



MANELISI DABATA

ART DIRECTOR

Africa International Design Awards 2026 Winner

'Art Director & Photographer for Forbes Africa's 30 Under 30 cover and major editorial features



Sandton, Johannesburg

CONTACTS

+2761 481 2394(whatsapp)/ +2764 683 7187

Manelisdabata@gmail.com

manelisdabata

https://www.behance.net/man_designs



AWARDS & RECOGNITION

Winner

Multimedia Design / Social Media
Campaign (Director's Cut)

Honorable Mention

Print & Digital – Book & Magazine
(Director's Cut)

EDUCATION

User Experience Design
University of Cape Town

2022

NQF level 6 Graphic Design
ELMI College
Major: Web Design,
Desktop Publishing, Animation

2015

2016

Skill Certification
Silulo Ulutho Technologies
Intro to Adobe Creative Suite
Fine Art 101

2014

HIGH SCHOOL
Zingisa Comprehensive
High School

2012

2010

PROFILE

Award-winning Art Director and multidisciplinary designer with nearly a decade of experience across print, digital, and visual media. Currently shaping visual storytelling at Forbes Africa, leading editorial design, creative direction, photography, and video production. Skilled at translating editorial and brand objectives into compelling visual narratives, directing teams, and delivering high-quality work under tight deadlines. Comfortable integrating AI-assisted tools into creative workflows to enhance ideation, efficiency, and visual storytelling without compromising editorial integrity.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Art Director

Aug 2024 - Current | Forbes Africa

- Lead visual direction across print and digital platforms.
- Design and art-direct multi-page editorial layouts with narrative flow and visual consistency.
- Major shoots: 30 under 30, Over 30 Under 50, Small Giants.
- Art-directed, shot, and produced editorial stories including Journey of an African Garment.
- Produced and directed social media video series Director's Cut, with online content for ForbesAfrica.com.
- Oversaw picture editing, image sourcing, and selection.
- Managed and mentored a small creative team of interns, photographers, and videographers.
- Collaborated with commercial and sales teams for branded content and advertorials.
- Integrated AI-assisted tools into editorial and social workflows for concept development, visual ideation, and content optimisation.

Associate Art Director (Probationary)

Feb 2024 – Jul 2024 | Forbes Africa

- Functioned as Art Director under probation prior to promotion.
- Led layout design and visual execution for editorial features.
- Contributed to shoot concepts, mood boards, and on-set direction.
- Supported transition of visual systems and workflows into the Art Director role.

CORE STRENGTHS

Art Direction & Visual Storytelling
Editorial & Magazine Design • **Picture Editing & Image Curation** • Shoot Conceptualisation & Direction • **Leadership & Team Mentorship** (managing interns, photographers, and videographers) • Photography & Video Content (editorial, branded, and social media campaigns) • **AI-assisted creative workflows for concept development, content optimisation, and visual ideation**

TECHNICAL & AI-ASSISTED SKILLS

Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator, Lightroom, XD Web / UI: Figma, InVision, Google Web Designer, HTML, CSS, Bootstrap, JavaScript Video: Premiere Pro, social media video series production
Photography: Shoot direction, lighting, concept boards, image curation AI
Tools: Image research, layout and concept ideation, headline/copy refinement, social content generation

MAJOR PROJECTS / HIGHLIGHTS

Forbes Africa:

30 under 30, Over 30 Under 50, Small Giants, Journey of an African Garment (art-directed, photographed, video produced)

Social Media Video Series:

Director's Cut (concept, production, online content)

Arena Holdings: Business Day Wanted (monthly), Sunday Times The Edit (quarterly), Sowetan S Mag (5 issues/year)

Luxury brand campaigns:

Chanel, G-Star RAW, Woolworths, Standard Bank

WORK EXPERIENCE

Senior Graphic Designer (Associate Art Director level)

Jul 2022 – Jan 2024 | Arena Holdings

Business Day Wanted, Sunday Times The Edit, Sowetan S Mag.

- Operated at Associate Art Director level, collaborating with the Creative Director.
- Led visual execution and art direction for Business Day Wanted, Sunday Times The Edit, Sowetan S Mag.
- Oversaw layouts, visual systems, and picture editing under tight deadlines.
- Mentored interns and junior designers, managing a small creative team.
- Art-directed and designed high-end advertorial campaigns for Chanel, G-Star RAW, Woolworths, Standard Bank.
- Estimated magazine production: **~51 issues over tenure.**

Editorial Graphic Designer

Jan 2019 – Jun 2022 | Arena Holdings

Business Day Wanted, Sunday Times The Edit, Sowetan S Mag.

- Developed layouts and visual systems for Business Day Wanted, Sunday Times The Edit, Sowetan S Mag.
- Managed picture editing, image sourcing, and layout execution.
- Designed assets for social media and marketing campaigns.
- Assisted with photography direction and shoot preparation.
- Built editorial design foundations for progression to Senior Designer.
- Estimated magazine production: **~75 issues over tenure.**

Digital Designer & Web Manager

May 2018 – Dec 2018 | Eastern Cape Rural Development Agency

- Delivered graphic design and layout solutions for marketing and corporate communications.
- Designed UI elements and managed website content updates.
- Assisted with intranet management and IT support.
- Collaborated on social media concepts and execution.

Desktop Publisher & Graphic Designer

Jan 2017 – Jan 2018 | Daily Dispatch

- Created newspaper advertisements and prepared material for print.
- Interpreted design briefs and delivered layouts under daily deadlines.
- Contributed to internal video content for social media.

Junior Graphic Designer (Intern)

Apr 2016 – Dec 2016 | Intengu Communication

- Assisted with graphic design, layout development, and web design tasks.
- Supported senior designers across multiple projects.
- Contributed to Buffalo City 360 magazine layouts, visual assets, and branding.



AFRICA INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS

Winner 2026

AWARD

Africa International Design Awards
Winner

PROJECT NAME

Director's Cut

LEAD DESIGNER

Art Director Manelisi Dabata

DESIGN TEAM / OTHER DESIGNER(S)

Editor, Renuka Methil

The Jury members of the Africa International Design Awards certifies that the Art Director Manelisi Dabata has received this award for "Director's Cut" design in "Communication Design - Social Media Campaign".

BIBI SECK
HEAD OF THE JURY



ASTRID HÉBERT
FOUNDER



HOSSEIN FARMANI
FOUNDER





AFRICA INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS

Honorable Mention 2026

AWARD

Africa International Design Awards
Honorable Mention

PROJECT NAME

Director's Cut

LEAD DESIGNER

Art Director Manelisi Dabata

DESIGN TEAM / OTHER DESIGNER(S)

Editor, Renuka Methil

The Jury members of the Africa International Design Awards certifies that the Art Director Manelisi Dabata has received this award for "Director's Cut" design in "Communication Design".

BIBI SECK
HEAD OF THE JURY



ASTRID HÉBERT
FOUNDER



HOSSEIN FARMANI
FOUNDER

