

Charles Frederick Goldie OBE (1870-1947)*Sad Memories Ngaheke**(An Arawa Chieftainess)*

oil on canvas

signed and dated 'C. F. Goldie 1916'

(lower right); inscribed "Sad Memories",

Ngaheke (An Arawa Chieftainess) by C. F.

Goldie, price 15.15.0' to reverse

25.5 x 20.5cm

\$400,000 - \$500,000

PROVENANCE

Auckland Society of Arts Exhibition, 1917

Sale, Cordy's, Auckland, 7 May 1971, lot 51 (\$4,000)

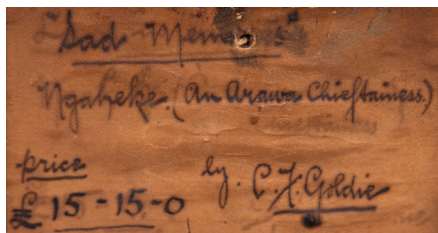
Private collection, North Island

EXHIBITED

Auckland Society of Arts Exhibition

Catalogue 1917

Dominion, 19 May 1972

H P Newrick, *NZ Art Auction Records, 1969-1972* (Wellington 1973), p. 171. plate 24 (B/W)Alister Taylor & Jan Glen, *C. F. Goldie (1870-1974) His Life & Painting* (Martinborough 1977) p. 241 (B/W)*Condition report available on request*

Particularly within the context of New Zealand's art history Goldie's portraits of Maori have been both celebrated and condemned in equal measure: Adored and coveted by collectors, ignored or dismissed by critics as being formulaic or demeaning of their subjects. The averted gaze, the downcast eyes have become the leitmotif of Goldie's visual message, collectively nurturing and supporting the attitude prevailing at the time this work was painted – that Maori was a dying race.

The demeanour of Arawa Chieftainess Ngaheke in her portrait displays several of these characteristics. But there are certain other notable features which make the work unique amongst the other Goldie portraits of this period. It is very much purely head and shoulders format on a small sized canvas, perhaps painted from a photograph at the request of another member of her whanau. Personal adornment such as greenstone earrings, hei tikis or cloaks are notably absent. In the preceding year of 1915 Goldie had painted a larger format profile portrait of Pirira Te Kahukura (Ngaheke) entitled *The widow* displaying all of these items. These tend to draw the viewer's attention to Goldie's technical abilities and deflect from the emotions of the sitter. This much smaller portrait emphasises the emotions and thoughts which Ngaheke might be experiencing. The hand supporting the head, a traditional sign of melancholy, conveys an attitude of resignation which reinforces the overall portrayal of her despondency. Culturally the downcast eyes or averted gaze could also be shielding her wairua/spirit from the intrusion

of imagery of any kind. Her downcast eyes create uncertainty between deep meditation or actual sleep. The muted coolness of the green background almost merges with the pattern of the familiar checked blanket over Ngaheke's shoulders so that her face and head are brought forward and fill the canvas more significantly. The pipe bowl is empty suggestive of an inner emptiness.

Conscious of the nineteenth century history of Maori/ European contact with its wars, land sales and confiscations and her own more immediate personal loss this particular portrait of Chieftainess Ngaheke transcends ethnic or sociological considerations. The Goldie 'formula' combined with his meticulous technique greatly benefits from the limited size of the canvas to convey in simple and direct terms a very human study of sadness.

Tony Mackle

