

The Commonwealth Association of Museums Triennial Conference 2024

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The Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM) Triennial Conference co-hosted by Tāmaki Paenga Auckland Museum and Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato in March 2024, offered a jam-packed programme of presentations, workshops and a day at Waikato Museum.

The conference's programme of talks, workshops and discussions dove into many different projects and experiences. As an emerging professional, while there was a lot for me to learn, I also felt privileged to be part of the sharing and discussions that took place throughout the week. Speakers from around the Commonwealth presented case studies and projects that explored the preservation, adaption or revitalisation of knowledge systems and practices, and the role of GLAMS within this. Emerging from the themes of community, kaitiakitanga and decolonisation, was the call for indigenous groups to take control of knowledge and objects and question or reframe the traditional notion of the museum. Almost as if leading by example, the conference's programme was not confined to presentations, encouraging the sharing of language, traditional practices, and material culture: producing moments that enhanced the week's conclusions for me.

The first of these, among many, was a Pōwhiri at Waipapa Marae and opening with two keynotes, which introduced use of te reo Māori throughout the conference — beginning from the Pōwhiri — that opened the space to all delegates for the week to explore with the programme's themes. Before the special session "Working with communities to address trauma" and, in particular, the talk "Reclaiming Shingwauk Hall", there was a traditional Smudging Ceremony, when, in a brief break between pouring rain, the group was invited outside to join the Ceremony. Throughout the week, everyone was captivated by the colourful outfits of CAM board member Nichodimas Cooper, who was wearing clothing constructed from Nama Patchwork in the lead up to his talk "Inspiration Behind Nama Patchwork". Nichodimas' talk introduced the history of Nama Patchwork, and it was interesting to learn about this history after seeing different variations of both pattern and garment. And just as there was the opportunity to see Nama Patchwork, I really enjoyed the Sharing Space that displayed and introduced Tāmaki Paenga's textile and fibre knowledge exchange centre. With different items from the museum's textile collection on display, along with items from the documentary heritage collection, there was a lot to learn about the community-led focus of the textile and fibre knowledge exchange centre. I found it really valuable to talk with team members about their work in the space and the objects on display. While viewing "A Catalogue of Different Specimens of Cloth Collected in the Three Voyages of Captian Cook", a book containing pages of Tapa cloth, it was interesting to hear that the known copies of this book mainly reside in libraries outside Aotearoa, so as this copy was donated to the museum, it can make a significant contribution to the textile and fibre knowledge exchange centre.

I'm sure that, like many who attended the conference, my favourite day was the excursion to Waikato Museum and the experience of Māori artists Lissy and Rudy Cole's "Wharenuī Harikoa". The woven neon Wharenuī fusing traditional whakairo with contemporary materials and colours brought many of

the week's themes to fruition. Alongside other tangible and intangible manifestations of these ideas, the Wharenui could not be ignored — it's so big that many institutions don't have the physical space for it! A conservator at the conference commented on the challenges the physical materiality of the work will present to conservators in the future. Reflecting on my learning from the conference, the conservation of "Wharenui Harikoa" it will be interesting to see the outcomes of the challenges and opportunities this work presents to museums and galleries as it moves to different locations.

I hope my summary has captured how, throughout the duration of the conference, there were many opportunities to engage with and learn from the programme of presentations and workshops. But also how the week was enriched through the sharing language, traditional practices and material culture, making my time at the conference much more meaningful as I apply my new knowledge and understanding to future practice. I would also like to extend a large amount of gratitude to ICOM Aotearoa New Zealand who supported my attendance, without which my presence at the Commonwealth Association of Museums Triennial Conference would not have been possible.