

"Drink thirstily from this creative oasis of inspiration" - Jason Xenopoulos

 By Leigh Andrews

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The 2018 Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity sees seven SA jurors representing across the various categories of creative work. I kick off the excitement with insights from Jason Xenopoulos, global chief vision officer and EMEA CCO at VML about his role this year as Cannes Titanium Lions juror.



A Cannes Lions-themed Jason Xenopoulos.

The 65th edition of the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity kicks off from 18 to 22 June with a more streamlined Festival schedule and simplified award structure.



Cannes Lions 2018 festival programme released

17 Apr 2018



Cannes Lions launches revamped 2018 Festival of Creativity!

14 Nov 2017



On his recently expanded role of global chief vision officer, driving VML's long-term vision and global positioning across their global network of 33 offices in 15 countries across six continents – in addition to serving as chief creative officer of VML EMEA – Xenopoulos spoke of how creativity and integration are the driving forces behind the agency network's ability to re-imagine the consumer experience.

It's just that focus on breaking boundaries and creative evolution that stands Xenopoulos in good stead as juror on this year's Cannes Lions' titanium panel. Xenopoulos is certainly up for the challenge, having served as part of the Lions Entertainment jury in 2017 as well as president of the Branded Entertainment jury at Dubai Lynx, sister event to Cannes Lions.

Even more fitting? When I chatted to him last year, Xenopoulos commented: “We have generally failed to win big in the newer and more integrated categories such as branded content, cyber, integrated, and titanium. These are the categories where I hope to see South African agencies start to shine.”



#CannesLions: The gold standard in creative excellence

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That's because Titanium Lions, formerly part of the 'Titanium and Integrated' Lions, celebrate game-changers. This means the entries needed to break new ground in branded communications through “provocative, boundary-busting, envy-inspiring work that marks a new direction for the industry and moves it forward”.

It's said to be one of the toughest and most coveted categories to compete in, with only four Titanium Lions handed out last year.



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Now, with Cannes Lions 2018 just around the corner, Xenopoulos shared his views on what SA creatives bring to the global Cannes Lions judging mix, as well as his favourite Cannes Lions-related moments...



Seven SA judges at Cannes Lions 2018

10 May 2018



■ Where were you when you found out you'd be one of this year's Cannes Lions jurors, and what was your reaction to the news?

I have no idea where I was when I found out. Sitting behind my desk, I suppose... but I was totally psyched when the invitation came through. Titanium has always been the most interesting and exciting category for me at Cannes Lions.

“ As someone who came to advertising via film and digital, I have always been focused on how technology will disrupt branded communications and what the convergence between marketing and other forms of communication will look like in the future. For me, Titanium is the category where we see ideas that don't just explode onto the canvas... but

explode the canvas itself and turn it into something new. ”

That's exciting, and hearing that I would have the chance to immerse myself in that kind of work and have a voice in rewarding the best of it was totally energising.

■ **Share a few of your favourite Cannes Lions-related moments over the years – either from attending personally or agency winning work-related.**

I've been going to Cannes for more than 15 years so I have built a trove of treasured moments. Most of those prized memories are of the creative work itself – mind-bending, world-changing ideas that exploded in my brain when I encountered them. Some of my Cannes memories are less graceful and involved copious amounts of alcohol and at least a fistful of regret.

Presenting a keynote on the Inspiration Stage at Lions Entertainment last year was a definite highlight, as was being part of the Branded Entertainment jury.



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But in truth, nothing compares to the feeling of going on stage to collect a Gold Lion. I have had that honour for the past two years in a row and I will always cherish those moments, I imagine that the only thing better would be going on stage to collect a Grand Prix, but alas that is a moment I am yet to experience - though one that I will continue to strive for!

■ **What do SA creatives bring to the global Cannes Lions judging mix?**

We bring perspective on our country and our continent and the cultural and economic dynamics at play in emerging markets. But I hope we bring more than that.

“ I hope we bring ourselves, our personal opinions and experiences and insights, regardless of national identity or cultural heritage. Our lens on the work may be tinted by those factors, but in the end, great creativity is borderless. ”

The deepest human insights are universal and the most powerful work transcends.

■ **Give us a glimpse of the specific criteria you're looking for in judging this year's entries.**

The Titanium category is all about “boundary-busting work that breaks new ground in branded communications,” so I will be looking for work that defies categorisation, that goes way beyond traditional advertising, and shines a light on the future of our industry.

■ **With other international award shows [D&AD](#) and the [One Show](#) having just wrapped up for the year, any predictions of trends that are likely to stand out at Cannes Lions 2018?**

The obvious trends are too obvious to be worth mentioning! The surprises are what I'm interested in and those, by their very nature, will be surprising when they emerge.

“ I prefer not to go to Cannes with too many predictions or expectations, because it creates a danger of confirmation bias. ”

You really want to approach each year with a totally open mind, allowing the best work in the world to guide you to where the puck is going. The work speaks far louder than words.

■ **Lastly, what are you most looking forward to from Cannes Lions 2018?**

Inspiration. For me, Cannes is a creative oasis in the middle of the year. I drink from it thirstily, taking in big gulps of inspiration, and then emerge revitalised and ready to tackle the rest of the year!

So much to look forward to! The 65th Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity 2018 takes place from 18 to 22 June 2018, with Cinemark once again the local representatives of Cannes Lions for SA. Click through to our Cannes Lions [special section](#) for all the latest updates!

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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