

CITATION FOR THE APANZ DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD 16 FEBRUARY 2026

GABRIELA MERCADO

Since joining APANZ (then NZAP) in 2005 Gabriela has been a vibrant, charismatic, and extremely generous member of our Association. She travelled to Aotearoa New Zealand from Argentina in the late 1990's and has creatively made a wonderful life here, beginning to train in psychotherapy shortly after her arrival. Coming to this country from Argentina, where psychoanalysis has a long and rich history, and where dream interpretation is available from your taxi driver, she had a cultural head start, and Gabriela has been gracefully engaging with the craft and profession of psychotherapy ever since. In her early years as a member of our Association she was a very active Northern Branch member, including making several now famous appearances as Father Christmas at the annual Christmas party. She joined and contributed with energy and deep sensitivity to the work of Ngā Ao e Rua, a group of Auckland psychotherapists exploring the interface of te ao Māori and psychotherapy. She was a founding associate member of Waka Oranga and has been one of the most consistent attendees of Waka Oranga hui, wānanga and events. She has been a central figure in building and sustaining APANZ relationship with our Te Tiriti o Waitangi partner over the past 20 years.

Gabriela joined APANZ Council in 2017 and was on Council for 8 years until 2025. In the years 2018-2024, she coordinated the multiple reviews of various APANZ committees. These reviews enhanced the life of our Association enormously, as each committee changed in structure, increasing their ability to enrich what they offered to all members. Recognition of Gabriela's standing and leadership ability was further recognised when she was elected and served as APANZ President elect in 2021-2022, President 2022-2024 (with 10 months leave in 2022-2023) and Past President 2024-2025. Gabriela's Presidency commenced under difficult circumstances due to personal family matters. With integrity and thoughtfulness, she took time out to attend to her family's needs. Having done so, she returned with enthusiasm, sensitivity, and enormous energy for the life and heart of APANZ. She was very active with the Northern region branch throughout. She co-convened the "Thanatos at my Table" workshop in Auckland in 2022, and liaised closely with all other branches, taking the "Breaking Bad" workshop around the country. In 2024 she co-initiated the online National APANZ monthly gatherings, "Mind-fields", further enhancing our opportunity and ability as Association members to think deeply together, as she invited us to "gather around the fire". As President Gabriela was also particularly active in supporting students to involve themselves with our Association. And throughout her Presidency Gabriela was skilful and dedicated in guiding initiatives in relation to the SOGICE report and Rainbow Rōpū.

As a leader Gabriela was enabling and dynamic in generating a culture of kindness and energetic creativity, both at the council table and amongst the wider APANZ membership. The warmth of collegiality amongst Council members, and the creativity of their work together during Gabriela's term, is a tribute to Gabriela's leadership. As a member and as President, Gabriela has gained the respect and admiration of the entire membership. The vitality and creativity of our organisation owe much to Gabriela's generous spirit, as she adds just the right amount of Argentinian flair to our indigenous and non-indigenous Aotearoa New Zealand dynamics.

Gabriela, Argentina's partial loss is Aotearoa New Zealand's tremendous gain: you are a taonga to our profession, and to us. You have been a truly wonderful contributor to APANZ, and to the life of psychotherapy in this country, and we are all deeply grateful.