

Standard Bank Young Artists Awards – a legacy of note



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2011 marks the 27th anniversary of the prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Awards. Established in 1981, the awards are a project of the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown. In 1984 Standard Bank acquired the naming rights to the Festival and automatically became the title sponsor of the awards.

The list of past recipients of the Young Artist Award over a period of 30 years reads like a *Who's Who* of South Africa's artistic talent and includes many of the country's most famous and accomplished creative achievers.

In 2002 Standard Bank stepped down as title sponsor of the overall Festival but wished to retain the awards in the bank's name due to the significant role they play in promoting South Africa's artistic heritage. More importantly, the awards provided Standard Bank with the continued opportunity to contribute to the enrichment of the country's cultural landscape.

Creating the vision

The National Arts Festival was founded in 1974, the brain child of Prof Guy Butler who was also the driving force behind the establishment of the 1820 Settlers' National Monument, a living monument in celebration of the English language.

Prof Roy Sargeant joined the Drama Department of Rhodes University and was soon co-opted by Butler onto the council of the 1820 Settlers' Monument. In 1980 he returned from long leave overseas brimming with enthusiasm and new ideas to give the Festival a special boost.

"...I had the feeling that we should be doing something for young creative interpretative artists, in the first flush of their careers, who are really making a mark. I said it must be for someone who is really making an impression, and for whom our experts can visualise a terrific future; and instead of after the fact rewarding them, give them money upfront to create the work"i .

Although the history of the National Arts Festival and the Young Artist Awards are inseparable, the awards have their own dynamic and requirements, making them part and parcel of the main Festival programme yet at the same time being an institution in their own right.

Selecting the visionaries of the future

The National Arts Festival committee, an independent body of specialists from around the country representing most of the arts disciplines, is responsible for guiding

the content and direction of each genre within the main Festival programme. The same committee members are responsible for selecting and nominating a maximum of three potential candidates in their respective discipline for the annual awards. These are motivated through presentation to the overall Festival committee in order to reach a joint and unanimous decision as to each year's winning recipients.

The Young Artist Awards are presented to relatively young emerging South African artists who have demonstrated exceptional ability in their chosen fields with a degree of national recognition but who have not yet achieved major national or international exposure or acclaim. Potential candidates in the performing arts may not be older than 33, and in the visual arts a maximum age of 38 applies.

Awards are made annually in the Visual Arts, Dance, Drama, Music and Jazz, with an award in the category of Film approximately every three years subject to the suitability of candidates. The word 'young' is also meant to denote groundbreaking, cutting-edge work marking a departure from established or entrenched conventions and content.

Designed to encourage the recipients in the pursuit of their professional careers, a key aspect of the awards is the provision of the necessary funding to create and produce a new work for the forthcoming main Festival programme, thereby guaranteeing the winner exposure to a national audience.

A monetary award is also made by Standard Bank to each winner in his or her personal capacity.

The candidates need to have demonstrated considerable excellence and innovative talent worthy of being considered for such a prestigious award. An adequate body of work should prove that the potential recognition and financial support would further their future careers. The latter aspect is an element that can never be guaranteed but evidence has shown that the vast majority of recipients have pursued highly successful careers. Since the demise of the cultural boycott in the early 90's many of these artists have also achieved major success internationally.

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A prestigious accolade – nationally and globally

Since the establishment of the Young Artist Awards a rich heritage of extraordinary artists has emerged at the Festival. Over the years this award has grown in stature as successive winners have gone on to greater careers after launching new work through the Festival.

In the words of Mannie Manim, former long-serving committee member and Chairman (2003 – 2008), "Through a combination of the creative energy that this award has released from the winners and the vision of those who have nominated the recipients over the years, the award has grown in stature over time since its inception. This is testimony to the importance of the award and the high regard in which it is held by those who have won it, those who aspire to win it and those who see the results of what the award enables the winners to achieve"².

And to quote Roy Sargeant, "... the Young Artist Award winners should have a reunion

Standard Bank Young Artist Award Winners

1984	
Peter Schütz	Fine Art
Ken Leach	Drama
1985	
Marion Arnold	Fine Art
Maishe Maponya	Drama
Sidwill Hartman	Music
1986	
Andrew Buckland	Drama
Gavin Younge	Fine Art
1987	
William Kentridge	Fine Art
Hans Roosschoon	Music
1988	
Margaret Vorster	Fine Art
Mbongeni Ngema	Drama
1989	
Johnny Clegg	Music
Marthinus Basson	Drama
Helen Sebidi	Fine Art
Gary Gordon	Dance
1990	
Robyn Orlin	Dance
Fée Halsted-Berning	Fine Art
Bonnie Ntshalintshali	Fine Art
1991	
Peter Ngwenya	Drama
Andries Botha	Fine Art
Darrell Roodt	Film
1992	
Deon Opperman	Drama
Tommy Motswai	Fine Art
Raphael Vilakazi	Music
Kevin Harris	Film
1993	
Christopher Kindo	Dance
Sibongile Khumalo	Music
Pippa Skotnes	Fine Art
1994	
Jerry Mofokeng	Drama
Sam Nhlengethwa	Visual Art
Michael Williams	Opera
1995	
Jane Alexander	Visual Art
Boyzie Cekwana	Dance
John Ledwaba	Drama
Abel Motsoadi	Music
1996	
Lara Foot Newton	Drama
Trevor Makhoba	Visual Art
Vincent Mantsoe	Dance
Victor Masedo	Music
1997	
Lien Botha	Visual Art
Geoffrey Hyland	Drama
Sibongile Mngoma	Opera
1998	
David Mudanalo Matamela	Dance
Debbie Rakusin	Dance
Bongani Ndodana	Music
Nhlanhla Xaba	Visual Art
Aubrey Sekhabi	Drama

because they have become an exclusive club. It is an extremely distinguished award”³.

According to Lynette Marais, who was director of the National Arts Festival for 20 years, “the Awards have given the Festival prestige...it is impossible to over- estimate the impact that the Young Artist Award winners have had on the South African arts scene”⁴.

Ismail Mahomed, the current Festival Director, is of the opinion that “the Young Artist Awards provide a wonderful platform, creating an opportunity for the artists to bring their work to a national arena. The awards have become a barometer of the standards that our artists are aspiring to... they recognise talent and create an opportunity for artists to be showcased in the national and international arena”⁵.

Standard Bank and the arts

Jacko Maree, Group Chief Executive, explains: “As a bank, we try to position ourselves as being relevant to the major societies in which we operate. Because we have been such an integral part of South Africa, having been around for 150 years, we try to demonstrate a sense for the society in which we operate. The Young Artist Awards form an integral part of this aspect of Standard Bank’s vision, which is all about putting something back. The arts constitute one of the core pillars of our involvement with communities”⁶.

The bank’s profile and its ability to relate to a more diverse public are thus hugely benefited by its sponsorship of the arts in general, and of the National Arts Festival and the Young Artist Awards in particular, making its involvement in the arts a vital aspect of its marketing objectives.

The role of arts sponsorship has developed far beyond purely fulfilling a social responsibility. It is a key element in the bank’s overall marketing mix, creating platforms that enable the bank to build strategic partnerships in niche markets which address specific business needs. Its arts sponsorship properties, from exhibitions in the gallery, the National Arts Festival and the Young Artist Awards to the jazz festivals, contribute towards building the Standard Bank brand and experience.

As Maree puts it: “Standard Bank has always had a philosophy of being a bank for all the people of South Africa. We bank all South Africans and always have. If you go back in the history of Standard Bank, you’ll find that we banked people from Cecil John Rhodes to Jan Smuts to Sol Plaatje. We’ve always tried to remain as apolitical as possible. And if that is your philosophy, then when it comes to something like the arts, you have to see it through. And when it comes to awards, you have to look at it through a prism of merit. Therefore, I don’t think we would have accepted sponsoring something of this nature if there was any sense that we would have to bow to pressure because of people’s beliefs, race or gender”⁷.

Exposure beyond the Festival

Standard Bank, where possible, has endeavoured to continue providing the artists with a platform after they have become winners in order to promote

their work and to reinforce Standard Bank's role in the development of their talent.

It has always been Standard Bank policy to buy an artwork at the annual exhibition by the visual arts winner for its corporate head office and provincial offices around the country.

Regarding the purchase of works by the visual arts winners, Maree says: "It does fit in with the fact that, for many years, Standard Bank has had a corporate art collection that is representative of South African art. I think it is very beneficial for both parties to purchase works by the award winners. It helps the artist and gives him or her exposure and it adds value to our collection. Most works are displayed in prominent parts of our buildings and reinforce our support of the awards"⁸.

Apart from the monetary award accompanied by a guaranteed platform at the festival, Standard Bank tries as far as possible to extend its support beyond that by giving the winners greater exposure through showcasing them at other events.

Performance artist winners are often commissioned by the bank to perform at corporate functions and public events. With Standard Bank's strong focus on music, and jazz in particular, the musicians have had the greatest benefit in recent years with some of them performing at prestigious events in London, Istanbul, Moscow, and at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Three years ago in celebration of the 25th anniversary of Standard Bank's sponsorship of the awards a new initiative was launched and repeated in 2010 in association with the French Institute of South Africa and the respective French Cultural Centres in each country. The jazz winner was selected to embark on a mini tour of some of the key countries in Africa where Standard Bank has major business interests, Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya.

In 2010 Standard Bank received a Business and Arts South Africa (BASA) award in the sustainability category in recognition of its long-term support and sponsorship leverage of the awards over the last 25 years.

The bank also ensures that the work of the visual artists is seen by a wider audience, beyond the National Arts Festival. Following the opening of the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg in 1990, it was decided to organise an annual travelling exhibition to all the main centres in the country for the winning artist, which provides far greater national exposure than the winner would have enjoyed previously.

Championing South Africa's artistic heritage

The partnership between Standard Bank and the National Arts Festival has been consolidated over time with a shared vision of identifying, nurturing and honouring young artists. It has created role models for future generations to value, respect and aspire to whilst enriching and expanding the country's cultural landscape and generating a rich legacy.

1999	
No awards made due to 25 th anniversary of the National Arts Festival	
2000	
Zenzi Mbuli	Drama
Gloria Bosman	Music
Alan Alborough	Visual Art
2001	
Tracey Human	Dance
Brett Bailey	Drama
Fikile Mvinjelwa	Music
Walter Oltmann	Visual Art
2002	
Gregory Vuyani Maqoma	Dance
Sello Maake Ka Ncube	Drama
Prince Kupi	Music
Brett Murray	Visual Art
2003	
Moya Michael	Dance
Yael Farber	Drama
Angela Gilbert	Music
Berni Searle	Visual Art
Dumisani Phukhati	Film
2004	
Portia Lebogang Mashigo	Dance
Mncedisi Baldwin Shabangu	Drama
Tutu Puoane	Music
Kathryn Smith	Visual Art
2005	
Peter John Sabbagha	Dance
Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom	Drama
Andile Yenana	Music
Wim Botha	Visual Art
2006	
Churchill Madikida	Visual Art
Sylvaine Strike	Drama
Hlengiwe Lushaba	Dance
Concord Nkabinde	Jazz
2007	
Pieter Hugo	Visual Art
Acty Tang	Dance
Bronwen Forbay	Music
Shannon Mowday	Jazz
Akin Omotoso	Film
2008	
Nontsikelelo "Lolo" Veleko	Visual Art
Dada Masilo	Dance
Jaco Bouwer	Drama
Zanne Stabelberg	Music
Mark Fransman	Jazz
2009	
Nicholas Hlobo	Visual Art
Thabo Rapoo	Dance
Ntsheng Mokgoro	Drama
Jacques Imbrailo	Music
Kesivan Naidoo	Jazz
2010	
Michael McGarry	Visual Art
Mlu Zondi	Dance
Janni Younge	Drama
Samson Diamond	Music
Melanie Scholtz	Jazz
Claire Angelique	Film
2011	
Nandipha Mntambo	Visual Art
Mamela Nyamza	Dance
Neil Coppen	Drama
Ben Schoeman	Music
Bokani Dyer	Jazz

As a central feature of the National Arts Festival, the Awards present audiences with an element of the ‘unknown’ as new talents are exposed and unknown territories are explored. It keeps the Festival at the forefront of artistic development, exposing audiences to cutting-edge exhibitions and performances, and creating opportunities for young artists to showcase their work in a national arena with the added advantage of international exposure since the Festival has grown into a platform for arts promoters and presenters from overseas.

A key element of Standard Bank’s longstanding and comprehensive arts sponsorship programme, the Awards are entrenched in the bank’s marketing and sponsorship mix and integrated into the portfolios of Standard Bank’s other arts sponsorship properties. The Awards contribute strategically to building and enhancing the Standard Bank brand, making it relevant to the society in which it operates, and affirming its role as a leading sponsor of the arts.

Standard Bank’s investment in the arts, and the Awards in particular, has borne fruit. The Awards are regarded as the most prestigious cultural accolades of their kind. This affirms the success of Standard Bank’s strategic decision to concentrate on a focused number of projects with national impact through the consolidation of sponsorships in meaningful, sustainable and dynamic partnerships.

In conclusion to quote the late Prof Alan Crump, a long serving member of the committee and Chairman for ten years, who was only too well aware of the value and impact of these awards on the future of emerging young professional artists in the early stages of promising careers, “The Young Artist Awards need little to champion their contribution and excellence to the national quality of the arts. Art inevitably expresses the nature of society: its pressures, hopes, insecurities and aspirations, particularly in a country like ours, which has undergone so many radical changes over so short a time”⁹.

NOTES

- 1 Standard Bank Young Artist Awards 25 Years, page 10
- 2 Standard Bank Young Artist Awards 25 Years, page 17
- 3 Standard Bank Young Artist Awards 25 Years, page 13
- 4 & 5 Standard Bank Young Artist Awards 25 Years, page 9
- 6, 7 & 8 Standard Bank Young Artist Awards 25 Years, page 6
- 9 Standard Bank Young Artists: 25 – A Retrospective Exhibition, page 18