

Cultural Memory The Heritage Collection

The Whangarei Art Museum Heritage Collection is based around the Gilbert Mair, Thomas L. Drummond, Olive Hawken-Udy, George Woolley and Ron Kirkwood bequests. Many of these works including the rather dour but historically very significant portrait of Sir George Grey are among the foundational works in the district collection.

The Whangarei collection began in the 1920's with the fitful philanthropy of artists and their descendants, and the enthusiasm of the Whangarei Arts & Literary Society. These gifts and bequests, notably from descendants of Eleanor K. Mair, Thomas L. Drummond, and latterly H.W.Kirkwood, and George Woolley formed the nucleus of a permanent collection. The works hung in the old Town Hall and were later relegated to neglectful silence in damp conditions. It was not until Whangarei's Silver Jubilee in 1989 that Mayor Joyce Ryan established a modest acquisitions fund to purchase artworks for the collection.

The formal establishment of the Whangarei Art Museum by the District Council in 1995 and the appointment of a curator/director saw a new phase in collections management and acquisitions.

This Whangarei city art collection has been held by the Whangarei Art Museum since it's inception in 1996 and continues to be enhanced through acquisitions purchased by the museum and through further gifts and bequests.

The most important addition to the Heritage Collection is the portrait of *Harata Rewiri Tarapata, Nga Puhi - Maori Woman* painted by Charles Fredrick Goldie in 1904, and had previously hung in the New Zealand High Commission in London for 40 years. This was one of three highly valued works negotiated by the art museum director and formally gifted to the Whangarei Art Museum by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in 2002. The Prime Minister, Helen Clark, said 'the decision to return this

significant artwork to New Zealand gave a wonderful opportunity to build regional art collections' and she was 'delighted that the Whangarei public would be able to view *Maori Woman* in their own gallery'.

Harata Rewiri Tarapata, along with her cousin Ina Te Papatahi, whose portrait *Maori Woman with Pipe*, by Gwyneth Richardson c.1920-1930 is also held in the Heritage Collection, were among the favoured sitters for the artist Charles.F Goldie.

The works held in the Heritage Collection are equally representative of both male and female artists of the late 19th and early 20th century. The painting, *Bushstream Wainuiomata*, c.1891 by Kate Mair (nee Sperrey), which the museum had extensive conservation work undertaken on, is an important work by one of this country's first academically trained women artists in New Zealand.

Pink Roses by Olive Hawken Udy, although less important artistically when compared to the painting by Kate Mair work, is significant to the collection as an example of the activities and interests of a European Whangarei woman 75 years ago. Udy was a member of a well-known Maunu family. She was an elected 'working member' of the Auckland Society of Arts from the turn of the 20th century until the Great War, along with other artists associated with Whangarei such as Beatrix Dobie, George Woolley Thomas L Drummond, Katherine Airini Vane (daughter of Kate Sperrey and Gilbert Mair) and Adele Younghusband.