# Unite Joburg Photographer Interview1: Hanro Havenga

Over the next week, AREA3 will be profiling some of the photographers who are featured in the Unite Joburg Photography Exhibition.

Representing the suburb of Illovo, Hanro Havenga is first up in a series of interviews with the photographers that joined adidas Originals to capture the streets for Unite Joburg. The West Rand native enlightens us as to what makes a good portrait and shares some insights on the diversity of Joburg and its people.

**AREA3: Joburg is a melting pot of cultures and diversity. As a photographer in this city, how does this diversity affect your work?**

Hanro: In every aspect, diversity is a major factor but, like all good things, you have to filter through it. I think the hardest part of shooting in Joburg is to know what you want to shoot, to focus on a certain part of the culture because there is so much going on. There is so much diversity that individuality has become the norm. So, as a photographer, I think you have to focus your attention on the people you relate to the most and leave the rest to the guys who roll in their own circles. That being said, you have to be ready to adapt and explore new cultures too.

I always try and tie my photographs to a part of myself and not the expectancy of others. Although my work is content-driven, I still believe that your experience and knowledge of a certain type of culture is very important to justify what you are trying to say. There is usually not a lot of good that comes from poking around in the dark.

**AREA3: Portraiture is such a subjective thing, and that’s what makes it interesting. When you’re doing portraits what do you try to capture?**

Hanro: Emotion. The pure and true elements of my subjects are very important. In this day and age I prefer shooting people who can express their emotions instead of going for the happiest of happy’s and gang sign driven street walkers. Basically, at the end of the day, we all feel and walk and talk, eat, drink and sleep. What we feel is what differentiates us from one another, and if you can break down the wall of any given photographic situation you can lure out the best in people.

**AREA3: Do you have a special connection with the neighbourhood that you chose to shoot in?**

Hanro: Yes, my heart was born in the West Rand, but a big part of it was stolen by the suburbs closer to the city.

**AREA3: In working with adidas Originals, how have you represented originality in your portraits?**

Hanro: I usually try not to shoot every Jane and Joe that walks by, but having to work with my subjects in a confined time frame just reminded me that everyone has their own story – no matter how big or small. There is always time to tell it, even if it is in 1/125 of a second. So the subjects chosen in the series have every ounce of my respect for sharing themselves, even the ones that didn’t make the cut.

**AREA3: How does it feel to be part of such a multifaceted campaign like Unite Joburg?**

Hanro: Great, I tend to stay away from any self lighted/set up photographs, but it was really a good experience in terms of setting up and letting the people come to me, instead of me approaching them.

**AREA3: You had the opportunity to meet and spend time with Danny Brown in person. Any pearls of wisdom?**

Hanro: Unfortunately I had personal duties on the day of the dinner and concert, but knowing the pop culture and the individual aspect of it, I know that the best part of today’s youth culture is that people like Danny Brown want you to be yourself. No matter what; thinking, doing, and acting on what feels natural. Artists like Danny Brown remind me that we can be whoever and whatever we want to be and I have the utmost respect for people who can deliver that message to the extent/platform that they do.

The Unite Joburg Photography Exhibition, featuring portraits by [Hanro Havenga](http://whyhelloclarice.wordpress.com/), [Chris Saunders](http://www.whatwasparadise.com/), [Anthony Bila](http://www.anthonybila.com/), [Justice and Innocent Mukheli](http://iseeadifferentyou.tumblr.com/) and [Stephanie O’Connor](http://www.connervarinblog.com/), will be up in [AREA3](http://www.area3.co.za/blog/)  from 3 December until 9 February 2014. (Closed for the holidays from 20 December 2013 to 13 January 2014.)

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