

# A dab hand at the art of diplomacy

By DON WOOLFORD,  
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For Matthias Kauage, it was "wanpela gutpela de tru long laip belong me long lukim yu, Kwin belong England". In other words, meeting the Queen was the best day of his life.

Exactly what the Queen (or "Misus Kwin") thought of the plumed Papua New Guinea highlander who'd just painted a portrait of her, resplendent in tribal plumes, ochre and nose bone, is not recorded.

But the brief meeting was enough to inspire Kauage to paint a new and slightly more orthodox series.

Kauage, in his mid-50s, has been one of Papua New Guinea's best-known painters for years.

He came to Britain about six weeks ago to exhibit some of his paintings in the Glasgow Museum of Modern Art and in the London gallery owned by Rebecca Hossack, the cultural

development officer at the Australian high commission.

He painted his first Queen portrait, a full-face, re-creation of a highland chief in full regalia, before meeting her at the opening of his exhibition.

At the exhibition he wore a headdress. She was in red coat and hat. Kauage immediately set about three more portraits, each time the Queen wearing her red outfit, looking a little like Red Riding Hood.

When he returned to London, Kauage went to Buckingham Palace to present the original to the Queen.

She wasn't there. But he later received a letter from a courtier saying: "I am commanded to thank Kauage for his kindness in making this presentation, which Her Majesty greatly appreciated."

Kauage may go home in a couple of weeks, but he hopes that in his own small way he's been a "gutpel bel amamas" — roughly, a good ambassador for his country. — AAP

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