first thing you plan to do when the lockdown lifts?**

I wrote a book about it called, *What We Should Do When This Is Over* with my good friend, local illustrator and designer, Rikus Ferreira. You should check it out. I think at the top, I just want to watch my kids play without masks on.

■ **Describe your career and if/how the pandemic/lockdown has affected its course.**

All my books got pushed out as publishers had no idea what the pandemic would mean in terms of buying behaviour, so that's been challenging. The bottom dropped out of the retail market but they've since seen figures that suggest that the amount of people reading has skyrocketed, which makes sense as reading is a healthy escape and these are times when I feel like everyone needs to escape a little.

■ **Any companies/brands that you feel have responded particularly well to the crisis and/or Covid-19-related campaigns that stand out to you, and why?**

“ Not really. Most of the communication looks and feels the same – a sentimental track, a sombre yet vaguely uplifting voice-over and then “Buy a car”. Or a shoe. And I don't really blame anyone for that. I don't know if right now is the time for cleverness. I think it's a time for sincerity and humanness and it can be hard to do that in a way that doesn't come across as the exact opposite. ”

■ **What are you working on right now?**

Everything. I'm supposed to be livestreaming my poetry into an avant-garde jazz concert in Denmark in a few days but that looks like it might not happen, so it might have to be pre-recorded. I've recently launched a print, gifting and merchandising business based on my books with my wife, and that's challenging but exciting.

I also have another book coming out in March next year, and so I'm in the process of planning that launch, and I'm in the process of finalising the pitch for my next book with my agents in New York. And I still freelance as an independent creative director and writer. I don't really mind doing all of that. It's great to consistently have challenges and to be able to cross-

pollinate my various projects with each other and to take what I'm learning in one area and apply it to another.

■ ***What does the 'new normal' look like to you?***

A lot more independence, I think. A smaller world with more opportunities, I hope.

■ ***What are some of the buzzwords floating around at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself?***

"Hold on," comes up a lot.

■ ***What advice would you give to other industry folk during this time?***

I was once told that the Chinese word for chaos is the same as the word for opportunity. It was a lie but I like the sentiment behind it.

Visit Thomas' website at iainsthomas.com, visit linktr.ee/iainsthomas, and follow him on [Twitter](#), <http://instagram.com/realiainsthomas/> [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

*Interviewed by [Jessica Tennant](#).

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