

It's time to reclaim our rightful place in the world of advertising - Pepe Marais

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No stranger to the advertising industry, Pepe Marais, group integrated chief creative officer at Joe Public United, Johannesburg, sits on the panel of the Film and Integrated Campaign category at this year's [Loerie Awards](#).



Pepe Marais, group integrated chief creative officer at Joe Public United, Johannesburg

■ *How do you feel about judging at this year's Loeries?*

In terms of film, I felt that the standard was slowly declining year on year, in terms of big brands and big campaigns. This gut feeling will be supported by the end result, with the big prizes awarded to work done by agencies other than the usual suspects – mostly for smaller-scale work. This is concerning, as we should all know by now that the only way to add value to the cost of media, is to fill it with work that will occupy the most valuable media space: the space between our consumer's ears. That said, the top winners are very well deserving.

■ *Tell us more about yourself and why you believe you were selected – your judging experience and so on.*

I have been in the industry for the past 30 years, and with Joe Public since its inception in 1998. I have steadily worked myself up the ranking and have judged Loeries for the most part of the past 23 years, except for the last three years.

“ It seems our industry assume you have reached your sell-by date at the age of 50, when in truth, I feel like I am only at the start of my career. ”

It feels great to be back at the judging table, especially for categories as important as the ones I judged. I must say, I left

the process inspired to lift our own game.

■ ***When you heard about being selected as a judge, how did you celebrate the news?***

I downed a stiff glass of water! Jokes aside, I was truly happy to be judging again. I feel I have a lot to add from my experience and sincerely hope I will be offered the opportunity again next year.

■ ***What does this mean to you, personally?***

On a personal level, I am concerned that we have lost the plot as an industry. We are seemingly more concerned with process, revenues, and margins, than delivering groundbreaking creative campaigns to our clients. Over the past two decades, I have seen creativity fighting a losing battle, often the last thing on the mind of our business partners and our clients. It's like we have forgotten what business we are actually in.

For example, Adfocus only allocated 5% of their scorecard this year to creative excellence and experience. Imagine an award for the country's best surgery only allocating 5% to how excellent or experienced the winning surgeon is? It truly baffles me.

This is mirrored by the fact that most of what we do as an industry, can be categorized as wallpaper. Being on a judging panel gives us the opportunity to become more conscious of the state of our product as an industry. And hopefully gives us the wake-up call we need to start digging ourselves out of this hole. We used to be revered internationally as an industry.

“ *It is time to get back to basics, get back to creativity and reclaim our rightful place in the world of advertising.* ”

Not for the sake of our egos, but for the sake of our clients. Great work works better than crap. It really is that simple.

■ ***Which category did you judge?***

Film and Integrated Campaign.

■ ***What specific criteria did you use when judging?***

Poison gas, to quote George Lois. Work that is provocative. We've become way, way too safe. In the end, I hope people will see past the mere judging of the judges' decisions and realise that the winners are the ones who pushed the boundaries way beyond the norm, at various degrees.

■ ***You have some major experience in the creative industry. Could you comment on the impact of Covid-19 on the industry?***

Covid-19 is here to stay. My only comment would be to focus on what you can control and throw yourself at doing better and better and better work, every day. It's like any brief: no problem, no solution.

“ Covid-19 has caused some major problems. So, let's use our collective creative skills towards finding major solutions. ”

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

My most favourite Loeries-related moments would be for every time we have won major awards for real work that made a real difference to our clients' businesses. Big John for Chicken Licken caused big drama and was rewarded in a big way for doing so. Hats off to our client for giving us the freedom to help her make chickens fly.

[Chicken Licken - Big John](#) from [They](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Nedbank's Grand Prix for Secrets last year was a highlight of my career. It rewarded our client for her immense bravery. I mean, would you ever have thought that a bank could do a piece of work like that?

■ **Any predictions of trends that are likely to stand out at Loeries 2021?**

Large clients are going to win less, smaller clients are going to win more. Maybe this will be an indictment on larger agencies and clients being too process-driven, with far too little focus on provocative creative campaigns.

■ **Lastly, what are you most looking forward to from Loeries 2021?**

I am looking forward to the Monday after the Loeries. I always feel inspired after each year's event, and ready to improve our game, ready to take the good fight for greater work to our clients.

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