

All the trends and key themes

 By Louise Marsland

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A clear thread of emphasising tolerance towards all cultures emerged from speakers at this year's Design Indaba Festival. Not surprising in this divisive post-Brexit world and against the backdrop of the controversial Trump Presidency.



While not overtly politicised, many speakers quietly, yet unequivocally declared how we need to integrate other cultures and welcome migrants and learn from all people. Using their own work and ideas as examples of tolerance and the value of a rich cultural identity brought about by human integration.

As MC Michelle Constant called it: “The current climate of nationalism and jingoism is making us all anxious.”

These are some of the key themes and trends that emerged over the three days of Design Indaba 2017:

Collaboration

This is a major trend year after year at Design Indaba, but with the ‘amplified’ Design Indaba focus on incorporating performance art to render presentations live on stage, this is even more apparent in the designers on show’s work. The audience was surprised and delighted time and again this year by how speakers brought their work to life with added vignettes or theatre – from [Yinka Ilori](#) and his Nigerian dance party with another presenter, Kenyan Blinky Bill as DJ; to the strange Viking space odyssey from Nelly Ben Hayoun, which incorporated film, interviews and live theatre. Collaborating to give back was also a strong focus, as evidenced by Black Coffee’s partnership with other artists to launch an academy of fashion, music and art in South Africa. “The need for empathy has become a big world problem,” said Stuart Forrest, owner of South Africa’s Triggerfish Animation Studios. “We need to connect with other cultures. We need to learn to live together. The time is right, diversity and voice is something that is resonating in the market.”

‘Afrofuturity’

A strong focus on Africa emerged, particularly with the announcement of the [IKEA collaboration with African designers](#). IKEA head of design, Marcus Engman, said they had been looking at what has been coming out of Africa for some time in fashion, music, design and architecture. “We would like to tap into that a lot more,” he told the Design Indaba audience. In a press conference on Day 2 of Design Indaba, IKEA outlined their plans in more detail to create IKEA’s exclusive, African

collection.

Build frameworks for co-creation

Instead of building walls and systems to keep people out, the world should be creating frameworks that accept change, participation and collaboration for co-creation, urged graphic designer Marina Willer, who showed her moving short documentary film, *Red Trees*, on her father's migration from Czechoslovakia to Brazil after the second World War and how her family's future was changed by being accepted by another country. Today she sees similar migrations taking place with the same perils. "The world is very much about migrations now... although there are crazy stupid things like building walls and Brexit."

Music as medication

[Marko Ahtisaari](#) demonstrated his remarkable Sync Project, showing how music can be used to heal pain and other ailments, including serious clinical conditions, and should be incorporated into medical interventions. "We all self-medicate with music, to pump us up for athletics, to concentrate and get more productive... to relax and calm ourselves down... We could use music to replace certain pharmaceuticals and use it to manage pain," said Ahtisaari, citing scientific studies and basic neuroscience. "A celestial jukebox in every pocket" is how he described music streaming via our phones.

Tell stories with your work

Designer [Yinka Ilori](#) tells a story with each piece of furniture or art he designs, drawing inspiration from his homeland of Nigeria and the culture of his rich African heritage, including parables told by his father during his youth. He looks at the state of hierarchy in his culture and status, using chairs as his narrative canvas. "Chairs are powerful objects and tell powerful stories," Ilori explained. He used the term "Afrofuturism" to describe adventuring with Africa's "makers, thinkers and dreamers".

Make things we can share

Architect [Winy Maas](#) should be in charge of the world because his solutions could end many of the problems we have globally, today. "These days the world is a lot about fear. What can we do about it? What can we learn from it? What's next in this world of egoism?" he asked. Architecture is a device to produce products for a future world, a future city, future models, to move from "fear to curiosity", from "egoism to collectivism..." "Make things we can share," he urged.

Be culture curious

New stories, new ideas, new things only come from interacting with one another, across borders, cultures, species, was a central message from Koen Vanmechelen and Chido Govera's intriguing presentation. "Be curious for other cultures," Vanmechelen emphasised. His life's work includes breeding chickens from all different countries, creating a more resilient breed and resulting in his work being studied by scientists in the context of finding cures for human diseases due to the diverse nature of his research. He is giving his "globally diverse chicken" back to the world and collaborating with Zimbabwean Chido Govera's socially conscious mushroom farming project to find a "bridge" between cultures and science, food and medicine.

Design inclusively

Graduate speaker [Grace Jun](#) focussed on creating a range of technologically aware and functional clothing for breast cancer survivors. With her masters degree in design and technology, she advocates designing inclusively, using design thinking to come up with solutions for the disabled who may not be able to function with normal clothing and simple things like buttons and fitted jackets.

See people as citizens, not just consumers

The core message from designer and coder Ekene Ijeoma, was one of collaboration and empathy. “Create empathy between people... empathy comes from understanding.” He sees the world creatively and through data. His work with data creates projects that help people, such as The Refugee project and his app to encourage people to look up from their phones so they don’t get into accidents at traffic intersections. He wants us to “think like citizens, not just creatives”; “use data to educate citizens, not just market to consumers”; and “make conversation pieces, not just masterpieces”.

Practice rebellion

Designer Kate Moross of Studio Moross encourages practising rebellion and finding new ways of being you and interacting with the world. Although just 30, her impressive body of work includes designing the stage and brand identity for famous band tours like that of One Direction, starting a record label and art directing numerous band covers and launches and music videos. She calls herself a “literal designer” and spoke at length about getting the mix of people right in a studio. Her tips included: share work early; hire people not skills – make sure you want to hang out with that person every day; create don’t copy; fire your clients; be careful which bridges you burn as every job is connected; do some work for love, some for money and some for charity; learn on the job; over deliver, on time, with a smile; failing is cool – share your failures, it makes the team stronger; culture is whatever you want it to be; don’t be afraid of self-expression; be as weird as you want.



Find yourself

A ground-breaking new global solution to provide street addresses for remote or high density informal settlements around the world, was unveiled by technology designer [Chris Sheldrick](#) of What3Words. What3Words is a system which generates a random three words which are easier to remember than GPS coordinates. In mapping the entire world to give 4 billion people living without addresses, a universal solution, Sheldrick brought pride and identity to people living without addresses, as evidenced by on-going trials such as the one in Kwandengezi in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, where people received their first addresses and where emergency services can now find their patients.

Keep on failing

Local filmmaker and animator, Stuart Forrest, CEO of Triggerfish, told his tale about the rigours of filmmaking and failing often and hard to reach his goals, producing award winning hits along the way like the ‘made in Africa’ *Zambezia* and *Khumba* animated movies with real African stories. His leave behind, was: “Let Go” – give up your own artistic vision and move on to the next project when failure happens; “Make friends” – you need strong networks of friends and contacts to

make things happen; and “Go Bigger”- you get stronger each time, after each failure, after each success, after each new venture.

Engagement has consequences

The distance between “thinking and doing” needs to be bridged, said Olafur Eliasson, Danish designer and artist of Studio Olafur Eliasson. His products include the famous Little Sun solar lamp which he showcased at Design Indaba in 2014. Eliasson encourages designers to get out and find out how their products “feel” in the real world. He has worked with refugees and the cultural sector to come up with solutions to issues in their communities, creating cost effective “social glue” within communities. “I love things that look great. But what does it mean? Do we successfully present something people can see themselves? What not yet verbalised emotional need does the viewer bring?”

Data as a craft

A personal handcrafted approach to data visualisation is [Giorgia Lupi's](#) skill. An information designer based in New York, she draws data, creating artworks that reveal personal insights and explore minds. She deconstructs data and finds the textures in it. “Can we use data to become better human beings?” she asked. She believes data can reveal the hidden patterns in our lives. Her collection of personal postcards sharing data on their lives, between her and a colleague, have been acquired by MOMA.

Celebrate the human condition

Photographer Osborne Macharia captures his subjects vividly, telling intricate stories with his work. A keen observer, he finds his stories all over, or when he's working on something else, capturing exquisite montages of the human condition. He encourages us to tackle taboo subjects and document the unpalatable.

Step back from reality

Reality is highly fallible and we need to get rid of our filters and distorted thinking to embrace a more magical, non-linear world, said TJ (Tea) Uglow, creative director for Google's creative lab in Sydney and a transgender activist. She encouraged a more questioning mindset that embraces the unknown, challenging our reality and thinking, while showcasing Google's beautiful Editions at Play project where books are specifically designed to live on mobile technology and animated to engage. “We are the first generation that can step outside of information and see it as a spectrum... and play with it. Step back from reality and find the edges, what we are creating and why we are creating it.”

What can you bring to the world?

One of the highlights this year was a talk by entrepreneur and co-founder of [Airbnb](#), [Joe Gebbia](#), who told Airbnb's story, using the analogy they used of “duct tape” design opportunities and solutions, including their social change programme to assist refugees without homes: #WeAccept, and encourage different cultures to meet up. He encouraged creatives to come up with small duct tape ideas that create social change and change lives.

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