Native VML's #LadiesofLoeries admire the women that hustle

By Leigh Andrews

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With Loeries Creative Week Durban just around the corner and #WomensMonth in full swing, I caught up with a selection of this year's female judges to find out what they're most looking forward to. First up, Native VML software engineer Phillipa Hickman and copywriter Karmen Wessels on the need for women to have an equal say in order to produce fully thought-through work.

August is #WomensMonth and time to celebrate creativity across Africa and the Middle East, with the Loeries. As a result, I merged these two themes and caught up with two of this year's #LadiesofLoeries ahead of judging, which kicks off next week.



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Leigh Andrews 10 Jul 2015

Hickman and Wessels, judging the digital crafts and digital craft: writing categories respectively, share their personal female business mentors and the need for better female representation in the creative industries…



Native VML software engineer Phillipa Hickman and copywriter Karmen Wessels, on this year's Loeries digital crafts judging panel.

Explain your personal Loeries highlights over the years and what you're most looking forward to from this year.

Hickman: I have actually never attended the Loeries before and I can't recall if I've been involved in any work that has won. I'm really looking forward to the creative energy that surrounds the whole experience, as well as the actual award results. Being part of the judging process this year, having insight into what was entered and what the competition was like, makes me very curious, this year specifically, about which awesome work will take home the awards! And then, obviously I'm also looking forward to taking a really long, hot bath because there are no water restrictions in Durban.

Wessels: I haven't been to many Loeries yet, but an early highlight was getting my first finalist for a project I was part of as an intern. It was the first step to "making it" in my mind. I've also loved attending the awards in Durban – nothing makes you feel fancier than getting flown out on the company's dime, staying in a fancy hotel, getting glitzy, seeing amazing work win, and then leaving the after party early to go spend some quality time with a can of Pringles and the mini fridge bar… I'm a low-key grandma when it comes to partying.



Unmissable day of creative inspiration at Loeries seminar

Loeries 27 Jul 2017

I'm looking forward to the DStv Seminar of Creativity the most – there are some excellent speakers lined up, especially Tea Uglow!

Talk us through the need for better female representation in the creative industries.

Hickman: I think it's really important for young girls to see that there are women doing every kind of job available, especially in the Stem categories.



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Wessels: Women need to have more say in the creative industry – when they're not present, or don't have a say in the work that gets put out, we end up with disasters like "Look like a girl/think like a man".



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When women are represented, work becomes more balanced and less clichéd. It means there are less campaigns about stilettos and handbags in pink, and more measured messages that talk to the humanity in women and men alike. We don't need to be the majority, we just need an equal say to produce fully thought-through work.

How does being a Loeries judge tie in with that and what else should be done to ensure more empowered females shine in the local creative industries?

Hickman: I didn't really feel like my Loeries judge position was in any way linked to my being female.

Wessels: Being a Loeries judge means I get to have that say! It means that I get to give input on whether work is inclusive, and speaks to women and men as people, not as stereotypes.

To ensure more empowered women shine in the local creative industry, hire them. Talk to them, give them challenges and ask what they think. Go talk to school girls and inspire them to come to our industry. Go talk to university girls and show them what they can do. Invite them to intern, job shadow and work for you! And flipping believe in them, because they'll change your work for the better.

That's for sure. Who are your personal female business mentors?

Hickman: I don't really have any. I don't feel like I've needed someone in a similar role to mine to know what I wanted to do or what my skills are. I was lucky in that it never really occurred to me that I couldn't be a programmer, even when there were only three girls in our high school computer science class.



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Being female has never really felt like a limitation to me. While I know I may make different choices for my own life than what my husband or male colleagues may, I don't feel like I am restricted to those choices, and they are a choice – I'm referring specifically to the career changes I have made personally since having kids. I think it's equally important for girls to see work-orientated, smart, powerful women in leading company roles as it is for them to see women who have been given the opportunity to make different choices and try to find a way to have the best of both. I work reduced hours for this purpose.

It never occurred to me that I couldn't rise through my career through aptitude and yes, I would be horrified if the guys doing similar things to me were earning hugely differently, unless it could be justified by skills or responsibility.

However, I don't think I'm the norm. I still strongly believe that we need to encourage and show our daughters that they can be anything and do anything in whatever field they feel called to, especially when it has historically been considered a career more suited to one gender or the other.

Wessels: The women that are hustling to make their passions their main job are my heroes – the ones that do everything (draw, paint, photograph, write, project manager, budget, network) to make it happen. Women like Piera Gelardi, who co-founded Refinery29, and Dita von Teese who turned her passion for burlesque into a full business!

Inspiration all round. Click through to Wessels and Hickman's MyBiz profiles for more, and keep an eye on our Loeries Creative Week Durban special section for all the latest updates! Loeries Creative Week Durban takes place from 14 to 21 August 2017.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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