

# Design Indaba 2009 - seeing the light in the dark

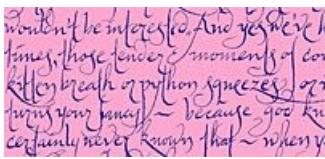
 By [Terry Levin](#)

2 Mar 2009

Inspiration levels at fever pitch, the 1500 privileged delegates of the 2009 Design Indaba once again assembled in the dark to witness the criteria that make up the world's design elite. In order to contextualise the levels of excellence and awesomeness of this conference, we might say that comparing it with most of the design we see around us everyday - like supermarket signage, tourism brochures, pole posters etc - is a bit like comparing a mediocre musician with Bob Dylan.

## That's funny... that's out of the park

For example, Marian Bantjes whose standard of illustrative typography probably hasn't been seen since *The Book of Hours* was published in 1410, puts so much love into her work that it magically transforms into money.



Sending out thousands of hand-drawn or printed Valentine cards and love letters each year to clients, family and friends as self-promotion can't help but generate assignments for *Wired* magazine, a limited edition *Wallpaper* cover, the *Guardian* UK's 62 page puzzle special and, for the heaven of retailers - Saks Fifth Avenue - as well as collaboration with other design superstars such as Michael Bierut and Stephan Sagmeister. Demonstrating

exactly how love turns into money are the exquisite laser-cut posters commissioned by AED Social Change, which were auctioned off in aid of AIDS orphans in Kenya. See why we all fell in love at <http://www.bantjes.com/>

The five-point checklist by which she measures her work are:

Does it bring joy?

Is there a sense of wonder?

Does it invoke curiosity?

Could it inspire?

Is it unusual?

And as a bonus... "If it's funny as well then I know I've hit it out of the park."

## To have and to fold

Nobumichi Tosa, is the third president of Maywa Denki, a company founded by his father, which he runs as a sort of parody of a traditional Japanese Electronics Corporation.



Of all the world's nations, the Japanese probably have the most evolved relationship with artificial intelligence and Maywa Denki produces what they call Nonsense Machines - which blur the boundaries between robotic, analogue, digital and mechanical technologies in a sort of post-Industrial irony - examples include (my personal favourites out of literally 100's of examples) - embryo masks, a dial interface TV remote control, a watch with an old-

fashioned telephone finger dial that simply calls the number that gives you the time eg 1026 - "When you hear the signal it will be 14hours 51mins and 0secs" - and everybody's favourite, the NAKI - a fishbone shaped electronic extension cord. Their wind-up KnockMan toys are mostly sold out, and his musical performances generate many thousands of YouTube views and may even go a long way to providing answers to the kinds of questions posed by Anthony Dunne earlier in the Indaba as to "What kinds of relationships will humans want with robots?"

<https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/415/33203.html>. The answer's probably the same relationship we want with most of the other machines we have invented - we will want them to entertain us and to add joy and wit to the thoughtless, the soulless and the mundane. Immerse yourself in the website [http://www.maywadenki.com/english/00main\\_e\\_content.html](http://www.maywadenki.com/english/00main_e_content.html), after which you might want to know that 1 ZAR = 9.64741 JPY

## He ain't heavy

Even after the glowing introduction by stalwart Indaba MC Ndoni Khanyile and Nkhensani Nkosi - to the effect of his being voted one of the “top 100 advertising people of all time”, nothing could have prepared us for the emotional power of Keith Rose's show reel. Just the opening bars “The road is lo-ong,” will immediately propel many of us back to the collective memories of the early days of SABC and the elephants that walked across the dunes for ISM computers, nor will the *Chariots of Fire* soundtrack which accompanied the little hero Staffie that beat the greyhounds on behalf of Dunlop's SP33 tyres or the day/night Standard Bank Cricket game in Mamre, the Merc going over Chapman's peak or the BMW Mouse ad leave many of us unmoved. It was so unlikely, in an industry dominated by the Scott's (Tony and Ridley), and the million GBP commercial budgets of the 1980's, that an okie from Krugersdorp, with no training, would have risen to become one of world's five most influential commercial directors. We can only surmise that his success has everything to do with his unshakable drive, passion and talent. If you're too young to remember the days where everything kept going right with Toyota - then you can marvel at Keith's latest work for the multi-award winning Allan Gray, “ballet tutu” commercial, the Sasol Puppet with an enquiring mind and, although he never showed it, the ads that have new brrrreathed even more life into the Coca Cola Company.

As Li Edelkoort pointed out in her customary trend forecast, somehow the Design Indaba just miraculously seems to get better every year - and how in French the phrase “we are delighted” translates as - Je suis Ravie! - and as the echoes of the mantra “Thank you Ravi Naidoo” fade for another year, we look forward to maximising the opportunities provided by our clients and associates to make a positive difference to the global perceptions of our region - via some really great and meaningful design.

## ABOUT TERRY LEVIN

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