

MEDIA RELEASE

BIG DAY OUT FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE TAKEN TO HIGHER GROUND IN NEW PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

As official photographer for one of the world's most successful rock music festivals, The Big Day Out, Sophie Howarth became fascinated in capturing the festival experience – the audience, the gaze, the energy.

Capturing the likes of Nirvana, Foo Fighters, Bjork, Metallica, Powderfinger, and Sarah Blasko in their element inspired Sophie to seek out the reverie in traditional, religious and spiritual festivals around the world.

Sophie returns to Sydney this month to launch her mesmerising new exhibition of 46 works, *Soaring*, featuring the Golden Eagle Festival of Mongolia.

The old Kazakh tradition of horseback eagle falconry is celebrated each October in the Bayan-Olgii Province in far western Mongolia. Participants train an eagle to hunt for them and the kill is shared - the pelt for the trainer and the meat for the eagle.

Horse-riding with her host family allowed Sophie to create shots that communicate her signature theme – the connection between performer and audience, of hunter/huntress and eagle – against the dramatic landscape of the wild Altai mountain range.

“My work is a study of reverie, a powerful alchemy that the performer and audience inspire, exist in, and respond to during the cycle of a festival. A presence that everyone has a part in, that brings an otherworldliness to the occasion; an atmosphere of something greater than ourselves,” Sophie says.

Her works capture the essence of the eagle, too – its extraordinary power to see clearly from great heights and across vast distances, inspiring personal transformations.

Eagles still have a mythical resonance in the Asian eagle hunting nations of Mongolia, southern Siberia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. They are a powerful symbol of transformation – signifying a higher ‘self’ taking flight, lifting free from worldly entanglement and soaring to an expanded vision of reality.

At the festival there are a series of games that showcase the speed, agility, accuracy and Kazakh dress of the eagle and trainer.

The theme that runs through Sophie's work has its own traditional name – the *baraka* – which is best described as the spiritual thread that lies between nature and the divine experience so often experienced at festivals.

“My personal practice has resulted in an anthology of imagery that tells individual stories, while visualising the change in the psyche of those swept away,” she says.

“In the moment I can feel what I call the *baraka* that the performer and audience inspire together, exist in and respond to. The way I interpret this is that it makes people feel like they are involved in something greater than themselves. It is a magical experience.”

This exhibition is part of a larger body of work on festivals, which has continued since Sophie's early career where she worked solely in the music industry, largely at rock festivals.

The creation of her book 'Peace Love and Brown Rice - A Photographic History of the Big Day Out' was self published to enduring popular and critical acclaim.

Soaring

45 x framed works + hero shot

Opening Event: Sunday 24 May at 3 – 6pm featuring Mongolian Morin Khurr musician and throat singer

Where: Shop 5 / 16 Hickson Road, Walsh Bay (opposite Wharf Theatre)

Exhibition hours: 3 – 8pm, Sunday 24 May then 12-8pm daily until 13 June 2015

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For interviews, high res images and more information please contact

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