

Sir Apirana Ngata once described Gottfried Lindauer's paintings as: the shadow-carving of the European artist. This sentiment reframes Lindauer's practice in terms of its relationship to Maori culture, offering an interesting basis from which to consider this excellent portrait of Chieftainess Ngatai.

The artist undertook his mission of obtaining a cultural pictorial record of Maori with incisiveness and sincerity. As is the case with many of Lindauer's portraits, this likeness of *Chieftainess Ngatai* exudes a gentle soulfulness and realism, evoking a sense of the sitter's mana. The splendour of her ta moko is accented by the hei tiki around her neck and pounamu earring. Two huia feathers adorn her head, elegantly crowning the work's pyramid-based composition. Interestingly, her right hand is adorned with a European gold band.

This portrait was completed at an interesting time in the artist's career. Since their initial meeting in late 1875 in Auckland, Lindauer had been working under the patronage of the English businessman Henry Partridge, his remit in this capacity being the documentation of prominent Maori personages. In the early 1880s, however, the artist sold his possessions with the intention of returning to Europe. His associate, the Napier-based photographer Samuel Carnell, convinced him to stay and remain in Napier.

With the support of Carnell and Walter Buller, the noted naturalist and ornithologist, Lindauer undertook a new chapter in his work and went on to travel extensively around the North Island, accepting many more portrait commissions. This portrait of *Chieftainess Ngatai* is an excellent example from this period. Inspired and influenced by Carnell, photographic concerns had become increasingly central to his work. In this large scale portrait, Lindauer's mastery of light is particularly striking: a single light-source casts the contours and lines of the Chieftainess' face into subtle relief, contributing to an almost photographic luminosity on the work's surface.