

24 **CHARLES FREDERICK GOLDIE**

Still Life 1886

Watercolour 26.4 x 37

35,000 - 45,000

Provenance:

Private Collection, Wellington

Purchased from Olive Goldie early 1950s

Lot 96, Fine Art Auction, International Art Centre, March 2000

Illustrated:

p 59 Roger Blakley *Goldie*, David Bateman Ltd 1997

Exhibited:

Goldie, The Exhibition 1997 - 1999

Auckland Art Gallery, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Te Papa

Charles F. Goldie's still life watercolours of Maori artefacts are his earliest significant works to have survived. They may have been among the sixteen-year-old schoolboy's offerings at the December 1886 exhibition of the New Zealand Art Students Association held in the premises of Milne and Choyce, Queen Street, where a critic referred to pictures including "Maori carvings, mere, baler, matting, and tui-bird, by Mr. Goldie, jnr."¹ The pair of watercolours could also have been displayed at the Sunday Schools Industrial Exhibition held in late November, where another critic mentioned: "A group of Maori curios (which) possess transcendent artistic merit, and would not be out of place in any art gallery in the world."²

Although better known for his Maori portraits, Goldie's early speciality was still life painting. It was in the still-life competitions that he first gained notice as an Auckland Grammar School exhibitor in 1885, and early the following year he exhibited his first oil painting, *Study in Still Life*.³ Several such works, mentioned by contemporary critics, perhaps lie unrecognised in private collections - for the famous signature C F Goldie did not yet exist. One of the signature's first appearances was on the marble slab in Goldie's controversial still life of snapper, mullet and goldfish. That he introduced live goldfish into a still life was only part of the problem; the goldfish themselves represented an exotic contaminant in an otherwise 'native' still life.

The 'native' still life came into its own in the later 19th century. The fledgling colonial art tradition, seeking identity in 'local' content, staked its claim to the indigenous landscape, to native flora and fauna, and to the depiction of Maori people and their art. Among the Art Students Association's most significant activities were two exhibitions of Maori art held in 1884 and 1885- events explicitly designed to provide inspiration for Pakeha artists. These exhibitions, a century before Te Maori, provided many Aucklanders with their first experience of Maori art.⁴

The impetus behind these activities came largely from Kennett Watkins, an influential figure in Auckland's art world of the mid-1880's. He was founder and president of the Art Students Association and master of the Auckland Free School of Art housed at the Auckland Museum in Princes Street. Watkin's was Goldie's first real teacher, a role soon to be assumed by Louis J. Steele. That these watercolours were produced under Watkin's supervision is confirmed by the presence of the superb cloak with its ornate taniko border - a garment which is still in the collection of the Auckland Museum. Roger Blakely

¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 3 December 1886, p.11.

² *Auckland Evening Star*, 23 November 1886, p.2.

³ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 April 1886, p.6.

⁴ See Roger Blackley, "*The exhibitions of Maori art in Auckland 1884-1885: documents of the New Zealand Art Students Association*", *Antic* 3, 1987