Basic Detail Report

Portrait of a Man of the Sandwich Islands with His Helmet and A Young Woman of the Sandwich Islands

Date

1784-1786

Primary Maker

George Noble

Medium

engraving

Description

Although John Webber's original drawing for the man's portrait is lost, King identified him as the Hawaiian chief, Kana'ina. He is depicted wearing a feathered cloak and helmet, a costume that King described as being, "… appropriated to their Chiefs, and used on ceremonious occasions, consisting of a feathered cloak and helmet, which, in point of beauty and magnificence, is perhaps nearly equal to that of any nation in the world." Royal cloaks, made from red and gold feathers, usually included geometric motifs of circle and crescent shapes, and were high status objects worn only by elites. The woven wicker and feather headdress, with its crescent shape arching over the head, represented an extension of the spine designed to protect the mana (spirit power) of the ruler, whose royal body was considered sacred. Webber sketched the young Hawaiian woman on site, and again after returning to England, but did make a number of changes to classicize her facial features in translating his sketch into a design for Sherwin's engraving. She wears two feathered rings (lei) on her head and another around her neck. The quality of this reproduction, which is probably by George Noble (English, active 1795-1806), is higher than many of Hogg's other prints. King's extolling of the beauty of Hawaiian featherwork may have encouraged Hogg to take more care with this engraving, which differs only in subtle details.

Dimensions

Sheet: 9 5/8 x 14 1/4 in. (24.4 x 36.2 cm)