

Media Release

Extraordinary First Nations theatre-maker Andrea James wins top honours for women playwrights

19/5/2022

Described by the judges as “unruly, delightful and heartbreaking”, the extraordinary playwriting of Yorta Yorta/Gunaikurnai woman Andrea James has earned the theatre-maker Australia’s coveted (and only) prize for women stage and screen writers — the State Library of NSW announced **TONIGHT [19 May 2022]**.

Andrea James was awarded the \$30,000 Mona Brand Award for Women Stage and Screen Writers for her exceptional body of work dedicated to sharing historical and contemporary First Nations stories on stage, often collaborating with other First Nations artists, and guided by her own ancestry.

According to the judges: “Whether telling us the heartwarming story of Evonne Goolagong in *Sunshine Super Girl* or the battle of ‘dog’ versus ‘dingo’ in her newest play *Dogged*, Andrea’s work speaks of things many of us are too afraid to face. Andrea’s work will stay with you long after you leave the theatre.”

The Mona Brand Award is offered biennially thanks to the generous bequest to the NSW State Library Foundation from the trailblazing Australian playwright Mona Brand (who also wrote under the name Alexis Fox).

Senior judge Helen Bowden said: “The last two years have brought huge challenges to the theatre world, so in this fourth iteration of the Mona Brand Award, it is an honour to also shine the spotlight on emerging writers.”

The \$10,000 Early Career Writer Award went to Sukhjit Khalsa for her debut coming of age work *Fully Sikh* (Barking Gecko and Black Swan Theatre Companies, 2019), described by the judges as “funny, vivid and provocative. Sukhjit’s work is robust and entertaining about Australian identity, feminism and the power of difficult conversations.”

Two emerging writers were Highly Commended:

Hannah Samuel for her work to centre people of colour, whether it be in the *Wentworth* spinoff for Audible or writing for the YA series *The PM’s Daughter*.

Kelsey Munro for her refreshing, cheeky and grounded portrait of contemporary Australian life in *Bump*, the hugely popular TV drama comedy starring Claudia Karvan.

The Mona Brand Award for Women Stage and Screen Writers



“The State Library Foundation is honoured to support this award from the generous bequest of the late Mona Brand,” says Susan Hunt, Foundation Director at the State Library. “This award not only honours the rich legacy of Mona Brand, but celebrates the best of contemporary writing for stage and screen by Australian women.”

The State Library administers and supports numerous awards including the NSW Premier’s Literary and History Awards, the National Biography Award, and the Russell Prize for Humour Writing. The Library also manages an extensive Fellowships program, which is supported by the State Library Foundation and generous private benefactors.

Background notes

- The biennial Mona Brand Award is presented to an outstanding Australian woman who has written for the stage and/or screen.
- The Award was made possible through a bequest to the State Library of NSW Foundation by the late Mona Alexis Fox nee Brand (1915–2007).
- The main award is valued at \$30,000, with an additional award of \$10,000 presented to an emerging female writer who is in the early stages of her career for her first professionally produced/screened work.
- Mona Brand was a trailblazing Australian poet, author, and a prolific playwright, who wrote nearly 30 plays. Her work often addressed socially relevant and controversial topics, and was widely performed on stage, radio and television in Australia, the UK, Eastern Europe and India.
- In 2002 the Library acquired Mona Brand’s papers, which include professional and personal correspondence, diaries, manuscripts, photographs, sound and video recordings, as well as many other records of her remarkable life and career.

The judges for the 2022 Mona Brand Award for Women Stage and Screen Writers are:

- Helen Bowden, film and television producer, Lingo Pictures
- Zainab Syed, poet and producer at Belvoir St Theatre
- Dr Romaine Moreton, Director of First Nations & Outreach at AFTRS

For more information about the Award please contact: Senior Project Officer, Awards, State Library of NSW (02) 9273 1582 or awards@sl.nsw.gov.au

MEDIA CONTACT:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communications Manager, State Library of NSW (02) 9273 1566, 0411 259 898, vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au