

Q&A: Ruth Boulter

Creative Director, McCann London



A lot of creative directors have left agencies to join in-house teams. Ruth has done the opposite, moving from Harrods first and Net-A-Porter second to McCann.

A lot of creative directors (in the old days) thought that the way you got respect was in being scary. The way Ruth commands the respect of those who work with her and for her is through (a) being a shrewd judge of an idea and (b) nice. People like working with her because they like her. And guess what? The work they produce is pretty darn good.

You're a Creative Director with all the pressure that the job entails. Do you have a side-hustle? What do you do as a counterbalance the demands of your workplace?

In any creative role, I believe that side hustles or counterbalances are essential – a way to free your mind, explore your full potential and ultimately feed yourself and your imagination. For me, it's feasting on independent side projects with my many creative friends and travelling around to soak in as much art and culture as possible. Running, swimming and long walks in the wild balance my mind and take me out of the intensity of being in a job you love that never sleeps.

If you hadn't ended up in advertising, what would you be doing instead?

Now, I think I would like to have gone into editing, it's the part of my job that I truly adore – the jigsaw where everything comes together in a million different ways. I didn't know about it as a job before I got into advertising. Isn't that terrible? That at school we just don't have exposure to the many exciting and wonderful roles around. Maybe it's different now?

In your career, what one piece of personal work are you most proud of?

There's so much that I'm proud of. At McCann New York, I worked with an incredible team to create the MUSE platform for our client Ulta Beauty. Despite the undeniable influence that Black women



have had on the beauty industry and in our lives, our world often fails to recognize, respect, celebrate and support the very impact they have made. MUSE still continues in its big ambition: to Magnify, Uplift, Support and Empower Black voices in beauty. I am so very proud of this creative platform that truly drives change in the Beauty industry and beyond.

[Read about Ulta Beauty's MUSE campaign HERE](#)

What work has your agency/team produced you're particularly proud of?

While my background has predominantly been in the beauty, fashion, luxury sphere, it was an unmissable pharmaceutical brief that brought me back to London from New York. Working with an incredibly passionate and tenacious team and client, we have just launched SEE MY PAIN, Nurofen's commitment to close the Gender Pain Gap. Why? To bring relief, and in time, answers for the one in six women who experience severe pain every day. And the one in two who've had their pain ignored and dismissed. More than just words, this platform is backed by brand actions that will change the way women are seen and treated in healthcare. I'm so proud of the work of the huge inter-agency team who made this happen and really, this is just the beginning. . . wait and see what's coming in the next few months!

What recent work have you seen from another agency (or agencies) that you would really like to see entered into The Caples? And why?

It's not actually from another agency – is that cheating? But The Unofficial World Cup Shirt from another McCann London team was inspired. Designed in response to the racist abuse several England players received at the 2021 Euros and in collaboration with charity Show Racism The Red Card. The shirt showed the fabric of England, celebrating the rich diversity and cultural tapestry of the England Football team and with an aim to start a conversation about immigration in the UK. So wonderful. So beautiful. So great.



Are awards important?

Ooof – what a pointed question to ask a juror. Honestly, I go back and forth on this one. Sometimes I think no, probably not outside the bubble of our industry and our client world. And then I think hell yeah, awards are a forum to celebrate and recognise creativity, to create healthy competition and to inspire ourselves and our partners to push ideas further and go beyond – which of course does have an impact outside the bubble of our industry and our client world. Ultimately, I think they can serve as a catalyst to creative opportunity – which is always a positive thing.

What does it mean to you to be a juror of The Caples Awards in 2023?

I'm excited for my first stint as juror of The Caples Awards this year – what an honour. Thank you for inviting me. I love that The Caples are free to enter, with a really cool group of sponsors and I love the ethos of rewarding work that works. I can't wait to see all the entries that will no doubt flood in – after 2022 and the year that's been – the cultural context is pretty wild right now.

The Caples is free to enter. Is this brave. Or very, very stupid?

I don't think it's brave or stupid. I think it's necessary. It's never been more important to create equal opportunity in our world. The removal of a financial barrier is a powerful stance and a message from our industry peers to say anyone can have great ideas worth noticing. I love that - exclusivity is so boring.

If you could have five creative luminaries sitting around your kitchen table, having a drink and a chat, who would they be? What do you think you'd talk about?

Oh god, do they have to be from advertising? I spend a lot of time doing that – often on a pitch or a shoot. How about Iñárritu? His latest film Bardo blew my mind. Then, I adore the writing of Raynor Winn, maybe it could be a huddled picnic in the wilderness of Skye. Being a Manc I'd always invite Dr John Cooper Clarke. Too many writers? Jason Mayden would be on the list, I shot him for a LinkedIn commercial last year and was transported by his every word. Lastly, Kehinde Wiley – his work is immense.

Impossible question. But what is your one all-time favourite piece of advertising, the idea you most wish you'd done yourself?

It depends what you're asking for. I'm taking this less as effective advertising and more as what inspires or moves me. And I'll give you three. Fearless Girl is pretty high up there in terms of purpose campaigns. And the team behind it so humble, lovely and brilliant. But really, I'm a sucker for 90s perfume ads – the banging shutters of the hotel windows in the Chanel Egoiste ad plays in my head most days. And when I need a lift, I often turn to the Prada SS11 campaign film for a quick dopamine hit.



Chanel Egoiste ad directed by Jean-Paul Goude in 1990. View [HERE](#)