

# Acclaim mounts for Salt of the earth film

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MURRAY Fredericks is an accidental filmmaker, but given the success of his debut effort he might need to rethink his day job.

Fredericks directed and shot the documentary *Salt*, which last Friday won the prize for best short at the prestigious International Documentary Association awards in Los Angeles.

The award is not the first for the 28-minute film. Since its debut at the Adelaide Film Festival in February, it has won the award for best Australian short at the Melbourne Film Festival in August and was voted best documentary short at the Atlanta Film Festival in April.

Twelve hours after last Friday's win, Fredericks picked up another prize: best cinematographer at the Plus Camerimage festival in Lodz, Poland. "That was a very prestigious win," Fredericks' filmmaking partner, producer Michael Angus, said yesterday, just off a plane from Los Angeles. "It was basically a who's who of cinematography."

Making that award even more notable is the fact that Fredericks is, by day, a stills photographer, not a cinematographer. "Rather than being a standard movie, *Salt* is really stills that move," Angus said.

*Salt* is essentially a video diary of Fredericks' trips to and photographic encounters with Lake Eyre. Over the past six years, he has made the three-day journey to the salt pan in Australia's heartland 16 times, staying for up to five weeks at a stretch. The large-scale photographic images he has produced on those journeys have become increasingly collectible; works in his latest series, *Salt 9*, are selling in limited editions of seven for up to \$14,000 apiece.

Given those prices, it's hard to see Fredericks moving to filmmaking full time. In fact, the film doesn't even have a cinematic distributor yet.

Fredericks was out of contact yesterday but, according to Angus, his Lake Eyre work is "done and dusted now". But the two plan to work together again.

"He's heading off to Greenland next," Angus said. "The project we're thinking of will be called *Nothing on Earth*."

There is one sour note in *Salt's* sweet story of success. Like *Anvil*, the film that won the IDA's best feature documentary award last week, it has not even made it to the shortlist for next March's Academy Awards.

There may be some small consolation in that it is up for two awards - best cinematography and best documentary under one hour - at the AFI awards in Melbourne on Friday.