

Design Indaba recruits Thabisa Mjo, Cole Ndelu to select emerging creatives for 2021

Design Indaba has recruited Thabisa Mjo and Cole Ndelu to oversee the curation of this year's cohort of young designers.

The annual Design Indaba Emerging Creatives programme is now in its 16th year. Supported by the Department of Arts and Culture and functioning as a launching pad for future talent, the programme invites nationwide submissions across multiple disciplines. From a flood of entries, only 40 young designers can be chosen, which is why Design Indaba invites curatorial oversight from experts in the industry.



Thabisa Mjo

“We’re honoured to have two such worthy individuals form this year’s curatorial panel, and we thank them for sharing their expertise for the benefit of the next generation,” says Design Indaba founder Ravi Naidoo.

“We know that Thabisa, who is no stranger to Design Indaba, will bring a wealth of international product and furniture design experience to the table, while visual maven Cole’s valuable insights into what’s required will stem not only from having successfully moved through the Design Indaba Emerging Creatives programme herself, but also from having showcased her photography so widely. We’re excited to meet the new members of the Class of 2021 as chosen by these two creative dynamos!” Naidoo continues.

Thabisa Mjo of Mash T. Design Studio brilliantly embodies the new, young generation of unstoppable South African designers. She is the first local designer to have her work form part of the permanent collection of the renowned Musée des Arts Décoratifs (MAD) in Paris, France. The museum has acquired two landmark pieces by the South African designer – her iconic Tutu 2.0 lamp and the eye-catching Mjojo cabinet.

This is not the first time that Mjo’s work has been noticed internationally. She showcased her work at the Bonne Espérance Gallery in central Paris from 19 June to 10 August 2019 and her products are featured in Nando’s restaurants across the globe. In 2019, she curated an exhibition of her own and other designer pieces at Milan Design Week.

She first rose to fame by jointly winning the first-ever Nando’s Hot Young Designer (HYD) talent search for her aforementioned Tutu 2.0, a lamp inspired by xibelani, the traditional garment worn by Tsonga women. The Tutu 2.0 went on to win our Design Indaba Most Beautiful Object in South Africa award in 2018.

Mjo’s product design company Mash.T Design Studio is based in Johannesburg and it is from here that she creates her unrivalled forms that blend African traditions with contemporary nous. Her work serves to raise the global status of South African design as a category, and her individual star continues to shine.

Cole Ndelu is a former Design Indaba Emerging Creative from the class of 2018. She has made a name for herself as a brave, progressive photographer who is unafraid to confront complex social issues and expose harsh realities through her conceptual work. She is an award-winning visual artist who has exhibited her work widely both locally and internationally.

Ndelu first caught the world’s attention in 2017 when she was both a Finalist and Commended Photographer at the Sony World Photography Awards (SWPA) for her projects #blackboyjoy and Pride in the Panther. The SWPA exhibition launched in London before travelling to 16 countries. Since then, Ndelu has received a Getty Images Creative Bursary Grant, which she completed in 2018; an Arthouse UK Residency in 2019; and an Adobe Creative Residency: Community Fund in 2020. She was also selected to form part of the team that developed the Corporate Identity for the V&A Waterfront’s new food space, Makers Landing.

Her work has been showcased at the Manchester Contemporary Art Fair and the FNB Art Fair and has been included in 27 exhibitions in just four years. Her photography occupies the intersection between art, fashion, design, documentary, photography and spirituality. She makes work that celebrates, honours and champions black people as a counter-narrative

to the negativity and problematic representations of black people and Africa.

For more information about the Design Indaba Emerging Creatives, please visit www.designindaba.com.

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