

# Monalisa Sibongile Zwambila, 'It's about access to opportunity'

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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*As part of our Women's Month content feature and in the build-up to our panel discussion with some of this year's Gerety Awards all-female South African executive jury members, taking place in September, Jessica Tennant, senior editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity, interviews this year's jury to find out what a woman has to do to get onto an advertising jury, what the opportunity means to them and the significance of these Awards given the current state of gender equality...*



Monalisa Sibongile Zwambila, founder and CEO of The Riverbed Agency

The Gerety Awards, founded by Joe Brooks and Lucia Ongay is relatively new, having launched in 2019. It brings together all-female juries from across the globe to shortlist the best in advertising – all advertising, not just advertising made for women – through the female lens.

The Awards was named after Frances Gerety, the copywriter who coined the slogan 'a diamond is forever'. So, instead of categories, the Awards are judged by cuts (as in diamond cuts), of which there are 10.

This year, there are a total of 180 new jury members from 30 different countries. Pre-Covid-19, judging sessions were hosted in each host city and the shortlists submitted to the international grand jury of creative experts for final evaluation, but of course this year's judging sessions are having to take a different format. Joe Brooks explains that "the judging would have taken place at the VMLY&R offices, with Jacquie as the ambassador. The date had been set for Monday, 1 June and we would have judged and discussed a number of categories of entries from around the world. The same week judging sessions would have taken place in London, New York, Buenos Aires, Bangkok, Melbourne, Milan, Istanbul, Helsinki and Berlin. Due to the 'Corona', all judging is taking place remotely and online over a four-week period with group calls in the middle of the judging to discuss favorite pieces."

This year's South African executive jury includes: Jacquie Mullany, ECD, VMLY&R; Mpume Ngobese, MD, Joe Public; Sanche Jansen van Rensburg, ECD, Avatar; Simone Bosman, founder and creative, Osu & Kumalo; Neo Segola, ECD, FCB Africa; Sarah Dexter, CEO, Mullen Lowe; Nadia Mohamed, marketing director, McCain; Emma Strydom, head of design, Network BBDO; Juliet Honey, creative, Freelance; Suhana Gordhan, ECD, FCB; Linda Notelovitz, director/producer and founder, Life Design; Liezel Bygate, marketing director, Bliss Brands; Monalisa Zwambila, CEO, Riverbed; Loli Bishop, producer, Freelance; and Fiona O'Connor, creative director, Havas. Look out for our online panel discussion featuring some of these remarkable women in advertising in September after the shortlists have been announced.



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Here, Monalisa Sibongile Zwambila, founder and CEO of The Riverbed Agency, believes that diversity in advertising narrative requires a platform for women to be acknowledged with regards to their vital role in the process and access to opportunity, and that it's sad to say it takes the Gerety Awards...

■ ***The Awards recognise the best advertising (not just advertising made for women) through the female lens. Comment on the significance of this given the current state of feminism / gender equality / women's empowerment.***

**Zwambila:** The purchasing power that women yield is undeniable, and yet our representation in advertising doesn't measure up. According to a Nielsen study in SA 71% of female consumers are responsible for grocery shopping whilst 60% are the primary purchaser. The diversity in advertising narrative requires that we give a platform for women to be acknowledged with regards to their vital role in the process.

■ ***As part of its call for entries campaign, the Awards sent purple moustaches to prominent female leaders in the advertising industry, and asked them to pose for a picture with the question: What does a woman have to do to get onto an advertising jury? How would you answer that question – what does a woman have to do to get onto an advertising jury?***

**Zwambila:** Sad to say it takes the Gerety Awards! We have seen the loud call for diversity in the creative industry showing that representation of jury members matters.

“ The truth remains that to get anywhere as women, we have to work twice as hard, be more committed and make more sacrifices to succeed. It is time to acknowledge that it shouldn't be about the effort that women put in, but the access to opportunity. That is what drives true transformation and allows the doors to be open to give more women a seat at the jury table. ”

■ ***What did you think of the campaign?***

**Zwambila:** The campaign is bold and hits home. All too often as women, we have to conform to be admitted into the boys' club. It is, however, our differences that make what we bring to the table so unique and of value. I'm not even sure we need the purple moustache!

■ ***What are you most looking forward to or excited about with regards to taking part in this year's Gerety Awards judging?***

**Zwambila:** The quality of entries is always important. Representation and a female jury is not about a different stand of excellence and I want to be sure that we reflect our 'womerness' in the process. I'm excited that South Africa is being given the opportunity to participate in judging these global awards.

■ **What is your hope for the next or future generations of women in advertising / the advertising industry?**

**Zwambila:** More inclusion in decision making roles for women across the value chain. Out of South Africa's 63 CEOs and creative leads in big agencies, only 10 of them are women with a mere four black females.



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■ **And what is your key message to fellow women in advertising this Women's Month?**

**Zwambila:** This time, during lockdown has brought to light the challenges women face in times of strife, from unemployment, GBV, single-led households and much more. Despite this, I've seen women show up with great resilience and strength. I am convinced more than ever before that as women we possess this innate power to thrive. Those of us that have any influence and that can make a difference in any way should do so. We're all intrinsically linked to how we show up in the world of work and I believe that the positive contribution we make will not only help other people, but ourselves too.

For more info, visit the Gerety Awards' [website](#) and follow them on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and/or [Instagram](#), and follow Zwambila on [Twitter](#) or visit [Riverbed](#).

## ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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