

The 10th St Martins' Young and Emerging Playwrights' Competition Reading Group's Comments

This year, the 10th St Martins' Young and Emerging Playwrights' Competition received a total of 54 entries; 4 in the under 18 year old category and 50 in the 18 – 30 year old category.

Each play was read by at least two members from a Reading Group that included:

Sarah Austin, Chris Howlett, Clare Madsen, Glenn Perry, Robert Reid, Chris Thompson & Kylie Trounson

In general, the Reading Group's responses were as follows:

- The stronger entries were those that had something to say, an original story to tell, or had clear, fresh, surprising ideas at their heart. Some of these were personal stories, some were political, some were absurd and some were hard to describe but the thing these plays all had in common is that they did not feel like stories we'd heard before. The weaker entries were those where the stories or characters were very familiar to us, where they felt derivative and often where the path the story followed was quite predictable, obvious or unbelievable.
- The stronger plays had good development and clear objectives for their characters' journeys. The weaker scripts included characters that felt two dimensional or that showed little change across the course of the story. Some scripts suffered from a lack of individual or distinguishable 'voices' of the characters through their dialogue.
- The stronger plays seemed to be written with a clear understanding of the story's theatricality and a good command of stagecraft embedded in the script. The weaker plays suffered from an ambivalence towards their theatricality and a sense that they might be better suited to the prose or screenplay forms. In some cases it seemed that the question *why is this a play?* had not been asked by the writer.
- The more engaging works were those that demonstrated a good 'ear' for the language and the idiom of the characters and the setting of the story they were telling. The stronger scripts also handled their exposition in clever and subtle ways through the dialogue and the action of the play. Weaker scripts often overused direct-address to the audience, or narration or monologues as a means of delivering their exposition.
- On a functional note, we were surprised by the lack of 'technical craft' in many of the entries. Quite a lot of scripts were not presented in any standard playscript format and, in particular, there were a large number of scripts that contained lots of spelling mistakes and unintentional grammatical errors.