

Design Indaba - Day 1 - State of the Art

Scales, sledghammers and stray bull terriers - was the cryptic title of this mornings opening speaker, our very own Graham Warsop of Jupiter drawing room fame.

 By [Terry Levin](#) 25 Feb 2004

The JDR approach to problem solving ensures they are one of the few agencies where design is not mutually exclusive with advertising. It enhances creative thinking and execution. They also have a agency mascot - bull terrier Polly aka head of agency security.

Did you know? South Africa has a mere 0.3% of the world's total advertising budget, putting us 29th on the list of all advertising nations [2nd last before Denmark]! In the USA the Chrysler budget alone is greater than that of our entire advertising industry. Despite these budgetary constraints however, we have still managed to clock up the 5th highest number of Cannes awards on the planet. JDR have gone a long way to contributing to these national success figures.

Thanks to Graham for reminding us of yet another reason to feel proudly South African!

A beaded Che Guevarra shirt and a cockney accent were our first impressions of the softly spoken **Fernando Gutiérrez**. Assignments include a new corporate ID for the English national Opera, Consultant Creative Director to the Royal Spanish art collection, the Musee Nacional del Prado in Madrid and the establishment of Tentaciones - a supplement to Madrid's national newspaper aimed at attracting younger readers - [now there's a good idea].



Creative director for Benetton's COLORS magazine, fashion mag Vanidad and the cult publication MATADOR - Fernando demonstrates his mastery in continually working to tight deadlines AND budgets at the positive results of collaboration with the most cutting edge and experimental photographers and illustrators. Commuting and consulting between London, Madrid and Barcelona lend Gutiérrez' work a unique intellectual and artistic edge.



Ross Lovegrove has had such a distinguished and stellar career that he did not know where to begin to tell us about it. The fact that, as we speak, he is Chief designer worldwide for Tag Heuer watches was thrown in as an afterthought three quarters of the way through his presentation.

A "confirmed futurist", offering such mind elevating concepts as "strangeness is a consequence of innovative thinking", and "clouds transport water much better than any packaging" - Ross is a product designer working on the edge of a new materialism - using jellies, sponges, transparency and elasticity to create a new genre of sensuality and physicality in objects. Most farout preoccupation - "car on a stick" made out of 4 components that runs on solar power and converts into a streetlight when not in use.



Director of minimalist retailer - Muji - **Kenya Hara** reckons the future will be changed, not by technology but by human beings. The human being is always the starting point in Japanese design and everything is designed to evoke the appropriate sense response. Examples - cloth signage of white cotton looks soft and hygienic for an obstetrics hospital, debossed designs on fluffy white paper remind one of footprints in the snow for the Winter Olympic games. Toilet paper with a square tube does not pull so easily reminding us to conserve natural resources. No one does white on white like the Japanese - this is the no design zone, the gap between what is and what might be. His most emphatic design point "if you look at a familiar object as it is totally strange it becomes surrounded by freshness".



Less is more becomes an overstatement for **Alexander Gelman**, founder of Design machine in New York and author of a book called "Subtraction". Wit and craft abound in his work as well as a strong philosophical approach - finding the edge looking for the moment when an image is about to fall down is when it is at maximum potential. Never have flat shapes assumed such 3-dimensionality, his is a true genius of form - it is no wonder that he is on the board of the Art Directors Club and that his work forms part of permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and abroad.



Elsie Nanji

Exquisite Mughal art, Portuguese architecture, cricket, the Hinglish [Hindi/English] language and the Bold [they have it too] are the inheritance and inspiration of modern day India - a fusion in the Indian spiritual acceptance of all things. Karma Sutra condom campaigns sidestep cultural taboos, chilli sauce is photographed on a shelf selling firecrackers. The Indian approach to design : see an empty space and pass it. Cross cultural communication showing Images of streets flooded by the monsoon being used to advert the previously unheard of concept of a waterpark! Long live the sari.

Shubankar Ray

Do not adjust your head, there is a fault in reality.

Everything or nothing you may have read about Shubankar Ray prepares you for this. His is not a career it is a thesis. A symbiotic relationship with cult Italian shoe manufacturer Camper sees them more a patron of his unique anti-capitalist worldview than a client. Previous work for Levis and Caterpillar began the process of rejecting cliched advertising images in favour of a quiet reality - the concept walk don't run for Camper, just as persuasive as the former reclaims the multiculturalism lost to global superbrands since the 1990's. He is selling us a better life, more individualistic, slower, honouring the earth, each other - using photography, film, music and words as his version of the "new visual language" which the world badly needs.

Interestingly Shubankar Ray was not on the bill for yesterday, he stepped in when David Carson suddenly took ill. As with all Indaba's this one has already developed a zeitgeist of its own, a theme that it wants to tell. The day had started with a prologo Graham Warsop telling us that their Nike brand worth, R142 million is now worth 30 times more than their client had paid for it in 1995, surely a wonderful business success story. As the antithesis Ray visually asks us, as do Kenya Hara and Ross Lovegrove to examine the cost to humanity of mass production and conformity. We do need to be doing things differently, this is not a subversive view it just is.

In the end the answer of course came from India's Elsie Nanji - balance in all things - is key.

ABOUT TERRY LEVIN

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