

#BehindtheSelfie with... Karen Steenkamp

 By Leigh Andrews

21 Aug 2019

This #WomensMonth, we go behind the selfie with Karen Steenkamp, creative director at young and dynamic empowerment agency, Sum of 21 Academy.



Steenkamp captions this, “#nocaption: Let the design do the talking.”

1. Where do you live, work and play?

I live and work in Centurion, though I spent many years in Johannesburg.

I play anywhere there is good company and music. Somewhere outdoors with a view is top of my list.

2. What's your claim to fame?

I don't know that I have one! I was on TV though, twice...



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Once as a game show contestant (I know!) and once to talk about a campaign as an agency representative. I've also done a couple of radio interviews.

3. Describe your career so far.

Manic, challenging, fulfilling. I cut my teeth as a packaging designer, but yearned for a more vibe-y agency environment.

“ There I discovered I'm good at art direction; becoming a weird AD/design hybrid, then group head of art, then creative director. I've worked on all sides of 'the line'— above, below, all throughout. I've lead small teams and large. I'm a true

agency animal that loves the thrill of a deadline and the buzz of my studio. ”

Conceptual campaigns are my favourite to work on.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things.

Heavy metal music, when it rains, my husband and child, to laugh, travel.



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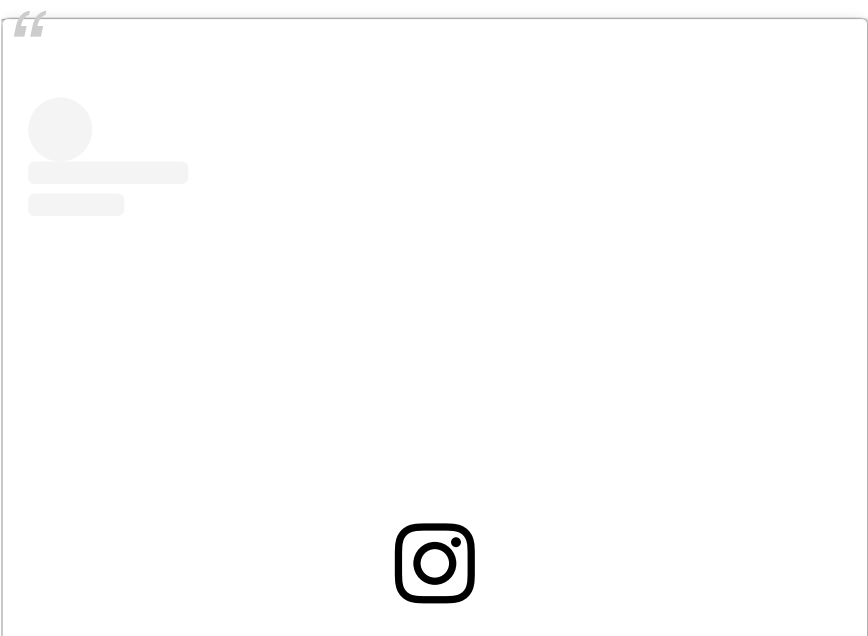


5. What do you love about your industry?

How small it actually is. As the years go by, you keep running into familiar faces, sometimes in very unexpected places.

I also love how adaptable it is – as tech, societal norms, business trends and the like grow, change and expand, so we are forced to grow, change and expand.

Part of the mandate of what we do as creatives/design thinkers is to stay on top of developments so we can offer our clients the absolute best solutions.



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A post shared by Sum of 21 (@sumof21) on Sep 30, 2018 at 4:39am PDT

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I love working with young, fresh, creative talent. They amaze me.

6. Describe your average workday, if such a thing exists.

Coffee, ops/client/finance/kickstart meetings, creative reviews. Perhaps a brainstorm. More coffee. More creative reviews. Jokes with my youngsters in studio. So many emails.

7. What are the tools of your trade?

Creativity. Coffee. The Adobe Creative Suite. Bloody Outlook and Excel. Design research. Design thinking. The MacBook I carry everywhere under my arm. And my Wacom.

8. Who is getting it right in your industry?

I don't spend too much time noticing what others are up to. We at Sum of 21 are doing something completely new in our own way, anyway.

Of course, I can list local and international designers whose work I admire, but for me, it's long past the aesthetic.



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I'd like for us to be the agency that gets mentioned in future as the one who has been doing it right, exactly because of our unique approach.

9. List a few pain points the industry can improve on.

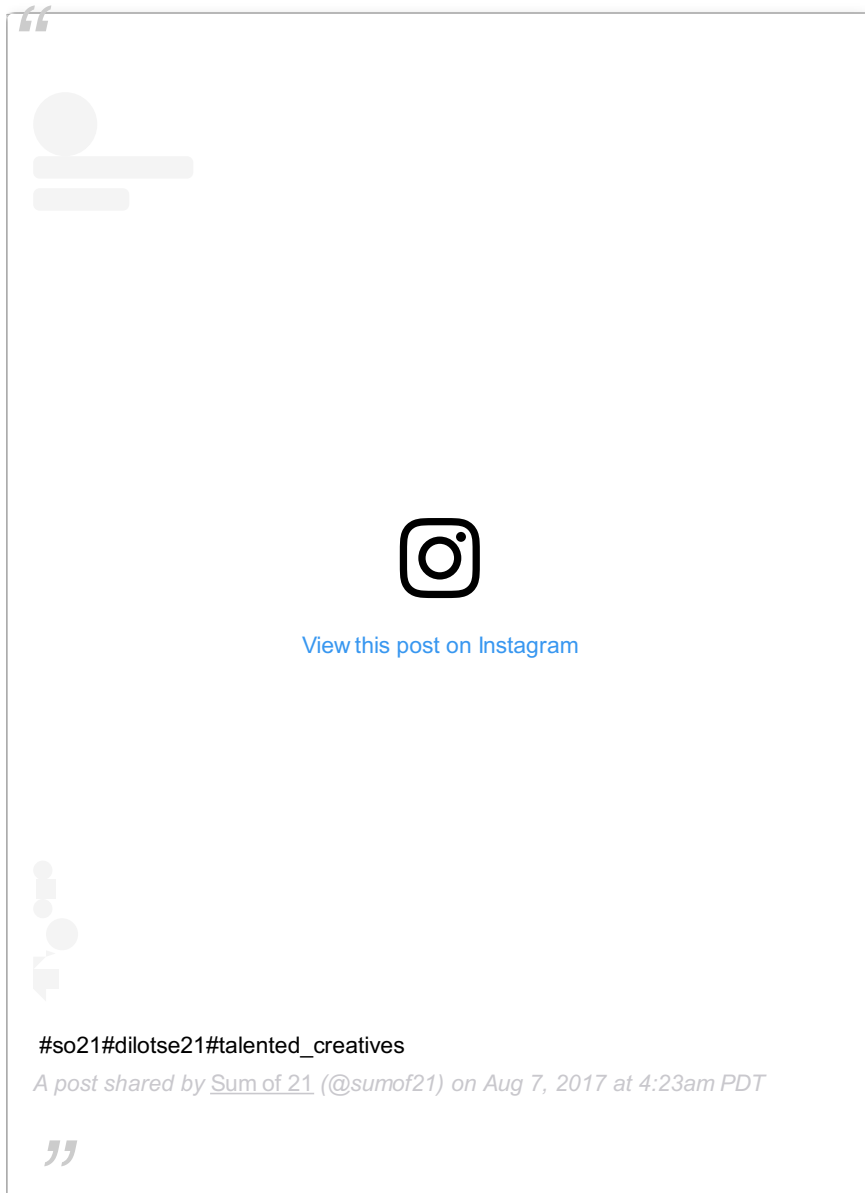
Wages and salaries.

“ Creatives are some of the most hardworking people you will find, yet the salary hardly ever reflects that. Client is king, often leading to massive sacrifices on the employee end of the scale. ”

I'd like to see a more even, widespread empathetic approach so that no-one gets the short end of the stick, client included.

10. What are you working on right now?

A social media campaign for a mall; the launch of a new urban living concept; a smattering of brand strategies/developments; audio-visual elements and websites for clients; and our own agency showreel, website and profile.



11. Tell us some of the buzzwords floating around in your industry at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself.

I hate buzzwords, but they are a reality.

“Impact” has been a big one over the last year or so, and lately it’s “design thinking”. I just do what I do though, I don’t pay too much mind to what’s “in”.

If what I do naturally happens to fit, wonderful, but if it doesn’t, that’s OK too.

12. Where and when do you have your best ideas?

In my sleep. Seriously. I’ll wake up at 2am having just “dreamt” something that unlocks an idea.

I don’t think it’s truly dreaming, though – I think it’s my stressed, overactive mind that can’t shut down and then it keeps gnawing at the problem until it spits out something useful.

13. What's your secret talent/party trick?

I'm an old rocker.

“ Our parties don't consist of any tricks beyond chugging beer and Jägermeister and banging our heads. That I do well, though less now that I'm on the wrong side of 35. And a mama. ”

14. Are you a technophobe or a technophile?

Hmm, I guess a phobe. I acknowledge the need to use tech and to stay on top of the developments, but that's strictly for my job. When I'm at home, out or on holiday you won't find a phone in my hand.



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ETIKET. 26 Feb 2019



I have a gypsy soul that loves to be unplugged.

15. What would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

- Décor ideas I'll never implement.
- A list of books I still need to read.
- LOTS of photos of my daughter, some of which she took herself.
- The most delightfully random collection of images posted by friends on our group chat.
- A gym schedule I don't stick to.

16. What advice would you give to newbies hoping to crack into the industry?

Be yourself. Hone what you're good at. Explore a lot – new ideas, new disciplines, new ways of doing things, but stay true to what you know your true craft to be. There is a niche in this industry for everyone, just keep at it.

“



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Our creative Leaders mini social #reimagine they cultivate the creative soul



A post shared by Sum of 21 (@sumof21) on Apr 19, 2018 at 12:04pm PDT

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*Interviewed by Leigh Andrews.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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