

Hubert Vos (American, 1855–1935)

Still Life, 1933

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Andrew I. McKee
(2014-70-01)

Hubert Vos, trained in classical Dutch portraiture and still life, was a realist painter dedicated to the academic style of his predecessors. In an adaptation of subject matter, Vos introduced what he called “curios” from his travels into his Dutch repertoire, whereby enabling him to remain consistent in style, while simultaneously distinguishing himself apart from other painters working in the same genre.

The Chinese Empress Dowager Cixi commissioned Vos to paint her portrait, allowing the artist to enter the Imperial Palace in the summer of 1905. Upon completion, the Empress gifted Vos Chinese decorative arts and rare antiques of beautiful jade and fine porcelain. Those pieces, and others acquired during his stay, continued to be among his favorite subjects to paint long after his 1905 experience in China.

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(2014-70-02)

Although Vos' career spanned avant-garde trends in art at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Impressionism, he remained committed to a traditionalist style of realism that he merged overtime with his burgeoning interest in ethnography. He often portrayed subjects in meticulous detail, set in front of atmospheric, smoky backgrounds, resulting in moody and evocative impressions of figures and cultural emblems who piqued his curiosity in world cultures.

Hubert Vos (American, 1855–1935)

Study of Hawaiian Fish, 1898

Oil on canvas

Gift of Robert and Deanna Levy, 1987 (5626.1)

No doubt in reference to this depiction of a white-bearded Hawaiian fisherman spilling the bounty of the sea from his woven lauhala basket onto a table top, the Pacific Commercial Advertiser informed its readers on April 26, 1898, that:

Hubert Vos is just now engaged in a large painting of Hawaiian Fishes represented in various positions on a marble slab. He has been particularly struck by the exquisite coloring of the members of the finny tribe to be found in Hawaiian waters.

In painting this carefully detailed representation of fifty-seven varieties of fish and crustaceans Vos drew on the tradition of seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting with which he must have been familiar from his childhood and studies in Europe. The myriad forms and colors are not fanciful imaginings but were carefully rendered from sketches of actual specimens purchased at the Honolulu fish market. Vos completed this impressive work by including a kou calabash and a draped net in the background.

Hubert Vos (American, 1855–1935)

Still Life with Kang Hsi Famille Verte Vase,
1932

Oil on canvas

Gift of Robert and Deanna Levy, 1987 (5627.1)

Hubert Vos' trips to China inspired him to expand the portraiture work for which he was known with the addition of still life paintings. The title of this piece, *Still Life with Kang Hsi Famille Verte Vase*, refers to the "green family" porcelain of the K'ang Hsi period (1662-1722). This type of porcelain features taller vessels coated in translucent enamels and sometimes intricately rendered, multicolored designs, all signs of technical achievement in the development of porcelain making. K'ang Hsi famille verte porcelain pieces are symbols of royalty, power, and prestige associated with the K'ang Hsi Emperor during the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1912).

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Kolomona: Hawaiian Troubadour, 1898

Oil on canvas

Gift of Charlotte and Henry B. Clark, Jr., 1994
(7676.1)

Born in Maastrich and trained in Belgium, Hubert Vos served as Holland's art commissioner at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. After meeting and marrying Eleanor Kaikilani Coney, who was accompanying the dethroned Queen Lili'uokalani in New York, Vos traveled to Honolulu in the late 1890s and set up a studio on Richards Street. An accomplished portraitist, Vos rendered many likenesses, including this of Kolomona, a stevedore by day and entertainer at night. Kolomona's lively minstrel style is conveyed through the vibrant animation of his radiant face, sparkling eye, half-opened mouth, and sensitive hands. As one writer noted in Honolulu's Pacific Commercial Advertiser,

The whole painting is a strong piece of work, brimful of life and action. The hands draped lightly over the strings of the adopted native musical instrument of these modern days, is one of the crowning features of

the painting.

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Ekekela: Hawaiian Flower Girl, 1899

Oil on canvas

Collection of Christina Hassell & Watters O. Martin, Jr.

Even though this portrait title identifies Ekekela as a flower girl, Vos' usage of cultural and class markers raise intriguing questions about the sitter. In *Kolomona*, a portrait that hangs nearby, the musician wears a red shirt distinct to the po'ola (stevedore) uniform, which signifies Kolomona's working class status. Ekekela, on the other hand, wears a lei po'o made of 'ilima, a flower symbolic of Hawaiian royalty; dons bracelets on each wrist; and is depicted with confidence and presence. These two portraits illustrate Vos' interest in painting a range of people of the same culture from various economic and social backgrounds.

Hubert Vos (American, 1855–1935)

Asian Still life with Blue Vase, 1915

Oil on canvas

Collection of Christina Hassell & Watters O. Martin, Jr.

The Chinese Empress Dowager Cixi, so impressed with Vos' handling of her commissioned portrait, not only bestowed upon him gifts of rare Chinese antiques, but also gave him an honorary title, "Commander of the Double Dragon." In this painting, we see the artist's Imperial references including the shi (guardian lion) situated among fine examples of porcelain, with a dragon painted in the background.