

Rata Holtslag, Assistant Curator,
Acquisitions Services, Alexander Turnbull Library.



1. *What is your name and what do you do?*

Kia ora, I'm Rata, an Assistant Curator in the Acquisitions Services Team at the Alexander Turnbull Library. This team was established toward the end of 2023 to manage incoming donations.

2. *Can you tell us a little bit about the path that led to your current role?*

I have always been interested in cultural heritage – I come from a family of artists and archivists – but my career kicked off after I completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Museum & Heritage Practice at Te Herenga Waka. After finishing my studies, I got a Library Assistant job at the Alexander Turnbull Library. I was intending for this to be a stopgap as my goal was to work in galleries and museums, but I fell in love with the collection and the variety of the work.

I secured a role in the Arrangement & Description team, and then later a fixed-term role in the Curatorial team, which later became Acquisitions Services. I have been at the Turnbull for over

five years now and am lucky to have worked in a variety of roles during that time, getting a taste of how different parts of the Library function.

3. *What is your biggest challenge in your current role?*

The volume of work. The Acquisitions Services team primarily deals with incoming donation offers, appraisal, and accessioning. But we also assist the Curatorial team with collection backlogs, complete desk shifts, work on projects, and retrieve collection items for internal and external clients, amongst other things. As is the case for most repositories, the collections come in faster than we can process them, so there is always work to be done. Each and every one of us has several projects we'd love to dedicate ourselves to (for me it's a full audit and rehousing of the Ephemera collections) but there is not enough time in the day! We've been lucky to have some very diligent interns over the years, but it would be great to see some resources be dedicated to getting all of the collections to a manageable state.

4. *What is your favourite archive or collection you have seen or would like to see?*

Two stand out to me, as a lover of both fashion and music. In 2015, I was lucky enough to see the *Björk* exhibition at MoMA (the Museum of Modern Art in New York). The exhibition showcased the singer,

songwriter and artist and included sound, film, visuals, instruments, objects, and costumes, as well as plenty of ephemera. It was a really incredible, immersive way to understand Björk's body of work and attempt to get inside her head (an impossible feat!). The costumes were out of this world, but I found her lyric drafts most touching. Her handwriting is beautiful. Very Scandinavian. In a similar vein, I saw *David Bowie is*, at ACMI (the Museum of Screen Culture in Melbourne) later that year. It was equally unusual, as expected. The highlight there was definitely the costumes!

I am also morbidly fascinated by the Wellcome Collection (a free library and museum in London focusing on health) and am interested in how it's morphed over the years to become a more inclusive, contemporary-focused institution.

5. *What do you most enjoy about the work you do?*

While I've pointed out the volume of work as the biggest challenge, it is also one of the things I enjoy most. My role is incredibly varied, meaning I could spend a whole day on paperwork and then follow it with a whole day working with collections. I love being able to move between tasks. It keeps the days very interesting! We've undergone some changes in process recently too, and I've loved the strategy and planning associated with that. But most of all, it's the people! I have an amazing team who make even the

most banal tasks seem fun. I have been very grateful to learn from my colleagues across the Library; everyone is so passionate and very generous with their knowledge. There is a real shared purpose of ensuring collections are accessible to and representative of Aotearoa New Zealand, and I feel very lucky to be part of that.

6. *Do you have any recent notable acquisitions or taonga that you'd like to highlight to ARANZ members?*

To follow on with the music and ephemera theme, I have recently accessioned a collection of posters by Garage Collective. Garage Collective was an independent screen-printing collective founded by fellow ARANZ member and Turnbullite, Jared Davidson, with the intention of avoiding the commercial design and printing industry. The Collective was run out of Jared's garage in Christchurch between 2006 and 2009. Jared hand-screen-printed posters and other ephemera for bands, political groups, and artists in small, limited edition runs. Some of the posters were designed by Jared himself, but most are by illustrators and designers such as Toby Morris, Hadley Donaldson, and Luke Wood. This is a really fun collection, and of interest to me as a former Ōtautahi resident who was going to gigs during the years that Garage Collective was active. The posters are visually interesting and feel very characteristic of the late 2000s. I hope they get plenty of use!