



Off the Wall: The World of Wearable Art.
Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing. RRP: NZ\$39.99. Pb, 184pp. ISBN: 9781877517426.
Reviewed by Cassandra Fusco.

When Nelson painter and sculptor **Suzie Moncrieff** wanted to promote the small art gallery she ran as a co-operative with

friends, she came up with an idea that has evolved into one of New Zealand's leading cultural extravaganzas, The Montana World of Wearable Art Awards (**WOW**[®]).

Arts patron and café owner, Eelco Boswijk, donated \$1000 prize money enabling Moncrieff to launch a national challenge to designers: to take art off the wall and place it on the human form. The first wearable art event, held at the William Higgins Gallery in Spring Grove in 1987, was a resounding success and the rest, as they say, is history. But is it? No. Moncrieff and colleagues deserve much better. ***Off the Wall: The World of Wearable Art***, elegantly produced by the Nelson publishing house of conservationist and photographer, Craig Potton, has done just that, delivering one of the most comprehensive visual surveys and potted history of the **WOW**[®] phenomenon.

More than a design sourcebook, more than an exploration of the intersection of fashion and art, this book both blurs and illumines something of the lines between costume and culture. In superb photography, it offers examples of identity – magnified and reflected in the work of designers, artists, costume makers and other craft artists from all over the world including Canada, Japan, USA, India, Thailand, UK, the Netherlands, Israel, Fiji, Germany and New Zealand. Some of the **WOW**[®] magic is the staging, lighting, dancers, musicians and performers who support the choreographed entry garments, emblems of identity. Rigorously selected, these capitalise upon cultural difference with a definite emphasis upon thoughtful and inventive use of resources – world-wide. For outstanding eye for detail, use of colour and material choices infused with cultural comment, have a look at “Clan Pacifica” by Janet Bathgate, “Tiki Touring” by Judith Keith, “Te Po” (The Night) by Shona Tawhia, “Reflection on Time” by Julie Brawley and “Flora” by Jeff Thomson.

In 1999 **WOW**[®] won the Supreme New Zealand Tourism Award. In the first year of its re-location to Wellington (in 2004), **WOW**[®] doubled its audiences and now magnets in excess of 40,000 people. What started in one woman's head and brought to fruition by a collective of gifted energies in Nelson, has become not just a theatrical extravaganza but an international creative forum of cultural expression.