

Collette Wasielewski on educating for creative female leadership

By Leigh Andrews

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Collette Wasielewski, creative director at FCB Joburg, was on this year's Loeries' Communication Design judging panel. She's also the recipient of the Helga and Michael Conrad Scholarship for Women in Creative Leadership. I found out about her #Loeries2017 experience and her views on gender equality behind-the-scenes in advertising.

Fresh from the creative craziness of Loeries Creative Week Durban, Wasielewski says Loeries week is always an education, with no aspect playing more of a part in this than judging. Having the opportunity to engage with like-minded individuals grappling with the same issues and contexts always leaves her feeling optimistic about the future of the industry.



Wasielewski with the rest of this year's Loeries' Communication Design judging panel.

She was also particularly pleased to see some really amazing social media entries and that the broader digital category is beginning to take a real place in the spotlight, as these are signs of exciting things to come indeed.



#Loeries2017: All the Communication Design finalists!

16 Aug 2017



But she herself is a sign of exciting things to come for the local creative industry. Having worked on some pretty big brands and with some of the top minds in the SA design and creative industry, Wasielewski's biggest career highlight has been working on the South African Tourism account.

“ It's a rare privilege to be able to work on something that you really believe in and to know that your work has the potential to truly create a different reality for people. I am a strong believer in South Africa's potential as well as the power of a tourism economy for South Africa. We really do have so much to offer the world. ”

She also says that finding an unexpected home in advertising at FCB, has been a highlight in itself, and that making real rainbows with Coca-Cola to celebrate 20 years of democracy is definitely up there as a career highlight:

Already a leader in her own right, the most enjoyable aspect of her workday is seeing young creatives growing, learning and finding their voices, every day. From a feminist perspective, she shares that FCB has a wealth of young, ambitious female talent right now and it's really great to see these powerful women of the future working together, supporting each other and making magic.

Now, Wasielewski faces the biggest highlight yet, having been awarded the Helga and Michael Conrad Scholarship for Women in Creative Leadership. It's essentially a traditional MBA with a focus on the creative industries, is the only one of its kind currently and comprises five modules: three in Berlin, one in Asia and one in the US. The potential for networking and discourse with creative leaders across the globe is already paying off, as Wasielewski calls Michael Conrad "an incredible benefactor," already facilitated connections with numerous people in the international creative world in the month since she received the scholarship. He also invited her, along with two other students of the Berlin School to speak on a panel at the Golden Drum Festival in Slovenia on the topic: 'In search of women in creative leadership'.



Collette Wasielewski, creative director at FCB Joburg.

There's also the fact that the funding "makes the slightly impossible, a lot more possible," as "ailing currencies don't make for accessible international study." The qualification itself also helps creatives take a seat at the boardroom table and to be taken seriously.

I caught up with Wasielewski for her scholarship expectations, views on gender equality in advertising and how we can ensure the next generation results in more empowered females and better gender representation in the creative industry.

🔸 ***What are you most looking forward to from the overall scholarship experience?***

Firstly, I'm really looking forward to being in more of a position to fully understand our clients' businesses and the global economic context in which they operate.

Second, as creative leaders we tend to progress into senior positions with little real leadership training. This problem is not unique to the creative industries, which means that we land up with very few conscious business leaders in the world. More 'woke' leaders make for a better world for all, right? That's a story I'd love to be a part of.

🔸 ***Let's delve deeper into your views on gender equality in advertising – both in SA and abroad.***

The South African industry is in an awkward space. While we can say that we've come a long way on the gender bus – further than many other countries, in fact – if we are absolutely honest with ourselves, that bus didn't grant access to all of us.

For instance, there's only one black female creative director to be counted across all the big name agencies in the country. One. Neo Segola, who I'm lucky to work alongside, is akin to a unicorn.

What kind of message does this send to all the amazing young and driven black female creatives in our industry? And what about the messages that our industry creates for our consumers, around 39% of whom are black women? These are consumers who deserve a context that isn't just the tried and trusted humorous-gossip-in-hair-salon skit, not to mention the oh-so-cute all-black-women-talk-this-way accent, but one that is representative of current times, and realities, and women; and is in itself empowering.

Moving on to global terms, FCB's Susan Credle was the world's first female Global CCO – in 2016.



The importance of true diversity with FCB's global CCO, Susan Credle

Leigh Andrews 28 Feb 2017



Now, consider that most of the real decisions on how communications are finally flighted are made at the top.

Then, if you consider the fact that the creative industry has massive power to change our narratives and the way in which society perceives itself – a fact that has been proven time and again – and we can see that to truly allow women the world over to reimagine their lives and their potential, we need more than just a handful of mostly white women at the wheel.

■ **Elaborate on ways we can ensure the next generation results in more empowered females and better gender representation in the creative industry.**

I think female sponsorship and mentorship is so important. Now that there are more women in our industry and in leadership positions, it is absolutely our responsibility to ensure that young women are able to grow and succeed.

That's not to say that it's not important for men to mentor women or women to mentor men, or that men don't mentor women, but, as women we understand the contexts of other women. As women, we are role models to other women. And, as women, we are in this journey together.

“ To truly create an equal world, where gender stereotyping does not determine how our sons and daughters live, we need more women and men of all colours, creeds and gender preferences telling our stories. Stories that don't close our world, but open it. ”

That sounds like a solid step in the right direction to me. Let's share those stories. Contact Wasielewski on [LinkedIn](#) for more on her story and click through to the FCB Africa [press office](#) for more of theirs.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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