

Distell National Playwright winner announced

Sibongakonke Mama has been announced as the winner of the 2022 Distell National Playwright Competition.



Image supplied: Distell National Playwright Competition winner Sibongakonke Mama

She was chosen from a group of five finalists for her isiXhosa and English work, *Ibuhlungu le Ndawo*.

Currently based in Johannesburg and working as an investigative journalist, she holds an MA in Creative Writing from Rhodes University, graduating cum laude. Born in Gcuwa, Eastern Cape, she has also studied journalism at Rhodes and the University of the Witwatersrand.

Sibongakonke's submission to the Distell National Playwright Competition is her first foray into the theatre world.

In their comments, the judges highlighted her moving script that weaves oral tradition, grief, cultural and family history through storytelling, children's games, and ritual.

In the fictional village of uMzimkhulu, where three sisters return home to play as a way of remembering and mending familial fences after the loss of a parent, Mama exposes the characters' building, dismantling and reassembling the playhouse over and over again.

Commenting on the human capacity to reboot, Mama presents a spectacular world where the threesome recalls the spirit of

their mother who has transitioned to the ancestral realm. She has called the play a poetic and movement meditation on “dis-ease, disease and alienation”.



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28 Oct 2022



The playwright award was established by Distell to recognise and reward new, not-yet-published script writing talent. Managed by the National Arts Festival, it was founded in 2018 and honours the creative legacy of academics and activists Adam and Rosalie Small.

Apart from the initial prize of R5,000 awarded to all the finalists, Mama receives a further R20,000 as the overall winner of the competition. Part of her prize includes mentorship in fine-tuning her script.

Marketing manager of the Distell, Phumza Rengqe, says, “We are a long-time supporter of the performing arts and understand the importance of nourishing new voices and providing an enabling environment for them to flourish. We believe that to advance playwrighting talent is an important step towards enhancing our ability as South Africans to better relate to each other.”



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10 Oct 2022



Ibuhlungu le Ndawo focuses on disruption, loss, and the forging of new relationships from old ones. Mama presents the character in limbo between the living and the ancestral realms.

Mama says she has found the initial mentorship offered by the award organisers to be an important way of becoming “acquainted with the theatre way of storytelling”, helping her to “learn and think like a playwright and a theatre maker.” She adds that it has also instilled the discipline of working to a deadline.

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