

Design Indaba 2018: A copywriter's expert opinion

 By [Jeff Harvey](#)

25 Apr 2018

We have a standing joke at Grey. When I give my two cents on something visual, I'll say, "I'm not a designer, but..." which gives me licence to drop pearls of wisdom and everybody else a licence to roll their eyes. Oh, how we laugh. Look, I don't know much about design, but I know what I like. And I liked Design Indaba 2018. Here's why...



It was insightful and inspiring. In fact, I was so inspired that I bunked the second morning. Not because I wasn't interested in the Day Two speakers, but because Thomas Heatherwick's talk on the first day compelled me to check out his latest architectural work: The Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art.



#DesignIndaba2018: Thomas Heatherwick on designing with heart and soul

[Ann Nurock](#) 26 Feb 2018



A visit without his insights wouldn't have been nearly as rich. I would never have known, for instance, that the atrium was made by cutting out the shape of an enlarged mielie pip into the grain silos. And that, for me, is what Design Indaba is about: going behind the curtain, digging deeper and mixing metaphors to understand these damn design geniuses.

Yes, I had seen and really enjoyed Khuli Chana's One Source music video, but only when I heard the heartfelt story of its director, Sunu Gonera, did I appreciate the passion that went into it and its context of Afrofuturism. Sunu is a masterful storyteller, but his own story is as compelling as his movies. He told us how Clint Eastwood and Bruce Lee helped him escape the stress of growing up in a Zim township. During the civil war, he imagined the tracer bullets at night were fireworks. We felt his embarrassment when he couldn't pay for lunch with Idris Elba in Hollywood. All these personal experiences made him, and his work, more authentic.

#DesignIndaba2018: 'This is Africa's moment'

[Louise Marsland](#) 21 Feb 2018





I'd heard *Hello* by Adele before, but only at the Indaba, when I saw a pre-recorded video of one of her live concerts, did I get goosebumps. And thanks to Es Devlin, the set designer, I understood why. She explained that by projecting a close-up video of the singer's eyes onto a giant screen, it amplified our most expressive language - eye contact - for an intimate, visceral connection. Combine that with the pop diva's haunting voice and you can't help but be moved.



Screenshot image supplied.



#DesignIndaba2018: Es Devlin on moving from thoughts to words to actions, fast

Leigh Andrews 26 Feb 2018



If you live on Earth, you've probably seen sand. Not much to look at, right? Until you meet Lonny van Ryswyck. As she started her talk, she removed her shoes. The gesture was natural, endearing and perfectly apt as she's more in touch with the ground than most.



#DesignIndaba2018: Seeing the world through a grain of sand

Jessica Tennant 23 Feb 2018



Barefoot and pregnant with ideas, she explained how sand is a seriously diminishing resource and how each type has a unique and fascinating character. Who knew? One of her projects, "A World of Sand", has sourced samples from around the world to reveal a broad array of the world's colours and textures. Thanks to her, I saw this mundane material with new eyes.



Screenshot image supplied.

Then there were death masks. Traditionally, these works record the contours of a person’s face at the time of their death. Neri Oxman, however, a professor at the MIT Media Lab, had a fresh take.

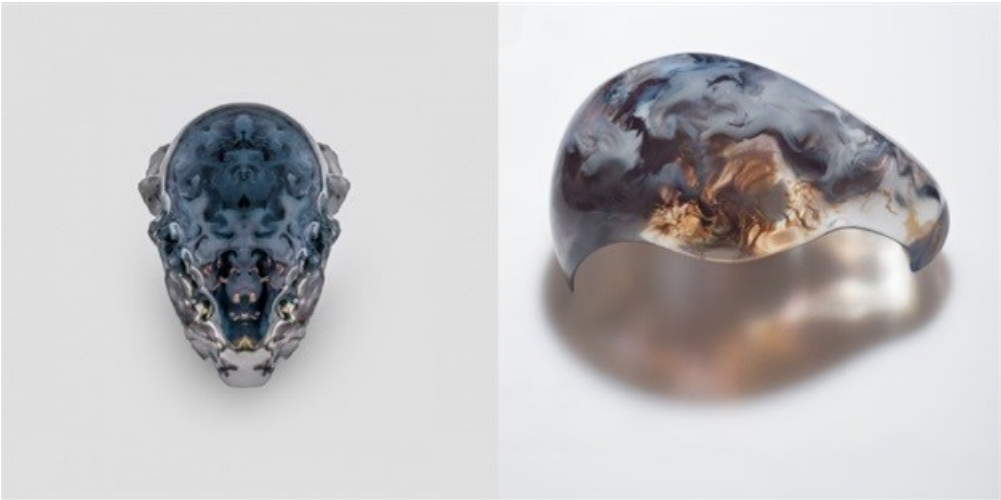


#DesignIndaba2018: Neri Oxman is naturing our future

Sue Disler 26 Feb 2018



Displaying colourful swirling patterns, her intricate 3D-printed death masks are informed by the airflow from a person’s last breath. Morbid, I know, but Neri was full of life as she enlightened us about her art. Some of the detail went over my head but she had a true zeal for honouring the deceased through memory.



Screenshot image supplied.

Yes, the Indaba is about takkies made of algae, poetry written with computer code, and a melting Trump gracing the cover of *Time Magazine*. But it’s just as much about the thinkers who bring their ideas to life. No, I’m not a designer, but I am a human being. And Design Indaba 2018 spoke to me like one.



#DesignIndaba2018: The next generation of fashion is biology

Jessica Tennant 23 Feb 2018





Highlights and higher powers at Design Indaba 2018: The superheroes of design

Terry Levin 26 Feb 2018



ABOUT JEFF HARVEY

Born in Durban, raised in Joburg and seasoned in Adland, Jeff has a fetish for fresh ideas and clear, clever writing. After meeting a copywriter while studying Business Science at UCT, Jeff got an itch for ads that only an internship at King James could scratch. Since then he's worked at Saatchi & Saatchi, Havas, Switch and Grey. With over a decade's experience as a copywriter, he's snared numerous awards including a D&AD Pencil, gold Cannes Lion and gold Loerie.

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