

The case for specificity in a world of safe advertising — Asmirh Davis

We were supposed to meet in Dubai, somewhere between jet lag and jury deliberations at the Clio Awards. Instead, we met like this: her in a cold 9am Atlanta, wrapped in winter light and platinum blonde braids; me in a 30-degree Limpopo afternoon, heat pressing through the windows.

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#) 16 Apr 2026



Asmirh Davis is the jury chair for the media category at the 2026 Clio Awards. Source: Clio Awards.

Standing out

For Asmirh Davis, founding partner and president of Majority, standing out on the global stage is less about scale and more about specificity.

“The work that cuts through is culturally relevant and resonant,” she says. “Not just on trend, but rooted in how people actually live — the nuances, the artefacts of now, and what’s coming next.”

That kind of work, she argues, cannot be manufactured. “It’s based on a specificity. Even if you don’t share that lived experience, you recognise the human truth in it. It resonates.”

As jury chair for the media category at this year's Clios — her first time chairing after serving as a juror previously — Davis saw plenty of technical excellence, but little that truly stood apart.

"I was underwhelmed," she says plainly. "There was a lot of work grounded in strong marketing fundamentals, worthy of recognition. But I didn't see the boldness or uniqueness."

For Davis, the issue is not capability, but courage.



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"The past year has been challenging for brands and agencies. That affects how much risk people are willing to take, and how much clients trust the process."

She hopes it's temporary — a reflection of economic pressure rather than a long-term creative retreat. The solution, she suggests, is to hold the line on both rigour and imagination: strong strategic fundamentals paired with ideas that solve business problems in ways that haven't been seen before.

Interestingly, the work that did stand out did not come from the usual heavyweights.

"It wasn't the big budgets or the big brands," she says. "It was the players who took advantage of their circumstances — the ones with nothing to lose."

That, she adds, is where African creatives and strategists have an edge.

"Being an underdog is an advantage. When you're operating under pressure, when you're more constrained than your competitors, that can drive a different kind of thinking."

It's also why she urges a longer view of the work itself.

Human ingenuity

"Everything worth having takes time. It takes human ingenuity — not just mechanical output."

Not every idea, she says, needs to chase immediate returns. Craft still matters. In fact, it compounds.

Some of the most compelling work she judged reflected a broader shift back to tactility and intention.

"There's a return to analogue," she notes. "It's not just an aesthetic trend — it speaks to a different way of thinking and living."

Across juries and markets, her benchmark remains consistent: relevance.

"As a chair, I always remind people — the work has to be relevant. Culture lives in specificity."

It's a principle that explains why certain stories travel far beyond their origins. Films like *Sinners*, rooted in distinct cultural experiences, resonate widely not despite their specificity, but because of it.

“Even if it’s not directly relevant to you,” Davis says, “it will still resonate.”

The 2026 Awards show will be held on 12 May in New York City.

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

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