



Sustained Excellence
in Tertiary Teaching
Kaupapa Māori Category

Dr/Tākuta
Ngarino Ellis

Art History
The University of Auckland

“I see my classroom presence, my culture and the values of my tīpuna, as hallmarks of my teaching. I like to think that students see me first and foremost as a Māori academic, and my pedagogy as one which is clearly located in the reo, tikanga and mātauranga of Aotearoa New Zealand. Knowledge is aspirational and achievable for them all.”

As Senior Lecturer in Art History at the University of Auckland, Ngarino Ellis is currently the only Māori art historian holding a permanent teaching position in a New Zealand university. And she teaches in one of only three art history departments in New Zealand. Her inspiration comes from Professor Ngahuia Te Awekotuku who, in 1988, was the only Māori art historian teaching the first-ever university-level Māori art history course, when Ngarino enrolled as a new student. Now, Ngarino is at the forefront of ensuring Māori art is recognised in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally.

“Just as Ngahuia mentored me, I feel particular responsibilities to Māori and Pacific students. I strive to identify and celebrate their worldviews and aspirations using the language and culture of this land, but do so in ways that I believe enriches the education of all my students.”

Ngarino’s teaching is deeply rooted in Kaupapa Māori practice, and grounded in her upbringing in a close-knit, strong whānau who spent much time on their marae. The values instilled by her grandparents shape her life and are at the core of her teaching practice, which is anchored in manaakitanga/care and rangatiratanga/empowerment. Her goal is to help students feel that Art History is their discipline, and see that being Māori – or knowing about the Māori world – is critical to their on- and off-campus lives. She is keenly aware that university study may be alienating for new students, including many Māori, Pacific and first-in-family students.

Ngarino fosters the study of Māori art forms and practices using Te Ao Māori frameworks. Her teaching is innovative, combining a Kaupapa Māori pedagogy with concepts drawn from Euro-American Art History and the ideas developed in her own research. She lectures in five courses – Global Art Histories; Art Crime; Gender, Ethnicity and Visual Culture; Mana Taonga: Tradition and Innovation in Māori Art; and Exhibiting Cultures.

When she first started teaching the new postgraduate Museum Studies core course in 2013, Ngarino discovered that, while she was teaching students about the importance of indigenous perspectives, 60-70% of the readings came from authors from outside those communities. Deciding to shift her approach, she sourced indigenous-authored texts, resulting in a paper, which she presented at the Native American conference in Denver in 2013, receiving much acclaim.

“My pedagogy is aimed at Māori students first and foremost. They are a small group on campus, subject to unique pressures. Every academic needs to work for Māori student success and actively engage with

expectations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, but the responsibility is keenly felt by Māori academics. The presence of Māori academic role models and courses with significant Māori content is critical to Māori student success.”

Ngarino believes in providing culturally-appropriate learning environments, ensuring that students feel welcome and culturally-supported when dealing with sensitive issues. She believes that diverse spaces foster diverse learning, so her classes often meet in the University’s meeting house, Tane-nui-a-Rangi, or the Auckland Museum. But, as most classes are held in lecture rooms, Ngarino achieves a more dynamic learning space (“activates the classroom”) by arranging classes into 15-20 minute blocks, which include a break, where students look at images, talk together, or participate in activities. She also sees teaching as a “performative act”, where students come to class expecting the unexpected and leaving with new knowledge and a thirst to pursue ideas presented in class. She loads follow-up material to Canvas (the Learning Management System), including audio-visual resources and podcasts.

Many of Ngarino’s class activities are based on the pedagogy of ‘learn by doing’, advocated by the photographer Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Seminole-Muscogee-Navajo). These include ‘The Blank Map’, ‘Taonga mo ngā tangata katoa – Treasures for everyone’, and the ‘International War Crimes Tribunal’.

Ngarino has disseminated her practice as a teacher at a range of indigenous and art history conferences. These include:

- 2019 Teaching Museums Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand - Museums Aotearoa Conference, Wellington;
- 2018 He maunga teitei: Teaching Māori Art as a Baseline for Art History in Aotearoa Today - New Zealand Art History Teachers Association, Auckland;
- 2017 Roundtable: What’s a Māori to do? Teaching and Innovating Māori History in the Turbulent Present with Aroha Harris and Hirini Kaa - New Zealand Historical Association Conference, Christchurch;
- 2016 What is Māori Art History? - Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, Canberra;
- 2016 Plenary: Why I don’t come to conferences like these - Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, Canberra;
- 2013 Kia ora te whānau! Going global with Māori Art History - Native American Art Studies Association Conference, Denver.

Her current book project, *Toi Te Mana: A History of Indigenous Art from Aotearoa New Zealand* (with Deidre Brown and Jonathan Mane-Wheoki), is grounded in her teaching. In her courses she has developed a core set of Māori terminology and frameworks to conceptualise disparate time, people and places, in the process identifying critical parameters for Māori Art History, and for the wider discipline. Māori Art History, she argues in her teaching and research, has much to contribute to Art History as a discipline.

“The values instilled by my grandparents shape my life and are at the core of my teaching practice. My teaching is informed by this inheritance and a living Māori pedagogy, infused by Kaupapa Māori methodologies, my upbringing in a close-knit whānau (family), and exposure to passionate teachers including Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (Art History), Jane Kelsey (Law), and Judith Binney (History)”.

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