

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Museums Aotearoa Awards, 16 April 2009**

Museums Aotearoa will present three awards for excellence at its 2009 annual conference in Gisborne this week.

'The awards are open to Museums Aotearoa's individual and museum members to celebrate the best of their achievements,' says Executive Director, Phillipa Tocker.

'We established these awards in 2008 to publicly recognise and celebrate the best of the many outstanding achievements by our members. Every day, innovative and creative work goes on behind the scenes in our museums and public art galleries. Museum people around New Zealand, staff and volunteers, are consistently coming up with new and exciting ways of presenting our arts and culture, engaging diverse audiences and communities. We want to highlight these achievements at our annual professional conference and publicly acknowledge the individuals and organisations who make our museums and galleries such essential places,' Ms Tocker said.

The three award categories are:

- the individual achievement award – for an individual who has made an outstanding contribution, initiative or development that has led to the improvement of an organisation or of the wider museum sector;
- the innovation achievement award – for an individual or team who has made an outstanding contribution towards innovation, particularly through the use of technology; and
- the Selecon exhibition/visitor achievement award – for a team or organisation for an outstanding new exhibition and/or visitor programme that contributes to best industry practice in the museum sector, and which demonstrates excellence, relevance and vision, particularly in lighting design.

'We received many high quality entries from all around New Zealand, from Oamaru in the South to Waipu in the far North. The selection panel were very impressed, and all the finalists deserve to be held up as models of best practice for others to study or adapt,' said Ms Tocker.

Finalists for the innovation achievement award are Canterbury Museum, TheNewDowse and Waipu Museum. Finalists for the Selecon award for exhibition excellence are Christchurch Art Gallery, Nelson Provincial Museum, TheNewDowse and Waikato Museum of Art & History. The winner of this category will receive a generous prize package from Selecon Lighting, giving one person the opportunity to visit designers and exhibition experts in Melbourne.

'Museums are vital to our communities. They are guardians of our national heritage, our arts, our treasures and our taonga. They protect and tell our stories, they educate us and future generations, they interconnect our many cultures and they provide the continuity for strong traditions in our society. As well as being there for their communities, museums are at the core of New Zealand's cultural tourism, showcasing our culture to our visitors. The innovation and quality of our museums is internationally recognised. The Museums Aotearoa Awards will contribute to the public appreciation and interaction with our museums and galleries,' Ms Tocker said.

'Our conference this week, *Culture-Access-Innovation*, will explore the challenges of making our museum collections relevant and accessible to all our audiences. Hosted by Tairawhiti Museum, we will also visit Whangara Marae and celebrate these Awards at a gala dinner.'

'We are thrilled that the museums have entered such excellent projects to make these awards a success. Museums Aotearoa is particularly grateful for contributions from the panel of selectors and to performance lighting company Selecon NZ Ltd, our inaugural awards sponsor in 2008, for once again supporting the Museums Aotearoa Awards.'

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](http://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](http://www.museums-aotearoa.org.nz)