

The Portrait as Leader: Commissioned Portraits and the Power of Tradition

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Abstract *This article examines the functions that commissioned portraits of leaders play in re-presenting the appearance of a particular leader, the office that he or she occupied as well as broader notions of idealized leadership at a particular point in time and place. We argue that one can usefully think of a portrait functioning as a virtual leader in terms of its latent and enduring influence upon followers. It is able to fulfil this function in large part because of its hybrid nature that brings together in material form various agents, institutions, interests and norms. To support these two arguments we examine the origins and conventions of commissioned portraits and show how their leadership functions have surprisingly endured. Using techniques drawn from art history, we analyse several portraits featuring historic New Zealand leaders that were included in an exhibition we mounted entitled *The Power of Portraiture*. It is our contention that such official portraits, by virtue of their context in institutions and their role in commemorating a particular office, are powerful exemplars of ideal leadership to followers. This is accomplished by the repetition of historical visual conventions of representing leadership, and not in promoting a singular, heroic individual, an approach that would undermine the power of the institution.*

Keywords *commissioned portraits and authority; portraiture; visual representation of leadership*

Introduction

This article examines the function that portraits of leaders play in re-presenting the appearance not only of a particular leader but also the institution that he or she represents as well as broader notions of ideal leadership as they evolve over time in a particular place. The commissioned portrait is a portrait that has been initiated and underwritten by the leader, an external agency, or most commonly, the institution that the leader heads. As a commemorative image of a person serving in a leadership role, the commissioned portrait introduces several important dimensions into the analysis of leadership that are not widely appreciated, especially to those who do not have formal training in art history.

We will commence the article by briefly reviewing the recent and welcome interest that has been shown in the visual dimension of leadership. This has been driven in part by the aesthetic turn within organisational studies as well as a growing concern with the processes by which leadership is socially constructed. Drawing on some of the pioneering work that has examined the visual representation of leadership, we will argue that one can usefully think of a portrait acting as a virtual leader in terms of its latent and enduring influence upon followers. It is able to fulfil this function in large part because of its hybrid nature that brings together in material form various agents, institutions, interests and cultural norms. To support these arguments we will examine the origins and conventions of commissioned portraits and explain how they functioned for their original audiences and how much of this continues to persist.

At the core of the article are the detailed artistic analyses of seven portraits of New Zealand formal leaders that were drawn from the 40 that were featured in an exhibition entitled *The Power of Portraiture* that we mounted and which was accompanied by a book (Griffey, 2008). The portraits that were featured in the exhibition encompassed works that were commissioned by local government bodies, businesses, diocesan offices, schools and private individuals. They demonstrate the active, participatory role of portraits in institutions, in a comparable way to the historical function of such portraits. It was our contention when we mounted the exhibition that such official portraits, by virtue of their context in institutions and their role in commemorating a particular office, attempt to act as powerful exemplars of ideal or virtuous leadership to followers. This is accomplished, in large part, by the repetition of historical visual conventions of representing leadership that serves to reinforce the power of the institution. This runs counter to the conventional understanding that leadership portraits simply promote a singular, heroic individual.

The portrait analysis will also underscore the culturally and temporally specific nature of the conclusions that can be drawn from bodies of commissioned portraits of leaders. The distinctively hybrid nature of the cultural context of New Zealand sets up in opposition indigenous and exogenous modes of leadership as well as indigenous and exogenous modes of artistic representation. The challenge of portraying nominal leaders brings these tensions to the fore and reveals how the artist has attempted to address and resolve these tensions. The article concludes that understanding the history, conventions and functions of portraits of leaders should more actively inform leadership studies in a manner that it has done to only a limited extent to date.

The visual representation of leadership

Given the primacy that the visual image has assumed in contemporary society, it is remarkable that organizational studies and leadership studies, in particular, have long suffered from a 'blind spot' when it comes to recognizing the influence that the production and consumption of visual images have on the conduct of organisational life (Guthey & Jackson, 2005; Küpers, 2004). Two recent developments, though, have helped to bring the visual image into contention. First, the aesthetic turn in organization studies has emphasized the need to develop ways of knowing that encompass all of the senses, including the visual (Gagliardi, 1996; Linstead & Hopfl, 1999; Strati, 1992; Strati & De Monteux, 2002; Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Hansen,

2005). Its effects are already being felt in the realm of management education. As Nissley observes, ‘we’re experiencing an intersectional innovation – the intersection of arts and business and the innovation of arts-based learning’ (2000: 189).

The aesthetic turn has also begun to make in-roads into leadership studies (Adler, 2006). For example, Hansen et al. (2007) note that leaders must learn to develop their abilities to acknowledge sensate responses and incorporate this understanding into how they communicate and interact with their followers. Ladkin (2006) has introduced a long overdue aesthetic dimension to cast fresh light upon the processes of interaction between charismatic leaders and their followers. On a more philosophical level, Bathurst (2008) draws on the pioneering aesthetic thinkers Vico, Baumgarten and Kant to argue that leadership practice should become enlivened through aesthetic engagement with employees, customers and other stakeholders.

The second development that has brought at least the possibility of the significance of the visual image to the fore has been the growing acceptance and support by leadership scholars of the socially constructed nature of leadership. Rooted in the notion of the ‘romance of leadership’ (Chen and Meindl, 1991; Meindl, 1985) this perspective has found its fullest expression in the accumulated works of Keith Grint. Starting with the recognition of the ‘constitutive’ nature of leadership which emphasizes the leader’s role in presenting a sufficiently compelling definition of the current and future situation to followers, Grint (2001) makes a persuasive case that leadership should profitably be considered not as a science, a view that most prominent leadership scholars have ascribed to (Avolio et al., 2009), but as an art. Leadership, though, is not confined to one art but four – the performing arts; the philosophical arts; the martial arts; and the visual arts.

In a subsequent book, Grint (2005) identifies another taxonomy of leadership which he characterizes as ‘four lenses’ that can and should be applied when defining leadership – Leadership as Person (WHO); Leadership as Position (WHERE); Leadership as a Result (WHAT); Leadership as a Process (HOW). The Leadership as Person lens might, upon first viewing, seem the most simple and familiar lens as it focuses upon the proverbial lonely yet heroic individual. Grint throws in a typically interesting twist when he notes that we can never properly isolate individual leaders in their purest ‘naked’ form as we cannot extricate them from a complex web of resources and technologies upon which they depend, the most obvious being the need to wear culturally appropriate dress. Drawing on Actor Network Theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1993), Grint notes that,

Wholly human social relations are inconceivable – because all humans rely upon and work through non-human forms, through hybrids – and that humans distinguish themselves from animals, amongst other things, on the basis of the durability or obduracy of their relations. That is, they encase their social relations into material forms. This does not mean that material forms determine things but that these material forms are an effect of their relations. (2005: 22)

While Grint does not explicitly refer to leadership portraits, we argue in this article that portraits can and do act as leadership hybrids. They ensure that leaders can be represented well beyond the space and time that they actively inhabit. Moreover, leadership portraits do as much, if not more, to reinforce the collective understanding of ‘Leader as Position’; that is, ‘the activity undertaken by someone whose

position on a vertical, and usually formal, hierarchy, provides them with the resources to lead' (Grint, 2005: 28). In many respects we can consider national portrait galleries, which are most prominently invested in by nations with a predominately Anglo-Saxon heritage, as being dedicated to ensuring that these hybrids of leadership are as 'durable' and as 'obdurate' as they can possibly be in order to preserve and reinforce the primacy of personal and positional leadership and demonstrate the extent to which these two perspectives are so functionally intertwined (Barlow, 1997).

The inter-linkage between personal and positional leadership that is represented in leadership portraits has also been highlighted by Guthey & Jackson (2005) in their study of CEO photographic portraits which appear in a variety of media such as magazines, newspapers and annual reports. They argue that these portraits represent significant sites for the visual construction of not just leadership but corporate identity. In fact, the two work very much hand-in-hand. However, the authors also highlight what they dub as the 'authenticity paradox' that plagues the use of portraits in this manner. Upon first impression, such photographs may appear to convey an impression of the kind of authentic presence that many observers consider to be crucial for establishing a strong corporate image. But, 'a closer look at the constructed nature of both CEO identity and portrait photography lays bare the elusive nature of authenticity itself, as well the way that CEO portraits can function also to expose the corporations' 'chronic lack of authenticity' (p. 1057).

The study of the visual representation of leadership has been further extended by Boje & Rhodes (2005) who explored the process by which leaders are virtualized through the mass media to become what they describe as a 'Virtual Leader Construct' (VLC). VLC is a non-human image of a leader that is purposefully created by an organization. Referring to three examples from the fast food industry – Ronald McDonald, Dave Thomas and Colonel Sanders – they argue that VLCs can and do perform potent transformational leadership functions for organizations – functions that are enabled the more they are virtualized. They define a VLC as 'a leader who is virtual, first in terms of being virtuous in relation to culturally accepted archetypes of leadership excellence, and second in terms of not being an actual embodied human being' (p. 407). This conceptualization, albeit situated in the contemporary mass-mediated world, resonates strongly with the virtual leadership role that we argue that commissioned portraits have historically played and continue to play.

Taking our lead from these writers we suggest that commissioned portraits are virtual in function and hybrid in form. Their 'virtual' function is to act as physical, non-human and visually compelling surrogates for leaders and the positions they hold. For many, the portrait will act as the only point of interaction between a leader and a distal follower. For those who have directly interacted with the leader on a proximal basis, it may even serve to sanctify and cement that relationship. The painted portrait derives its symbolic power from the fact that, compared to a photograph of a leader, it is relatively unusual and generally more expensive to produce and difficult to copy. It also possesses a sense of permanence and prestige that is becoming increasingly rare in the age of the disposable celebrity (Guthey et al., 2009). As with all works of art, the original portrait of a leader holds the most cachet, but the image can be distributed in alternative forms through the medium of print and the Internet. Ironically, though, this widespread distribution serves to strengthen the

symbolic power of the original portrait. This was quite notable in the reactions that exhibition attendees had to the better known leadership portraits. Most significantly, though, as Boje & Rhodes (2005) cleverly note, portraits also hold a ‘virtuous’ function in that they reflect and reinforce culturally and historically specific notions of ideal leadership. Commissioned paintings can act as a seal of approval for leaders and for followers.

Commissioned portraits are hybrid in form, that is, the artist draws upon and combines two or more divergent sources for inspiration and for impact. This process takes place at several levels of abstraction. At the most fundamental level, in enabling the portrait to carry out its virtual leader function, the artist brings together, at the initiative of the sponsors and the cooperation of the subject and the mediation of the curator an actual or potential follower with a leader in a moment of quiet contemplation. At a slightly higher level of abstraction, as was noted earlier, portrait artists bring together in one visual representation the personal as well as the positional qualities of a particular leader in a way that is sometimes difficult for them to be isolated. At a higher level than this, leadership portraits are hybrids as artists selectively draw upon and integrate a number of artistic conventions from different historic periods and different cultures. Finally, at the highest level, the artist, the critic and the viewer draw upon and integrate different archetypes of leadership from specific historic periods and cultures.

The influential Mexican intellectual, García Canclini, has theorized that Latin America is characterized by a ‘hybrid culture’ where ‘traditions have not yet disappeared and modernity has not completely arrived’ (1995: 1). In endeavouring to make sense of and, ultimately, to create a stronger and autonomous culture that can survive in transnational markets, he argues that the tools of traditionally separate disciplines need to be deployed collectively to simultaneously capture the ‘cultured’ (i.e. art history and literature), the ‘popular’ (i.e. folklore and anthropology) and the ‘massified’ (i.e. communication studies) elements of this hybrid culture. Moreover, this work should be accomplished by ‘nomad social scientists’ who are ‘capable of circulating through the staircases that connect those floors – or better yet, social sciences that redesign the floor plans and horizontally connect the levels’ (p. 2).

In the spirit of Canclini, the article’s authors have circulated to alien staircases within their university. Recognizing the potential synergy that might exist between our research and our teaching, we have come together as an art historian specializing in portraiture and a leadership scholar intrigued by the popular representation of leadership through the mass media to share our insights, our knowledge and our mutual passion for portraiture. In the following sections we hope to demonstrate the benefits of this partnership by teasing out the virtual functions and hybrid forms of leadership portraits. We will begin by describing the origins and conventions that are associated with commissioned paintings and attempt to clarify the specific leadership functions that these paintings have played in the past and continue to perform today. The full benefits of bringing the art historian’s training to bear on the leadership scholar’s traditional sphere of concern will, however, be most clearly revealed in the detailed and highly nuanced analyses that we provide in the penultimate section of the article of seven core commissioned portraits drawn from *The Power of Portraiture* exhibition.

The commissioned portrait and leadership

Throughout history, portraits of leaders, whether in stone, bronze, paint, prints or currency, have been created to commemorate individuals, incite loyalty and command authority for the office. The success of a traditional leader portrait was not just in its accomplishment as a work of art but in its perceived power over its viewer-subjects. Long before the members of the public had direct, almost continuous visual access to their nominal leaders, these virtual images, whether on coins and banknotes, colourfully recounted physical descriptions (spoken or read), prints or, if they commanded some wealth status, painted portraits. With the advent of photography in the 19th century, and the explosion of media coverage of leaders from the 20th century, we have seen a shift to quicker, cheaper and more accessible images of leaders. These modern images are, like traditional portraits, stage-managed to show a leader to best and occasionally worse effect, and employ many of the historical conventions of portraits of leaders. There has been a dramatic impact, however, in the quantity of these modern images, the malleability of visual personae, and the viewer's sense of perceived intimacy with the subject. These factors have helped to determine a greater casualness in the visual roles that leaders cultivate today. Just a hundred years ago a smile would have been unthinkable in an official portrait of a ruler, as it has been for thousands of years, while today it is common. From Tony Blair to Barack Obama to Yukio Hatoyama we have witnessed a new imperative to convey warmth and accessibility as an important marker of ideal leadership.

Portraits have been produced for millennia, and their origins as commemorative images of the ruling elite have had a lasting influence on how, and for whom, portraits are created, and how they function for their intended audiences. Ancient civilizations in the Near East and Egypt saw the creation of exceptionally hierarchic images, in bronze and stone, for their followers and their descendents. For the Egyptians, a person's *ka* or life force could reside in their mummified body, or if this disintegrated, it could inhabit the portrait statues that accompanied rulers in their tombs (Quirke & Spencer, 1992). The portrait statue was thus conceptualized as a surrogate for the physical body. Because the contents of the tomb were understood to accompany the deceased to the afterlife, they were made very much as objects intended to be seen and showcased.

The male patriarchs of Republican Rome equally invested in the power of portraits for funerary purposes, but their focus was on promoting family lineage. *Imagines* or likenesses of ancestors, in the form of sculpted portrait busts, were kept in their homes and paraded at the funerals of relatives (Beard & Henderson, 2001). Such was the power of the portrait that under Roman law slaves and former slaves could not possess family portraits because their parents and grandparents were considered property rather than people. If ownership was limited to citizens, the privilege of being portrayed in a portrait was limited to the ruling elite, who were typically male elders. Male domination was in part determined by the military triumphs that were essential for claiming and maintaining political power at this time (an aspect of claims to leadership that has always been relevant). The startlingly realistic portrait busts the Romans commissioned thus functioned in a primary sense as a sign of political power and legitimacy, and promoted the family dynasty. It was, too, the Romans in the first century BCE that placed ancestral portraits on coins. Indeed

Julius Caesar was the first living ruler to put his face on a coin in 44 BCE (Beard & Henderson, 2001). Portraits thus became a part of the 'currency' of authority, where they have remained ever since.

In the Renaissance, the commissioned portrait enjoyed a huge revival amongst ruling families such as the Medici, in recognition of the power of portraits to help broker political control and cultural cachet. Part of the inherent power in the portrait was the visual association with the genre itself: as the prerogative of the ruling elite of ancient Rome, the culture most celebrated in the Renaissance (Woodall, 1997). Countless portraits were commissioned by rulers of themselves and their families at this time, and placed strategically in biblical scenes for churches, important reception rooms in family palaces and in government offices. With developments in print-making from the 15th century, portraits could be circulated widely, and far less expensively, to satisfy the growing public demand for such images.

Treatises from the period maintain that portraiture is the special prerogative of the illustrious, the famous and the virtuous. In his treatise on portraiture, Francisco de Holanda, a 16th-century Portuguese humanist and court portraitist, recites precisely who merits portrayal: illustrious princes, king and emperors, princesses and queens of virtue and wisdom, men famous in arms, art and letters, or of singular liberality and virtue, 'and nobody else at all'. De Holanda elaborates, too, on the function of portraits, which is, in his view, to define, publicise and honour the elite (Woodall 1997). The intrinsic relationship between portraiture and power is echoed in an Italian treatise written in 1584 by Gian Paolo Lomazzo. Lomazzo concurs that only worthy sitters are portrayed, though his concept of worthies encompasses ecclesiastics and businessmen. Elite or leader subjects thus could be born with the right to portrayal through noble birth, or earn the privilege through military feats, business success, church rank or learning. It is worth stressing, however, that in Lomazzo and De Holanda's time, it was uncommon to earn such virtue without being born into a ruling family.

The perceived power of portraiture in the early modern period can be gleaned from the roles portraits were expected to perform for their original viewers, and how viewers were meant to interact with them. For example, the Medicis might present themselves as Magi in a spectacular narrative painting in their Florentine palace chapel. In addition, Charles I stressed his absolutism by decorating his throne room at Whitehall in London with bombastic ceiling paintings by Peter Paul Rubens featuring the Stuart dynasty and the glories of absolutism. And, during the reign of King Louis XIV of France, it was an offence to turn your back on the official portrait of the French monarch by Hyacinth Rigaud (Burke, 1992). When the king was away, the portrait physically took his place.

These examples illustrate that portraiture was used, as de Holanda contends, to define power actively. The Medici family were thus able to claim their piety and charity to the city of Florence and Charles I could stress his legitimacy as an absolute monarch at a time when he had disbanded the English Parliament. In the case of the most formal of all ruler portraits, state portraits, such as the aforementioned one by Rigaud of Louis XIV, were considered virtual substitutes for the real-life king or queen.

Therefore, historically, leaders have availed themselves of portraiture to define, publicize and honour themselves. This was accomplished, crucially, through the repetition of conventions of portraiture. If nobility and virtuosity were the

considered the prerequisites for re-presentation, imitation was the artist's principal tool for defining power. Certain conventions were used as a short-hand for authority, including the scale and format of a portrait as well as the pose, facial expression, attributes and setting. Patrons paid by size, so full-length portraits were the most costly and connoted the most power. Therefore, scale was particularly important for state portraits, and this remains true today. Bust or head and shoulder portraits were cheaper, but they also handily offered close associations with ancient Roman portrait busts, and, if presented in a profile format, enabled a close visual link with imperial images on coins such as that of Julius Caesar. Standing with a sword was popular for its ties to military prowess; the wearing of armour similarly showcased military invincibility; sitting horseback made a comparable claim of power. Mouths were gently shut, heads immobile, postures upright, gestures strong. In addition to swords, other military attributes were commonly employed, like batons; and symbols of office, such as crowns or Orders, were widespread.

The result was that portraiture was, by necessity, governed by strong traditions, because the point of a portrait was to claim one's rightful membership in an historical community of elites. Great experimentation and ambitious creativity, in execution by the artist and in presentation of the subject, was incompatible with such claims. In this manner just as leaders need to be represented for the purpose of recognition to their followers and descendents (as Aristotle argued in his *Poetics* (Woodall, 1997)), and, therefore, be true likenesses of the subjects, they also had to participate in the conventions of the official portrait.

While prints handily enabled full-length portraits to be issued on a small scale, and at a modest price for the public, sculpted portraits relied for their power on precisely the opposite, the use of expensive, labour-intensive material. Paintings were, in this period, relatively cheaper than sculptures, and prices for the most esteemed artists, in any genre, were always high. While the conventions and associations were common in all media, there were particularly rich associations with objects that were materially more valuable, and artistically more labour-rich, such as marble. The final, and arguably greatest, mark of honour for the portrait subject was, from the Renaissance, the authorship itself. Celebrated painters such as Raphael and Rembrandt commanded high prices from their portrait patrons, who valued works made completely by an artist's 'own hand'.

A mention should be made here, too, of the fashion for group portraits of civic institutions in the 17th-century Dutch Republic. They are of particular relevance because these portraits of mayors, boards of charitable institutions, members of militia companies and guild deans are the forerunner to the modern boardroom images ubiquitously featured in annual reports, which are in turn indebted to family portraits kept in the household from antiquity and later showcased in princely halls from the Middle Ages. With the country ruled by *burghers* or citizens (albeit wealthy and lineage-minded ones), the Dutch Republic embraced images that commemorated the *shared* power of civic office rather than promoting a single individual. Rembrandt's works in this capacity are particularly notable, such as his famous portrait of the Arquebusiers guild, popularly known as *The Nightwatch* of 1642. Hung in guild headquarters, these group portraits promote the value of team-work and the power of shared leadership. Hierarchy is not eliminated though. The Captain of the company, Frans Baning Cocq, commands our attention, in the central foreground,

placed hierarchically in the more important position to the right of his lieutenant in yellow. However, Cocq's success is presented as not based on his autonomous leadership but his ability to work with, and lead his followers, upon whom he depends for success. This tradition continues to be honoured today as witnessed in the lavish March 2009 'special commemorative issue' of *Vanity Fair* that featured an impressive 15-page continuous spread of Barack Obama's leadership team photographed by Annie Leibowitz (*Vanity Fair*, 2009).

Hence these two basic paradigms of official portraits, independent and group, provide two related ways of interpreting the role of such leader portraits for their original audiences. Both, significantly, rely on being viewed in a context of authority, be it state or civic business, by followers. Both were hung high, typically above the eye level commonly found in the hangings of art galleries today. Both relied for their successful conveyance of authority the employment of the visual conventions of leader portraits. Both depended on the viewer's knowledge of the significance of these conventions as well as the importance of materials and the authorship. While it is commonplace to refer to the 21st century as 'primarily visual', such sweeping generalizations are rarely framed around a consideration of the visual acuity and stage-managing that was central to claims to power in ancient cultures as well as the early modern period.

The power of portraiture exhibition

Both of the authors have emigrated to New Zealand and discovered a common interest in the relationship between the visual vehicle of portraiture and the social construction of leadership. We decided to develop an exhibition with the related aims of revealing the longstanding conventions upon which portraiture is based and showing how one specific medium in one geographic context had evolved as artistic tastes and fashions had developed and as attitudes and norms regarding leadership had changed.

The exhibition comprised 40 portraits of major public figures with a shared identity as nominal leaders in New Zealand in a multitude of different ways, male and female, Maori and Pakeha (i.e. European origin), conservative and liberal: they included bishops and nuns, business leaders, Prime Ministers and Governors General, University Vice-Chancellors, military generals, judges, the Queen and others. To tighten the focus, the exhibition was limited to commissioned painted portraits, by virtue of the longstanding traditions and associations with the medium and its history as a favoured form for official portraits. It is true that photographs are regularly ordered, made, and displayed to represent and narrate a line of leaders, and these images show significant parallels with the conventions of painted portraits. However, painted portraits point to a related but subtly different status of institution and the nature of its leaders. Because such painted works also generally involve a complicated process of artist selection, negotiation of the portrait's appearance, a series of lengthy life sittings, a substantial fee and an opening ceremony, the results tend to be particularly revealing.

There were two broad rationales for putting on the exhibition. First, we wanted the exhibition to contribute to a broad-based debate and discussion within the country about what constitutes effective and ineffective leadership and how we might go

about fostering this (Jackson, 2008). Taylor & Ladkin (2009) have provided a helpful typology to help position the growing array of arts-based methods that are being deployed in management development. While the exhibition was not designed explicitly as a management development initiative, it did have as its primary intent the opportunity to enable participants to apprehend the 'essence' of leadership. In particular we wanted to foreground the type of leadership that is exerted through formal authority to encourage participants to deliberately question the conventional wisdom that suggests that this type of leadership does not, in fact, constitute real or genuine leadership. As Ladkin & Taylor note, great art enables people to personally and emotionally connect with and understand concepts that cannot be conveyed as powerfully as through the more conventional propositional and linear means.

The other primary rationale for mounting the exhibition was to demonstrate the enduring quality and appeal of portraits, specifically painted ones. In New Zealand portrait painting has traditionally taken a distant back seat to landscape and abstract painting in terms of prestige and attention (Keith, 2007). However in the past two years there have been some encouraging signs that portraiture is undergoing something of renaissance – a renaissance that we wanted to actively fertilise (Wolfe, 2008). Most specifically, we wanted to add support and build momentum for the case to create a permanent home for the New Zealand Portrait Gallery.

The exhibition, the first one in the country to have featured exclusively commissioned painted portraits, was held between the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 for two months at the Gus Fisher Gallery in Auckland and, following that, for six weeks at the New Zealand Portrait Gallery in Wellington. In total the exhibition was attended by over 5000 visitors and attracted considerable media attention. In addition to the two launch events which attracted over 300 people to each, we facilitated eight workshops at the galleries, five of which featured leaders who were portrayed in the exhibition. Accompanying the exhibition was a book entitled *The Power of Portraiture* (Griffey, 2008) containing strongly interdisciplinary essays as well as catalogue entries for all of the exhibited pictures.

New Zealand provides a particularly fertile area to study both leadership and art history study because of its close links with British government and cultural traditions alongside its growing sense of independence, and because of its heritage as the home of native Maori and settlers of Anglo-European descent (King, 2003). In this respect it presents a vital and compelling case of a 'hybrid culture' in which strikingly different temporalities (traditional, modern and postmodern) co-exist (Canclini, 1995). From the earliest years of colonization in New Zealand, official portraits have been commissioned by individuals and institutions. While there are strong parallels with western conventions of formal portraiture discussed above, most New Zealand portraits seem less self-consciously over-blown, less rooted in a sense of inheritance than their British and European counterparts. Instead, commissioned portraits in New Zealand generally promote leadership not as a born right to rule but as a privilege achieved by hard work, determination and the desire to be a productive member of society, even when the subject has inherited their leadership role. They are typically characterized by a modest scale and demeanour, and the limited palette and low tonality of most portraits contributes to this reserve which is distinct from British and European official portraits, and a marked contrast with even Australian official portraits, where higher keyed colours and larger formats are far more common.

The kind of leadership that is visually announced by New Zealand political leaders in the media today, and indeed in their contemporary official portraits, is largely insistent then on an ‘everyday’ humility, a basic integrity and grit, a solid, no-nonsense, no pretension approach to leadership that is antithetical to the leader as hero paradigm (Jackson, 2008). This may seem antithetical to the inherent nature of the official portraits of a single leader, but what the portraits attempt is both the emulation of visual conventions of leader portraits but also modifications of it in order to make it less explicitly self-aggrandizing and heroic. New Zealand’s official portraits seem, in fact, strikingly informal, in scale, props, dress and pose, even in the face of the international trend toward a relative relaxation of such portraits.

The analysis of seven leadership portraits

Seven commissioned portraits will be analysed here, encompassing New Zealand’s first sovereign, Queen Victoria, whose right to rule was inherited; a Maori chief, Tamati Waka Nene, whose power was also inherited, and who was pivotal to the success of the Treaty of Waitangi (the nation’s founding document signed on 6 February 1840 by representatives of the British crown and various Maori chiefs from the northern North Island of New Zealand); a Maori leader in Parliament, James Carroll, whose mana or power was based in his birth and the land; a spectacular mountaineer and explorer, Sir Edmund Hillary, whose physical and mental strength earned him mythological status in New Zealand; Hugh Fletcher, under whose tenure his family business dramatically expanded and then contracted; Jenny Shipley, who exercised power as the first female Prime Minister; and finally Don McKinnon, who served as the head of the Commonwealth Secretariat. These examples will reveal the connections with visual conventions discussed above, and will also facilitate discussion regarding the hybrid nature of portraits (i.e. the differing roots, functions, locales and styles of leadership).

Queen Victoria’s (1819–1901) legacy of leadership was a defining one for colonial New Zealand society. She was not only a constitutional and religious icon but provided a strong image of motherhood as wife, mother and widow. This portrait of her (see Figure 1) is the quintessential example of the state portrait, the most formal type of commissioned portrait of a ruler shown full length and in her Robes of State (Griffey, 2008). The portrait scrupulously conforms to conventions of commissioned portraits of rulers, in the format, pose, attributes, attire, and setting. Buckingham Palace is visible to her right, which is positioned strategically both under and above her coronation crown, further stressing her authority. The strong outlines of her form help, too, in articulating her face. Her alabaster face, shoulders and left arm are set off by magnificent Turkish jewellery and, on her head, the circlet, all rendered with exquisite delicacy. Indeed, elegance and femininity complement her power, and arguably it was presented as a source of it, a concept that would not have been lost to Maori who viewed it. Her strength is shaped not in physical bulk but in her steadily upright deportment, emphasized by the astonishing volume and weight of her sumptuous robes, which undulate with implied movement and lustre. Her elegantly poised right hand, as if ready to gently grasp the gold sceptre on the table, signifies her imperial rule.

This is a copy after the one commissioned when the Queen had been on the throne for a decade, but such state portraits are often ordered on the occasion of coronation.



Figure 1 After Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805–1873), Queen Victoria, c. 1847 (oil on canvas, 292 × 181.5cm). The Royal Collection © 2010, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

As such, they promote the new sovereign's legitimacy and authority, and the images are typically copied widely to be sent to overseas embassies, government houses and council chambers. It was also copied in miniatures and on china. While originally painted for the crown and hung at St. James's Palace, Queen Elizabeth II gifted this portrait in 1970 to New Zealand via Governor General Sir Arthur Porritt for placement in the Treaty House located at Waitangi in Northland (Griffey, 2008). This provided the perfect context for the portrait subject and her relationship with New Zealand, the only British colony established by treaty. Much significance was ascribed to the personal authority of the Queen especially by Maori who invested much hope in Victoria's mana as a sovereign (King, 2003).

Victoria's state portrait embodies the sovereign's most vivid declaration of formal leadership and was loaned to the Treaty House to promote her role in the establishment of New Zealand. Before her portrait arrived at Waitangi, another portrait had hung there for nearly 50 years, a portrait of a signatory to the Treaty, the Ngapuhi chief Tamati Waka Nene (c.1785–1871) (refer to Figure 2). One of the first chiefs to be baptised, Nene's intervention was crucial for Maori support of the signing of the Treaty. Many prominent Maori were painted in the 19th century by portrait painters in the European tradition; however, Nene was only painted posthumously, and in this case the portrait was commissioned by Lord Bledisloe in 1933 for the Waitangi National Trust, gifted for the Waitangi centenary ceremonies (Blackley, 1997; *The New Zealand Herald*, 27 January 1934). While it is very small in comparison to Victoria's portrait, for Maori the power is in the subject rather than the scale, materials or quality of the artwork itself.

Like Queen Victoria, Nene's mana and status as chief came from his high birth. He was the second son of Tapua, leader and tohunga of the Ngati Hao of Hokianga, and younger brother of Patuone. The deeply incised moko (a Maori form of tattoo) on his face is, as all moko are, unique to him, and signalled his mana. As with many Maori concepts, mana cannot be translated into a single English translation but broadly speaking it implies an impersonal force or quality which, in contemporary New Zealand English, is related to a person or organization of people of great



Figure 2 Charles Frederick Goldie (1870–1947), Tamati Waka Nene, 1934 (oil on canvas, 45.5 × 40.5cm). Auckland Art Gallery

personal prestige and character (Mead, 2003). Within this portrait, other attributes connoting mana are evident, the cloak, the kiwi pendant, the ngutukao (shark's tooth earring) and the huia feather. It is appropriate given the setting of the Treaty House that he is not shown holding a weapon. With a deeply meditative gaze and aging features, the portrait celebrates the inner dignity of the man of peace rather than his skills at war. The bust-length focus gives it a funerary quality akin to ancient Roman busts of emperors, a link also suitable to the function of portraits for Maori as representations for their kin. Moreover, for Maori a portrait was the image of the subject, a re-presentation in the sense Aristotle describes in his *Poetics*. For Maori, whose identity is so closely bound to their kin, and in which portraits are a primary vehicle for recognition and communion with kin, identification is crucial (Tapsell, 2008). The detail of the moko, and the highly realistic technique, accomplish this to powerful effect.

Awareness of western portrait traditions and conventions are similarly combined with Maori cultural values in the portrait of Sir James Carroll (1853–1926), the first Maori Minister of Native Affairs and first Maori acting Prime Minister, by H. Linley Richardson (see Figure 3). Commissioned as a birthday present by the Whakaki (Wairoa) Natives Committee, Carroll died before it was completed, and it was presented to the House of Representatives in 1931 (Griffey, 2008). Although he was awarded the New Zealand medal and in 1901 made KCMG, Carroll is not represented in this portrait with any such honours, nor is there any reference to his distinguished public service. His physical stature (he was a natural athlete) is not paraded, and his suit is downplayed by the casual dash of a heavy coat and scarf. The European dress dominates his physical body, but a distinctly Maori greenstone hangs from his watch chain, and he holds a carved walking stick.

It is one of the only painted portraits at Parliament in Wellington, because the tradition is to photograph departing prime ministers. Both its rarity as a large painting and its striking juxtaposition of a portrait of a man and the land that shaped him make it the most compelling portrait in Parliament. True to his Maori heritage, Carroll is rooted in the land, with his feet shown firmly on the ground of his birthplace. He stands on the riverside at the back of his marae (sacred meeting place), in front of a fenced cabbage-tree. The tree, as much a study in a portrait-likeness as the figure of Carroll, marks the spot where he was born, and where his placenta is buried according to Maori custom. It is a tree that reaches the very top of the canvas, its roots in the earth and its branches in the heavens, a tree that unites birth and after-life, the uniting tree of land and kin. Behind him, the Wairoa River flows, with its gentle undulations situated behind his body as a kind of life-force, a reflection of the Maori belief that 'I am the river, the river is me'. The spiritual qualities of the land, and the relationship between that land and the mana of Carroll are the subject and carry the power of the portrait in a specifically Maori manner (Walker, 2006). In this manner, it is a portrait of Carroll, his land and his kin that have inhabited that land.

Carroll's full-length portrait thus offers a striking comparison to that of Queen Victoria both visually and ideologically. The choice of attributes has changed, but Carroll is maintained in the community of western elite portraits through his dignified bearing and full-length representation. But Richardson cleverly thwarts these conventions to also highlight Maori ideas of power as rooted in the land and in kin.



Figure 3 *H. Linley Richardson (1878–1947), Sir James Carroll (Timi Kara), 1926 (oil on canvas, 117.1 × 100cm). Parliamentary Collection, Wellington*

Sir Edmund Hillary (see Figure 4) was an explorer-humanitarian and ambassador, whose death in January 2008 found him eulogized as a prototypically New Zealand kind of hero. In Hillary, the media and portrait painters found an icon of visual leadership built on physical strength, mental determination, and public humility, all recorded in regular clothes, weathered features, and everyday tools rather than the idealised pomp and sword-branding bravado of much of the inherited 19th-century British tradition. The English court painter Sir Edward Halliday painted him from a life sitting done in Auckland in 1955, and the portrait is arguably the best known image of a New Zealander. It was the first commissioned portrait of him and set the tone for a remarkably rich commemoration of him throughout his life, in paint, bronze, concrete and currency (his face is on the country's five dollar note). Hillary



Figure 4 *Sir Edward Halliday (1902–1984), Sir Edmund Hillary, 1955 (oil on canvas, 114 × 87.4cm). Auckland War Memorial Museum*

never commissioned a portrait of himself but instead agreed to sit for the many artists who requested it.

The Hillary portrait was one of several commissioned in the 1950s from Halliday by Sir Ernest Davis, a former Auckland mayor (Griffey, 2008). Davis sought a suite of portraits of significant leaders to gift to the Auckland War Memorial Museum, and the subjects included General Freyburg, Sir Winston Churchill and Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II. The patron's aim was to inspire the citizens of Auckland. Davis said of Hillary, in particular, that he wanted it 'to inspire the rising generation to emulate Sir Edmund's deeds . . . I view him as the excelsior of Auckland' (*New Zealand Herald*, 20 March 1956).

As the Renaissance theorist, De Holanda, reminded us, artists defined the subject through choices made in the appearance of the portrait. Halliday specified that he wanted to paint Hillary 'in his Himalayan kit, with a background of Mount Everest as an inspiration to the youth of the future' (*New Zealand Herald*, 4 January 1955). It is intriguing to observe that Hillary's status as a leader may be interrogated since in this portrait he did not occupy a formal office or post like the other subjects

(although he was appointed as New Zealand Ambassador to India, Nepal and Bangladesh in 1985). However, it was our contention that Hillary's accomplishment (which earned him a knighthood, an honour that often results from distinguished service in a formal post) defined him as a leader, and defined for modern New Zealand ideas of what constitutes ideal leadership: physical and mental power articulated in a casual manner.

Halliday uses a razor-sharp outline to incise the impressive figure of Hillary among the Himalayas, and his hard contours are analogous to the mountains around him. The deep undulations of his jacket and trousers and hair, the emphatic lines of his determined brow, and the strikes of pigment giving life to his monumental hands participate in the rocky rhythms of the subject's portrayal. But instead of the proud brandish of a typical hero's portrait, with his sword or baton valiantly upheld, Hillary's mountaineering tools enrobe him humbly, and his insistent, upturned gaze bespeaks of a silent determination rather than a bombastic boast. The white cloud around him helps not only to put special focus on the physicality of his body but also to suggest an ease of mind. Flickers of light splashed on the right side of his face, the arms of his jacket and knees of his trousers animate the figure in what is a notably quiet portrait of physical and mental leadership.

As convention historically determined, the viewer is positioned physically under him, but the lack of eye contact and the upwards push of the lines on the canvas keep the portrait from being one of simple hero-worship but instead make it one of heroic inspiration. There is a striking ambiguity to Hillary's position, sitting atop but still with peaks behind him; has he reached the summit or is he resting before the final haul up? The idea of showing a leader 'at work leading' is common to official portraits (this was typically showcased in the form of male heads of state or military generals ready for, or on the battlefield). But the decision to commemorate Hillary at rest, ice pick in his right hand, provided a novel way of celebrating leadership as a process and also leadership as both an active role and a private challenge. The portrait originally hung high up in the Geology Hall of the Auckland War Memorial Museum but has since been moved to the greater prominence of the main stairwell. It is one of the Museum's most admired and visited objects, and was for the first time loaned out for *The Power of Portraiture* exhibition.

Comparable themes of leadership are picked up in another striking portrait of a New Zealand leader, painted by Richard McWhannell in 1996 of Hugh Fletcher, former Chief Executive of Fletcher Challenge (see Figure 5). This relatively small canvas, measuring 46.5 × 66 cm, was commissioned on the occasion of his retirement. The curator of the Fletcher Trust Collection, Peter Shaw, approached the painter, who then agreed with the subject of the painting that instead of a formal sitting, the artist would observe some day to day activities that took place in his office. This was in accord with the subject's preference for a relatively informal approach to having his portrait painted (Griffey, 2008). It was one of two small-scale genre-style portraits made of him in his office, which are remarkable in commemorating leadership as both a quiet, reflective role, and one that necessitated working with others. One shows the subject's head bent over his desk working alone, and the other shown in Figure 5 depicts him standing, looking out of his office window, while his long-standing secretary, Lynsey Burley, stands behind him. The lack of superficial detail in execution and the amount of space around the two figures creates a mental



Figure 5 Richard McWhannell (b. 1952), Hugh Fletcher with Lynsey Burley, 1996 (oil on canvas, 46.5 × 66cm). The Fletcher Trust Collection

weight to the picture, and the cool early morning light flooding in, rendered so realistically by McWhannell, contributes to the sense of a working, thoughtful person who is ultimately alone in being accountable to the organization that he leads.

Instead of the ancient Roman inspired convention for official portraits to focus on the subject's face as a memorial, here Fletcher's facial features are obscured. The focus is instead on the work setting; this is a real inhabited office rather than a portrayal of a ceremonial 'office' or post. The idea of representing a leader actually in the act of working, in an office as Hugh is represented, and in the transaction of working in an office, as seen here, is unique in New Zealand portraiture, and in fact highly unusual for a commissioned portrait. The McWhannell portraits have remained hanging in a meeting room, a perceptive and appropriate site for paintings that involve both active working situations and group dynamics. Pointedly, while Fletcher's leadership of the family business was in part his birthright, McWhannell's images do not in any way signal dynastic claims. Removed of traditional portrait conventions, the images provide a narrative about work and leadership rather than a symbol of power.

It was not until the 1940s that women were commemorated in official portraits commissioned by institutions. It took until 1997 for a female Prime Minister to lead the New Zealand Parliament: Jenny Shipley (see Figure 6). Because of the entrenched male values of both ideal leadership (encoded from antiquity when success in battle was central to power), female leader portraits depended for their authority on both acknowledging the conventions but also creating a visual paradigm for ideal female leadership. In Martin Ball's 2002 portrait of Shipley, commissioned on the occasion



Figure 6 *Martin Ball, The Right Honourable Jenny Shipley, 2002 (oil on canvas, 111 × 82cm). New Zealand Portrait Gallery Collection*

of her retirement, her authority is stressed in male terms: the head takes centre-stage and threatens to poke out of the top of the canvas, the outlines are sharp and the shoulders are broad (Griffey, 2008). Ball's use of close cropping successfully aggrandises the sitter, and inevitably positions the viewer underneath. Even her hair cut and features bear comparisons to a male ideal: short hair, broad face, strong chin. There are, however, female flourishes, most notably the slick of red lipstick situated right in the centre of the canvas, the earrings and the brooch. Ball's anatomical love of detail creates an unapologetic impression, but also a frankly human portrait. Shipley's portrait is remarkably revealing about female leadership dynamics in the 1990s and shows how they are codified in portraits.

The final official portrait commission under scrutiny here is a duo of portraits painted again by McWhannell, this time to commemorate Don McKinnon as Commonwealth Secretary General. A strict contract was negotiated with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and details of proportions for the portrait were stipulated; it had to be full-length, and it had to suit the State Drawing Room of Marlborough House, where other portraits of other former Secretaries General are hung (Griffey, 2008). The artist was a natural choice since he is well-versed in the



Figure 7 *Richard McWhannell (b. 1952)*, Don McKinnon, 2006 (oil on canvas, 152.4 × 111.8cm). Marlborough House, London

European princely tradition of portraiture. McWhannell executed two, one formal one (Figure 7) and another for the subject to bring back to New Zealand (Figure 8). A comparison of the two portraits offers fascinating insight into how the different contexts for display impacted on the presentation of the subject. Both show the subject full-length, in a suit, in the same room (McKinnon's office in Marlborough House). The informal version shows a marked change in pose, from hands clasped at the hips to hands on hips pulling the jacket aside to reveal his shirt and tie. His facial expression and angle of his head have also been modified. If one shows him posed officially, the other version presents him in a strong, even confrontational manner, a man in conversation, a leader at work.

Back in Auckland, McWhannell executed two 'imposter' portraits in which he and his wife inhabited the roles of McKinnon's official portrait, on the same scale. Thus McKinnon's portrait is part of a fascinating series of portrait 'conversations' with a specific tradition of Secretary General portraits at Marlborough House, the visual tradition of leader portraits (which is enhanced by the placement of the original in a former royal residence). McWhannell's visual role-playing speaks of the staged nature of leader portraits, and the extent to which they rely on the repetition of conventions for authority.



Figure 8 *Richard McWhannell (b. 1952)*, Don McKinnon, 2006 (oil on canvas, 152.4 × 111.8cm). Private collection, New Zealand

Discussion and conclusion

Drawing on the limited pioneering work that has investigated the visual representation of leadership, this exploratory article has brought commissioned portraits of leaders to the fore, arguing that they function as virtual leaders in that, while they are merely inanimate surrogates of leaders, they can exert an influence that endures and extends well beyond the person they represent. Most significantly, the portrait serves to underline the power of the office or institution that the leader is temporarily the nominal head of. This function was perhaps most clinically demonstrated in our analysis by the portrait of Queen Victoria, a monarch who never actually visited New Zealand. The decision to relocate her portrait to the Treaty House, long after her death, alongside the portrait of Tamati Waka Nene in order to represent the two sides of the Treaty, provides a graphic example of an effort to manipulate the portrait's function as a virtual leader.

An important subsidiary function of the commissioned portrait is to present virtuous forms of leadership. Portraits can and do act as seals of approval of leadership excellence. The significance of this was evidenced when we were repeatedly questioned by exhibition attendees about why a certain leader had been included or

another omitted. It was difficult for many not to see the exhibition in terms other than a 'Top 40' of New Zealand leaders. No questions were ever raised, however, about the choice to include not just one but three portraits of Sir Edmund Hillary, which is somewhat ironic given our concern that he did not strictly adhere to our criteria that only included portraits of leaders holding a formal office when he was portrayed. Moreover, the 'Hillary triptych' seemed to almost inevitably become the compelling focal point in all of the gallery talks in which we participated.

In addition to highlighting the virtual leadership functions played by commissioned portraits we wanted to reveal their fundamentally hybridized form. The analysis we presented served to underline the cultural and temporal significance of the *context* within which these leadership portraits were commissioned, painted, exhibited and viewed. The analysis clearly laid bare the myriad influences that had been exerted upon these paintings from beyond New Zealand through the processes of immigration, education and commercial enterprise. It also showed a distinctively 'New Zealand' style and approach to commissioned portrait painting. This style draws most obviously upon both Pakeha and Maori artistic conventions (recognizing that these themselves are hybridized cultural categories) but it also integrates Maori and Pakeha notions of idealized leadership – twin processes best illustrated by the portrait of Sir James Carroll. This approach also seeks to present a more humble and more muted form of leadership which, in contrast to the more triumphal and celebratory approaches taken by their Anglo-Saxon cousins in the United Kingdom and the United States, features the quietly heroic, verging on apologetic, leader who is fundamentally uneasy with notions of formal power and authority – an ideal embodied most compellingly for New Zealanders in the form of Sir Edmund Hillary. The interviews we conducted in gallery talks with several of the leaders featured in the exhibition revealed a marked reluctance and uneasiness to be portrayed, most especially via the highly formalized medium of oil painting but also a wry acknowledgement that it was a duty that accompanied the office. However, all reflected on what a powerful experience it had been to work with their respective artist and, while they did not necessarily like the portrait or even think it looked like them, they deferred to the artist's judgement.

What would obviously be interesting in terms of further research would be to construct similar analyses in other national and regional contexts and to explore patterns within different types of institutions and leadership roles. Recognizing that the tradition of leadership portraiture is something that has largely been confined to the West it would be important to broaden the scope of the analysis to encompass a much wider range of media (such as statues, coins, buildings and landscapes) and to encompass more abstract, collective notions of leadership that are not confined to either persons or positions.

In addition, we recognize that we need to broaden our focus to include the processes by which the visual representation of leadership is consumed, not just produced. The importance of this was made clear to us in the numerous encounters we had with exhibition attendees who responded to the individual paintings and the overall exhibition in different ways and with differing levels of engagement to the art historian and the leadership scholar. In reflecting upon how we might have increased the educative impact of the exhibition, it would have been helpful to have combined the 'Illustration of Essence' approach which we primarily took with the

three other arts-based approaches – skills transfer, projective technique and making – identified by Taylor & Ladkin (2009). The gallery talks that we participated in gave us a sense of some of the educational benefits that a more hands-on, processual approach might yield. Certainly, we were struck by the comparative richness and emotionally charged nature of the discussions that took place against the backdrop of these leadership portraits.

We look forward in earnest to seeing subsequent investigations into leadership representation and consumption which we believe will go a long way towards fulfilling the enticing promise of a truly aesthetically-informed leadership studies field. In order for this work to reach its full potential, it is imperative that leadership scholars seek out and endeavour to work with those who have already developed the most expertise in this area – art historians, most specifically, portrait specialists. As their title suggests, these scholars combine a well-polished aesthetic attitude with a strong commitment to acquiring historic knowledge. Leadership scholars, on the other hand, can expose art historians to methodologies used by leadership scholars in exploring dynamics of power and authority. Together we can fathom not only how art can improve our understanding and the practice of leading and leadership, but also how a work of art can in and of itself exert leadership. Simply put, we humbly submit that leadership scholars might seriously begin to consider the possibility of ‘Art as Leadership’.

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