

Hubert Vos: Class, Culture, and Curios

Hubert Vos: Class, Culture, and Curios brings together a selection of paintings by Dutch artist, Hubert Vos, featuring works from two genres; portraits of people he met in Hawai'i and still life compositions inspired by multiple visits to China. Together, these bodies of work offer perspective on an artist whose ability to meet the requests of his patrons while remaining stylistically consistent, produced distance yet related artworks over the course of his eventful life.

Trained in the academic painting tradition, Vos honed his skills at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels before moving on to study in Paris and Rome, and eventually opened a studio in London where his success as a society portrait painter thrived. A shift in Vos's career occurred in 1892 when he was appointed as the Royal Commissioner for Holland to serve at the Chicago World's Fair. There he encountered what he thought to be "the greatest collection of different people of the globe ever reunited in one spot..." It was on this trip that Vos's interest in painting diverse figures from around the world, and across the social strata, was spurred.

Rather than focus exclusively on upper class members of society who supported his lucrative career through portrait commissions, Vos expanded his oeuvre to include people of working class. He also embarked on what would become a lifelong interest in depicting characteristic distinctions between ethnicities, socio-economic status, and cultural emblems he called "curios" based on his international travels. The usage of class and cultural markers in a work of art offers layers of meaning. A painting's title can indicate one perspective on a subject, however cultural markers can simultaneously signify a different interpretation of who or what is being portrayed.