

# Zumurrud Rinqest hopes to see more women of colour in adland

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Zumurrud Rinqest has spoken out about her experiences as a woman of colour in the industry and her plans to pave the way for the next generations of female creatives of colour. As founder and MD of the all-women bespoke agency, Curious & Creative, Rinqest, through her journey from a junior designer in a big agency has thrown herself into sharpening a hugely important skill: to find the gap, make a move, and build others up in the process.



Zumurrud Rinqest, founder and MD of Curious & Creative

## **You're the founder and MD of Curious & Creative. Tell us more about your role here**

As a growing SMME, I have to constantly work on facilitating cohesive collaboration between our clients, suppliers and partners - that's what's going to ensure that we continue to grow from strength to strength.

A day in my role could typically include anything from a pitch presentation to getting client approvals, managing expectations and being an active part of the creative process. Naturally, one would always want to gravitate to what your strengths are, but coming from a creative director role of 18+ years, and then developing into my role as an MD has allowed me to harness both strategic and creative skills.

This plays a massive part in keeping our clients engaged by constantly adapting to the evolving landscape - both within their businesses and their particular industry. Another sizeable element of my role involves being a strong and compassionate leader, sharing everyone's success and encourage each team member to play to their strengths. The well-being of my team is a non-negotiable for me. At C&C, this works hand in hand with the delivery of great work, and ultimately leads to the

satisfaction of our clients.

### ■ ***When, how and why did you get started?***

The backstory is that I spent my early years learning best practices and true award-winning design at renowned creative agencies like The Jupiter Drawing Room and Ogilvy for over a decade. Then, soon after the birth of my second child, I began to explore the prospect of starting my own business as it offered more flexibility and independence.

Curious & Creative agency was born in 2013. I began contracting for clients as an entry into their business and started building relationships. As time went on, I used my wealth of agency experience to push client briefs and adapt campaigns to achieve maximum impact. Once we had developed close and productive working relationships, clients began to ask me to assist with conceptualising campaigns and help build strategies for customer engagement targets.

One day I walked into a boardroom filled with grey suits, white walls and the giant corporate heads that have become something of an industry legend by now. I stood there feeling like a very small, yellow fish in a giant shark tank, but it would turn out to be the golden piece of business I had been working towards - it meant that I could finally hire the dream team and build on the mission of not only holding space for young women of colour in the ad industry, but to expand it.



What does the future hold for women of colour in the advertising industry?

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### ■ ***Could you share your reasons for why you chose to start an all-women agency?***

Initially it was not my intention as building a solid business was my only focus. In the beginning, my clients were mainly in retail fashion space, and the strongest candidates I had contact with happened to be women. However, as the industry developed, it became abundantly clear that there was a niche opportunity for a women led agency.

The business dream then developed into building a network of strong women with a mutual love of strategic creativity, and that's what we have achieved at C&C. Today, I am very fortunate to run a bespoke, all women full-service agency, with a team that has been carefully handpicked. We take every opportunity to celebrate our diversity, rich backgrounds, religions and cultures.

### ■ ***What are some of the challenges that you've experienced as a female in the industry?***

I found that talent was not enough, and issues of exclusion still managed to persist despite conversations opening up about the issue. My first job was at a small design agency where the staff complement was made entirely of white men. I was the only person of colour, and the only woman. I then moved to Johannesburg in 2005 and joined the Jupiter Drawing room, where there was not a single woman of colour in a leadership position.

Moving back to the Cape Town branch in 2009, I found that there was a diverse mix of people, but that senior management at the time was not as transformed. It's important to mention that at this stage, they were in the process of grooming my generation to take on senior roles. I then moved on to Ogilvy, Cape Town, and that was a total boys club. This was my final push towards paving my own way and building an agency led 100% by women.

■ ***Women seem to appear less vocal about what goes on behind closed doors in the advertising industry. Why do you think this is?***

The opportunity to be truly honest within any workplace is almost non-existent, particularly if open communication is not a robust part of the company culture. In an agency, leadership has the opportunity to influence how people support or oppose decisions, behaviour and feedback, and this is what sets the tone for women to be silent or vocal. Also, if it's the norm not to speak up, then creating meaningful change becomes near impossible.

■ ***Can you comment on the transformation (or lack of) of how women are represented in the creative industries?***

The playing field is still tragically unequal, at least in the Western Cape. In the last few years, companies around the globe have become more sensitive towards matters of equality, now strengthened by the added pressure to not merely claim diversity, but to take action to make room for women – and women of colour – among the key stakeholders, decision makers and leading thinkers within every organisation. Now is the time for us to hold all companies accountable for real transformation.

■ ***In a recent article, you mentioned as a woman of colour, you received an opportunity to lead. What was your feeling towards this?***

When I started in the industry, I was looking for a role model or mentor that understood my journey and outlook. Someone I could connect with, someone that came from the same background or shared a similar culture was also important in terms of being who I am, and being completely understood. This is important because it influences how one can perceive hierarchy, and how that has a knock on effect on goal-setting and your personal ideas around worthiness and capabilities. I have always been intentional with my approach, to represent who I am with purpose, and to take on the responsibility of showcasing the fact that everything is possible.

■ ***Are women, and specifically women of colour, still a minority in ad-land? How and what should be done to change this?***

In the Western Cape there are only a handful of women of colour in creative positions - let alone leading teams and businesses. We have placed numerous ads for creative positions, and in total, women of colour only account for less than 10% of applications. We want to make an effort to start going to grassroots level in the communities and introduce the various professions/ job roles within the ad industry. It will only ever become an option if you know about it.



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Creative agencies need to offer bursaries and be committed to the intake of POC straight out of college/ university. We have been recruiting with the intention of diversity and the best candidate for the job, my goal has always been to open the door for those who are not by the financial means to empower themselves through formal education, we would love to start a bursary programme that focuses on the upliftment of women of colour in the Western Cape. With our agency acting as an incubator for them to grow and upskill themselves.

■ ***What advice do you have to share with the future generation of female creatives like yourself?***

Be fearless. Don't let imposter syndrome stop you. It won't always pan out the way you've planned, so nurture a willingness

to follow your unique journey of growth.

“ *Build a support network of people who inspire you. A great mentor or business coach can benefit you immensely, as sage advice from an expert outside your business is vital.* ”

A trustworthy accountant and/or financial advisor is a must - they'll help you think through the opportunities and risks, especially as your business grows.

■ **As we celebrate Women's Month in South Africa. Do you have any words of encouragement for all the women out there?**

**Start.** Whatever it is, just start. **Inspire** those around you to push their limits. **Be brave** and conquer the fears that hold you back.



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