

Jonathan Deeb on the blurring lines between Cannes categories

 By Ann Nurock

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Jonathan Deeb, Executive Creative Director of FCB Johannesburg, spoke to our Cannes Lions media correspondent, Ann Nurock, on his experience of being part of this year's Press Jury, the changes in this category throughout the years, and the rise of the female creative.

Nurock: How are you enjoying Cannes? I would love to hear some insights into the Press Jury...

Deeb: So it's been an interesting Cannes year for me, normally I would immerse myself in hundreds of seminars, but this year I had the honour of being invited to sit on the Press Jury and I've always wondered about the way the juries go about assessing, trawling through the thousands of entries to ultimately select what they put out into the world and be a guiding light as to what each category should work towards in terms of craft and where ideas are going. This year, I was honoured to be amongst 16 others. Press is an interesting category, it's unfortunately a category in decline, I think in 2008 there were 7,441 entries, and this year there were 4,470, so it's a drop of about 3,000 and I think that sends the kind of message and red flags that we're seeing.



It's interesting that it's also only 23 years old as a category. When I first heard that I thought: "No, that can't be right that in 1992 is when Press was first introduced," and if you think back to the number of new categories over the last five years, I remember when Titanium was introduced years back, and what a shift that was in identifying the idea that transcends categories. I think we're seeing a shift towards more and more categories and with that comes the debate and slight shift in lens of focus from an idea just being an outstanding idea that perhaps has an integrated nature or can span across multiple media forms, versus it being very specifically niche and effective within a very tight category.

So in our category, and I think Press is very different to other categories at Cannes, but in Press we had many debates on whether something is traditionally a Press ad or very direct and whether it should be allowed within Press or not. We're looking for cutting through advancements in the Press category, because everything else seems to be evolving incredibly quickly. Where are those advancements in Press? It feels like how it's been judged is quite traditional, and I think what we'll see in the future is an assessment of allowing a little bit more blur. A few things that are happening within Press from a technological advancement perspective is the ability to create smaller runs of niche publications to specifically targeted audiences.

Nurock: One of the things that I've picked up here is that there is such a blurring. The campaign that won the Grand Prix for Radio, the Jury said wasn't actually radio and that they should change the category name to Audio. And even with Direct, there seems to be a lot of blurring of the lines

Deeb: So there is some work that I have seen in magazines in the world that I think would be amazing to judge within the Press category. Currently, as it stands in what defines a Press ad, taking out a specific piece of media within print or press, it doesn't really allow for that, and I think we'll start to see the envelope being pushed on.

Nurock: Overall, in terms of the work you've seen at the awards shows, where do you think South Africa stands at the moment and where can we improve?

Deeb: It is about big ideas, it's always been about big ideas. I think we're seeing more and more large, credible brands that have the power to effect real change. The kind of work that we are seeing is work that shows proper results, it's not just the

fact that it was a fantastic idea that had effect in a very small niche in a little environment, we're awarding big brands that make big change that had big results and had effect on a large group of people, not just a fantastically-skinned case study for a small little scenario, so I think we're going to see more of that.

Nurock: One of the themes that's really run through this Cannes is "doing good", everything is about trying to make the world better, trying to help improve people's lives. What's your view on that?

Deeb: Well I think it's fantastic, and as marketers we have a massive responsibility on behalf of the brands we work for, not just in bolstering bottom line, I think we saw probably about six years ago at Cannes Al Gore, The Inconvenient Truth, the "tick-tick-tick" initiative, it was all very much green-focussed, and then the world woke up and thought "it's not just about the greening world" there are many other issues that we have in terms of effecting positive change in people's lives and we have the opportunity to do that, we have the opportunity to change behaviours, and these brands are massive cogs in economy, and if they can achieve an objective of making their brands more loved and bolstering the success of that business, because at the end of the day they are not charities, they are big brands that need to be successful, but you can't do that without negatively affecting the environment around the brands and I think you can do that more so by actually making real positive change.

We've seen Coca-Cola, for example, over the last couple of years have done a massive amount of work bringing people together, and the brand loved that we've seen the good that they do, which is off the charts, and many other brands are playing so interestingly in that space.

Nurock: What is your point of view on the Glass Lion and on the huge gender gap that exists in creative departments, with only 3% of creative directors around the world being women?

Deeb: It's sad to sit in an audience and watch the people go up for Gold and see how many of those are women. We work with the most fantastic female creatives on a daily basis, and there does seem to be a real concern in the industry in terms of the people that we value and work alongside with and for, there's not enough advancement in the female space and the question is why and what are we doing to counter that.

Nurock: And what is FCB doing about that?

Deeb: Well, I'm proud to say that the majority of our creative directors at FCB are female. We have got some really incredible dynamic female talent spanning the seniority level right from junior to the most senior. This year we've got a young dynamic female-duo team that are up and coming, but in fact did the Coca-Cola commercial "Bobby" that's flying now in 98 countries around the world.

This is their first Cannes, in fact it's their first overseas trip and I'm delighted to see the world through their eyes here at Cannes as their minds are just being blown by the inspiration they've been immersed in. It's about exposing people to the right things and giving them the right opportunities, and it's incredibly important. Globally, it's something that our group absolutely buys into in terms of transformation, that come January we will become the first global group to have a female Group Chief Creative Officer in Susan Kriel. So I think it sends a strong message out to the industry in terms of where we see women driving the core of the business and putting our money where our mouth is to live up to that. But I think we're far from the destination and it needs to be a journey that we're all committed to.

We're definitely seeing it as a trend with Glass Lions and the work that's being done across the board, I really admired some of the work done by our FCB Inferno office "This Girl Can", which was an amazing campaign and hit like wildfire across the world, which won a Grand Prix and a Glass. So there's some really powerful work, I really admired the Superbowl spot for Always "Like a Girl".

I think there's a need to see more functional change than just the type of approach as to how women identify themselves, and how they see themselves as advertisers, and I think we have the opportunity to really effect some change, so the responsibility sits on us to really start implementing that.

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