

Distell National Playwright Competition entries open for 2022

The organisers of the Distell National Playwright competition are once again calling for entries by South African scriptwriters of 18 and older. They are accepting entries of previously unpublished or commercially unproduced work in any of the country's official languages from now until 28 February 2022.



Source: www.unsplash.com

The announcement comes after the earlier postponement of the competition, brought on by the pandemic, which would have made it impossible to rehearse or stage the winning script. Now that Covid constraints have been eased, the project is back on stream, according to Distell's corporate affairs director André Opperman.

Founded by Distell in 2018, and managed by the National Arts Festival, the award honours the legacy of Adam and Rosalie Small, "not only for their contribution to South African literature, philosophy and education but also for their unwavering advocacy against social injustice," said Opperman.



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"The judges are looking to recognise and reward local talent and at the same time promote diversity and inclusivity. We are encouraging scriptwriters to submit their concepts, narrative outlines, and examples of their writing for appraisal. The point is to discover new talent, to reach writers who have not yet seen their works published or produced, to hear their voices and to bring the vision of the winning playwright to the stage."

CEO of the National Arts Foundation (NAF), Monica Newton, said, “South Africa is rich in story-telling talent, in writers whose work is ideal for theatrical adaptation in ways that can bring novel and compelling insights to audiences. Contestants can choose the issues they want to explore in their submissions, from the every day to the exceptional, the joyful to the heart-rending, the provocative to the evocative. We just want to give that talent a chance.”

She explained that a panel would choose five finalists, all of whom would receive a cash prize of R5,000 and the opportunity to develop their script for final adjudication, working closely with an established industry mentor. The 2022 finalists will be announced next April.

In September 2022, one of the five finalists will be identified as the winner and will receive a further R10,000. The winner would then finesse their work and prepare it for staging. The work is scheduled to go into pre-production in October, she said.



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The winning work would debut at the 2023 National Arts Festival in Makhanda in July of that year. Thereafter, it would be available to theatres across the country to stage for their own audiences.

“Having brought the work to fruition and onto stage at the NAF means that the Distell National Playwright’s work is seen by decision makers in the theatrical world. The Festival is an important forum for producers seeking to support and give expression to contemporary South African playwrights,” Newton added.

As part of the prize, the winning script would be awarded a production budget to allow for its premiere on the main programme of the National Arts Festival, according to Opperman.

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