

Charles Frederick Goldie painted Te Kamaka, a rangatira of Ngāti Maniapoto, on five occasions between 1916 and 1921. The artist preferred to depict elderly Māori who still wore traditional tā moko and thus frequently reused the same models for multiple compositions. This painting is representative of the domestic scale works that Goldie increasingly produced during the 1910s, intended for middle class collectors. In contrast to his larger brush-textured canvases, these more intimate works were usually painted on wooden panels, with completely smooth surfaces. Such close-up, bust-length paintings allowed Goldie to showcase his skill – derived from his academic training – at depicting closely observed details, contrasting textures and the intricacies of wrinkled and tattooed skin.

Unlike commissioned portraits, where the sitter pays to be depicted, Goldie paid his models. The traditional garb and adornments they wear were usually drawn from the artist's own collection of Māori costumes and props, rather than being the personal possessions of his sitters. Both the intricate korowai (tasselled cloak) and pounamu hei tiki worn by Te Kamaka appear in several of Goldie's other paintings. In this work the Ngāti Maniapoto elder also wears a maka taringa, or sharks tooth earring. An element of theatre is apparent in the various personae that Goldie's models perform. In many instances the paintings' anecdotal titles and models' melancholic demeanors served to reinforce the belief that Māori were a dying race, an inaccurate and problematic view held by many Pākehā during the early twentieth century.

Writing on the 1918 exhibition of the Auckland Society of Arts, the reviewer for the New Zealand Herald observed: "Mr. Goldie's work consists of small portraits, finished with his characteristic perfection of detail, and splendidly typical of the Maori, in whom he finds such constant inspiration." (31 May 1918). Amongst the works on display was another painting of Te Kamaka titled "*The Whitening Snows of Venerable Eld*": *Kamaka An Chieftain of the Maniapoto Tribe (Aged 90 Years)*. The title of this work is taken from James Thompson's allegorical poem *The Castle of Indolence* (1748). Goldie regularly titled his paintings with phrases borrowed from British poetry, further reinforcing the manner in which his paintings reflect Pākehā sentiments. While this title emphasises Te Kamaka's age, by calling the present work *The Diplomatist* Goldie instead focuses on his subject's intellect and skill. Te Kamaka was involved with the Kingitanga movement in the Waikato, thus it seems likely that intertribal and cross-cultural diplomacy formed part of his lived experience.

The painting gains much of its visual impact by presenting Te Kamaka in profile against the patterned surface of a raupo whare. During the late nineteenth century, many proponents of aestheticism esteemed the profile portrait for its decorative effect and emotional restraint. At the same time, with the expansion of European colonisation the format was frequently deployed as a tool of ethnography, used to document the physiognomies of different racial types. In this painting, the downward tilt of Te Kamaka's head imbues the elder with an introspective demeanour, according him the dignity of a thinking, feeling individual. The profile format also allows him a degree of privacy in his thoughts, avoiding the maudlin sentimentality found in some lesser paintings. Thus, what at first sight may appear to be straight-forward depiction, gradually reveals its complex interplay of cultural, aesthetic and emotional conventions and effects.

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