

Three decades of World of WearableArt

World of WearableArt (WOW) is the world's leading wearable art design competition and is celebrating its 30th year in 2018.

What began as a small local competition has grown to become WOW, a theatrical spectacle and magnet for extraordinary talent from around the world. Dame Suzie Moncrieff began the annual design competition and stage show in 1987 as a way to publicise the William Higgins Gallery, which she set up in a Cobb Cottage in Wakefield near Nelson.

The inaugural WOW show integrated wearable art, theatre and dance, and was performed to an audience of 200. It was an instant hit and continued to grow, being staged at Nelson's Trafalgar Centre until 2005 when it was moved to Wellington to allow for a larger venue.

Now, WOW's combination of an international design competition inside a spectacular stage show is New Zealand's single largest annual theatrical production and a must-see event for more than 60,000 people every year.

Dame Suzie was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 1998 Queen's Birthday Honours for services to the arts and tourism, and in the 2011 New Year Honours was promoted to Dame Companion of the same order.

As an organisation, WOW also includes the National WOW Museum in Nelson (which attracts more than 40,000 visitors each year), an expanding international exhibition touring and presentation programme.

WOW's international travelling exhibition is set to open in St Petersburg, Russia in October this year. Since starting its tour, the exhibition has been seen by more than 600,000 visitors across New Zealand, Australia and in the USA: Bishop Museum Hawaii, MoPoP in Seattle, and Peabody Essex Museum in Salem.

At the core of WOW is the annual international design competition that each year attracts entries from more than 40 countries. This year the show will feature 140 finalist garments by 147 designers from 17 countries (up from 13 in 2017).

WOW draws on the best of New Zealand's creative industries across theatre, dance, music and production, building to a team of more than 300 people for the show's season, presenting what is truly a national event.

With about 70% of the audience travelling from outside of Wellington, WOW has a huge effect on the city with its economic value estimated at \$25.2 million in new spend in the last economic impact assessment in 2016. WOW's high visibility, coupled with the number of incoming visitors, enlivens Wellington's restaurants, hotels and retail sectors.

The finalist garments compete for awards across six sections: the 2018 competition has three recurrent sections – Aotearoa, Open and Avant-garde; and three sections with design briefs specific to 2018 – Reflective Surfaces, Under the Microscope and Bizarre Bra. The range of awards has a total prize pool of more than NZ\$170,000.

The World of WearableArt Awards Show is on from September 27 - October 14 at TSB Arena in Wellington. More information and tickets from worldofwearableart.com.

30 Years of WOW: By the numbers:

- 4,877: Number of garments that will have adorned the stage since 1987
- Over 770,000: Number of people that will have seen a WOW show since 1987
- Over 4,500: Number of people that have been on a stage since 1987
- 10,200: Total number of people that have worked on a WOW show since 1987 including cast and crew
- Almost \$2,430,000: Value of prizes (cash and in kind) WOW has awarded designers since 1987
- 207: Number of designer sections since 1987
- Over 430: Number of historical garments in the collection of the National WOW Museum in Nelson

2018 Show: By the numbers:

- 147: Number of finalist designers
- 140: Number of finalist garments
- 17: Number of countries represented in 2018 show
- 65: Number of finalist designers from New Zealand
- 83: Number of returning finalist designers
- 8: Number of previous Supreme WOW Award winners in 2018 show
- 60,000: Anticipated audience for the 2018 three-week show season