

ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand Press Release 4 September 2024

A New Zealand heritage specialist has been awarded a Conservation Guest Scholarship at the prestigious Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles

In 2025, ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand member, Kararaina Te Ira, will be a guest scholar for the 2024/2025 intake at the Getty Conservation Institute. This opportunity is highly sought after and the last New Zealand scholar to be selected was over 10 years ago.

As a guest scholar, Kararaina's research will focus on advancing cultural heritage conservation through the lens of Indigenous peoples' perspectives with a project called 'A Practitioner's Experience: Advancing Cultural Heritage Conservation through the Eyes of Indigenous Communities'.

For over ten years Kararaina has worked as a conservator, curator, museum director and heritage specialist in government, most recently as a senior leader in an archive. It has been her goal to work across many types of organisations in the sector to understand the business.

At the Conservation institute, Kararaina will grasp an understanding of how the Center operates. From there, Kararaina will be able to gauge where the opportunities are for organisations like the Getty Center and indigenous peoples to co-develop in line with their corresponding aspirations and goals.

Kararaina says:

'Tēnā koutou. He uri au o ngā tūpuna mai ngā waka ō Tokomaru, Kurahaupō, Tainui, me Takitimu. Ko Kararaina Pareroi Rāhui Te Ira taku ingoa.

My name is Kararaina Te Ira and some of my iwi (tribal affiliations) are to Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Hinemihi, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Apa ki te Rā To, Ngāti Kuia and Rangitāne o Wairau.

It is a great honour to be selected as a Getty guest scholar as both Māori and a New Zealander. When I look at the current political space in New Zealand, post COVID-19 realities, and where Māori are collectively and economically, many changes have occurred. In New Zealand perspectives have diversified particularly when considering the preservation of heritage, although in some cases this has been slight. These shifts have naturally realised both challenges and opportunities.

It is important for me to ground this project within my own whakapapa (ancestry) as an indigenous person of Aotearoa-New Zealand. These will reveal opportunities and alignment for other indigenous groups and communities.

My background in heritage started at an early age as I was raised with my grandparents, aunts and uncles and parents. As my grandparents moved seasonally, we lived in our various papakāinga (ancestral homes) throughout the year. This is a privilege that many of my kin have limited access to, as many Māori had left to work in the cities decades ago. With that privilege, my primary education was focused on Māori cultural heritage, our histories, our shared stories with the wider community and taonga (cultural material). When visiting family in the cities we attended hui (meeting and events) at local galleries,

museums, libraries and archives. We knew these places as visitors but much of the operations, particularly the decision making, was kept hidden away.

At home, heritage organisations were spoken about as the keepers of the collective consciousness and with that power they had the ability to erase or augment our stories. If it wasn't for a small handful of Māori heritage professionals and GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) sector sympathisers, these places were viewed as domineering entities seeking to control our cultural identity. Unlike some papakāinga, mine taught me to see past this oppression and seek to realise the opportunities. We knew we could keep our own memories alive without these organisations, who have a role with us, to ensure that the taonga and our stories within their walls were cared for. This is what my whānau continues to do today, we collaborate with these organisations to penapena (care for) our taonga and stories captured there.'

For five years, separate to her primary work, she has been researching and writing briefs of evidence about the harm caused by the Crown/New Zealand Government against her iwi. The focus has been the challenges caused by Government that continually disempower her kin. Very rarely has she had the opportunity to research and write about how our past and present informs possibilities for the future. Her project with the Getty is collective-minded focusing on opportunities today for tomorrow's people.

Kararaina applied for the Getty scholarship knowing it was an opportunity to explore the possibilities for Māori and other indigenous peoples to enhance the heritage sector and align aspirations. This is a rare opportunity to work with a world leading heritage organisation, where Kararaina aims to highlight opportunities for co-development, in enhancing conservation practice and potentially reimagine the practice as something more fluid.

Kararaina encourages other scholars to consider making an application to the Getty Conservation Guest Scholar Program.

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