

The #REDexperiment: Bringing art to life

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Thursday, 1 June 2017, saw the winners of the #REDexperiment announced at the Youngblood Art Gallery in Bree Street, Cape Town.

The experiment, created by Radisson Red in collaboration with the Youngblood Africa Foundation, encouraged local creatives to submit their artwork for a chance to be a part of the hotel's creative team, and a chance to win R10,000, each, in either the beermat design, 250ml or 350ml takeaway coffee cup sleeve design categories. Over a 100 entries were received, out of which three winners, all from South Africa, emerged victorious - Micah Donnoli was named the winner of the creative beermat design category, while Riekus Raaths, and Nkululeko Zulu were the winners of the 250ml, and 350ml takeaway coffee cup sleeve designs, respectively.



The RED inspired exhibition featured artists like Caro Allum, David Griessel, Robyn Pretorius, Michael Rinaldi, Ncumisa Spelling, Mariette de Villiers, Rael BliedenSy Opperman, Juanita Oostuizen, and Auroro Macaopoles, as well as all competition finalists' artwork.

The evening also featured pop-up dance performances by the Figure of 8 Dance Collective who had us moving from one stage to the next throughout the three-stage art gallery, as well as a dance performance by Aaraadhana who presented a piece through the medium of Bharatanatyam, an ancient Indian ideal, including live performance by Kirality who ended off the evening's First Thursday meet.

We caught up with Dale Simpson, Radisson Red's Cape Town's curator, and Marie Voghts, manager and curator of Youngblood to talk about the collaboration, the judging process, and the inspiration behind the #REDexperiment.



■ ***What inspired the collaboration between Radisson Red and Youngblood?***

Simpson: Radisson Red as a brand is inspired by art, music, and fashion, so we always look for ways to work in these fields. I suppose, personally, I really enjoyed the gallery and what Youngblood offered, and seeing the spectrum and what they support. Because of this, Radisson Red was very interested in starting a conversation with Youngblood to look at ways in which we could work together and working at ideas, so it really started with me and Marie having a coffee.

Voghts: I think it started really organically as well because the day we met for coffee, we didn't think that things were going to escalate this much at all. I think it's a big, important thing, that our vision aligns with what Radisson Red is trying to do within the hotel industry. I think it's interesting because the biggest thing is that people don't just focus on the locals when you think of a hotel, so that was also a cool thing in terms of marketing to come to the forefront. But it was literally an organic discussion back and forth and I think it's almost not safe for Dale and myself to work together because we throw things in and out.

■ ***How has art and what it represents, been to the philosophy behind Radisson Red?***

Simpson: I think for development throughout Radisson Red as a brand, that a sense of peace is really an important aspect because we wanted to create a hotel where people really felt engaged, through a sense of peace. So if you arrive at Radisson Red in Cape Town - you can arrive on a Friday afternoon, you could eat something at the bar, you can have a few drinks and it would all be local and then you could meet local people, you can listen to local music and you can see people dressed in local fashion - you could spend your Saturday in the hotel and wake up on a Sunday morning and check out, never having left the hotel, but knowing you'd been in Cape Town.

I think that art plays a huge role in terms of showcasing the creative abilities and creative talents that each destination has to offer. For Radisson Red, we've been blown away in terms of Cape Town, what's out there, the creative focuses and abilities - it's really quite exceptional.

■ ***How did you decide on the judging process – what were you looking out for specifically?***

Voghts: I think it was interesting to come from both parties side. (Correct me if I'm wrong) from Radisson Red side they were thinking specifically in terms of their brand, in terms of a visualisation of their brand, a uniqueness and not just a typical branding with a logo everywhere. From Youngblood side, it was specifically in terms your first appearance, people aren't going to have the design motivation in the applications, so firstly, it's visual, and it needs to feel visual. It was also the entire group of Youngblood and Radisson Red that had the final decision, but it was just something unique and different. You'll also see with the winners, in the end, there are very specific elements towards Africa or South Africa but not necessarily so blatantly.

Simpson: Two things I would say, one from our perspective, is that it was about the artists being themselves, expressing what they wanted to express, and the questions I've been asking about a number of things is that first, "what was your influence?" - we generally just wanted the artist to be themselves - and secondly, judging it, it's about thoughtful curation. I was looking at what the sentiment and story behind the design and what the visual impact would be for the guests when they pick up the beer mat or pick up the cup, trying to make sense from what you would feel about the design and I think that was more important from a guest angle, taking into consideration the visual impact.

Voghts: I think another important thing is we first sat with all the applications and we picked a few finalists, but it was actually a broad group and then we literally made the final decision today when we saw everything hanging, seeing it as a cup, because it's very different seeing a flat type of design compared to the actual cup.



■ ***How has Cape Town, as design capital, influenced the process you took to set up the #REDexperiment?***

Simpson: I think I was naïve about it because when Marie mentioned to me that it was a design capital, I actually wasn't aware of that. But I knew Cape Town was an extremely creative city and I am really proud of the artistic things you see around the city and what's been achieved. I knew there was a great and natural platform to try and attract and help artists, to just create a platform to showcase talent, and to offer people a chance to really engage, get involved and get a foot in and do something. Radisson Red is about doing that – we felt that it was a really good platform to showcase some of that talent and let that creativity just flow. It represents a team because our team is called creatives, so they create the guest experience. This was an opportunity to work with Youngblood, to bring in external creatives if we can call them that, and get them to be a part of that guest journey.

■ ***How has the #REDexperiment helped Youngblood artists – has it been beneficial to them?***

Voghts: With regards to the #REDexperiment competition, there's a lot of people who wouldn't necessarily have had the chance to enter or even people who don't think they've got the talent to give - it was literally open to anybody, which was amazing. With regards to the exhibition - curated throughout the entire building – it's all artists that we have worked with in the past, from Youngblood side - everybody was just so keen to be involved.

Once again we're focusing on the emerging artists, giving them a platform and also putting a simple design like this in a professional environment, neatly curated, gives it a completely different standard. It being a platform for emerging artists is the biggest thing. You'll also experience a variety because, throughout everything, we've tried to incorporate music and dance - everything that Radisson Red stands for. Through pop-up dance performances by Figure of 8 dance company, it's also creating a platform for them.

Has the #REDexperiment brought art to life – in which ways?



Simpson – From our team perspective, to really see internally how all of this has come to life is quite valuable, because they can really see how the inspirational work is taken through this activation and collaboration and brought to life. It's when you look over your shoulder and see all of the coffee cups hanging and suddenly imagine now and, very tangibly, how you would want to drink some coffee from those cups in about three months' time -

we've come out with a minimum order of 100,000 of the designs so we want to be very omnipresent in the hotel. Thirdly I think we really staying in Cape

This isn't just some sort of fly by night thing. When we discussed the awards, the category, it wasn't about what we could get away with, it was about giving people a reward for what they do and to do that genuinely and fairly.

Also, being in the Silo District, around the art, we can see that it's becoming artistic itself.

Voghts: I think in this instance, I'd look at the #REDexperiment and also the Radisson Red as an outsider, I really feel they're an awesome team to work with – it's almost been like a positive snowball effect since the first day we met, their offices are also here, sharing our space for now, and I think it's just so interesting to see how they incorporate each art element.

It's very cool to see everything on paper come to real life - I think it was quite a rush today but it's a good one and it's just very inspiring and exciting. Just hearing these things are happening in the hotel industry... this is the first time a hotel that I'm working with got me excited about what they are doing, for the first time I'm really amped because they're actually incorporating locals.

Radisson Red really looked at how they can push the artist, which comes across very true and honest and I like that.

We also had a moment to chat with the artists who won, about their designs and the inspiration behind them, and how they felt about winning...



Donnoli: I am an industrial designer, I do a lot of furniture design, so I am involved in techniques and processes, materials and all of that, so over a period of time I've always been fascinated by carvings... and how they get their weaves cut.

Obviously, with traditional wood carvings, I do this meticulous line work and it becomes like a therapeutic process, like a zen style of thing. I've always been getting inspiration from that and my doodling has always been steered in that direction, so mixed with the Ndebele patterns, geometrics, and the blocking off of it – the two mixed together are beautiful, I mean if you look at the coffee cup designs those geometric lines quite dominate and it's just a fun fusion of it.

It's great to have won, I almost didn't do it, it was very last minute. Like literally at midnight I sent my application.

Zulu: I was just celebrating the origins of Africa basically. I just tried to keep it local, making use local coffee beans, with a natural feel of having coffee beans shaping Africa. It was an awesome experience, I wasn't expecting to win. I'm really excited.

Raaths: I am a graphic designer and my inspiration for the designs was combining what we see every day and what we love with fantasy/design. I love seeing design elements in spaces we don't really expect, tweaking reality to make it beautiful. I'd like to thank Radisson Red for this amazing opportunity, it really is so amazing what they are doing, I don't think local artists get enough exposure and it's so nice to see that a team like them give opportunities to young artists to put themselves out there for the world to see their - passion and love for design and art... they really play a great part in youngsters' future and self-confidence.

The Youngblood Gallery will be exhibiting all #REDexperiment finalist designs for the duration of June, including other exhibiting artists showcasing their red-inspired artwork at the gallery during the month such as Robyn Pretorius, Juanita Oosthuizen, and David Griessel, with all designs set to be displayed at the hotel's grand opening event later this year.

View the gallery [here](#).

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