



March 8th, 2023

## **PUBLIC STATEMENT: FNMISA's Address on Graham Gillmore's "Portrait of a Woman in a Renaissance Costume with Cadmium Middle"**

Tēnā tātou,

It is well known that Indigenous Peoples continue to face significantly higher levels of discrimination and marginalisation as a result of the ongoing processes of colonisation which remain ingrained in colonial institutions such as universities. It appears that Simon Fraser University is actively maintaining these systemic barriers of colonial oppression and is failing to meet the needs of Indigenous students.

On Wednesday, January the 4th 2023, Indigenous Māori students visiting Simon Fraser University on an exchange programme to further their understandings of Indigenous Studies were shocked at the sight of Graham Gillmore's "portrait" of a Victorian-era woman in traditional Māori facial tattooing, mataora. Their concerns that it was in fact mataora that featured in this portrait were confirmed by a highly offensive [article](#) written by The Peak in 2015. Considering the immensely sacred nature of facial tattooing for Māori Peoples, and the inappropriate and incorrect application of it to a portrait of a white woman, you can understand the deep disrespect and disgust these students expressed. As such, these Māori students have requested our support in approaching Simon Fraser University to have this "portrait" remedied.

It is absolutely unacceptable that in 2023, Indigenous students from any part of the world, are confronted with the reality that institutions such as Simon Fraser University actively maintain their oppression through "art" which so severely and proudly appropriates the most sacred aspects of their culture for the entertainment of the non-Indigenous majority. Nor is it acceptable that Indigenous students be faced with such offensive and disgraceful "art" every time they walk through this university campus. Importantly, it is not the job of Indigenous students to remind universities of their obligations to reconcile relationships with Indigenous Peoples, yet, Indigenous students are consistently in the position of having to do emotional labour to ensure they can walk across the campus like any other student.

On behalf of these students we request that Simon Fraser University seriously consider the recommendations below.

1. Make a public statement apologising for the harm caused to Māori Peoples by the proud display of Graham Gillmore's art in this university.
2. Not remove the art, but instead allow the impacted students to amend this "art" as they see fit. This includes consulting with these students to ensure that any efforts to



reconcile colonial harms reinforced by this university come from the voices of the community they seek to reconcile relationships with.

3. Demand that The Peak publicly apologise for and amend their 2015 article which further contributes to the ongoing oppression and marginalisation of all Indigenous students, including Māori students.
4. Ensure that Māori facial tattooing created by non-Māori artists is never again displayed for the sake of entertainment at any Simon Fraser University campus.

Please note, these students are currently in discussions with their home university on how to resolve this issue if they are not satisfied with the response from Simon Fraser University.

It is our hope that this egregious appropriation of Māori culture is reconciled in a way that respects the wishes of the impacted students. Furthermore, it is hoped that this incident will spark conversations on the continued disrespect Indigenous Peoples across the world are confronted with every day. This is an opportunity to educate the wider Simon Fraser University community on why Indigenous Peoples cannot be used simply as faces for entertainment. It is also an opportunity to reconsider the efforts Simon Fraser University is making to decolonise this institution to ensure that all students have the equal opportunity to participate in a positive educational experience.

E mihi ana ki a koutou katoa,

Nā FNMISA

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Association

<https://the-peak.ca/2015/02/sfu-masterpiece-portrait-of-a-woman-in-a-renaissance-costume-with-cadmium-middle/>