

THE NOMA AWARD FOR PUBLISHING IN AFRICA

PRESS RELEASE

4 November 2006

SOUTH AFRICAN PERFORMANCE POET WINS NOMA AWARD FOR HER FIRST PUBLISHED BOOK

The Noma Award for Publishing in Africa announce that Lebogang Mashile has won the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 2006 for her poetry anthology *In a Ribbon of Rhythm*. The book was published by Oshun Books, South Africa, in 2005, and co-published with the Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust.

The Jury's citation reads:

“This is a powerful voice which has great beauty, delight and meaning. The poet weaves her feelings, experiences and expectations around the story of her life, which merges with the story of the struggle for freedom among South Africans. In masterly and sonorous style, the poetry has a distinct oral flavour, developing oral poetry and performance beyond the boundaries of the poetry of the era of resistance. From the personal to the wider world, this is fresh philosophical writing, movingly declaiming the pride of heritage. These poems are the spoken word in all its beauty, power and elegance.”

Lebogang Mashile is one of South Africa's best-known spoken word poets. Writer, performer and actor, this is the first published work of her performance poetry. Edited by Don Mattera, the poetry is infused with the hip-hop beat that has made performance poetry a mainstream cultural revolution in South Africa. Recognising the power of art to heal, this first published work shows what it means to be a young, black woman with confidence and soul.

The Noma Award, under the auspices of UNESCO, will be presented to Lebogang Mashile at a special ceremony details of which will be announced later.

105 titles, from 63 African publishers, in 15 countries, in 8 languages, were submitted for the 2006 competition. The Jury singled out a further two titles for Special Commendation, and two titles for Honourable Mention. The list is attached.

The Noma Award Jury is chaired by Walter Bgoya from Tanzania, one of Africa's most distinguished publishers, with wide knowledge of both African and international publishing. The other members of the Jury in 2006 were: Professor Peter Katjavivi, Ambassador of the Republic of Namibia to the Federal Republic of Germany and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia; Professor Femi Osofisan, head of the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan, and past director of the National Theatre in Nigeria; and Mary Jay, Secretary to the Managing Committee (the Jury). The Award is sponsored by Kodansha Ltd, Japan.

For further information about the Award, please contact:

Mary Jay, Secretary to the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, PO Box 128, Witney, Oxon OX8 5XU, UK. Tel: +44-(0)1993-775235 Fax: +44-(0)1993-709265 Email: maryljay@aol.com
www.nomaaward.org

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Special Commendation

(alphabetical by publisher):

Tree Atlas of Namibia by Barbara Curtis & Coleen Mannheimer

With a CD

(Windhoek: National Botanical Research Institute, 2005)

This is an outstanding and beautifully produced book, a great achievement and scientific tool. With rigorous scholarship, an impressive amount of fieldwork, and clear and concise writing, the authors document all 408 Namibian woody plant species for the first time. It is an innovative contribution to the literature; medicinal uses and conservation concerns are highlighted for each species; the new mapping and phenology aspects are exceptionally valuable.

Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC by William Mervin Gumede

(Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2005)

A powerful work of synthesis and political analysis. The highly readable, salutary, powerfully argued and extensively detailed book chronicles the rise of Thabo Mbeki within the ANC, his political career, personality and policies. The author marshals many different sources of information, and the depth of research is impressive and exhaustive. Remarkably frank and thorough, book is essential for any understanding of contemporary South Africa.

Honourable Mention

(alphabetical by publisher):

Lena's Bottle Tree by Wendy Maartens

Illustrated by Anna-Carien Goosen

(Pretoria: LAPA Publishers, 2005)

An attractively illustrated book for young children about a small girl's survival after the death of her mother. The book is unusual and successful in two ways. The characters belong to the minority "coloured" community in South Africa, where few children's books have featured a main character from that community. Death is an uncommon theme in children's books, and here it is very effectively handled and sensitively told.

Tshepang: The Third Testament by Lara Foot Newton

Illustrated by Gerhard Marx

(Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2005)

A searing and compassionate one-act play, with powerful and disturbing illustrations, that addresses the unspeakable, inspired by the true case of the rape of a nine month old baby in South Africa. A single male actor tells the story; but the impact of the silent presence of the mother on the stage is inestimable. Part of the canon of conscientising drama, the author is reiterating the imperative to look at the worst full in the face. The play is successful in its language and its visual representation: expertly written, the idiom is entirely convincing.