

Julia Durkin, the founder and director of the annual Auckland Festival of Photography [AFP] has been awarded a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2020 New Years' Honours list.

Since it began in 2004, AFP has become Australasia's longest running annual photography festival, typically providing more than 100 exhibitions and events each June.

Ms Durkin says. "I'm humbled and delighted to receive this honour. It is a real privilege to be given such a significant national recognition of my work and of AFP's contribution to the photography community and cultural sector. I'd like to acknowledge the support of the team and the Trustees, past and present."

Ms Durkin is proud of the festival's broad appeal, relevance and commitment to free entry. "Building the festival has taken time and funding is extremely tight. But we can certainly claim to have shown a leadership in the sector, with a series of cultural "1st" for which this MNZM honour is given. Plus our ongoing commitment to embracing the margins of our communities, reflecting a diversity of imagery and showcasing high quality New Zealand and international work. AFP has a successful track record over 16 festivals of presenting imagery relevant to today's visual conversations and issues."

The cultural leadership she has shown since 2004 include the launch of public photography projects such as the annual 24 hour people's competition Auckland Photo Day - the first public participatory competition of its type in the country. Over the years she commissioned diverse inaugural community photography projects – Diwali 2005, Lantern 2006, Sushi 2008, Festival Tuesday – first evening gallery circuit, 2009, Climate Change and Environmental Photography Symposium in 2010 and since 2011 an Annual Commission for fine arts photography which has resulted in an AFP Trust collection of 27 artworks, all created for public exhibition during the annual Festival.

AFP has made a major contribution to how Aucklanders enjoy cultural activities across the region. 2019's festival attracted an audience of 93,000 people and since AFP started it has engaged with 780,000 visitors to over 1100 festival exhibitions, events, talks and projections.

As well as the festival's regional reach, Ms Durkin's leadership has included establishing the Auckland Photo Blog which boasts an online community resource of over 10,000 images of Auckland region and AFP being a founding member of the Asia Pacific Photoforum. This network has boosted AFP's and New Zealand photography international reach, profile and reputation. Including AFP presenting the first Maori Pacific photography exhibition, Ata Te Tangata curated especially for the largest photography festival in China 2016.

"Community arts and cultural development are integrated in the AFP programme," Ms Durkin says. "This includes collaborations between professional artists and communities in ways that recognise the importance of the people's visual voice by using the power of photography as vehicle for crafting culture and identity through participation"

Ms Durkin is the longest serving female festival director in the Auckland region. She is a senior cultural producer, pioneer, innovator and entrepreneur with a 30-year career in visual imaging, pictures, video, film, and photography.

Further details at photographyfestival.org.nz or to contact Julia Durkin, Auckland Festival of Photography, call (09) 307 7055, 0274 735 443.