

Thursday, March 3, 2016

Community

Tuhoe chief's portrait is Goldie gold

A rare national treasure featuring a Tuhoe chief is expected to sell for more than \$1 million.

The work is the last major painting by New Zealand artist Charles Frederick Goldie.

Titled "A Noble Relic of a Noble Race" the painting was Goldie's last significant work, painted in 1941 before he died at the age of 76.

It features Tuhoe chief Te Wharekauri Tahuna and will be auctioned at Parnell's International Art Centre next month.

Te Wharekauri Tahuna, Ngati Manawa (Tuhoe) tribe, appeared in several portraits by Charles Goldie. Te Wharekauri was a priest (tohunga) from the Galatea district near Murupara and Goldie took several photos of him from which he later made a series of important works. These include several versions of portraits that he completed from 1910 onwards and two are now in the Auckland Art Gallery and Te Papa Tongarewa.

The International Art Centre's director Richard Thomson said the artwork is one of the painter's best.

"This is a national treasure and not many works of art deserve that title.

"Goldie had an ability to draw people into his art because his paintings were so compelling and intriguing. It is a painting with a true presence," Mr Thomson said.

The painting has garnered national and

international interest and is expected to sell for about \$1.2 million.

If sold for this price, it will be the highest-selling painting by Goldie.

Because the painting was a work of national significance, it would likely need special approval under the Protected Objects Act 1975, if the new owner wanted to take it overseas, Mr Thomson said.

The painting is in its original frame, thought to have been made by Goldie's father.

The various portraits show Te Wharekauri either in profile or full-frontal, either with a white wispy beard or clean shaven. However there are features common to all the portraits — the greenstone ear pendants, the cloak and the fine tiki suspended from his neck on a cord.

The sculptor Nelson Illingworth had already modelled Te Wharekauri in 1908, and a reference to this in a newspaper clipping kept by Goldie inspired the artist to visit him soon after and take the photographs.

The long-lived Te Wharekauri spent most of his life in the rugged Te Urewera, and Whirinaki, and fought in battles against colonial forces at Te Tumu in 1836 and Te Arika in 1854.

Because Goldie based all his portraits of Te Wharekauri on the same photos, the subject appears to be the same age in all versions.

The current example is strongly lit from the viewer's left and shows the tohunga's features in shadowy profile with the light illuminating and dramatising his finely-painted facial moko.

The tactile grooves of the moko cause the viewer to "feel" the chisel indentations — an illusion brilliantly conveyed by the artist's brush.

A French authority on tattooing said in a letter to Goldie in 1935, "You have proved that art and documentation are not incompatible".

In all versions, Te Wharekauri looks downwards, his eyes half-closed as if in meditation or communication with the spirit world. The pooling of shadow

under his eyebrows intensifies the mood of introspection and inner thought, seemingly disengaging him from reality.

Goldie enhances the illusion of proximity to the sitter by cropping the image to head and shoulders and projecting the head in three dimensions with strong chiaroscuro, adding volume.

The differing textures of the hair and beard, the tattoo and skin, the polished surfaces of the greenstone and the cloak encapsulate a classic Goldie of his finest period.

His moko, usually hidden under a beard, is significant because he was thought to be the last fully-tattooed Maori seen in Te Urewera.



□ A close-up of the Goldie painting of Tuhoe chief Te Wharekauri Tahuna, showing the intricately-chiselled full-face tattooing.

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