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Marcus King: *The Arrival*

What a stroke of genius on the part of Marcus King to use the repoussoir (a form that leads the eye) of two palms on the left hand side to simulate the effect of columns which are complete with drums, annuli (rings), entasis, a decorative capital in red and fan vaulting above. The classical "columns" of the Greek temple and the "fan vaulting", so prevalent in Gothic ecclesiastical architecture, lend a civilising aspect to the arrival of Maoris on the shore.

All of this "architectural" detail reinforces the suggestion of a sacred event made even more obvious by the clear water of refreshment, cleansing, and renewal, and it would have registered, even unconsciously, with the Pakeha collector. Of course the water is also a foretaste of the baptism of many Maori into the Christian faith.

With the hand gesture, the central protagonist signals to his fellow travellers that he and his friend have found the precious water and, from a painterly point of view, this gesture both leads our eye to the wakas on the beach and, together with the slant of the sails, form a diagonal which is parallel with the slope of the bank in the left foreground and the bank in the middle ground, all again helping to guide the viewer's eye to the centre of the work.

The light is coming from the top right hand side of the painting which means most of the foreground is in darkness. We, as the viewer, are in the darkness of the "church" looking out to an idyllic sunlit shore. Many artists of religious works, including Leonardo in his *Madonna of the Rocks*, use a pool of fresh water to separate the viewer either from the Virgin or from Christ in order to reinforce the sacred nature of both. Likewise, the sanctity of this occasion is intensified with this use of water and the pool in the foreground. The special nature of the event cannot be escaped.

The curving fronds of the palms, of the ferns and of the bushes are all painted in a variety of shades of green, the Christian symbol of hope, while the mauve, the complementary colour of the green-yellow of the backlit bushes and moss-covered rocks, is the colour of royalty. This delightful combination of colours is especially pleasing in the shaded repoussoir tree on the right-hand side.

In this work of King's, standard painterly techniques are overlaid with architecture and colour from the sacred world of both the classical and the Christian.

Marcus King (1891-1977) studied under the Swedish born, Edward Fristrom, and his works are to be found in major galleries in New Zealand: the Auckland Art Gallery, Dowse Art Museum, Hocken Library, Christchurch Art Gallery, Rotorua Museum of Art and History, the Sarjeant Gallery, Suter Art Gallery, and Te Papa Tongarewa.

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