

Welcome

PhD completed in July 2018

Name: Dr Natasha Barrett

PhD: Museum Studies

Thesis Title:

Meshworks of meanings: photographs of Mori and their *taonga*

Thesis Description:

This interdisciplinary research (museum studies, anthropology and photography) examines the meanings and uses of commercial colonial-era photographs (1860s-1914) of Mori, the indigenous people of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, and their *taonga* or cultural treasures. To achieve this, it draws on British Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum and Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum collections; interviews with curators from these museums; participant observation and interviews with Ngiti Rnana, the London Mori cultural group; exhibitions; publications and manuscripts.

It poses interpretative historical and contemporary questions within British museum and Mori contexts, asking:

- How were these photographs used by Mori and tourists, and more broadly within the NZ and British visual economies, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?
- What does the historical adoption of these photographs by Mori represent?
- How do Mori contemporarily view these photographs?
- How have these photographs historically and contemporaneously been used in internally and externally facing capacities in British museums?
- How and in what ways can Mori perspectives influence understanding and uses of these photographs in British museums?

For example, it explores and analyses these photographs' creation and uses as souvenirs by museum collectors visiting New Zealand, and Mori involved in tourism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and their historical and contemporary roles in British museum exhibitions. Moreover, it considers why and in what ways photographs became part of Mori remembrance practices, and how they are viewed contemporarily. It contends they are *taonga* with *mauri* or life force, ancestral presence and encoded knowledge of deep significance to descendant communities. This deepens understanding beyond visual content and has the potential to impact their management, display and multisensory interpretation in British museums.

Central to the thesis is a dual theoretical framework. This novel approach combines *Mtauranga Mori* or Mori knowledge and worldview with Ingold's anthro-phenomenological concepts. Specifically this includes Ingold's "meshwork of relations" or the unbreakable interconnections between things (2011) and alternative approach to animism or the life force in everything. Accordingly, the thesis positions photographs as relationally enmeshed objects with material properties, and sensory and affective qualities.

Supervisors:

Dr. Sandra Dudley, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester

Prof. Emeritus Elizabeth Edwards, formerly PHRC, De Montfort University

Dr. Gaye Scunthorpe, Curator & Section Head of Oceania, British Museum

Academic qualifications

- Archives & Cultural Memory Masterclass, Prof. Eric Ketelaar (visiting scholar, Univ. of Amsterdam) from Victoria, University of Wellington, NZ (2013).
- Certificate in Proficiency in Archives: Access, Advocacy and Outreach (A+), Prof Wendy Duff (visiting scholar, Univ. of Toronto) from Victoria, University of Wellington, NZ (2011).
- MA in Museum Anthropology (Distinction) from University College London (1999-2000).



Ethesis on UoL's Research Archive:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2381/42785>

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Other Social Media: <http://bit.ly/1PPQJuw>

- BA Dual Hons (1st Class Honours) in Social Anthropology and Visual Arts (practice & theory) from Keele University (1995-1998).

Publications:

- Barrett, Natasha (2015). 'Visual Submission: The indigenous museum space or *whareniui* / Mori meeting house as the embodied Mori ancestor in New Zealand'. In: *Museological Review*, issue 19, p.18-19 (plus front cover image). See: <http://bit.ly/1MOy7me>
- Barrett, Natasha. (2016). 'Question & Answer: The Impact of Digitisation on Museum Practice'. In: *Museological Review* journal, issue 20, p38. See: <http://bit.ly/1MNp7lw>
- Barrett, Natasha. (2016). 'Exhibition review of 'Dressed as a New Zealander' at the Pitt Rivers Museum, 21 March-3 July 2016'. In: *ICME News*, issue 78. See: <http://bit.ly/2cjyPu2>
- Barrett, Natasha. (2016). 'A sensory interpretative journey'. A blog post on [Sensory Labels](#) and [Museum in a Box](#). This resulted from my fieldwork, which included a focus on different types of non-textual object engagements in museums. See [Sensory Objects](#) blog: <http://bit.ly/2efFZBQ> and <http://bit.ly/2ekBeYk>
- Barrett, Natasha. (2016). 'Artist and Empire (Tate Britain, London)' exhibition review. In: *Museum World* journal, vol. 4, pp.225-227. See: <http://bit.ly/2iSkdXG>
- Barrett, Natasha. (2016). 'Honoring and Interpreting the Past: Project Review of the Collaboration between Mori artist George Nuku and National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh'. In: *Museum World* journal, vol. 4, pp.212-214. See: <http://bit.ly/2i7BBc6>
- Barrett, Natasha. (2017). 'Printing and Collecting'. A blog post about the photographic workshops I attended as part fieldwork on alternative engagements with photographs in museums. See [Pitt Rivers Museum Photograph and Manuscripts](#) blog: <http://bit.ly/2jQM PQC>

Scholarly/Public Engagement Activities:

2014

- Prepared and ran a Think Tank (elective workshop) for MA students on Repatriation with a focus on New Zealand, 18 February 2014, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester.

2015

- Presented on my research to two Brazilian PhD Museology students from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil (part of ongoing collaborative project between the School of Museum Studies, the British Council and UNIRIO (The Federal University of Brazil)), 20 October 2015, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester.

2016

- Gave a public talk at the British Museum with Julie Adams, Oceanic Curator. My talk focused on the New Zealand Mori case ('Sustaining Each Other') in the Living and Dying exhibition (Wellcome Trust Gallery), 15 January 2015. I presented on the use of archival and contemporary photographs in the case and the involvement of Ngiti Rnana, the London based Mori cultural group, in the development of the display. See: <http://bit.ly/1IK29tw>
- Presented my research to the Colonial/Postcolonial New Researchers' Workshop group, 22 February 2016, Institute of Historical Research (IHR) at Senate House. These workshops provide a forum for postgraduates and new researchers to meet and present their work on any aspect of colonial or postcolonial history. As per the series foci, I concentrated on the interdisciplinarity of my research, the research methodology, research theories and positioning of research in the colonial past and postcolonial present, as well as the three core museum examples. See: <http://bit.ly/1wLZl3S>
- Prepared and ran a Think Tank on photographs as material and sensory objects for the Art Museum And Gallery Studies (AMAGS) MA students, 1 March 2016, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. This covered: the common positioning of photographs in galleries and museums; how photographs can be approached as three dimensional objects using material and sensorial theories, indigenous engagements with photograph and an examination of exhibitions using a photographic object approach.
- Took part in an interview and a live Twitter discussion with We The Humanities @WetheHumanities to showcase my research and the projects I am involved in (8-9 March 2016).
- Presented at the University of Leicester School of Museum Studies 50th Anniversary Conference, *The Museum in the Global Contemporary Debating the Museum*

of Now (21 April 2016). My paper discussed the roles photographs can play in exhibitions, including as 'contact zones' (Clifford, 1999). It asks whether photographs can contribute towards engendering meaningful exchanges and cultural understanding of indigenous colonised peoples. I used my analysis (archival research, exhibition analysis and interviews) of the Mori display in the British Museum's *Living and Dying* exhibition to illustrate my discussion along with examples from Irish exhibitions curated by Harriet Purkis, whose 2013 article inspired my thinking. See: <http://globalcontemporarymuseum.com>

- Designed a poster presentation for the AHRC M3C Research Festival, 12 May 2016, Nottingham Conference Centre, Nottingham Trent University. See: <http://bit.ly/1WQXXxj>
- Keynote speaker at the MA Museums Studies and Art Museum & Gallery Studies Students Dissertation Conference, 9th June 2016, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. This focused on my research, and covered research and project writing advice.
- Prepared and ran a Think Tank on photographs as material and sensory objects (as above) for the Art Museum And Gallery Studies (AMAGS) MA students, 6 October 2016, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester.
- Gave a short research presentation on the temporal cycles of reuse of photographs featured in my research at the first RAI Photography Salon, 7 December 2016.

2017

- Invited to present my research, focusing on my methodology including theoretical framework, as part of Big Ideas at The National Archives on 23 January 2017. This is a seminar series, which presents innovative ideas and methodologies that can be applied by staff to their own work.
- Presented at the Logic of the Archives workshop 27 April 2017 in Birmingham workshop and featured on the plenary discussion. I covered the appropriateness of the theoretical framework I have chosen and the problems I faced whilst carrying out research on photographic collections in museum archives.
- Co-presented on the Logic of the Archives workshop at the M3C DTP Student Research Festival, 25 May 2017, Leicester. See: <https://vpp.midlands3cities.ac.uk/x/PY8uAQ>

Creative partnership & other projects:

- As part of my ARHC M3C I undertook a creative partnership with the British Museum (2015-2016) alongside my fieldwork at the museum. The creative partnership involved researching, identifying and adding contextual information (e.g. dates, names of photographers and sitters, and geographic locations, historical events) to the New Zealand photographic collections, located in the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. This helped me gain an understanding of and familiarity with the NZ photographic collection and internal museum systems (e.g. internal database). It also gave me opportunities to discuss the collections with curators and other specialist staff in the Anthropology Library and Research Centre. Overall, this experience has provided invaluable insight and contributed towards the development of ideas, which have directly fed into my research.
- Co-curated a selection of objects, including photographs, from the *Joe Orton* collection held in the University of Leicester library's Special Collections department. The project aims were to interpret and display the contemporary ceramic pot created by Orton's niece in response to her uncle's play *Entertaining Mr Sloane* and to promote the library's Joe Orton archival collection. The exhibition/small display focuses on the creative life of Orton (a playwright from Leicester), his sense of black humour and the play. A playful approach (aesthetically and in terms of content) was taken to reflect Orton's character. This included a 'cabinet of curiosities' style case with various drawers containing interactive elements and social biographical/first person interpretation from the pot's perspective. The project culminated in a physical permanent exhibition in the library during July 2016 and an official unveiling by the Orton family and actor Kenneth Cranham on 24 September 2016. For photographs of the display see: <http://bit.ly/2djahof> For more information about the pot see: <http://bit.ly/29LOvrY>
- Committee member of the *Logic of the Archive*. This CDF bid covers planning and running a training workshop aimed at understanding the 'logic' of archives on 27 April 2017 in

Birmingham. Organised in conjunction with M3C partners, the workshop included a broad level subjects, as well as themed approaches e.g. creating displays from archival collections and archives as a career. I also presented at this workshop and featured on the plenary discussion.

Member of:

- Archives & Records Association (ARA)
- Museums Association (MA)
- Museum Ethnographers Group (MEG)
- NZ Studies Network UK & Ireland Te Khui Rangahau Krero m Aotearoa.