

Hall of Fame inductee Nathan Reddy on Grid's culture refresh disruption and curation

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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This year's Loeries Creative Hall of Fame inductee, Nathan Reddy, chief creative officer and founder of Grid Worldwide Branding and Design, has just turned 47. In this exclusive, off-the-cuff interview he shares his views on the formidable work coming from the Middle East and why his 23-year-old daughter is his source of inspiration when creative block strikes.

Representing the only SA agency to win a Grand Prix on the first award night -in the communication design category for Marble's "Meat made luxury" - Reddy fills impressive shoes, with the late Tony Koenderman inducted two years ago and Facebook Africa's inspirational Nunu Ntshingila the most recent addition at Loeries 2016.



#Loeries2016: Ntshingila inducted into the Creative Hall of Fame

Ann Nurock 21 Aug 2016



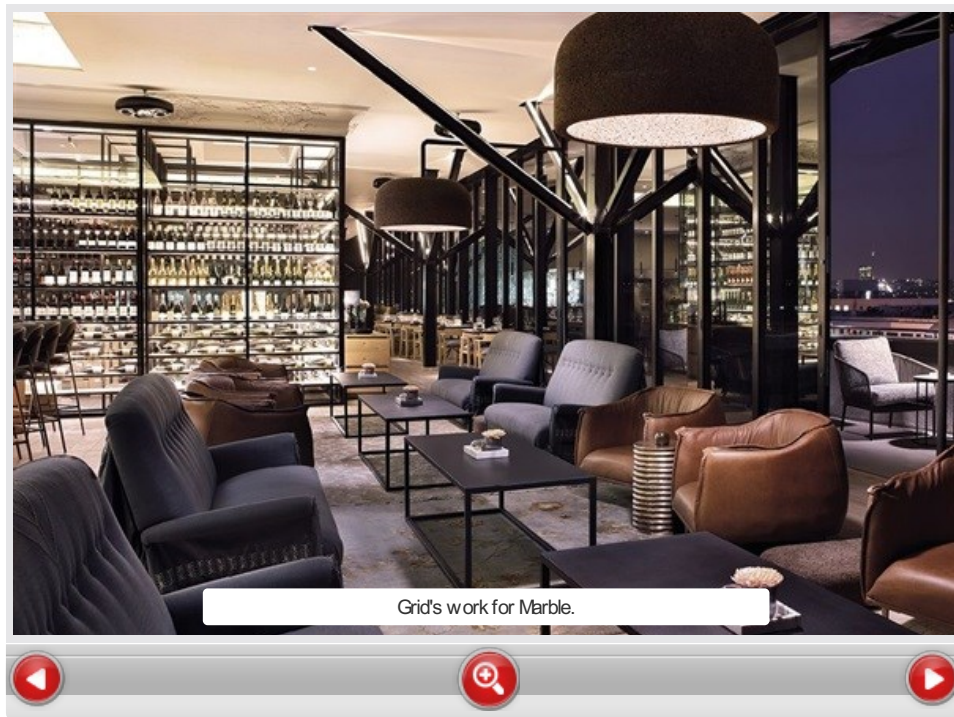
Chatting to Reddy about his addition to the Hall of Fame, I learned that while he was initially surprised, he's more than ready for this as he's humble, hungry to learn more and hugely inspiring. Here's why...

■ **What does your induction into the Hall of Fame mean to you and your career so far?**

To be honest, when they phoned me to let me know I was a little shocked as I'm the kind of person who always looks forward, keeps moving and trying new stuff, and I have a very child-like mind that keeps absorbing, so I don't think I'm done yet. I have so much more in me and such a long way still to go!

So only when they told me about this, did I really reflect on my career. Once my shock settled and I started looking back, it sunk in that it's not about the age but about the contribution to the industry over so many different years. It's great that the passion still drives and burns, and sets your perspective as you don't usually give yourself any accolades. I'm all about what I'll do next.

While looking back and also looking forward, it's an interesting milestone in terms of perspective. I live by the saying that if you don't give back to the world, you're stealing. So I always keep in mind whether my successes are in my own interests. I look back at the entire span of my clients and cultures and am reminded of the quote, "No one died because of advertising." That may be true, but a lot of people do live because of it. Let me explain: Whenever I create and refresh brands, I remember going to the building of a client that I refreshed, and the initial photographs of the people were so drab, there was no spring in their step – then suddenly, after the refresh, the business had purpose. It wasn't just a face job, we went directly into culture and worked out with the CEO to find out what we could do to change the business for the better.



All brands are fighting for share of voice, but while many agencies worry about communication or advertising about a client, they don't worry about the actual client itself. The client is made up of people and widgets and buildings, so many facets that it's almost as complex as a human being and it's on a bumpy road, facing competition at every curve. If you want to do great work, you need to work out what the client's about. If the client is amazing, and its people feel amazing, the service and products they offer will be unbelievable as a result of that firm belief system. That's why I say, "sure, no one died, but a lot of people lived because of advertising".

■ **No wonder so much of Grid's own work has been shortlisted for Loeries this year – all 20 of your 20 entries made the grade as finalists! As a judge of this year's communication design category, let us in on the calibre of work overall that you saw – did any trends emerge?**

Firstly, the Loeries' introduction of Africa and the Middle East has really boosted quality of entries. The Middle East in particular is doing some incredible work. A handful of years ago, when I was jury president of the Dubai Lynx Awards, run by Cannes Lions, I got an interesting first-hand look at the work they were doing, which served as a very good preview of what I saw in judging the Loeries this year. A lot of great people from all around the world are working in Dubai and the work is formidable. Production values are good, as is the thinking and understanding of all the mediums. So when you include that in the design stuff we were judging, it makes the category stronger. The South African and other African

pieces really have to stand out against them. This means the African work shortlisted is truly great and there's an excellent standard in design.

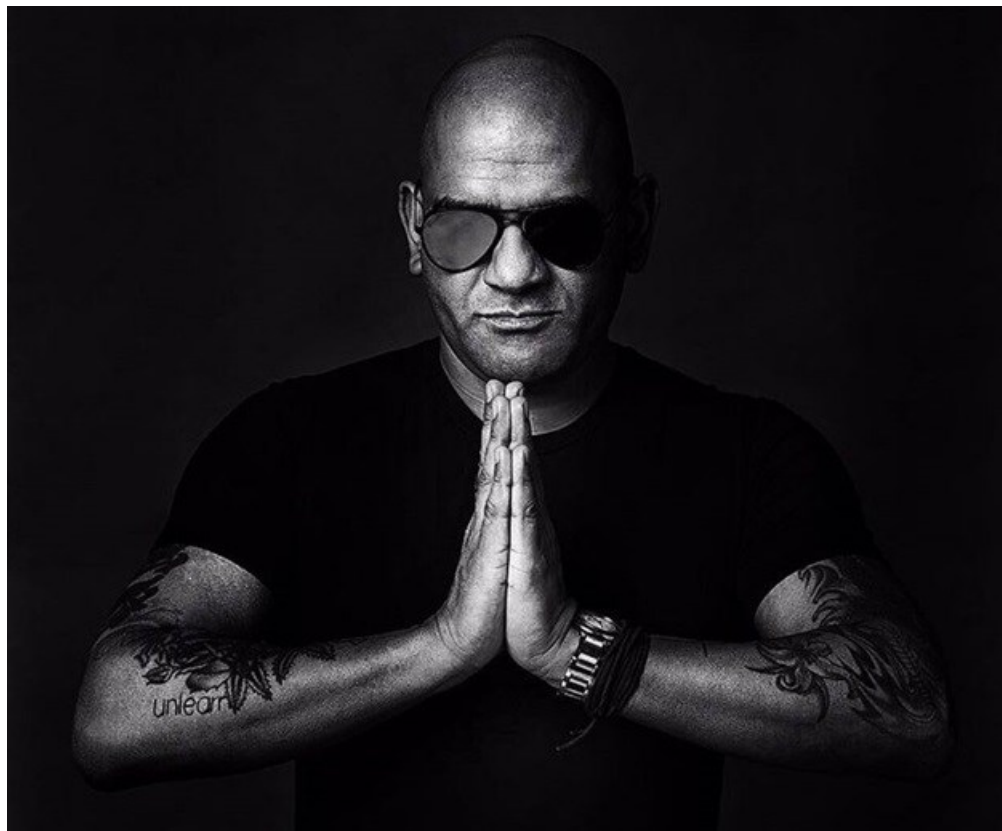
“ Loeries design Jury 2017, South Africa, Africa, and the Middle East. The future. [@BridgefordClint](#) [@Ad_Mski](#) [@paul_hinch](#) [@WadeMoonsamy](#) [pic.twitter.com/IPFVxhOX3c](#)— GRID (@nathangrid) August 16, 2017 ”

From a trends perspective, there aren't really any. It's all about relevance, which is not a trend. That's more of a look, and no client wants to have a 'look', they want to be timeless. It's about relevance for your audience and how you communicate.

Think of a Millennial sitting in South Africa and a Millennial sitting in Dubai are the same Millennial. They have the same habits and are thinking on such a different level as the world has gotten so small for them as they're always on their phones. Today, great, breakthrough creative is great, breakthrough creative. You don't need to focus on trends and localisation. Irrespective of the country you come from, are you paying the bills in terms of clients valuing your work? Are you converting your clients' business into becoming the best they can be, whether in their category or in a category of one? True value comes from whether the work is super creative, absolutely memorable, and when the client feels that you've moved the cheese with a massive understanding of economies of scale. None of this is about a specific look or trend or whether the design is from South Africa or Dubai. There's a universal language now that people are in hard times and clients are facing crazy competition – especially in terms of retail, banking and telecommunications. As communicators, we have to give them the upper hand.

■ **Let's talk about Grid's own current rebrand – what is G Culture and #makeitmeansomething?**

We're rebranding the whole of Grid, but it's not a case of putting lipstick on a bulldog.



Nathan Reddy, photographed in line with Grid's brand refresh by Liezl Zwarts of Lamppost.

There's a growing 'reduction to amplify' movement in the world right now and we're all playing in culture. If I want clients to believe they compete in culture, that means they're no longer in financial services or telecommunications. Their share of voice is fighting with the likes of Google and Nike and all the tech brands, so we ask how they're Uberising their brand – it's effortless, 1-2-3, especially as consumers have a limited attention span before they move on to the next thing.

We need to understand how to cut through the clutter, create that category of one and compete with music brands and the like. Whether you're a financial institution or an insurance company, clients need the same kind of rigour as any other brand. So at Grid, we're more than a design agency. We are an agency playing in culture, from understanding clients' culture to designing who they are visually in terms of their assets and understanding all the platforms they need to operate on. Reflecting on the old model of selling the big idea, in the new world, repeating a single idea is almost like you're screaming at the consumer. The new world is multi-faceted and there are four things in terms of culture that my team instils

to get audiences to take notice of their brand: Inform me, entertain me, inspire me and, running through everything, it has to be beautiful.

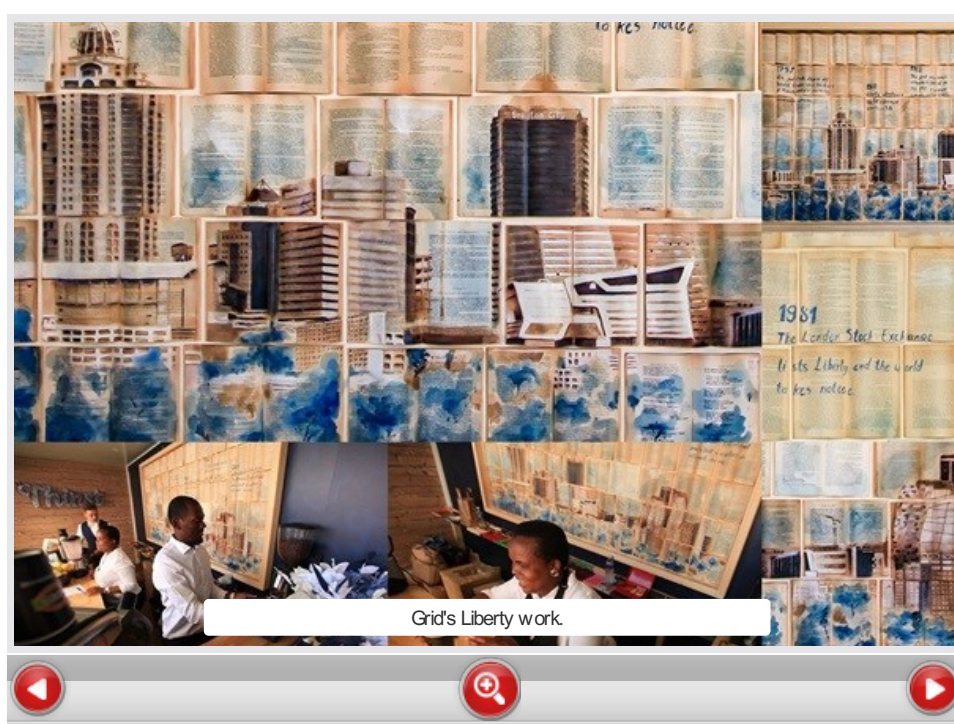


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Leigh Andrews 6 Nov 2014



Victoria's Secret is a good example of putting those four aspects in action. Prior to the show, they've already spent three times the amount of money on traditional advertising like billboards. Now, the actual runway show becomes theatre of the mind, because it's experiential. People wait in anticipation for it as there's so much build up and content that's actually humorous, educational and pleasurable, while also informing, entertaining and inspiring. Throughout the year, the user is told what's coming: which model is the year's top Angel, what she will be wearing and who designed it – all insane content that culminates into something spectacular through using music and artists and celebrities to create a magical moment. So it's now costing them less than what they used to spend but giving them three times the results. That's what our clients want, not the 'buy me, buy me, buy me' message.



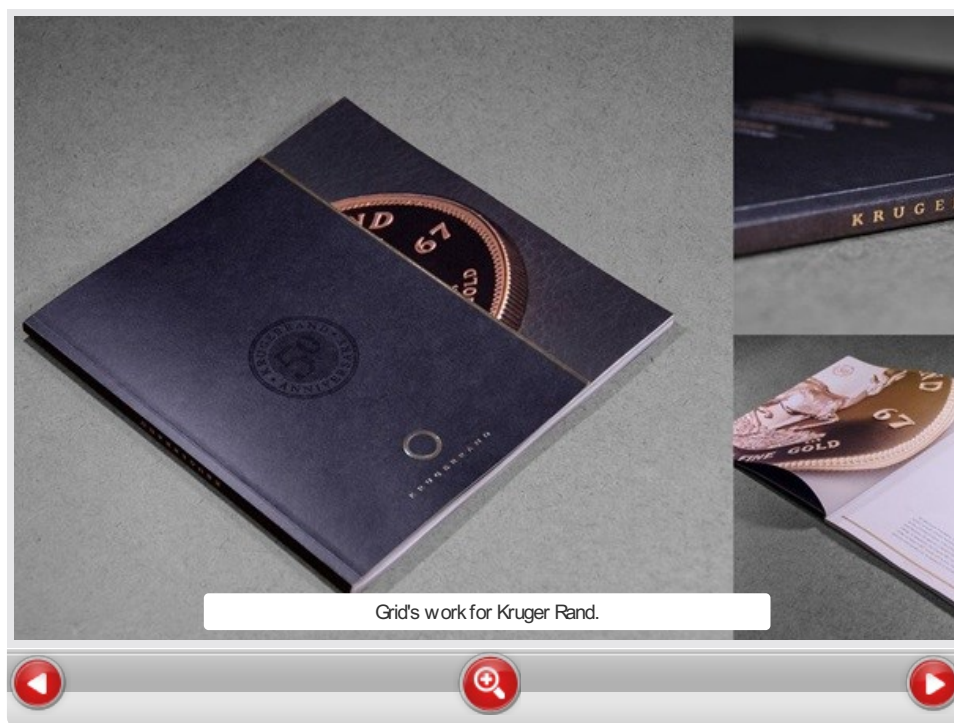
So Grid as a culture means we're not just a design studio anymore. For example, we work on all of FNB now and have created all of their assets in terms of colour and fonts for the past eight years. We understand them so well that we now do their advertising, sponsorship and store design, too as we know how to inform, entertain, inspire and make it beautiful. If you've seen our latest FNB ad on TV, you know it's beautifully designed from the characters to the curation of the acting, music and art, which is actually cut down into themes like yoga, which is about peace of mind and stretching and understanding your body, the father-and-son relationship... If you look at the story and double-click into the content, we're not just creating a TV ad.

We're creating a movement of understanding and aligning ourselves not just with the 'How can we help you' message, but 'How can we help you help yourself', as the idea is more about the activation. It's not just about 'like me, like me' – I want to actually engage you, interact with you and for you to know that I understand you. We delved quite deeply into the context to understand the client's journey and the different facts of their life and how we come in needs to be seamless.

Today, it's more about feeling than about selling. If you give the customer a feeling and a sense of comfort, trust and that you 'get' me, that relationship is formed over many interactions on different platforms. As an agency, we need to curate that.

■ ***So it's bringing the brand to life across many touchpoints and instilling that sense of culture, lifestyle and what people are actually looking for overall, not just in one promotional ad.***

Yes, we look at the journey – what is the end user's understanding holistically of you as a brand. Who curates that? That's what Grid is doing with our own new rebrand and self-disruption. We understand the movement and shift of what clients want and making it mean something. If I pay you money to communicate for me, I first need to make sure that someone feels something about me, it's got to have significance and relevance and move product or service. It's quite the nuanced responsibility of going in and physically curating that and carefully mapping it out. It needs constant nurturing in terms of how you ensure that you're performing like a conductor – add some cello here and some bass there. Collectively, the audience sees the music, not those bits and pieces.



As the communicators, we need to show clients that we get them, we understand the terrain.

■ ***Let's switch focus then to the fact that August is Women's Month – with a comment on the role of females in the creative industry.***

If you're in an advertising agency, specifically for FMCG products, women are predominantly the buyers by a long shot. You can't have guys communicating to females from a guy's perspective. It reminds me of the movie *What women want* – that's a classic example of why I wouldn't even try to act like I know what women want. Today's big idea is all about authenticity. If clients are buying male-dominated work, they'll get a quick wake-up call when it doesn't do well. You need a mix and I've always worked with females as a result. But there are a lot of male-oriented businesses that still see it differently. In my view, if you don't have a female in your team, especially in terms of strategy and leadership, your business is definitely going to suffer.

■ You're certainly an inspiration to many, but who is your inspiration when you get stuck in the moment?

My 23-year-old daughter is super bright and talented so went on to study after school, but she suddenly said to me, 'Dad, I don't want to do this anymore, I don't want to contribute to the commercial world.' She left and started travelling, working her way through a monastery in the Himalayas. I didn't get it then, but when I see her now, my inspiration comes when she asks me why I'm eating my food so fast. Those simple things come from a very simple place. She'll speak of the hands that made it or grew it or the sunshine that gave it life, and despite the speed at which we do things, we still eat and breathe the same way. I just calm down when I see her, my eyes get wider and I'm far more aware. That's why she's one of my biggest inspirations.

And that's why Nathan Reddy is one of mine. Follow [him](#) and [Grid](#) on Twitter. Loeries Creative Week Durban takes place from 14 to 21 August 2017. Keep an eye on our [Loeries Creative Week Durban special section](#) for all the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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