

# READ A WORK OF ART AS YOU WOULD READ A BOOK

Honolulu  
Museum of Art



Teachers Teaching Teachers  
THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER  
AT HANAHAU'OLI SCHOOL  
Endowed by the  
Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation

Art is a powerful pathway into the Hawai'i Common Core

Observe

Look closely and quietly.

Describe

What do you see?

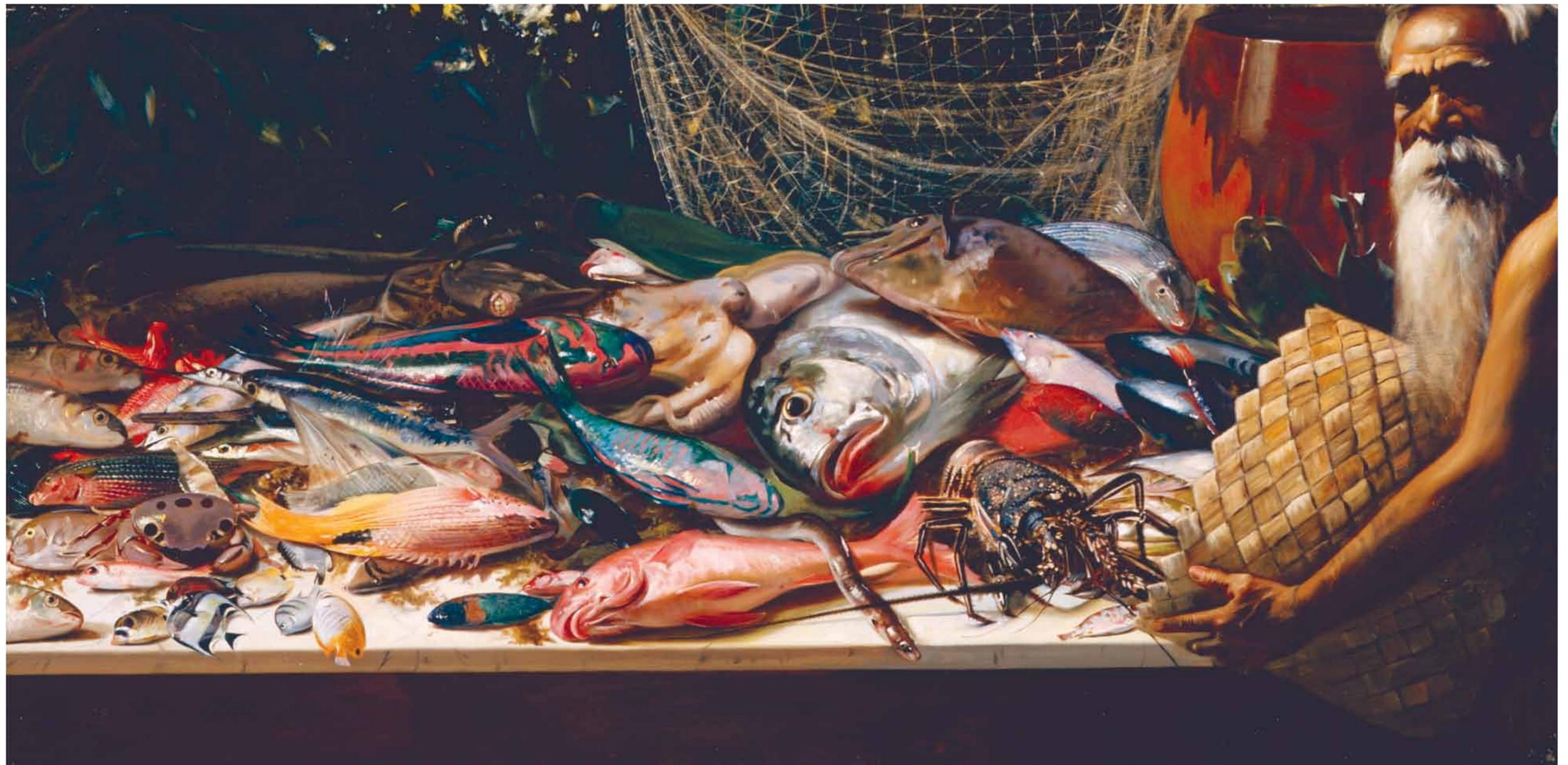
Interpret

What do you think this painting is about and what makes you say that?

Connect

What does this remind you of? Why? What more do you want to know? Why?

Learn more at  
[HawaiiPublicSchools.org](http://HawaiiPublicSchools.org)



ON THE COVER:

**Hubert Vos**  
American  
(1855–1935)  
*Study of  
Hawaiian Fish,*  
ca.1898

Oil on canvas  
36 ½ × 72 ⅞ in.  
(92.1 × 184.5 cm)

**The Artist:  
Hubert Vos**

**BORN IN MAASTRICHT**, 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 1893, 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 met and married his second wife—Eleanor Kaikilani Coney Graham. She was a descendant of Kamehameha, born on Kaua’i 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 Hawai’i, Vos painted a number of works, including *Study of Hawaiian Fish* and *Kolomona: Hawaiian Troubadour*, both on view at the museum.

**The Artwork:**

*A Study of  
Hawaiian Fish*

On April 26, 1898, 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 Hawai’i, even as it was changing due to Western intervention.

An academic *realist* painter, Vos adapted his Hawaiian subject to the Dutch or Flemish tradition of *still life* painting. *Realism* in Dutch painting can be traced back to the

Northern Renaissance (1430 to 1580), a time when vibrant international trade created a wealthy middle class who *commissioned* (paid artists to create) artwork for them. At the same time, Dutch artists perfected the use of oil paint, using layers of paint to create translucent, jewel-like tones. These techniques helped them paint everyday life in astonishing, realistic detail.

**Common Core Teaching Ideas**

Have 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 do you think he will do with all of the fish? Are there any fish you can recognize and name?*

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. Access other media such as photographs or video to add to the students’ understanding of the implements.

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 can be conveyed in paragraph format that is not conveyed by the painting or the key?*

Discuss the painting using the ODIC process on this poster (see right), then have students analyze the online corresponding key (see left).

*Are there any fish you can recognize and name?*

*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?*

**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.R.7)

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 1: Visual Arts

Understand that science, technology, and society are interrelated.

Hawaii Content and Performance Standards III  
Science-Standard 2: The Scientific Process: Nature of Science

**Honolulu  
Museum of Art**

**The museum offers:**

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Teacher resources

Lending Collection

Outreach programs

Art School classes

To learn more, go to [honoluluuseum.org](http://honoluluuseum.org) and click on **Learn**

**Observe, Describe, Interpret, Connect (ODIC)**

Four simple steps to engage with art:

The key to this looking strategy is to prompt students to describe and report as much as they see, with evidence from within the artwork.

You may be surprised by what they come up with given the opportunity to just look.

The hardest part is allowing time to look on their own—resist the urge to share what you see or what you think they should see.

**OBSERVE:** Start by taking a minute or two to do some silent, close looking.

**DESCRIBE:** Have students describe what they see, using evidence from within the artwork.

*What is the first thing you notice? Where do you see that? How is the artist showing you that? What more can you find?*

**INTERPRET:** Have students interpret what they see, by thinking about the time, place, mood, intention, and content of the painting.

*What is the story? How do you know that? Who are the main characters? What is the mood of the painting? Where is the story taking place? Could this be taking place today or is it a long time ago? What might be going on just beyond the edge of the frame? Where does the story go next? Are there clues in the painting that make you think that?*

**CONNECT:** Have students connect the artwork to their own lives to make it relevant.

*Does this remind you of something from your own life? Can you relate to what’s going on in this picture? What more do you want to know? If you could ask the artist one question about the image, what would it be? If you could change one thing about this work of art, what would it be and why?*



Visit [honoluluuseum.org](http://honoluluuseum.org), click on **Learn** in the menu and go to **Teacher Resources** to find: Printer-friendly key of painting labeled by fish species, as well as information on opportunities to visit and learn more about loko i’a (ancient Hawaiian fishponds).