

Judging D&AD: The hustle and strive

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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Where do you find inspiration? As it happens, I found it on a windswept balcony overlooking Shoreditch.

It is a part of London that is made of grit and questionable glamour. A suburb that has urban decay and optimistic baristas in equal measure. And, with their neat haircuts and even neater tattoos they will eventually win the day. One cup at a time. It is a home for the homeless and the hopeful. I was watching the sad, daily pilgrimage of hundreds of commuters with their arms folded against the biting wind walking straight past cheerful and hopelessly ineffective graffiti.



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London is a place of contradictions. It is a place of endless, beautiful layers. Just put your f*!king graffiti over the graffiti from yesterday. One voice over the next. It is a hard place where you have to push, scramble and fight to be heard. It is a place where you can never give up. It is a dance where you have to hustle and strive.

I was here to judge D&AD.

Mostly however, I wanted some inspiration. Whatever that is. Inspiration. Where does it come from and where does it go?

D&AD is many things. Like London, it also has its contradictions and layers.

From the older creatives in fetching scarves who love the sound of their own voice to the younger, uncertain creatives who don't quite know what their voice is yet. Last year's winners, looking at next year's winners, standing next to this year's winners. Ideas so great you are jealous for days and the average ideas that start to make you feel mildly smug.

More than all these contradictions and layers though, like London, D&AD has the highest standards. And that simple fact, gives it value. The value of something rare and illusive. The value of something you should never just automatically expect.

Let me explain. I think I judged well over 700 entries. From that, there were six Graphite Pencils. That is less than one percent. From that, there were two Yellow Pencils. That is way less than one percent. I would call that rare. There were only 5 Black Pencils awarded from 26,000 entries. That is exactly 0.0192307692308 percent of all the entries to receive a Black

Pencil. I would say that is beyond rare. Closer to impossible.



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There are some things that can only be learned when something is very difficult. You know that if you're going to succeed in this arena you have to give it your all. You know you might fail or screw up because that path is very narrow. But, you also don't want to be anywhere else. You want to know how good you are or could be. You want to test yourself. You want to find out what you are made of.

Inspiration doesn't always come from a beautiful piece of music or sunlight dancing on the horizon. Sometimes, it comes from struggle. It comes from the hustle of trying. It comes from putting everything on the line. When I was standing on that freezing balcony I could see it on the walls and street corners of the unending story called London.



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With every fibre of its being London shouts, 'get in the game son, you are alive, show us what you can do.'

And for a few days a year at D&AD, we get the chance to accept that challenge. We get to fight to be heard. We get to hustle and put it all on the line. We get to take our shot at the title. We remember why we love this business. We get hungry again. And, we suddenly find inspiration was there the whole time.

Thank you D&AD for making it so bloody hard.

"First comes the sweat. Then comes the beauty if you're lucky and have said your prayers." – George Balanchine

ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Clio, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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