



# MERATA

## How Mum Decolonised the Screen

A Film by Heperi Mita

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#Decolonisethescreen

# Technical Information

Film: Merata: How Mum Decolonised the Screen

Duration: 95 minutes

Genre: Documentary

Available format: DCP (2D 2K, Colour)

Ratio: 1:1.85

Sound: Dolby 5.1

Frame rate: 24 fps

Language: English

Country of Origin: Aotearoa New Zealand

Year of completion: 2018

## Festival screenings

2018 New Zealand International Film Festival

2018 Rotorua Indigenous Film Festival

2019 Sundance Film Festival

2019 Berlin International Film Festival (NATIVE Programme)

2019 Hawaii International Film Festival – Spring Showcase

## Reviews

“a richly personal portrait” – New Zealand International Film Festival

★★★★ “Merata deserves more than most to have her story and her work remembered, re-evaluated and celebrated. Her own son has achieved all that” – Stuff

“an incredibly moving account of this determined Māori woman defying the constraints of her context, at great personal cost, to help forge of pathways for Māori, for women, and for indigenous storytellers worldwide. Merata lays down a wero for us all: what will we do with our own lives to make a better future for the generations who follow?” – The Spinoff

“She is a trailblazer in that regard, deserving to be talked about alongside Spike Lee, Charles Burnett and co, in terms of influence and in terms of making art within dominant power structures”  
– The Pantograph Punch

“a loving and often revealing portrait of a seminal figure in the development of this country’s film culture.” – The Listener

# Synopsis

An intimate story of the birth of indigenous cinema told from the perspective of Merata Mita's son Heperi Mita.

The sudden death of pioneering Māori filmmaker Merata Mita in 2010 led her son on a journey to uncover a story of a mother's love that changed the landscape of indigenous participation in film forever.

As a film archivist Hepi uncovers never before seen footage and shares deep personal accounts of her life that led her to blaze the trail for many indigenous voices we celebrate today; Warwick Thornton, Taika Waititi, Sterlin Harjo and Zoe Hopkins to name a few. This film is an important historical account of a movement we owe our indigenous voice to.

Merata was the first Māori woman to write and direct a narrative feature in 1988 titled *Mauri*. Merata's political films highlighted the injustices for Māori people during the 1980's and often divided the country. She became an international hero with her work but considered a domestic nuisance.

Merata worked across the globe and for various respected organisations including the BBC and National Geographic. She directed on Hollywood sets, interviewed Robert Mugabe and followed Louis Farakhan, there was nothing she was afraid of especially if it meant a voice for the voiceless.

She was fearless.

But the suffering of her family during these times was all too real. Her drive for social justice would have to be weighed against the dangers her work would expose them to.

Merata Mita is the grandmother of Indigenous Cinema. This film is a dedication to her life's work towards that goal.

**“The revolution isn't just running out with a gun, if a film I make causes indigenous people to feel stronger about themselves then I'm achieving something worthwhile for the revolution.”**

**– Merata Mita**

# Heperi Mita – Director Bio



Born into a movie making family, a career in the film industry was inescapable for director Heperi Mita (of Māori Ngāti Pikiao and Ngāi Te Rangi) - not that he didn't try. His media career began in 2007, working in online journalism for the Pulitzer prize winning Las Vegas Sun newspaper. He returned to his home country of Aotearoa / New Zealand in 2011, following the death of his mother - indigenous film making pioneer Merata Mita.

It was here that he began his career as an archivist with Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, the nation's film archive. The combination of these experiences culminated in his directorial debut with documentary *Merata: How Mum Decolonised the Screen* which premiered at the 2018 New Zealand International film festival.

Heperi was recently awarded the '2018 Pacific Islanders in Communication Trailblazer Award' at the Hawaii International Film Festival.

## Director's Statement

I never saw my mum as a filmmaker, nor was she ever an activist in my eyes. She was always a loving mum. And as the youngest of her six kids, that was the only side of her that I really knew.

There was a lot about her 68 years of life I didn't know, and it is within the vaults of the film archive that she tells me the story of her past.

My mum, Merata, was the first Māori woman, and first indigenous woman in the world, to write and direct a narrative feature film. She directed movies in Hollywood, interviewed Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, and worked for various respected organisations around the world such as the BBC and National Geographic.

Her independent political documentaries of the '70s and '80s highlighted the injustices for Māori people in New Zealand, and often divided the country.

But the suffering of my older siblings during these times was all too real. Her drive for social justice would have to be weighed against the dangers her work would expose them to.

By weaving together films discovered within the vaults of the archives with the deep personal accounts of my older brothers and sister, a deeply intimate portrait emerges, and my mother's story reveals itself to me, and to the rest of the world, for the first time.

## Chelsea Winstanley – Producer Statement



Although this film has been five years in the making, what is presented on screen is a legacy that spans decades and the influence will be felt for generations to come. Merata was not only a mentor to many of us who now have a voice within the film industry, but she was also a social justice fighter for so many who were not being heard. She put herself on the front-line capturing events in our history that document the courage, resilience and strength of those often marginalised in society and more often than not, it was her own Māori people she was documenting. If it were not for Merata's staunch conviction and the will to keep fighting for opportunities for Māori to be in control of their own stories, we would not have the thriving industry we have today. There is still more to do but she paved the way and we will never forget; this film is a tribute to her legacy.

# Key Credits

Director: Heperi Mita  
Producer: Chelsea Winstanley  
Executive Producer: Cliff Curtis  
Creative Producer: Tearepa Kahi  
Associate Producer: Manutai Schuster  
DOP: Mike Jonathon  
Editor: Te Rurehe Paki  
Consulting Editor: Annie Collins  
Production Manager: Elise Francis  
Post Production Supervisor: Desray Armstrong  
Production Company: Ārama Pictures

# Cast

Merata Mita  
Rafer Rautjoki  
Richard Rautjoki  
Rhys Rautjoki  
Awatea Mita  
Eruera "Bob" Mita  
Heperi Mita  
Alanis Obomsawin  
Jesse Went  
C.M. Kaliko & Tammy Haili'opua Baker  
Heather Rae  
Bird Runningwater  
Andrew Okpeaha MacLean  
Sterlin Harjo  
Pauline Clague  
Blackhorse Lowe  
Taika Waititi

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