The Artist:
Hubert Vos
Born in Maassluis, the Netherlands, in 1855, Hubert Vos wanted to be an artist from the time he was a young boy, often sketching portraits of his classmates and teachers. He continued his education in Europe and opened a studio in London, where he taught art and painted. In 1883, Vos had the opportunity to attend the Chicago World’s Fair—it was a trip that changed his life. He was fascinated by the diversity he saw and painted portraits of many of the people he met. He decided to create portraits as he traveled the world. But first he moved to the United States, where he became a citizen and married his second wife—Eleanor Kaikilani Coney Graham. She was a descendant of Kamehameha, born on Kauai in 1867, and acting as a travel companion to Queen Lili‘uokalani when she met Vos in New York. Vos went on to paint rulers and heads of state throughout Asia, including his most famous subject, the Dowager Empress of China. When he and his wife traveled to Hawaii, Vos painted a number of works, including Study of Hawaiian Fish and Kolomona: Hawaiian Troubadour; both on view at the museum.

Honolulu Museum of Art
The museum offers:
Free guided school tours
Teacher resources
Lending Collection
Outreach programs
Art School classes
To learn more, go to honolulumuseum.org and click on Learn

A Study of Hawaiian Fish
On April 26, 1889, the Pacific Commercial Advertiser reported that Hubert Vos was working on a “large painting of Hawaiian Fishes represented in various positions on a marble slab.” He purchased actual marine specimens from the Honolulu fish market and made detailed renderings of the 57 varieties of fish and crustaceans that can be identified in his painting. They are labeled on the corresponding key. Beyond painting in accurate detail, the artist’s goal was to capture traditional life in Hawaii, even as it was changing due to Western intervention.

Vos was an academic realist painter, and he adapts his Hawaiian subject to Western intervention. His artistic goal was to capture traditional life in Hawaii, even as it was changing due to Western intervention.

To enhance the realism of his work, Vos used translucent, jewel-like tones. These techniques helped him paint everyday life in astonishing, realistic detail.

On the Cover:
Hubert Vos
American (1855–1935)
Study of Hawaiian Fish, ca. 1898
Oil on canvas
36 ½ x 72 ⅝ in.
(92.1 x 184.5 cm)

Connecting to Standards
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Hawaii Common Core ELA Literacy Standard (CCRA.R7)
Understand and apply art materials, techniques, and process in the creation of works of art and understand how the visual arts communicate a variety of ideas, feelings and experiences.

Hawaii Content and Performance Standards III
Fine Arts Standard 3. Visual Arts
Understand that science, technology, and society are interrelated.

Common Core Teaching Ideas

Ask students to identify a fish in the painting, research that fish, and write an informative paragraph integrating the information found with that from the painting and the key.

What information does the key add to the painting? What does the painting capture or share that the key alone does not? How do the painting and key complement each other to provide a more complete understanding of the marine life?

Who might the man in the painting be? Have your students imagine what the man in the painting might say to them if they could jump into the painting.

Who might the man in the painting be? What does this remind you of something from your own life? Is there any fish you can recognize and name?

Discuss the painting using the ODIC process on this poster, then about the painting on the poster.

Discuss the traditional Hawaiian implements in the painting (i.e., calabash, lauhala basket, net). Have students research one of these traditional artifacts and write a short informative paragraph about the artifact, to include what they know from both what they have read and from the depiction of the artifact in the painting.

Who might the man in the painting be? What does this remind you of something from your own life? Is there any fish you can recognize and name?