

Auckland Festival of Photography : A festival focused on Asia

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Zoé Isle de Beauchaine June 10, 2025



Launched in 2004 by photography enthusiasts, the Auckland Festival of Photography has become a major hub for the medium in Aotearoa New Zealand over the years. Under the leadership of Julia Durkin, the festival encourages collaborations within the Oceanic and Asian network to decentralize conversations and remove photography from the Western lens.

The idea for a photography festival for New Zealand was born in 2003 among a group of friends and colleagues gathered around Julia Durkin. She was already immersed in the world of images, having worked in film and television. Discussions with various organizations, including the Auckland Art Gallery and the Auckland Museum, private galleries and dealers, and photography associations, demonstrated widespread enthusiasm, and the Photography Festival launched its first edition the following year.

“It was a small, human-scale event spread across the city, with ten exhibitions and events. Everything was driven by passion and the desire to make a difference.” Twenty years later, the festival offers a large-scale program, which is divided into three parts: exhibitions in various historical and contemporary locations throughout the city; outdoor installations; and online programming. At the time of its creation, the festival

stood out above all for its openness, with a whole section of programming “free access,” allowing everyone to participate without going through a selection committee. *“At the time, I think we were the only festival to allow this type of open participation, without organizing everything ourselves. Our curatorial footprint was quite light at the beginning, but we strengthened it considerably from 2013, when we opened the program internationally.”*

This openness was fostered by the creation, in 2010, of the Asia-Pacific PhotoForum, a network of Pacific-Asian photography festivals of which the Auckland Festival of Photograph was one of the founding members, under the leadership of Julia Durkin: *“The objective was to bring together our knowledge and create a center for the exchange of ideas and discussions around photography. New Zealand being very isolated, this was a wonderful way for us to create links.”* Since its creation, more than fifty international experts, practitioners and curators have been invited to Auckland and contributed to enriching the exchanges.

For Julia Durkin, New Zealand’s geographical location is ultimately an opportunity, as it grants her precious freedom: *“We’re not looking to blindly follow the movement. Our isolation allows us to take more risks, to explore unconventional approaches. We certainly have something to prove, but also much less to lose.”* This approach provides a welcome counterbalance to the rather centered tendency of the Western art world. *“It’s important for us to focus on the Global South and the Asia-Pacific region, which offer immense opportunities. Through initiatives like the Asia-Pacific PhotoForum, we seek to initiate new conversations around photography, ones that are not anchored in traditional Western markets.”* Over the years, the Auckland Festival of Photography has established close relationships with several Asian countries, leading to strong partnerships: with the Pingyao festival, which presented the first exhibition of Māori and Pacific photography in China, and with Japan, where the Kōwhai Residency was launched to welcome New Zealand photographers each year.

Today, the festival offers an ambitious yet accessible program, driven by the dynamism of its director, Julia Durkin, who has led this project with passion and intelligence for over twenty years. This commitment earned her a 2020 nomination as a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for her contribution to photography.

More information

- [Auckland Festival of Photography](#)
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