

MEDIA RELEASE

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South Island scoops National Museums Awards

The three winners of Museums Aotearoa's annual awards for excellence were announced at a gala event in Gisborne tonight – and all are from the South Island. Winners included a major metropolitan museum, a respected provincial museum, and the director of a small visionary art gallery.

In presenting the Awards, Priscilla Pitts, former Chair of Museums Aotearoa, said she was thrilled to see such excellent nominations in this, the second annual awards round. 'We wanted to celebrate and show the public some of the wonderful achievements by people in museums and galleries throughout New Zealand, their commitment and enthusiasm. The range and quality of this year's entrants endorses this goal.'

Fred & Myrtle's Paua Shell House at Canterbury Museum won the Innovation Award, the Selecon Award for Exhibition Excellence was won by Nelson Provincial Museum for *Unpicking the Past*, and Warwick Smith won the Individual Achievement Award.

The selection panel said that Warwick Smith, Director of the Forrester Gallery, won the Individual Award for 'tenaciously but gently pursuing his vision for a quality art gallery in Oamaru. We are delighted to recognise this work, and also to see that the Waitaki District Council are supporting the expansion of the Forrester, which is a further endorsement of the benefits the gallery brings to Oamaru and its community'.

Fred & Myrtle's Paua Shell House was a bold project for Canterbury Museum. 'On top of the publicity surrounding its acquisition, and the complex logistics of recreating a home life-size, the Museum has successfully retained the domestic feel through innovative visitor management and protecting the objects on open display though unobtrusive new security systems,' said selection panellist Jane Legget, editor of *Te*

Ara: Journal of Museums Aotearoa. The popularity of the exhibit bears testimony to this achievement.

In presenting the Selecon Award for Exhibition Excellence to Peter Millward of Nelson Museum, Ms Legget noted that *Unpicking the Past: Revealing our Dress Collection* 'exemplifies how detailed object-based research enables our material culture to provide unexpected and meaningful insights. This costume exhibition, by highlighting individual dresses, their design, technology, creation, use, wearers and history, succeeds in allowing each dress to tell its own story.'

'Selecon NZ Ltd is proud to sponsor the exhibition award,' said Deepak Nayee, Selecon's Architectural and Display product manager. 'Our aim in providing the prize of a study trip to Melbourne to meet with designers and look at exemplary projects, is to raise awareness of the key role that lighting plays in exhibition and museum display.'

Other finalists included TheNewDowse for *The Enchanted Forest* and *Common Ground*, Christchurch Art Gallery for *White on White*, Waikato Museum of Art & History for *Waiclay*, and the transformation of Waipu Museum from a traditional historical society museum into a sustainable business-oriented museum which is a force for community pride and identity.

Museums Aotearoa Executive Director Phillipa Tocker said she was thrilled to see these successes being celebrated. 'Being recognised by your peers is surely the highest accolade – and being able to celebrate these achievements more widely is a source of pride not only for the individuals and organisations who were honoured tonight, but for the whole of New Zealand's museum sector. The selection panel was impressed by the calibre of the projects and applications it received, and Museums Aotearoa is delighted to congratulate all those who participated.'

Also announced on the night was the prestigious Clark Collection / Creative New Zealand Scholarship, which this year goes to Josephine Hughes, designer at the Hawke's Bay Museum & Art Gallery.

Museums Aotearoa ~ Te Tari o Nga Whare Taonga o te Motu is New Zealand's independent professional organisation for museums and those who work in or have an interest in museums. Members include museums, public art galleries, historical societies, science centres, people who work in these institutions, and people connected or associated with arts, culture and heritage in New Zealand. More information is at: www.museums-aotearoa.org.nz

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Further details

New Zealand museums and public galleries care for more than 40 million items relating to New Zealand's history and contribute to our national identity. Generating in excess of 1000 public exhibitions and publications and attracting over 8 million visits each year, museums and galleries are currently ranked as the top attraction for New Zealand's overseas visitors.

New Zealand museums are actively focused on enriching their communities by enhancing the quality of their facilities, collections, programmes, products and services.

There is unprecedented growth in the establishment and development of museum facilities and services in most regions of New Zealand. Over 3500 people are currently employed in New Zealand museums, and at least twice that number of volunteers. Total annual museum operating and capital expenditure is well in excess of \$300 million.

Museums Aotearoa strives to be the strong, objective, fully representative voice for the evolving museum community, and to promote a shared sense of professionalism, solidarity and identity.

www.museums-aotearoa.org.nz