

A NEW FESTIVAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY FOR DIFFICULT TIMES

With the startling spread of Covid-19 across the globe, many beloved annual events were forced to close up shop for 2020, but Aotearoa’s largest celebration of photography has found innovative ways to thrive

There is perhaps no bigger event on the local photography calendar than the city-spanning Auckland Festival of Photography (AFP). But, in the wake of the devastating coronavirus, an event that brought so many people together in so many venues across the Auckland region seemed doomed to be shut down in the time of enforced social distancing. Luckily for photography lovers throughout the country, the festival’s dedicated team has instead developed a number innovative ways to interact with a programme bursting with exhibitions, presentations, and special events.

The AFP will not only continue with its scheduled 28 May to 14 June dates, but will reach far beyond Auckland via a number of online platforms, as well as being broadcast daily on Freeview TV, a first for any festival in New Zealand. Virtual visitors will be able to attend talks and panels through the AFP website, the Zoom platform, and a dedicated YouTube channel, and

exhibitions can be experienced from the comfort of home on Freeview TV Channel 200 at 3pm and 8pm every day but Sunday, which has an 11am slot .

While the format may be different, the scope and quality of the festival’s programme remain as mind-bogglingly exhaustive as ever. To help you parse the line-up of exciting exhibitions and events, we have festival director Julia Durkin to talk us through this year’s theme, followed by a series of *D-Photo’s* Picks of the Festival and interviews with the three photographers tapped to make new work for this year’s Annual Commission.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

The AFP 2020 theme, Unseen, was decided in late October 2019, during attendance at an international photo festival in Pingyao, China. We were presenting Alex Plumb’s work made for the 2018 Annual Commission. I was seated around the lunch table in the ancient city’s courtyard with Australian photographer Shoufay Derz, talking about my creative block for the 2020 festival theme. She instantly suggested ‘Unseen’. That’s how it happened, in a moment. So, we need to thank our Australian neighbours, at a festival in China, for the idea for the 2020 AFP theme.

That was then and this is now, May 2020. I recall this genesis from international collaboration as entirely fitting given today’s altered, Covid-19 state; that we hold onto the shared humanity of what is happening and be kind to each other. We in New Zealand find ourselves in a time of the unknown, of uncertainty and crisis. Our way of life is seemingly changed forever and anxiety fills the air.

Given Shoufay’s serendipitous gift of the Unseen theme, we asked her to write the festival message which, in our

new world, seems to foster a searing connection between the virus and the artist’s work, *Collective Shroud*, about the death of the Great Barrier Reef due to climate change; “A shroud is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it,” Shoufay writes.

Dark words in a dark time. To have darkness we must be deprived of light.

Fortunately, in a photographic world, we are never ever without light. With that in mind, the AFP Trust and team have worked tirelessly. The objective has been to honour the light, hope, and work of the artists, photographers, groups, photo clubs, and curators who have stayed the course with us — and all our stakeholders to provide a beacon of hope in these unprecedented times.

At the AFP, we aim to share the mystery of visual narratives, the hidden meaning of photography, the ‘Unseen’.

Tune in, turn on, and enjoy.

Julia Durkin,
MNZM, AFP director



JEANNE TARIS, *GESTES GITANS PERPIGNAN* EXHIBITION
WERNER BISCHOF, *MAGNUM PHOTOS, USA SERIES (1953–1954)* EXHIBITION



D-PHOTO'S PICKS OF THE FESTIVAL

As ever, the AFP delivers a programme jam-packed with opportunities to see works from leading photographers both local and international. If you find yourself wanting guidance in navigating this generous catalogue, we offer up the following shows as *D-Photo’s* Picks of the Festival.

Jeanne Taris: *Gestes Gitans Perpignan*

27 MAY–4 JUNE, ELLEN MELVILLE CENTRE
FREEVIEW CHANNEL 200, 8PM, 29–30 MAY

Photojournalist Jeanne Taris has spent years photographing the Roma population of the city of Perpignan in southern France. The long-form project examines the intersection of rigid gender roles, religion, drugs, and community for this singular ethnic minority group. Part of the festival’s Core programme, the series will be digitally projected at downtown Auckland’s Ellen Melville Centre and outside at Auckland Live Digital Stage..

Werner Bischof: *USA Series (1953–1954)*

23 MAY–21 JUNE, QUEENS WHARF FENCE
FREEVIEW CHANNEL 200, 8PM, 27 MAY AND 1 JUNE

A rare chance to experience imagery from one of founding fathers of photojournalism, *USA Series (1953–1954)* sees Swiss photographer Werner Bischof visiting the States to document everyday life during the post-war economic expansion. Falling under the festival’s Unseen theme, these images come from the archive set up after the photographer’s untimely death in a car crash at the age of 38.



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: NEIL IHAIA, SLEEPING WITH MY MATE, NIKON PHOTO DAY 2019 WINNER

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: PETRA LEARY, FROM *BIRD'S EYE* SHORT FILM

ABOVE: AMIE KAUFMAN, TRYING TO GROW UP, ALEX MAO PHOTOGRAPHY YOUTH AWARD 2019 WINNER

RIGHT: SHOUFAY DERZ, CHRYSALIS, COLLECTIVE SHROUD EXHIBITION



Nikon Auckland Photo Day

6 JUNE, AUCKLAND WIDE
FREEVIEW CHANNEL 200, 8PM, 5–6 JUNE

A 24-hour photography contest that puts New Zealand's largest city in the centre frame, this is always a fun day, and this year will probably be something new altogether with the impact of Covid-19 affecting the urban landscape. As well as fame and glory, there are Nikon mirrorless and DSLR prizes to be won.

Digital Screens: closing weekend

12–14 JUNE, AUCKLAND LIVE DIGITAL STAGE
FREEVIEW CHANNEL 200, 8PM, 7 JUNE

Three of *D-Photo's* favourite young photographers present short films to close out the Digital Screens portion of the programme. Previous Annual Commission winner Alex Plumb presents an exploration of immigrant Latin American identity in *Elena*, one of this year's Annual Commission winners Saynab Muse probes Somalian Muslim identity in *Unseen*, and creative aerial photographer Petra Leary soars through the sky with *Bird's Eye*.

Panel discussion: Female Identity and Myths in Photography

30 MAY, 1–2PM,
PHOTOGRAPHYFESTIVAL.ORG.NZ

This is a chance to connect, via Zoom video conferencing, with prominent contemporary photographers and curators as they discuss their works as they relate to mythology and gender identity. Festival director Julia Durkin moderates as guests Jeanne Taris (France) Alison Steven-Taylor (Australia), Marco Bischof (Switzerland), Helga Salwe (Australia), and Raymond Sagapolutele (New Zealand) converse and answer audience questions.

Auckland Photo Blog

28 MAY–14 JUNE,
PHOTOGRAPHYFESTIVAL.ORG.NZ

See some of the finest work by Auckland's talented photographers under the age of 25 in this exhibition of emerging artists who competed for last year's Alex Mao Photography Youth Award. If you fall in the age range, don't miss your chance to enter by 31 May and compete for a \$1200 prize; see photographyfestival.org.nz for details.

ANNUAL COMMISSION

Each year, the AFP awards the Annual Commission to a talented local photographer to create new work. This year, to celebrate the commission's 10th anniversary, three artists have been given the honour

Being selected for the AFP's Annual Commission is a big achievement for emerging and established photographers, one that invariably leads to a noteworthy career. Skimming over past recipients' names is a veritable who's who of the contemporary scene: Janet Lilo, Russ Flatt, Tanu Gago, James K Lowe, Roberta Thornley, Yvonne Shaw, and more.

This year, three more names have been added to that impressive list; Qiane Matata-Sipu, Raymond Sagapolutele, and Saynab Muse. *D-Photo* chats with all three about their styles and practices, to whet readers' appetites for the unveiling of their new works. The Annual Commission 2020 exhibition will run over 26 May–26 July at The Pah Homestead as well as being broadcast on Freeview channel 200 at 8pm on 27 May, 1 June, and 12 June.

QIANE MATATA-SIPU

D-Photo readers will already be familiar with Qiane Matata-Sipu (Te Wai-o-hua, Waikato-Tainui) in her capacity as a writer — she has penned many excellent profiles on some of the nation's most important photographic figures. What you might not know is that she is quickly becoming one of those important figures herself.

Based in South Auckland, Qiane wears many hats — journalist, mother, social activist and photographer among them. She got her start on the small team at now defunct *Mana* magazine, and has since shot commercial, editorial, wedding, family portrait, and documentary photography.

“My career has always been a little bit all over the place, because I always do such diverse things,” she says. “People have always said to me, ‘You should specialize in something and stop trying to do everything’. But that’s not who I am.”

Who she is, is a proud indigenous wāhine who uses her art practice to explore themes of gender and Māori identity in many different forms. For 13 years, she has documented the life and struggles of the mana whenua of Ihumātao, winning the Photostory category in the 2018 *New Zealand Geographic* Photographer of the Year Awards for a selection of that work. Last year, she launched her project *Nuku*, a platform to tell the stories of 100 “kick ass indigenous women doing things differently”, through multimedia formats including portraits, videos, podcasts, and more. At time of printing, Qiane had just published the 30th profile of the *Nuku* 100. She hopes that the project will not only showcase and celebrate indigenous female leaders but also challenge the stereotypes that exist around them.

“*Nuku* is all about breaking that apart and saying, actually here are these 100 indigenous women who are all doing things differently, who all have lots of things in common but also have lots of things that are really different about them. Not one of them is any more indigenous than the other,” she explains.

Shooting the portraits for *Nuku* has seen Qiane expand her usual documentary style by experimenting in the studio and with techniques outside her usual wheelhouse, like off-camera flash and colour gels.

“Trying to create a unique portrait of wāhine that really shows who they are has stretched me as a photographer,” she says.

At the culmination of *Nuku*, Qiane is looking to publish a book of her portraits in addition to the project's sizable digital presence. It is not a cheap endeavour (and she welcomes interest from funders who agree with the kaupapa), but she sees a publication as something of real value in advancing indigenous representation.

“It’s something I wish I could have right now to give to my daughter. There are lots of books out there about women, but I want a book where she can see women who look and sound and have experiences like her, or her mother or her aunty or her grandmothers,” Qiane says.

For her new commission work, the photographer will continue to develop her themes of wāhine identity, connection to the whenua, and Māori rights, utilizing the skills she has developed along the path of her varied career.

“I say my [purpose] is to tell the stories of marginalized people so we can change the narrative for future generations. I believe photography can do that and does do that.”



RAYMOND SAGAPOLUTELE

Another photographer with a diverse career leading up to this year's commission, is Aotearoa-born Sāmoan photographer Raymond Sagapolutele, who has been shooting for the last 18 years.

Self-taught, he has shot everything from commercial to editorial, events to music photography, documentary to portraiture. And, since enrolling in post-graduate study in 2016, Raymond has been utilizing that expertise to explore his own cultural identity and those that make up the beautiful collective of the Pacific. Study and developing his art practice has given him a new perspective on his own heritage.

"I'm born here, my parents raised me to be more in tune with the Pālagi world, because that's where they thought the advantages would lie," the photographer says. "Later in life, I came to realize that, even though they never cut me off from my heritage, I wasn't really immersed in it and didn't see the value in it until I got a bit older."

Raymond has since come to treasure the wealth of indigenous knowledge, often eschewed by the European view, that exists in the many cultures throughout the Pacific. Discovering ways that his cultural learning can tie into his practice, he sees his art as a way of continuing Sāmoan oratory and storytelling traditions via the camera.

Some of Raymond's recent work has been around the cultural significance of skulls, and this motif is set to also figure heavily in the new works he has created for the Annual Commission.

"For most of us, death is not the end, it is the beginning of something else," he says. "Within a cultural context, the head is the most sacred part of the body, so the skull represents the most sacred part of that next journey."

His new pieces will extend this inquiry to the eastern Pacific, using the festival platform to create support work for West Papua's independence movement. For decades, the people of West Papua have been struggling against racist and repressive Indonesian rule over their territory. Raymond sees it as a duty in his role as a storyteller to spotlight this often-ignored conflict in the light of the festival's Unseen theme.

The photographer says that being awarded the Annual Commission has been humbling, especially as some of the past winners are friends whose practice he admits to being awed by. But those who follow Raymond in future commissions will no doubt feel the same awe in the face of his elegant, challenging imagery — though it seems unlikely to go to this modest photographer's head.

"In essence, what I am is an artist," he says. "I just happen to interpret life as I see it through my camera. I learned along the way I have a specific way of seeing things, and for some reason people seem to like the way I see things."



SAYNAB MUSE

A young, deaf, Muslim photographer from a family that arrived from Somalia in the late '90s, Saynab Muse creates images that show daily life in Aotearoa from a perspective many would otherwise never see. Working under the Unseen theme of this year's festival, she provides an engaging look at the intersection of culture, family, ability, and religion through her documentary-informed portraits.

Saynab's family came to New Zealand in 1998 as refugees, leaving behind a Somalia that had become unsafe in the wake of a protracted civil war. There was a large gulf between the cultures of the two nations, so resettlement was not an easy task. But despite cultural and communication challenges, Saynab has found schooling and creative opportunities here that she is grateful for.

“When we moved to New Zealand it was the first time we had access to education and the first time I learned about photography, too,” she tells me via sign-language interpreter. “I would not have had that otherwise.”

Beginning her photographic journey in high school and continuing into tertiary study at Auckland's Unitec, Saynab has predominantly trained her lens on her family and community. Her first photo book, *Imaanshaha* (meaning 'Arrival' in Somali), was published last year, comprising intimate glimpses into the lives of her five sisters, two brothers, parents, and grandmother.

The images serve to both highlight the importance of the family's cultural and religious practices, while at the same time showing the dynamics and situations that are familiar to daily life in any Kiwi household.

For her new commission works, Saynab will continue along these lines of inquiry. Citing British-Iranian photographer Mitra Tabrizian as an influence, the young artists hopes to increase the

visibility of the Muslim culture and values, reframing the 'othering' narrative that often accompanies Muslim representation through the Western lens.

There is also a bold feminist vein to Saynab's work. Resisting the narrative that Muslim women are disempowered subjects, her images depict female Muslims, both young and old, as strong, prepossessed individuals. It is

a case that is easily made by looking to Saynab herself, as she effectively navigates New Zealand's art world: *Imaanshaha* was published by the prestigious PhotoForum organization, was a finalist in the 2019 Australia & New Zealand Photobook Award, and has now helped her snag the Annual Commission spot.

Saynab hopes that exhibiting her

new work at the AFP will encourage visits from people who might not otherwise come along, which will also give the photographic community a chance to expose itself to a more diverse audience.

“It would be quite good to have a few people from the deaf community come along, because maybe that could

influence them,” she says. “It would also give hearing artists exposure to more deaf people, help them be more aware of this community. It's an issue of equality.”

The AFP's Annual Commission 2020 exhibition will run from 26 May to 26 July at The Pah Homestead, and feature new works from this year's

three commissioned artists as well as a series of images from previous Annual Commission recipients. The exhibition will also be broadcast on Freeview channel 200 at 8pm on 27 May, 1 June, and 12 June. See photographyfestival.org.nz for details.

