

MEDIA RELEASE

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Christchurch and Hawke's Bay winners of New Zealand Museum Awards

Christchurch Art Gallery and Hawke's Bay Museum & Art Gallery have each won top honours in the 2010 New Zealand Museum Awards, announced at a gala dinner in New Plymouth this evening.

Other Christchurch finalists are the Air Force Museum and Canterbury Museum, with the Museum of Wellington City & Sea and Locales (with Te Papa) bringing honours to Wellington. 'We had a wide range of entries of an extremely high standard for our third annual awards, and we're delighted to be able to celebrate them tonight,' says Phillipa Tocker, Executive Director of Museums Aotearoa.

'Museums Aotearoa wanted to recognise the best of the amazing exhibitions and programmes that our museums and art galleries are offering visitors. There is fantastic creativity, and a huge amount of energy being put into this work, often with very tight resources,' says Executive Director, Phillipa Tocker. 'We want to celebrate these achievements and let the public know that we are proud of what we do in our museums.'

The judges selected projects that show innovation and quality for other museums and galleries to strive for. 'We are very aware of the aspirational dimension to the awards,' noted Dame Cheryl Sotheran, one of the three members of the judging panel. 'While the winning museums this year are relatively well-resourced, they have all gone that extra step. Institutions need to be prepared to take risks, to go out on a limb to be innovative,' she said.

New sponsor of the Museum Awards programme is Story Inc, an innovative New Zealand-based company well-known for working with museums and tourist sites around the world to create exciting and inspiring visitor experiences.

Winners of the Selecon Award for Exhibition Excellence, the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, has shown that re-visioning a 'permanent exhibition' can breathe new life to an entire institution. 'This example provides a model of high standards and good practice as well as a rewarding experience for both first time and regular visitors', said the judges.

Finalists Museum of Wellington City & Sea (for *10 Years in Wonderland*) and The Air Force Museum of New Zealand (for *Horizon to Horizon*) both demonstrate that careful planning, vision, and extremely high production values can inject vitality into a collection-focussed exhibition.

Innovation finalists Canterbury Museum and Locales both use technology to add new dimensions to their visitor experiences. 'Canterbury Museum's 3D digital station project is an outstanding exemplar of the intelligent and inventive convergence of historic narrative and modern technology,' said the judges. In citing the Locales project of interactives and website for Te Papa's Colossal Squid, the judges cited the unprecedented levels of engagement and interest: 'The interactives at Te Papa brought the event to life, and the website set a benchmark for creating a huge body of interest in an event of national and global significance.'

The winner of the Innovation Award, Hawkes' Bay Museum & Art Gallery, drew on the imagination of the exhibition creators and its visitors, rather than technology. *The Miniatures: An Adventure in the Bren Collection* brings a collection of miniature figures and furniture to life through fiction and inventive display. 'The decision to partner with writer Stephanis Johnson was inspired and has resulted in an experience that is witty and engaging, creating "a world of imagination and adventure",' says the citation.

The third award category is to recognise an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the museum sector in New Zealand. Thérèse Angelo, Director of The

Air Force Museum of New Zealand, has done just that. In awarding her the Individual Achievement Award, the judges noted her outstanding record of achievement in many dimensions, all related to the wider heritage domain. 'The Air Force motto is *Per ardua ad astra – through adversity to the stars*. As our museums and art galleries face arduous times, it is inspiring to have Thérèse Angelo as a role model,' said the judges.

'It is interesting to note that the elements of advocacy, innovation and risk-taking which were highlighted in our Museum Awards tonight have also been key topics for our conference sessions during the day. *Museums – who needs them?* is the conference theme, exploring ways to articulate the relevance of our museums and art galleries to our funders, stakeholders and especially our communities. These awards are a great way to reward and showcase successful museum projects,' said Ms Tocker.

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