

SA's Young Lions winners – “Our strength is our South Africanness”

Fresh from Cannes and winning a Silver Lion in the Young Lions for film, TBWA\Hunt\Lascares' Paula Andropoulos, copywriter and Khomotso Makoto, art director, talk about the chaos and magic of their Cannes experience.

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#) 26 Jun 2025



TBWA/Hunt/Lascares' Paula Andropoulos, midweight copywriter, creative and Khomotso Makoto, junior art director, creative, chat about the chaos and magic of their Cannes experience (Image supplied)

Both remark that they were surprised to represent SA initially, not because they don't believe in their work, but because there is a wealth of young talent in this country, and they were up against the best of them.

But they were thrilled when they were selected.

“We're both very patriotic, so representing South Africa felt very significant for us and very important,” say Andropoulos.

“While we didn't want to let each other down and we didn't want to let the agency down, we really didn't want to let South Africa down, because, as a country, and continent we are so often overlooked, or misunderstood, when in fact, we are such a hotbed of creativity, of thought and industriousness, often in the face of real adversity and different resources.”

She says their strength was that kind of scrappiness that South Africans have, “That ability to work with limited resources, but have a little bit of fun, a bit mischievous and where appropriate go against the grain.”



CANNES LIONS

SA Cannes Young Lions 2025 Competition winners

22 Apr 2025

The Cannes experience: Chaos and magic

Makoto says the Cannes experience was beautiful. But the process was tough.

“Paula and I spoke about how we can explain our experience, which was good and the bad, and stressful and we had to stretch ourselves and push hard to make it over the line.”

Their goal was to make the shortlist.

When they entered the local Cannes Young Lions competition, their approach was not to try to win, but to make something they would be proud of.

Andropoulos says they tried this in Cannes, but they found it a lot tougher as they did not fully appreciate how much pressure they would impose on themselves.

“We found it psychologically very tough, with the added pressure of the 48-hour deadline, knowing you are representing more than yourselves in a certain sense, without being too grandiose.”

“But”, says Makoto, “it is also beautiful. A lot of magic comes from the chaos and the messiness of the process.”

While it was psychologically challenging, it was also very emotional.

“There were times when I needed to lean on Paula, and there were times when she leaned on me and we had to hold each other up in that process,” he says.

A sense of anger

This was important when it came to the brief they were assigned.

The Young Lions Film competition challenged teams to create an engaging 60-second film ad in 48 hours for the Ovarian Cancer Action for World Ovarian Cancer Day (8 May 2026).

While the eighth most prevalent cancer worldwide, ovarian cancer, receives very little attention relative to breast cancer, for example, although the prognosis is dire.

Most women who are diagnosed, relapse after the first year and the majority don't live or 50% don't live past five years.

Both had quite an emotional reaction to the brief.

“I felt enraged when I found out this cancer is 217 years old and there is no cure, but we found a cure for erectile dysfunction in six or seven years,” says Andropoulos.

But this became the inspiration for their work [*Two Centuries Too Long*](#).

“The brief wanted an optimistic take on the situation to encourage people to donate to the cause on World Ovarian Cancer Day, but we wanted people to feel the anger and indignation I felt,” she says.

The craziest ideas

Makoto has been an art director with TBWA/Hunt/Lascares for four years. He is from the Eastern Cape and came to Johannesburg to study at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and worked and studied in the US.

“I started as a designer, but about two years into that, I wanted more than what a career in design offered, and I transitioned into art direction.

“Art direction kind of borrows the same kind of qualities, or the ideal ideologies, design, where there are certain principles that we follow in the process.

“I’m this very fastidious person who likes things to be in order and very particular, so I use that to get me in this art direction space, but with a looser approach, where it is thinking about the craziest ideas and finding out how to best execute them.

“I enjoy and appreciate the process of what happens when ideas are generated by the human brain. It’s not about the trends, but about feelings and, you know, stories, stories...”

Intense collaboration

This is Andropoulos' second year with the agency. She comes from an editorial background, with a master's degree in English literature from Cambridge University. She worked at *Business Day* and the *Sunday Times* writing the lifestyle sections.

“I was at a strange juncture in my life where I felt that something was missing there for me, a kind of growth, a kind of radical creativity, or a departure from what I was familiar with.”

She came to TBWA for a month to “check it out” and never left.

“I totally fell in love with it and the intense collaboration the work requires.

“This is a world of making where you work with other minds and have the privilege of the automatic tutelage of great thinkers around you and this pushes you to spaces that you didn't think you'd possibly work in, and inspired about what anyone can do as a creative without the confines of the discipline they start in.”

Advice for young people

Andropoulos' advice to young people who are thinking of a career in the creative industry is to believe you can.

“Silence the inner voice that we all grapple with every day, that no one acknowledges, that is stilted with self-doubt, and self-created barriers to entry. You must believe that you're great and behave accordingly.”

This is not something she did, but if she had the chance to do it all over again, she would believe in herself.

more.

However, she cautions that you can't do that and then not be incredibly diligent and treat every piece of work however small, like it matters.

“You need to combine that delusional arrogance with real dedication and hard work.”

What's next

Looking to the future Makoto remembers meeting Andropoulos.

“We chatted, and I liked her vibe. Then we started working together but we never anticipated this.

“We were just doing good stuff because we like doing good work, because that's what we believe in, and it makes us proud.”

“And we want to keep making great things. We don't want to be complacent. We've still got a lot to learn and there are still many milestones that we want to hit.”

Celebrate your South Africanness

Both say that Cannes was life-changing because of their fellow South Africans.

“At Cannes, all the South Africans were very supportive. It was not about what agency you are from, it was about being from South Africa, and we are all doing this together.”

And they want to celebrate this.

“It made us appreciate where we are from and to celebrate it instead of complaining about it, because we are just from the most extraordinary place.

“It's complicated. It's fraught with different tensions, and we all come from such different spaces, but we have such resilience, grit, determination, like a wonderful sense of a collective sense of humour and of innate community, that being a South African abroad feels like a privilege.

“Young South Africans need to be proud of where they are from and their voice because your distinct experience is what sets you apart from the generic rest of the world, and that is your superpower.”

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.
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