

## Fake Lindauer's origins lost to history

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11/12/2012

The artist who carried off a "calculated forgery of a highly sophisticated nature" has got away with it because police cannot trace its origin.

The philanthropic Trust Waikato, which bought the painting of Tainui chief Kewene Te Haho at auction for \$121,000 from the International Arts Centre in Auckland in 2001, has also ruled out taking legal action against the sellers after an investigation of its own.

Trust Waikato complained to police in October after experts concluded the painting was not 120 years old and had not been painted by Gottfried Lindauer, despite being signed with what looks like his signature.



Ben Curran/ Fairfax NZ

'Calculated forgery': A \$121,000 fake has been consigned to the Waikato Museum store while a decision on when and how it will be exhibited is made.

The investigation was sparked by Whanganui art expert Peter Ireland, who saw the painting in the Waikato Museum of Art and History in January. He thought it did not look old enough to be a Lindauer and the style was wrong.

Sarah Hillary, of Auckland Art Gallery, conducted forensic tests. Victoria University art historian Roger Blackley concluded it was "a calculated forgery" after reviewing the results.

Trust chief executive Dr Bev Gatenby said both the seller and another Auckland auction house which had sold it before had been contacted.

But both were unable to offer any information about its origins.

The Times reported at the time of the sale that the painting had come from a private collection in Parnell, Auckland.

It appears it had been auctioned previously a few years before.

Both Dr Gatenby and art adviser Ann McEwan had joined the trust since the artwork was purchased.

"We do have some information but very little. We know that the art adviser at the time [Stuart Stubbs] was involved."

Detective Sergeant Dave Grace, of New Zealand Police's corporate fraud office, told the trust a police investigation was most unlikely as there was no additional avenue police could explore.

Trust chairwoman Ali van der Heyden said there was compelling evidence the painting was almost certainly not a Lindauer, but it would remain in the collection and continue to be exhibited.

"It has always been our view that this is a magnificent painting of a significant Tainui tribal chief. This has not changed."

The painting is now in a store at the museum. The trust and museum staff have yet to decide how and when it will be displayed again.

It is also due to be revalued, since the International Arts Centre valued it at \$175,000 in February after Mr Ireland raised concerns about its authenticity.