

Tusk: Emergent Culture

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Launched in 2015 by Matariki Williams and Nina Finigan, *Tusk – Emergent Culture*¹ is an online platform for people entering GLAM institutions to contribute constructively, in their own voice, to the sector. As a foundational manifesto the website asserts that:

Tusk is our place to engage in a productive, critical manner.

Tusk is our place to test, provoke and prompt for positive change.

Tusk is where we share our voice. It is relevant, current, smart, worthy and humorous.

Tusk is for us. It is our community.

It is a principal intent for Tusk to contribute to strengthening the cultural sector from the ground up.

Operating in an online space has afforded us the freedom that an analogue platform would not have as it has the ability to be immediately responsive, and we can adjust it whenever we need to. Having this adjustable format means that the website, and our social media channels to a lesser extent (Twitter² and Facebook³), can be a testing ground for ideas. The online format enables Tusk to develop quick victories as well as identify quick failures.

The manifesto point about allowing our contributors to speak with their own voice is an important aspect of Tusk. The need for these voices to have autonomy inspired the genesis of the site in the first place. However, it is equally important that the articles published reflect the manifesto above. They need to be ‘prompts for positive change’ and it is within our editorial mandate to not publish writing which does not answer to that point.

An important part of raising the visibility of Tusk has been through presentations given at conferences and hui including the Museums Australasia conference 2016, Kāhui Kaitiaki⁴ May 2016, and the National Digital Forum⁵ 2016. The latter presentation saw us win two awards at the concluding ceremony: the ‘Big Takeaway Award for the talk which inspired people to try something new or different in their practical work’, and the ‘Great Collaborator Award for creating a collaborative space which values diversity and promotes voices from across the sector’. Given our commitment to supporting people who are entering the sector, the author has also given presentations on the website to the Victoria University of Wellington Museum and Heritage Studies programme since 2016.

The landscape in which the site exists however, is not without tension as it exists within a sector where the funding from central government has stagnated (Ministry for Culture & Heritage, 2017), and there is a feeling among employees that they are overworked. This is a reality of the sector, which, the site sits within. Tusk itself is self-funded and subsequently does not have the ability to pay contributors. To further reality check the situation, the GLAM sector is infamous for its low pay, never-ending contract cycles, and a culture of expectation that getting a foot in the door requires unpaid work.

Coupling this with the underrepresentation of Māori in museums (Service IQ, 2015) has meant that ensuring the presence of Māori in our online platform further increases the workload of a sector already stretched. In a 2017 article in *Tusk*, Naiomi Murgatroyd⁶ discusses the remuneration challenges for GLAM institutions based on a 2012 report from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage that states the average salaries in the arts sector are approximately \$13,000 lower than the general average salaries in New Zealand.

These statistics show the sector itself is built on the unpaid work of an already overextended workforce. Making matters worse amongst the reported salary inequity mentioned above is that, in general average salary statistics, Māori women earn 13% less than Pākehā women, and 23% less than a man of any ethnicity. As a wāhine Māori working in a museum, this is not the most inspiring landscape to work amongst, yet it is through the *Tusk* platform that contributors are able to influence the narrative of the sector and redress some of the prominent power and pay inequities. Of our most regular contributors, the majority identify as women with a minority of those identifying as Māori. Given that I am one of the co-founder/co-editors and have the access to our social media accounts, mine is the most prominent Māori voice on the site and I have written extensively about my experience as a wāhine Māori in the sector.⁷

Further ways in which *Tusk* effectively presents Māori voices, bringing a great richness of *kōrero*, are our *Tuakana*⁸, *On the Level*⁹ and *Ringatoi*¹⁰ profiles. Each of the profiles feature standardised questions and for *Tuakana* these are posed to people in the sector who have influenced and supported our contributors and ourselves. As the *Tuakana* section tagline states, “A *Tuakana* is someone for us to learn from in a reciprocal way. *Tuakana* inspire us and make the sector a welcoming and supportive place.” There is an evident correlation between the gender split in our regular contributors and our *Tuakana* profiles in that the majority of both are women, and the *Tuakana* profiles do have a higher rate of ethnic diversity. From these profiles it is clear that identifying as Māori in a museum environment has a significant influence on the way in which each of the respondents undertakes their work and how they interact with their colleagues.

To illustrate this point, it is best to use the words of our respondents, as per the following excerpts from *Tuakana* profiles.

Janeen Love, Exhibitions Content Developer at Auckland War Memorial Museum on the day-to-day challenges faced as a wāhine Māori in a museum workplace, “Balancing being a Māori working in a museum and working to my job description (and sometimes the only Māori in the village/meeting room).” She also describes the inherent value of a *tuakana/teina* relationship, “Mā te *tuakana* e tōtika te *teina*, mā te *teina* e tōtika te *tuakana*. Help keep the sector real. Trade your knowledge *your perspective is valuable* with *tuakana*. Understand your own *mana* and bring that to the *hui*.”¹¹

Leanne Tamaki, Researcher (Māori Content) at Manatū Taonga | Ministry for Culture and Heritage on her hope for the sector to boldly acknowledge te ao Māori in a tangible way, “Prioritising the importance of Māori culture and heritage so that it is a

given. Moving recognition beyond box ticking, compartmentalisation or a ‘nice-to-have’. Helping us along the pathway to where we compassionately and easily embrace, celebrate and integrate things Māori. Also recognising that the benefits in doing this are many. It’s not privileging one over another; it is but another window through which to see. It is an opportunity for growth and it should be taken.”¹²

Tryphena Cracknell, Development Co-ordinator at Hastings City Art Gallery on what she thinks new people bring to the sector, in reference to the Emerging Museums Professionals group and Tusk, “Something that stands out for me in both of these examples is that they are founded on a natural expectation that Te Tiriti be honoured in theory and in practice. Feels like the future is in good hands.”¹³

Chanel Clarke, Curator Māori at Auckland War Memorial Museum on the challenges museums face in gaining relevance in Māori communities,

Becoming irrelevant if we haven’t already. My roots are in a very small settlement that in times past prospered and was considered the food bowl of the north. Unfortunately this community is now one of the most depressed in the country topping the charts across all socio-economic and health indicators for Māori.

While, as a museum, we could pat ourselves on the back for performing outreach work at the tribal festival and reconnecting whānau with their museum held taonga. I do wonder what the point of it all is when the biggest question on the minds of our rangatahi is not ‘wow this taonga belonged to Chief so and so but where is the after party at?’ We might think we have contributed to the overall health and cultural well-being of a community but let us not kid ourselves here. Our communities are suffering from systemic issues that will take more than a few taonga transported out for a day or a weekend to fix.

It concerns me too that as Māori we have lost, to an extent, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and learning. As museums, do we have a role to play in this? Is it even our job to fix the ills of society? One thing I know for sure is that it will take out of the box thinking and a genuine commitment to the long-term aspirations of iwi rather than one hit wonders. But I’ll leave that thinking to you young guns!¹⁴

A recurring theme in the responses from wāhine Māori in the sector is the tension they each feel about working in museum spaces. The way in which they talk about the presence of their culture in their work, regardless of whether it is part of their role, is an important reminder. For Māori, working in a sector built on culture and heritage, we are often asked to provide expertise that has come from being Māori as separate to the parameters laid out in our job descriptions. This discomfit has seen dialogue in these Tuakana profiles requesting to have cultural competency built throughout the sector. However, they also acknowledge that they do not need to fix all the problems now, as, there is a generation of workers coming up behind them who can continue to build on what they have achieved.

One of the questions asked of each Tuakana is what they see emerging people contributing to the sector and most answers are a variation of the same answer: they bring energy, innovation, new ideas and a fresh perspective. These answers led to the establishment of the On the Level (OTL) profiles to provide a space for peers to present this fresh perspective in their own words. Again, the majority of the respondents are women with a minority of these identifying as Māori. In a similar vein to the Tuakana, the OTL respondents are influenced by their culture as much as they are by their ages. Interestingly, unlike the *Tuakana*, their culture was presented as a point of strength that spurs them forward wanting only for there to be more Māori in the sector and greater recognition of what it means to work truly biculturally.

Again, it is in their own words that these opinions are most powerful.

Bridget Reweti, Exhibitions Officer at Pātaka Art + Museum, independent artist¹⁵ and one quarter of Mata Aho collective¹⁶ on what first got her hooked on being part of the sector, “Art! But I also remember the first time I went into Te Āhuru Mōwai, Te Whare Pora and what was the Pounamu store at Te Papa. It was a pivotal experience that cemented my decision in wanting to work with our taonga Māori, people and narratives. I love going into those collection stores. Te Whare Pora especially is one of my favourite places because it holds such a wealth of knowledge about Māori women’s skills, adoption of new technologies and extremely high standard of quality in making.”¹⁷

Chloe Cull, previously of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery on positive change she would like to see in the sector, “I would like to see more Māori students studying art history in Aotearoa and moving on to work in art galleries.”¹⁸

A more recent addition to the website is our Occasional column, which features our first respondent in the Ringatoi artists’ profiles.

Sarah Hudson is an artist who works both independently¹⁹ and as one quarter of the Mata Aho collective²⁰. Responding when questioned about the difficulties she has faced as an artist, here she describes the most pressing issue for her,

Burnout. High demand, high pressure, short time-frames, burnout. (Some) Institutions talk about ‘artist burnout’, but I have only had one gallery where they were actually like, ‘oh nah yeah, come back to us when you’re not so busy and look after yourself bebe’. Well, they may not have put it like that but, it felt really good to not have felt wrung out after an exchange.²¹

Hudson’s response shows that issues which affect people in museums, are similarly felt by people working in the art world. These issues were some of the main driving factors behind establishing *Tusk*. Working in roles where you feel like you do not have the ability to affect positive change can be demoralising. Eking out space, by establishing our own platform, has empowered us as well as our contributors in a way we had not expected. More importantly, by presenting te reo Māori and Māori viewpoints, it is our hope that it will increase the

exposure to, and representation of, Māori perspectives as we feel it is imperative that the understanding of these perspectives is deepened and the burden which many Māori staff feel that they carry, is shared.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://www.tuskculture.com>
- ² <https://twitter.com/TuskCulture>
- ³ <https://www.facebook.com/TuskCulture>
- ⁴ A network of Māori staff working in Aotearoa's museums and galleries
- ⁵ <http://www.ndf.org.nz>
- ⁶ <https://www.tuskculture.com/writing/paysisterssameasmisters>
- ⁷ <https://www.tuskculture.com/contributors>
- ⁸ <https://www.tuskculture.com/tuakana>
- ⁹ <https://www.tuskculture.com/on-the-level>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.tuskculture.com/occassional/ringatoisarahhudson>
- ¹¹ <https://www.tuskculture.com/tuakana/2017/2/15/janneen-love>
- ¹² <https://www.tuskculture.com/tuakana/tuhoekanaleanne>
- ¹³ <https://www.tuskculture.com/tuakana/tryphenacracknell>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.tuskculture.com/tuakana/chanelclarke>
- ¹⁵ <http://www.bridgetreweti.com>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.mataahocollective.com>
- ¹⁷ <https://www.tuskculture.com/on-the-level/bridgetreweti>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.tuskculture.com/on-the-level/2016/8/3/on-the-level-chloe-cull-1>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.sarahhudson.co.nz>
- ²⁰ <https://www.mataahocollective.com>
- ²¹ <https://www.tuskculture.com/occassional/ringatoisarahhudson>

References

- Ministry for Culture and Heritage. (2017). *Budget*. Retrieved from <http://chewydata.com/samples/170525-Budget2017/#expenditure.real.2017.2733>.
- Service IQ. (2015). *Service sector demographics*. Retrieved from <http://www.serviceiq.org.nz/assets/Attachments/Workforce-Development/Service-sector-demographic-infographics.pdf>.