

*When Evening Shadows Fall* is an intriguing early work by New Zealand's most celebrated academic artist, Charles Frederick Goldie. The amorphous sea and sky occupy two thirds of this intimate canvas. To the upper left, the evening sun sheds a final, flame-like burnish upon the expanse of cloud as it retreats from the encroaching expanse of violet. With a quirky symmetry, the form of the sandhills mirrors the brighter area of sky. A grey-haired woman sits in deep contemplation, her head resting on her hand as she stares wistfully out to sea. When shown at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in Wellington, the subtle colour harmony of Goldie's painting led one reviewer to comment on its "misty-mystic atmosphere," reflecting that its "strange soft tones" were perhaps intended to evoke "an appropriate allegorical colour-setting" (*Evening Post*, 18 September 1900). The suggestion of a spiritual state, transcending mere physical existence, is reinforced by the lines from Lord Byron selected by Goldie to accompany his painting:

There is rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, where none intrudes.  
*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, 1812.*

This painting was produced during a pivotal transitional phase in Goldie's career. In mid-1898 the young artist had returned to Auckland following four and a half years of rigorous art studies at the Académie Julian in Paris, a conservative private art school popular with both French and foreign students. Here he had received a traditional art training under the eminent French academicians William Bouguereau and Gabriel Ferrier. Part of the school's training involved the weekly production of esquisses, rapidly painted compositional sketches depicting a stipulated subject. In both its small scale and free brushwork, *When Evening Shadows Fall* shares qualities with the esquisses Goldie produced in Paris. The calligraphic rendering of marram grass in the present work recalls his depiction of bulrushes in *The Finding of Moses* (1896, private collection).

Upon his return to New Zealand, Goldie was keen to capitalise upon the prestige associated with his European art studies. He furnished his studio in the Hobson's Buildings with a range of exotic bric-à-brac in a manner that evoked the opulent studios of his Parisian masters. *When Evening Shadows Fall* features in a posed photograph of Goldie in his studio from 1900 (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). The painting is displayed beside a Japanese silk hanging and below art school studies of the *Venus de Milo* and a male life model; a bust of Dante Alighieri sits nearby. The photograph shows the ambitious young artist keen to demonstrate his cosmopolitan credentials, with the present painting contributing to the ambiance of fin-de-siècle aestheticism.

The other two paintings that Goldie submitted to the 1900 Wellington exhibition were decidedly European in subject matter – depictions of Venice and an Arthurian maiden. By contrast, later that year the works he showed at the Auckland Society of Arts included *Tamehana, from Life* (1900, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki) and *One of the Old School* (1900, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū), examples of the portrait studies of Māori for which he achieved renown. It is difficult to establish the ethnicity of the woman depicted in *When Evening Shadows Fall*. She might have been conceived as a weather-beaten French peasant, but could equally be a Māori kuia, deep in thought on the New Zealand coast. In its very ambiguity, this intimate and intriguing work encapsulates this key phase of Goldie's development, as he sought to adapt his European art training to his local New Zealand context.

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*Goldie in His Studio, Hobson's Buildings* (1900) Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Goldie Family, 1995 Accession no 1995/3/6