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## African animation is catching global attention

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For the past few years, we've seen an increased global interest and demand in African stories, works and the creatives behind the work. This has been happening across different spectrums of the creative industry, from the exportation of musicians like Nigerian-born international musician and songwriter, Wizkid; South African photographer, Trevor Stuurman, who got to work with Beyonce; Angolan-born Alida Rodrigues, mixed-media artist who's now based in London; and Internationally recognised Fashion designer and Founder of Orange Culture, Adebayo Oke-Lawal from Nigeria.

Different creative expressions are being used as a tool to represent the past, present and future of this continent, contributing to a shift in mindset when it comes to the way the world thinks of and sees the region and its people. It's through such efforts that, as a continent, we no longer just consume but actively participate in the production of mainstream cultural symbols that others want to replicate and be a part of – with some describing this moment in history as a rise of an African cultural renaissance that showcases our uniqueness as a people.

These African creatives are collectively making their mark as storytellers, curating nuanced narratives of where they come from and where they are going, and changing how the world perceives and receives what it means to be African. This is a cohort of young African voices reimagining the creative landscape by using a diversity of mediums and unique artistic platforms to showcase their talent. African animators, emerging as a big part of that movement, are self-taught talents disrupting the space with productions and stories that challenge the status quo.

So what are they doing differently?

First of all, many African animators are self-taught due to a lack of educational facilities focusing on this area, which in itself means they aren't too concerned with traditional structures and formats. This brings more authenticity to how they choose to tell their stories.

Secondly, Africa is full of untapped potential with a lot of rich and beautiful stories. Thus, these animators have an opportunity to curate narratives that resonate with their audience while ensuring Africa is represented in all its nuances. They tell stories that are carried by never-seen-before superheroes who speak local languages like Swahili, Hausa and Somali, thereby creating access to animation for an audience that historically didn't have it due to language barriers. Animation is used to teach young people, as seen in series like 'My Better World' by Fundi Films. It also engages with difficult conversations affecting individuals across the continent, exemplified by the work of Nairobi-based artist and animator Ng'endo Mukii. Her film, 'Yellow Fever', tackles the use of whitening creams by African women.

These animators also get an opportunity to share the lived experiences of many Africans with the rest of the world. Historically we had people outside the continent telling our stories, now we get to take our own authentic stories to the world. In the words of Zambian animation writer, Malenga Mulendema, "It's bigger than me. Our stories are more powerful when told by multiple African creatives." African stories made by African animators get to have a global platform with the support of distributors like World Disney, Netflix and Cartoon network, while the likes of Pixar are hiring Africa-based animators on their own productions because they appreciate the talent that is coming out of this continent.

And more importantly, the rise in streaming services has created a new demand for fresh content from all over the world. This interest in African content creators coincides with the hunger for something that audiences have yet to see.

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Which shows and animators should you watch out for?

These past few years alone have seen a big splash for African productions and animators alike. In March 2021, a Kenyan animated superhero series titled 'Super Sema' premiered on YouTube as part of the video platform's Originals roster. Cartoon network commissioned the 'Garbage Boy and Trash Can' series based on a pilot by a Nigerian animator Ridwan Moshood. Meanwhile, Disney+ featured a 10-part collection of original films titled 'Kizazi Moto: Generation Fire' by animators from six African countries on the streaming service. The Walt Disney Company also picked up two African animations: 'Kiff', by South African creators Lucy Heavens and Nic Smal, which premiered in early March 2023 on the Disney Channel, and 'Kiya and the Kimoja Heroes', by South African artists Kelly Dillon and Marc Dey, which debuted on Disney Junior in later that same month.

What does the future of African animation look like and what needs to be done to support this emerging pool of talent?

The local industry is still very young and grassroots, with a lot of room for growth and development as the industry progresses. Going into the future, there is definitely a need to formalise the industry through training to equip more creatives and make animating more accessible to a wider audience. Training means that many of the talented young people who are hungry to tap into this space can get into it sooner – with international animation studios Toonz Media Group and Baboon Animation announcing a plan to establish animation academies in Africa. African animation is full of untapped potential and there is still so much to be created and shared with the world as more creators find their voice.