

62 **ALFRED SHARPE**

1836 - 1908

*Bay of Islands from Paihia*

Watercolour 41 x 66

Signed, inscribed & dated 1882

50,000 - 75,000

Provenance:

Private Collection, Auckland

Purchased by current owner, *National Treasures*

International Art Centre, Auckland, March 1993

Profoundly deaf and partly mute, Alfred Sharpe embarked on a three week sketching tour of the Bay of Islands in 1882. *Bay of Islands from Paihia* is a rare watercolour painted as a result of that journey. This carefully composed work, framed by native foliage, affirms the artist's close personal relationship with the New Zealand landscape, in one of his poems he refers to the trees and rocks as 'friends'.

In his book *Frames on the Land* Francis Pound suggests that Sharpe, like other topographical painters, believed that to make the work artistically pleasing, the subject needed to be idealised but that, *the real must be idealised realistically*. Francis Pound, *Frames on the Land*, Collins, 1983. Set like many of Sharpe's landscapes at twilight, the painting has a tranquil air. Soft blues and greens predominate, with warmer hues in the pathway leading the eye through the foreground towards the hills of the background.

*There with friends I am surrounded;*

*There no solitude I feel;*

*And to me her mystic wonders*

*Nature ever doth reveal*

Alfred Sharpe

Although Sharpe had established a reputation for finely detailed watercolours of the New Zealand landscape, exhibiting with the Society of Artists and the Auckland Society of Arts, he did not feel he received the deserved level of critical recognition he deserved. This coupled with marital difficulties, contributed to his decision to leave New Zealand for Australia in 1887.

This watercolour is one of the rare surviving works of the 1880s depicting this historically important area. It was a little over a century earlier that Captain James Cook sailed into the bay in 1769. It was he who named it *Bay of Islands*, finding it heavily populated by Maori, he was impressed at their industry and intelligence. The name *Paihia* came from the Bay of Islands Nga Puhī chief *Te Pahi* 1760 - 1809, who was one of the first Maori leaders to have significant contact with British Colonial officials.

