

# Journalists recognised at Grahamstown

The Gold award winners of the inaugural National Arts Festival/BASA Arts Journalism Awards were recently announced at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. The 2013 National Arts Festival Arts Journalist of the Year is Charl Blignaut.



Blignaut was the outstanding arts journalist in 2012, not simply because his writing informed and responded to national debates, but because of the sheer scope and vigour of his output. Whether writing about theatre, dance, visual arts, television or heritage, he is eloquent, astute, honest and - not least of all - witty. He received a R5000 cash prize and the opportunity to travel to report on an international arts event, choosing between the Amsterdam Fringe, Adelaide Fringe and Venice Biennale.

The judges wanted to give special recognition to one journalist whose extended coverage of the battle over Durant Sihle's artistic legacy was superb. These carefully researched articles demonstrate that arts journalism is not a marginal "beat" and that reporting on the arts also means reporting on, for example, social and legal issues. A Special Gold for Investigative Journalism was awarded to Phillip de Wet.

The Gold winner in the Features section was Percy Mabandu. The judges were impressed by the variety of the subject matter taken on by this journalist, who does not shy away from controversial topics, but treats them in an even-handed fashion. His features are marked (as is his arts writing more broadly) by a strong but amiable writing persona.

The Gold winner in the Reviews category was Anna Stielau. Stielau emerged as a consistently excellent reviewer in what was a tightly contested category, dominated by strong visual arts journalism. In her arts writing she takes care to provide the necessary context or background to the artist she is assessing while paying careful, critical attention to the work at hand.

## Nuanced, provocative insights

The Gold winner in the Opinion category was Brooks Spector. Spector is a veteran arts writer who uses the long-form advantages of his platform to offer nuanced, provocative insights into the arts and culture sector. His writing is informed by a remarkable knowledge of the historical, political and aesthetic forces that shape the sector.

An individual commendation, for a significant and sustained contribution to the arts through journalism, was given to jazz writer Don Albert.

Gold award winners for Features, Reviews and Opinion receive a cash prize of R5000 each and a Nespresso Coffee Machine.

Special judges' commendations were also given to the Mail & Guardian Online, Mahala, and Carte Blanche; whose collective entries showed that these platforms have created an environment in which arts journalism can thrive.

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