

“Fight for your ideas, ask for what you want” - Karmen Wessels

 By Leigh Andrews

4 Sep 2017

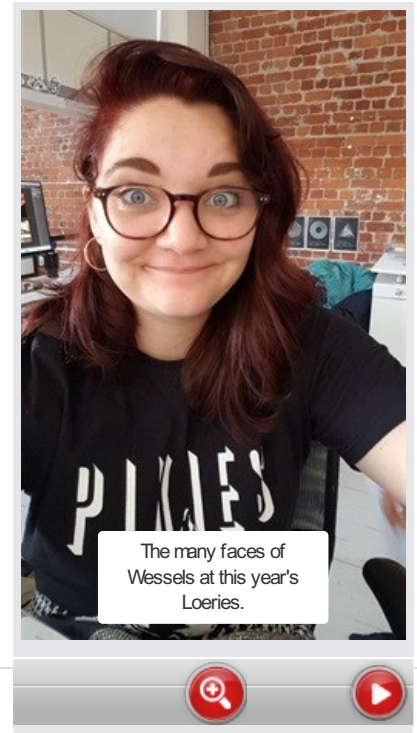
The Loeries have been recognising a duo of fresh creative talent under the age of 27 since 2007. This year, Native VML copywriter and ‘mad wit’ Karmen Wessels, was announced as one of the lucky two, on her 27th birthday.

Wessels was awarded a Gold Loerie and R60,000 for this honour, as was co-recipient Thabang Manyelo of FCB Africa, during the closing ceremony at the Durban ICC just a few weeks ago on 21 August – which few realise was also Wessels’ 27th birthday, so she made the cut in the nick of time.

But Wessels has been living a creative life for as long as she can remember.

Winning a Loerie has been a dream since she found out what they were a decade ago, then she was on the dean’s merit list on completing her BA Film & Media Production at UCT in 2012, went on to graduate with distinction from the AAA School of Advertising in 2013 and has since been at Native VML for four years, rising up the ranks from intern and already holding Loeries, Bookmarks, Pendorings, and a Cannes Lion under her belt.

Wessels was also one of this year’s Loeries’ digital crafts judges, so it’s really been a month of creative focus for her:



#Loeries2017: Native VML's #LadiesofLoeries admire the women that hustle

Leigh Andrews 11 Aug 2017



That’s certainly stood out in her office life, where Native VML CEO and CCO Jason Xenopoulos says Wessels’ energy and passion motivates her teams and clients alike, while Native VML Cape Town ECD Ryan McManus says she has a hunger to create and a voice that needs to be heard, with Ben Wagner, head of Native VML Cape Town, describing her as one of the most talented people he’s ever had the pleasure of working with in his 20-year agency and marketing communications career.

Impressive accolades for one so young. Here, Wessels shares what she wishes her moment of accepting the award was *really* like, the perhaps surprising places we can expect to find her in a decade and what more the industry can do to bolster young creatives’ confidence and quality of work...

📌 ***Congrats on your Young Creative Award win! What does this mean to you?***

It means that I am a real, live contender in the creative game. It means that my therapist was right when she said the bad thoughts and self-doubt were all made up by my evil chimp brain... sure, I'm paraphrasing, but that's the gist of it!

📌 ***Let us in on your favourite moments from Loerie Creative Week Durban 2017.***

I'd say my favourite moment was walking out on stage to accept my Young Creative award, but to be honest, I blacked out for that entire 15 minutes.

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Winning a Loerie has been a dream since I found out what they were when I was 16. I didn't believe it when they announced my name, and the Imposter Syndrome was too real (and still feels a little too real), but fu#k if it wasn't my fu#king name up there. I'd practised my gracious losing face (with a scheduled bathroom cry for later), so I was settling into it when they said "But wait, there's one more!". I still cried all the way down the stairs, and back up the stairs, and back down them again when they said I was going through the wrong door, and back in my seat when the amazing people I work with hugged me and wished me well and told me I really did deserve it, "it's not a mistake!" I wish they'd used a better picture of me on the website but composure fu#ks off when you're that excited. I couldn't have done it without @nativevml (and my favourite @shana_sees who has her name on half my entered pieces of work too). Thank you guys for letting a neurotic loudmouth win a shiny bird on her 27th birthday (fu#king happy birthday me!!) ❤️❤️❤️

A post shared by Karmen W (@spotfishy) on Aug 20, 2017 at 9:51pm PDT

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Instead, I will reconstruct the moment as I hoped it would go and tell you about that:

I hear my name being announced, and a beautiful, peaceful calm washes through me. I do not start to ugly cry or shake, even at all. No one even has to pull me to my feet and basically force me down the stairs because I have gone numb. I get up, and float towards the stage, graceful like Audrey Hepburn, the top hit when you Google ‘graceful Hollywood actresses’!

The expression on my face is a lovely smile, not a panicked grimace of surprise and shock. I hug the judges, my fellow winner, and don’t stand around like a twat with my arms outstretched, looking for more hugs!



Wessels and Manyelo, this year's Loeries young creative winners.

I hold my Gold Loerie triumphantly in the air, not clutched to my bosom like the goddamn ‘one ring to rule them all’, my precious (*my preciousss*)...

Backstage, I’m handed a lovely chilled bottle of bubbles, and I don’t immediately think “Oh thank fu#k, I’m downing this the second I sit down”.

I get ushered to the photo wall, and people all around gasp at my dazzling red carpet skills. “Is that Julia Roberts circa 1999 from the movie *Notting Hill*, also starring Hugh Grant??” I hear someone shout. No, dear stranger, it’s just me. Every photo taken seems to glow, and the photographer has tears in his eyes. I never forget which side is my best side, and there are definitely no photos of me on the main page of the Loeries website, where it appears as if I am wearing Jabba the Hutt as a scarf!



Native VML copywriter Karren Wessels with her Young Creatives Award Gold Loerie.

Finally, I return to my seat and go through the right door on the first try, and bask. I don't cry and cry and cry, and even if I did it would be **so** elegant. No, I just glow. And smile. And look at the little gold bird with my name on it.

❏ ***Crying with laughter! What's your ultimate career aim? Where can we expect to see you in ten years?***

In ten years I hope to become the most powerful woman in advertising. Or I'll get pregnant and be a *kuns tannie* with a closet full of mumus.

❏ ***Why is this type of recognition important to young creatives like yourself?***

It's important because it proves that with the power of our brains, we can overthrow the old overloads and finally accomplish the millennial agenda of destroying capitalism! That, and all the stuff about gaining the confidence to keep making great work, giving a voice to young minds, moving with the times, etc.

❏ ***What more can the industry do to bolster young creatives' confidence and quality of work?***

Just let them do stuff! I've been asked this question before, and it seems ludicrous that people don't know. You've just got to keep giving them opportunities to make amazing sh!t, mentor the hell out of them and let them mentor someone else in return.

❏ ***Lastly then, what advice would you share with creative youth looking to follow in your footsteps?***

Fight for your ideas, especially the dumb ones. Ask for what you want. Don't always rely on your day job to get your creative juices flowing. Be extremely 'extra', all the time!

Sounds like a winning strategy to me – who knows, you could be next! Click through to Wessels' [MyBiz profile](#) for more, keep an eye out for our interview with Manyelo and click through to 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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