

Advertising, all grown up

 By Leigh Andrews

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Cannes Lions kicked off this weekend, and we have ten SA jurors across the various categories. I spoke to Michael Lees-Rolfe, creative director at FoxP2 and Cannes promo & activation juror, about the areas he predicts SA agencies' work will excel in this year, and more.



Cannes Lions 2017 jurors announced, include 10 South Africans

5 May 2017



With international award season in full swing, I asked this year's jurors what makes Cannes Lions stand out to them over the numerous other award shows, why being appointed as a Cannes judge is a career bucket list item, a few of their favourite memories of past Cannes Lions events, and the sizzle factor that makes work in their specialised category stand out.



Michael Lees-Rolfe, creative director at FoxP2 and Cannes promo & activation juror.

Lees-Rolfe responds below...

 ***Explain why being appointed as a Cannes Lions judge is a career bucket list item.***

Cannes Lions feels a bit like advertising all grown up. The best of the best from around the world competing on the biggest stage our industry has to offer. To be a guy who's helping identify work that is shaping our industry and setting a precedent for the future is a real honour. Of course, there's also the Rosé and the pastries!

■ **Of course. What makes Cannes Lions stand out to you over the numerous other award shows?**

There are other great award shows and creative festivals around the world, but Cannes Lions does it on a scale like no other.

Each year the world looks to Cannes to set the bar by which creative work and effectiveness is measured. For me this show, more than others, celebrates the raw power of creativity applied at scale. Strangely, many businesses today are still suspicious of creativity as a business tool. I love how festivals like this one aim to democratise creativity by showing how effective it can be across a huge spectrum of industries.

■ **What's the sizzle factor that'll make something stand out to you in judging that work?**

In general the standard of entries is really high, so the piece has to do something quite special to rise above thousands of other pieces.

“The ones that make a quick and visceral emotional connection naturally pop for me. If I find myself saying “Faaaak! that’s incredible!” swiftly followed by strong feelings of envy, and inadequacy, then I know it’s a good one.”

The beautifully simple solutions are often the ones that have the most potential to affect change on a massive scale, become woven into popular culture and ultimately rise to the top of mind for us judges.

I also really like pieces that take an existing medium and re-interpret it, combine it with something unexpected, or make you rethink the possibility of that technology.

Side note: Unfortunately, **lots** of VR for VR’s sake this year. It is a newish medium so we can let it slide, but thankfully there are some great pieces that use tech as a tool to bring the idea to life, not as the idea itself.

■ **Talk us through a few of your favourite memories of past Cannes Lions events.**

I was last trotting down the Croisette back in 2008, so my memories are a little foggy. But I know that it was the year of the Cadbury’s “Gorilla”, The Burger King “Whopper freakout”, and Nike’s star-studded World Cup spot called “Next level”.

It was amazing to experience first-hand how polarising “Gorilla” was for people at Cannes. At the closing party on the beach, some guys were shouting, “But what’s the bloody idea!” while others were convinced that it was the freshest thing they’d seen in years.

Either way, it was a ground-breaking piece of work and it spawned a host of “me too” ads trying in vain to capture that illusive ‘gorilla on drums’ glow.

On the South African front, 2008 was a good year, too. DDB won the press Grand Prix for their beautiful 'Energiser' campaign and there were a bunch of other awards for our country.



Press Grand Prix for DDB SA

19 Jun 2008



There was a palpable feeling of camaraderie to be from a country that punches above its weight at Cannes.

I also remember a massively opulent closing ceremony on the beach with lobster rolls and a 20-minute fireworks display, even though the theme that year had something to do with sustainability.

■ Which areas do you predict SA agencies' work will excel in this year, and why?

SA has been really strong in radio for quite a few years so we'll likely have a good showing there. We seem to be one of the dwindling number of regions that still use radio heavily, which means the competition is a little less fierce in this category. The cost effectiveness of radio production also allows us to achieve high production value from small budgets, so our spots stand toe-to-toe with any other big global ads. We also have very strong writing craft skills and radio is a great medium for flexing those muscles.

It is great to see that we have a few really good design pieces this year so hopefully some of those will convert.

I'm also really holding thumbs for some of the pieces in social media categories do well. South Africa hasn't really excelled in the Cannes digital categories in the past, so it would be a huge step for us to pick up some awards there. There are two pieces that I have my eye on here, both simple and powerful little ideas, well executed and fresh.

We're all holding thumbs! The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity 2017 takes place from 17–24 June 2017, with Cinemark the local representatives of Cannes Lions for SA. Click through to our [special section](#) for the latest updates.

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