

# Africa's new creative direction

By [Gary Harwood](#)

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It is an exciting time for African creativity. A lot of fresh, new thinking is being injected into the sector, bringing with it strong, contemporary ideas that look to the future while honouring the continent's traditional past.



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This new course sets the tone for the trends we will see emerging in 2019, which I believe will be more about authenticity and embracing true *Africanness*, and less about the lip service so often relegated to African issues.

These trends include:

## 1. Branding for good

While not a new concept among South African brands, the idea of companies acting responsibly and protecting their brand reputation through good corporate governance is still finding its feet across the broader continent. Until recently, African brands have been able to compete on availability and price. But with markets maturing, citizens and communities are starting to expect, even demand, more from these brands.

The result is that value alone is no longer enough. The proliferation of smart technology is also giving consumers a voice,

leaving little room for exploitative brands to hide. Branding for good will become a key imperative in the future, especially where community and environmental issues are concerned.

## **2. The rise of contemporary African creativity**

Africa has really come into its own as a creative continent this past year, both as a place that hosts exceptional creative talent and one that serves as inspiration for global creatives. Simultaneously, we have seen a surge in creative content based on Afrofuturism. While this concept is appealing, I think it is superficial.

I saw a commercial for a Kenyan financial services brand where Africans were wearing futuristic clothes and sporting oddly painted faces with a weird musical track. Watching that advert felt so wrong on so many levels. I think we are going to see a move away from this notion towards a concept that we as HKLM have always embraced, *Afrorealism*. This idea points to African creativity that is inspirational, authentic and doesn't have a Hollywood veneer over it. It is real and honest and resonates with Africans. This trend is already evident in the emergence of powerful contemporary African art across the continent.

## **3. Embracing African heritage**

Alongside this upswing in contemporary African creative thinking is an increased focus on being proudly African and proud of our heritage. This includes creating products with Africans, for Africans, and specifically for African environmental conditions. As Western influences continue to creep into the continent, so traditional cultures are fast evaporating. An important aspect of embracing Africa's heritage is tapping into indigenous knowledge systems, and uncovering those 'lost' parts of our cultures to enable communities to celebrate them once again. This is not only the right thing to do but – when truly engaging local communities – is better for business too.

## **4. The escalation of smart technology**

African countries are leapfrogging technology, especially on the smart tech front. We are seeing more affordable smart phones being made available which, combined with cheap data rates, will be a game changer. Ecommerce is growing, and many countries are investing in tech start-ups. I also think we are about to see crypto currency stake its claim in Africa. Given the challenges around fluctuating African economies and currencies, there is significant potential for this digital asset on the continent.

## **5. The beginning of beneficiation**

For too long we have seen African resources extracted and exported from the continent, to be beneficiated elsewhere in the world. Our coffee beans go to the USA to be turned into Starbucks coffee, and our gold goes to India for jewellery. But now I think we are going to start seeing our own African coffee brands and our own African jewellery brands emerging.

With the rise in contemporary African creativity, there's room to birth amazing African brands that are born out of own

resources and benefited right here, on the continent.

None of these trends are mutually exclusive; they are all interconnected, signalling the new direction in which African creativity is moving. This is critical, because Africa needs impactful brands to prosper. If these trends are anything to go by, we are on the right track.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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