

A gentleman is someone who does not what he wants to do, but what he should do.

HARUKI MURAKAMI
Writer



ICYMI | IOL.CO.ZA

TREVOR NOAH TO PAY SALARIES OF 'DAILY SHOW' CREW

SOUTH African comedian Trevor Noah seems to be going beyond the call of duty. Just this week, the "Daily Show" host gave away 50 laptops to teachers who are giving online lessons from home.

M
METRO

ARTS

'Imbewu' joy at first Safta win

Awards ceremony held virtually during lockdown regulations

AMANDA MALIBA
amanda.maliba@i.nl.co.za

THE annual South African Film and Television Awards (Saftas) ceremony on Wednesday was low-key due to Covid-19 lockdown regulations that prohibit social gatherings.

Gone was the pomp and glitter as some of South Africa's leading film and television stars accepted their awards via video conferencing facilities.

e.tv's daily drama *Imbewu: The Seed*, which debuted two years ago, finally received its first Safta. Celebrating the win, Fundi Zwane, who plays the much-loved overly-zealous yet complicated Christian woman KaMadonsela, said winning their first award while on lockdown was a surreal yet wonderful feeling.

"As a cast member, the win is a reassurance that people are enjoying the production we work so hard to put together for all these years. "It's also reassuring that as Africans we are identifying with narratives that address issues that speak to our lived experiences," said the thespian, who has been with the show since its inception. Zwane has been acting for 12 years, in productions like *Divers Down* and *Generations*, and acknowledged those productions for laying a strong foundation for her craft.

"*Imbewu* and the role of Donsi found me at a place in my career where all these years have built my inner confidence to play as an actress.

"The show afforded me a great window to continuously explore the art and science of performance and that's pretty cool," she said.

Zwane's character is the total opposite of who she is in real life and that, according to the star, is the exciting part about playing KaMadonsela.

"We are polar opposites. I have 'sport' shaved hair and many tattoos, and I think if Donsi and Fundi met in real life, it would be a hilarious collision of ideologies.

"But Donsi and I are very much identical in how deeply we love our kids. I've acted with Nqobile Ndlovu and Nokwanda Khuzwayo as my daughters and, wow, how awesome," she said.

To help prepare for such an intricate character, Zwane said she wakes up at around 2am daily to pray, prepare and get into the character's psychological mind frame.

"The arts can be very indulgent but I do make sure to leave Donsi on set and pick her up at the next shoot," while also enjoying every facet of this intricate character.

Beyond the screen, Zwane is also the founder of an ideation and content creation company, Phezulu Phambili Collective, which has been around for the past five years.

"I've had the privilege of working with clients such as Broll, Transnet and Travel with Flair.

"Running my business is another expression of who I am as I love

coming up with ideas and enjoy collaborating and finding creative business solutions to things," Zwane said.

While those who tuned in on YouTube enjoyed catching a glimpse of their favourite stars at home, the virtual ceremony experienced a number of technical glitches that led to National Film and Video Foundation's chief executive Makhosazana Khanyile's profuse apology to the winners as well as viewers.

Khanyile said organising and hosting such an occasion, and exploring uncharted avenues of communication, is always a challenge and not as easy as it looks.

"Given all the technical glitches which may have in part, dampened the winners' spirits, we hope that given the fact we are in the middle of a global pandemic, winners understood and hopefully appreciated the fact that we fully intended for them to have a lively experience.

"We cannot apologise enough for the mishaps," she said.

Saftas lost about R6 million when sponsors pulled out when the lockdown hit, as well as R2.5m in cancellation fees days before the ceremony.

"Overlooking all the mishaps, with Dineo Ranaka as the host, the awards were in parts lively and fun and tried to infuse entertainment within social distancing parameters and this was done as best we could," added Khanyile.



FUNDI Zwane, from *Imbewu: The Seed* which won a Safta.

Technology unlocks new way of life

LESEGO MAKGATHO
lesego.makgatho@i.nl.co.za

TECHNOLOGY has kept people connected, working and informed as the globe fights the spread of Covid-19. Online video meeting platforms such as Zoom and Google Hangouts have replaced boardrooms and classrooms during the lockdown, while virtual pub quizzes and livestreamed religious services have been nourishing the soul.

Flux Trends founder Dion Chang said the Covid-19 pandemic has fast-tracked a lot of technologies that were readily available but sitting on the sidelines, and that people have had no option but to learn.

"We need to first get onto the platforms and learn how to do things, and then learn the etiquette of engaging in online meetings. People are still struggling to get used to and understand this.

"The pandemic is forcing us to look at contact-less ways of doing things. When you check-in for a flight, the machine will now check your temperature. All of the automation and robotics is coming into its own and is being fast-tracked because of this pandemic," said Chang.

On how to embrace technology more, he said there are no limitations.

"There's no other option. We are forced to embrace technology. And once these habits become embedded, you are not going to go back.

"If you've never bought anything online and are doing it now, chances are, you'll continue doing it post the lockdown and pandemic."

An African goddess refashioned

Don Makatile

AN AFRICAN goddess refashioned Right off the bat, fashion filmmaker Nirma Dolly Madhoo gushes about winning the Humanities And Social Sciences Award 2020 and how it has enhanced her conviction about the worth of what she does. She won in the Visualization or Infographic category. "Since the publication of articles in journals is generally the way that research output is acknowledged, academics who do creative and practice-based research often struggle to get the validation that their work may be worthy of. The HSS Awards as an initiative of the NIHSS, has in its 5-year trajectory consistently shown that it recognises and awards instances of creative best practice in the Humanities and Social Sciences in South Africa on the basis of solid academic and scholarly principles. Being a recipient of one of the DH HSS awards helps validate that as an academic and practitioner my work could be a voice that is contributing to a collective agenda for transformative change in our societies."

If the black empowered feminine is not a new phenomenon in fashion, who are the pioneers? "Icons in African fashion histories stem from the antiquity of Ancient Egyptian women rulers and the embodiment of goddesses such as the Yoruban Yemoja / Yemaya. The Agojie or Dahomey women warriors of Benin whose identities were historically performed by elaborate costume, weapons and rituals are not often heard of and were interestingly the inspiration for the all-female warrior protagonists in Marvel's Black Panther. Except where selectively exoticised and kept alive by the colonising West, these identities would have been systematically erased or obscured for the agenda of oppression through cultural dominance. While fashion is for most attributed Eurocentric origins, we have a number of contemporary black icons such as Grace Jones, Eartha Kitt and Miriam Makeba who distinguished themselves not only for their style but also for their undeniably empowered and fierce presence," Madhoo says. She makes a distinction between a film-maker in fashion and the more ubiquitous fashion photographer, and that their work would at times interface.

"Yes, of course. My formal training is (in part) in fashion photography and I still sometimes shoot stills. It is just that with digital technologies there are less barriers in the sense of access and ease of use for the production of fashion media so the definitions of who-does-what is sometimes fluid. The fashion photograph as still image is still very important in digital culture and is not going to disappear, just as older forms of media have not disappeared where new tools have re-invented these. The convergence of media into digital formations has evolved into the convergence of the digital towards immersive new media. Fashion film is the (re)mediation of the more traditional form of the fashion photograph with new technology; and with this, inevitably comes new syntax, new ways in which fashion images can be made and stories expressed." Madhoo took up residency at the AR/VR Lab in 2018 where she was one of only two artists representing South Africa. "The AR/VR Lab was run by Cape Town-based Electric South, who are a non-profit organisation." It was held at the Bertha Boschendal Retreat in the Western Cape. The cohort of nine artists included representatives from other countries such as Rwanda, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Tanzania, she says. What did the 'course' of the residency entail? What did you learn to hone your skill further? She says: "The New Dimensions AR/VR Lab in 2018 provided mentorship from a number of international experts from places such as Kenya, US and South Africa and towards the development of continental African artists for immersive digital storytelling. We had intensive sessions

with these mentors one-on-one and as a group. Mentors included creative technologists, VR film directors, producers and we got acquainted with the equipment for VR, ran some tests and 'pitch-decked' VR media concepts at the end of the residency. While the real-life application of skills happened with the making of *Azimuth*, this residency was pivotal in enabling me with the confidence to experiment with the medium, core understanding that informed making the film and most importantly a network of support and mentorship in order to do so."

Who are the subjects in *Azimuth*? Are you telling their story or that of the film-maker? "Fashion films do not adhere to the traditional structures of film-making but rather have a focus on fashion performances. *Azimuth* takes the form of a 'non-narrative' fashion film, as there is no dialogue and the fashion performances are cut/edited to an original score. The protagonist embodies a superhero type of fashion identity, moving through a triptych of elements – birth/water, solid/life and ether/sublimation. This happens against backdrops of Brutalist South African architecture including Dolosse, an urban jungle and a simulation of the iconic Ponte Tower. It is meant as an expressionist, South African fashion film, and within the VR headset, transports the audience through a vertiginous geography connoting a technological sublime." Fashion has established Western cultural standards on everyone else.

"In my opinion, there are not yet enough positive images of black identities. Political messages are potent, not only as overtly political but very significantly as subliminal in the everyday. Larger audiences consume many more images of raced-gendered representations in our likeness."

Is this about the anorexic model? Should this change? "Fashion has indeed established Western ideals as the norm but this is not only about the anorexic model which was at its strongest, is a 1990/early 2000s trope. While skinnier body shape still permeates how we construct ideal bodies in some ways, this has been de-stabilised through the emergence of social media which in our digital cultures has become a platform for self-expression and communication. I am not saying that social media is universally a good thing; but, in giving a voice and platform to anyone who wants to broadcast their narrative (after you sift through the bulk of the less meaningful 'stuff'), it has had a role in undermining an elitist circuit of fashion publications by fracturing the monopoly this community held in literally saying what is hot, and what is not. In this way, larger, curvier celebrities have, to an extent, endorsed a diversity of body shapes and the body positivity movement creating a shift in what it means to be beautiful to a much wider range of women globally. Instances of these include Nicki Minaj, and more recently, Lizzo. Change is inevitable and the digital era can be democratizing and emancipatory if it is steered to be as such."

Azimuth is not overtly political but why not go all the way to make the point that Western norms should not be imposed on all? She says: "There is much value in the media that makes the outright point that imposing Western norms on the 'Rest' of us (as in West and Rest) is not okay. We see this in arthouse films for instance and also numerous mainstream films that drive that point home in a very direct way." "These however often depict ideological and physical violence onto black bodies. While these productions are crucial



Nirma Madhoo winner of Humanities Awards 2020 Best Digital Humanities Visualization or Infographic category.

and relevant, it can be emotionally taxing to only be exposed to this type of representation. People of colour are also further barraged with the representational violence encoded in seemingly passive images of their disempowerment – say for example, in the London Underground where adverts of brown, dusty, destitute kids are poster faces for 'charitable' foundations calling for Westerners to 'save', 'adopt', 'sponsor' these archetypes for their small change. Are these who we singularly are as Africans? No." If it is further theorised that images have a role in how we negotiate our identities, what does this mean – are we stuck into a feedback loop that keeps stereotypes alive? Madhoo responds: "In my opinion, there are not yet enough positive images of black identities. Political messages are potent, not only as overtly political but very significantly as subliminal in the everyday."

Larger audiences consume many more images of raced-gendered representations in our likeness. Being mainstream ways in which as larger audiences, we consume images of raced-gendered representations in our likeness. Sustained Othering is not likely to render obsolete the stereotype. Therefore, *Azimuth*, instead of making the point that Western norms should not be imposed, rather puts forward a production of collaborative practice from the global south that is only subtextually subversive and rather foregrounds visualising an 'affirmative affirmation' of a techno sartorial black feminine."

Have models like Alek Wek shattered the stereotype around Othering? "I am not sure I understand this question but will try to answer this way ... and she says: "Alek Wek superseded her predecessors (Iman, Naomi Campbell) in the ways that her natural hair and dark skin shattered the Caucasian aesthetic prevalent in fashion. Her presence definitely trailblazed a slow but gradual progression where further similar models, such as Ajak Deng and many other models of colour now are cast by luxury fashion brands for their shows and campaigns – hopefully no longer as others – but as something that signals not a trend but a definite shift in mindsets and belief systems. Since fashion is not the only site where identities are constructed, the work of the new guard of African visual artists and photographers such as Aida Muluneh, Namsa Leuba, Ruth Osai, Athi Patra Ruga is equally significant. These artists are exploring black identity in ways that de-other Africanness and situate it outside the repressive binaries of West and Rest; these enrich our societies with lush, affirmative representations of who we are." What gives you the adrenaline rush with this kind of work? Madhoo tabulates her passion: Sensing the potential of a (fashion) performance

in-frame during production as a concerted team effort; Exploring new technologies can be a convoluted process, but being able to do or say something meaningful with it at the end of the process; The (mostly elusive) times where I think I may have grasped at the essence of what I do, and the times where I am able to somewhat share this in my teaching practice. Digital story-telling vis-a-vis fashion. Tell me more. "The prevalence of Western narratives has resulted in their dominance as mainstream culture. As alluded to before, the advent of digital tools and platforms has taken this monopoly away from hegemonic cultures.

Digital story-telling is a technique that provides an alternative to the lengthy, pricey processes of analogue storytelling through film, photography and print magazine publication. A fashion editorial tells a story and so the fashion image-maker now has the option of telling this story using digital methodologies. Merely using a DSLR to shoot the editorial does not make it digital storytelling. It is rather a considered exploration of the possibilities that digital methodology enable that will place fashion and digital storytelling in an experimental relationship, opening up the space for innovation." Based at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), Madhoo is currently overseas – on a scholarship undertaking a practice-based PhD in Fashion & Textiles at RIMT (formerly known as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) in Melbourne, Australia. --



Azimuth is in a non-narrative style of experimental fashion film directed by Nirma Madhoo.