

THE PHOENIX

In their final decades, both John and Grace were beset by health problems. By 1920, Grace was diagnosed with a thyroid condition for which surgery was prescribed. After some research on John's part, however, Grace chose instead a treatment in which radium tubes were implanted in her neck to slow a developing goiter. The tubes remained there for the rest of her life. John, too, suffered increasingly from a series of ulcers and a weak heart, and Grace spent more and more time nursing him. Creative as always, though, Grace now began experimenting with new media and processes such as sculpture and hooked rug design. Yet none of the resulting work was as commercially successful as her paintings, perhaps due to the difficult economic climate of the Great Depression.

In 1925 John and Grace returned to Europe for a five-month tour. While abroad, Grace again viewed the cream of European art. In a letter home to her nephew Mark Carpenter, she mused: "I know now why my little Indians sell – we have looked at hundreds of paintings – from all over Europe and of every period since the beginning of art...My canvases are unique. Their originality places them apart, in subject, sentiment and technique. One of my babies would attract attention in any gallery we have been in."

Her perception about the uniqueness of her contributions to the history of Western art, history for the most part made by men in metropolitan areas, was accurate. Few painters have ever chronicled a people with such devotion and attention to detail. Her connection to Ukiah, which she chose to make her lifelong home, played a significant role in her success. There she gained models with relative ease, relying on long-standing friendships with successive generations of Pomo families.

Dr. John Wilz Hudson died on January 20, 1936, followed in three months by Grace's twin brother, Grant. There is no evidence that Grace ever painted again. Little more than one year later, on March 27, 1937, Grace herself succumbed to a heart attack. She is buried at the Ukiah Cemetery beneath a great basalt monument of her own design. At its apex is a phoenix – a symbol of immortality. It is a likely indication that she desired her life story, and her art, to endure. The Grace Hudson Museum in Ukiah is a testament to her vision.



Grace and John Hudson standing in the driveway to the north of the Sun House, 1927. Unknown photographer. Grace Hudson Museum, 18933. The Hudsons are below the redwood structure supporting a church bell from their collection of large bells. It is still in place today, as are the school bell and fire bell to the left of it. Grace has a Pomo Indian dowry bag hanging at her waist.



Right: The Phoenix monument at the Hudson/Carpenter plot, Ukiah Cemetery, ca. 1894. Unknown photographer. Grace Hudson Museum, 15923. The stone benches bear the Hudson and Carpenter family crests. Grace sometimes took visitors to admire the double plot that she so carefully designed. Today, large stones mark the graves of Grace, John, Grace's brother Grant, Grant's son Mark, Mark's wife Melissa and Melissa's second husband, Otis.



Left: The quailpond birdbath at the Hudson/Carpenter plot, Ukiah Cemetery, 1995. Unknown photographer. Grace Hudson Museum, 17536.e



Grace and John Hudson and friends, Potter Valley, 1922. Unknown photographer. Grace Hudson Museum, 18016

ART SCHOOL AND EARLY WORKS

Grace Carpenter Hudson's parents, A.O. and Helen Carpenter, recognized and encouraged their youngest daughter's artistic abilities. In 1879, in what was both a financial and emotional sacrifice, they allowed Grace while in her mid-teens, to study at the San Francisco School of Design (later known successively as the California School of Design, then the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art, and currently as the San Francisco Art Institute). The only art school of its kind west of the Mississippi, it was under the directorship of artist Virgil Williams, and provided students with a solid grounding in the fundamentals of art.

Like other American art schools in this era, the School of Design looked to Europe for inspiration. All of its early faculty had studied abroad and the School's curriculum was largely based on that of the famous *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. Students were instructed in drawing, painting, and sculptural modelling, and their training followed a progression of sketching from engravings, studying anatomy, composition, and perspective, drawing from plaster casts of classical sculptures, and finally working from live models. The School of Design also offered classes in landscape painting. At that time, its Board of Directors claimed that it was the only art school known in the United States or Europe to offer a landscape class in which teachers took their students outside to sketch. Advertisements for the School highlighted its instruction in "drawing from nature."

Grace showed great promise at the School of Design, winning praise from her instructors for her abilities and progress. Her style changed markedly as she began to incorporate the many new ideas and techniques from her training into her work. She came to be known as the "lightning striker" in her life drawing class due to the rapidity with which she worked. In 1881, when only sixteen, Grace won the School of Design's coveted Alvord Gold Medal, awarded for the best full-length study in conte crayon from a plaster cast. Many of Grace's classmates also went on to notable artistic careers, and she continued lifelong friendships with several of them.

In 1884, against the wishes of her parents, Grace Carpenter married William Davis, an older man she had met in San Francisco. Their ill-advised marriage was short-lived, and Grace abandoned the Bay Area, returning to Ukiah at the age of twenty carrying the stigma of divorce. She set up a studio, where she began to paint and teach art. During these early years, she explored various genres including landscapes, still lifes, and portraits, executing them in a variety of media.



Class at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art, ca. 1896. Photograph by Isabel Porter Collins. California Historical Society. GN-02910



Carpenter's winning conte crayon study of Achilles. Unknown photographer. Grace Hudson Museum, gift of Searles R. Boynton.



The Alvord Gold Medal awarded to Grace for the Achilles drawing. Both are now in the holdings of the California Historical Society (CHS). Photo by Cheryl Maslin, 2008, courtesy of the CHS.



Grace Carpenter at age sixteen, 1881. Photograph by A.O. Carpenter. Grace Hudson Museum. 77-92-8

TECHNIQUES



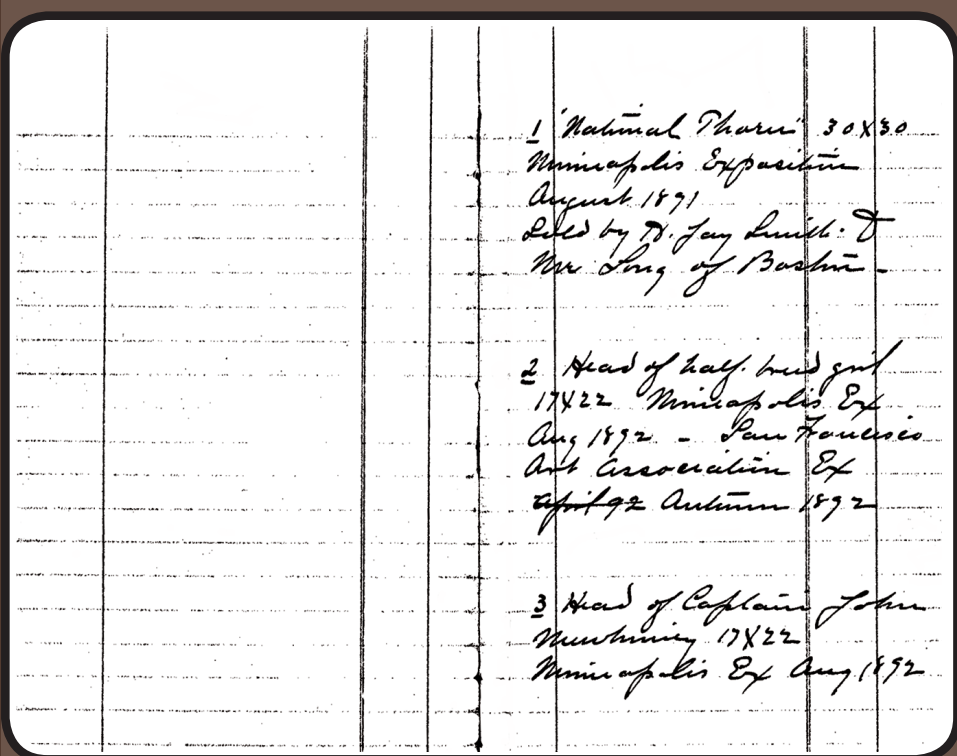
Grace sketching outside, “en plein air,” 1922. Unknown photographer. Grace Hudson Museum. 18399



Woman posing in Grace's studio, supporting a baby basket containing an imitation infant on her back, ca. 1896. Grace Hudson Museum, 18470. This photo served as the model for Grace's painting No. 66.



Blue Monday, 1896. Monday was the traditional day to do laundry, an occupation performed for pay by many Pomo women in the area. Grace Hudson Museum. Contact print 3066



First page of Hudson's initial painting diary (1891-1907). Grace Hudson Museum. 5009a. Grace compiled three such diaries in the course of her career. In these diaries she recorded a variety of facts for each painting, numbering pieces chronologically from 1 through 684. Titles and/or descriptions of subject matter, names of models used, sizes of works, identification of buyers, places exhibited, dates of production, and awards received, all found their way into her little books.



Grace in her Ukiah home and studio, prior to the Sun House, ca. 1895. Unknown photographer. Grace Hudson Museum. 18445

Though adept in a variety of media including pen and ink, pencil, plaster casting, and watercolor, oil is the medium for which Grace Hudson is best known. Her paintings are exceptionally realistic, and many people have wondered if she utilized photographs in creating her portraits. Hudson always publicly denied such a practice. Her twin brother Grant Carpenter, a San Francisco journalist, published a piece on Hudson's art in 1897 which purported to reveal her work methods. Chief among these was the use of photographs to capture her young subjects' poses. At this, Grace was outraged, and stated in print: “the fact is that Grace Hudson does not depend on a Kodak for her studies. She is a thorough artist, and the imputation that she uses a Kodak to assist her art is not to her liking...” Grant responded that “there were seven different kinds of fools in the world and that he believed himself to be a resplendent combination of the group.” However, a careful reader will notice that he did not say he was in error.

In truth, Grace's compositions were based on a combination of photos of individuals, especially their facial expressions; preparatory sketches; and painting from live models. She often also used her small plein air landscapes as inspiration for the backgrounds of her studio portraits. To begin, she would deftly sketch her composition with charcoal on a canvas or board support, then give an overall underpainting to define broad sections of light and dark. On top of this, she added layers of paint and glazes, building from the general to the specific. She finished with highlights and fine detail to create a sense of sharp focus, notably so in the faces of her subjects. Interestingly, though her early pieces could exhibit broad brush strokes and a somewhat uneven paint application, her mature brushwork is known for its ultra smooth quality, sometimes even nearing the point of invisibility.

Renowned for the rapidity with which she worked, it is clear from her painting diaries, which she kept from 1891 until 1936, that she could turn out a jewel-like miniature in one week. However, her larger oils and sketches in bitumen (a tar derivative) could take weeks or months to complete. She was gifted in the use of color, an area of expertise in which black and white photographs were of little help. She favored a darker palette, more Tonalist in nature than that employed by many early California painters. This palette, her subject matter, her working methods and techniques—all adopted at the beginning of her career—did not vary in any significant way for the rest her life.

A SHARED FOCUS

In 1890, four years after her divorce from first husband William T. Davis, Grace married Nashville born-and-raised Dr. John Wilz Napier Hudson. He was a handsome, 6'2" tall physician who had recently resettled in Ukiah. Fascinated with anthropology since youth, he soon became a serious student of the local Pomo Indian culture. Grace now began, led by her own interests and encouraged by her new husband, to settle on a theme and media that were to remain remarkably consistent throughout her long artistic career: for more than four decades she painted oil portraits of the Pomo Indians whom she had known from birth. "My desire," she wrote, "is that the world shall know them as I know them and before they vanish."

Throughout their married life, the Hudsons pursued a joint goal – the depiction and preservation of what they believed to be a disappearing people. John Hudson accomplished this through his ethnographic studies, recording hundreds of pages of Pomo linguistic, cultural, and historical information. He also collected and documented thousands of Pomo artifacts, most of which can be found in museums across the country, including the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. In contrast, Grace Hudson attempted to portray the Pomo Indian peoples' history, culture, and beliefs visually, through her canvases. She took great care that her detailed paintings were ethnographically correct, often turning to John for his help in this matter. Over the years, the Hudsons developed long-lasting, multi-dimensional, and friendly (albeit paternalistic) relationships with many nearby Pomo families, particularly the Mitchells, the Scotts, the Duncans and the Peters.

Contrary to the Hudsons' expectations, Pomo peoples did not disappear, but today are a vital part of the local community as they undergo a cultural resurgence and revitalization. Grace, however, did succeed in capturing them during a point in their history that has since passed—depicting scenes of everyday life in the hop fields, at home on the rancherias, and in the lovely Ukiah countryside. Just as importantly, her paintbrushes dramatized a number of Pomo myths, and recorded ceremonies that marked significant life events among Pomo peoples, such as births, marriages, and deaths. And always, her affection and appreciation for the individuals she painted shines from her canvases.



Grace Hudson and an unidentified Pomo basketweaver. Near Ukiah, ca. 1895. Unknown photographer, Grace Hudson Museum. 18442



Grace Hudson, kneeling at left, with unidentified Pomo woman and child. John Scott in distance. Pinoleville rancheria, ca. 1890. John Hudson, probable photographer. Grace Hudson Museum, 1999-3-2. Native elders recalled hearing the bells of the Hudsons' carriage as it drove up to the Pomo rancherias. Youngsters would run out to meet "doc and the Painter Lady," knowing that there would be gifts of candy and dried fruit for them to enjoy.



John Hudson at rear, with Pomo Captain Jack Napoleon and two Pomo children. Pinoleville rancheria, ca. 1892. H.W. Henshaw, photographer, Smithsonian Institution. Negative No. 47,750j



Miscellaneous Pomo baskets from the Hudsons' basket collection, ca. 1893. A.O. Carpenter, photographer. Grace Hudson Museum, contact print 9057. The Hudsons commissioned and purchased an extensive collection of Pomo artifacts, particularly basketry, which Grace used in her portraits to outfit her subjects with "props." Many of these artifacts are in the Grace Hudson Museum's collections, and a few that are pictured in the paintings are on display in this gallery.



Interior of Pomo structure with light streaming in around door and through the gaps in the walls. Near Ukiah, ca. 1895. A.O. Carpenter, probable photographer. Grace Hudson Museum. 15151

Grace Hudson, ca. 1915. Photograph by A.O. Carpenter. Grace Hudson Museum. 2451a



INTRODUCTION

In 1891, when Grace Carpenter Hudson officially inaugurated her career as a professional artist, oil painting was an occupation ruled by men, and many wealthy Californians were looking to Europe or the eastern United States when seeking to purchase art. However, appreciation for the grand Western landscapes of nationally known painters such as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Hill, and William Keith was on the wane, and collectors were looking for something new. Into this changing world stepped petite Grace Carpenter Hudson (1865-1937), daughter of Potter Valley, California pioneers Helen and A. O. Carpenter.

It is a testament to Grace's talent, spirit, and tenacity that she became a nationally successful artist herself, and is now recognized as one of the West's most accomplished painters of American Indian portraiture. Though other artists of the time focused their subject matter on Indians (a poignant choice, as many tribes were on the verge of disappearing), it was Grace's unique portrayal of the Pomo baby in a cradle basket that caught the public's eye and became her trademark. It is an image that would not have occurred to male artists of the day, and she used it consistently throughout her professional life.

This exhibition features paintings and related artworks by Grace Carpenter Hudson from the collections of the Grace Hudson Museum & Sun House in Ukiah, California. We have selected representative examples of her work from her student days through the unfolding and development of her career. On exhibit are some ten of the approximately 685 numbered oil portraits and genre scenes that comprised her professional painting output, in addition to sample oil sketches, watercolors, pen & ink illustrations, and drawings.

Grace kept a painting diary in which she recorded information about works she felt were completed and worthy of sale. She numbered each piece in her diary consecutively. Where applicable, these numbers are provided on labels throughout the exhibit. Grace also wrote little vignettes, or "painting stories" to accompany many of her pieces, which dealers often attached to the backs of her canvases. Where possible, we have included these to allow you to experience the artist's own words about the inspiration for her work. We trust you will enjoy the artistry of Grace Hudson on display here. And we extend an invitation to visit the Grace Hudson Museum—and Grace's home and studio, the Sun House—in Ukiah, California.

Marvin Schenck – Curator
Karen Holmes – Family Historian & Registrar
Sherrie Smith-Ferri – Director



Twins Grant and Grace Carpenter, ca. 1869. Photograph by A.O. Carpenter. Grace Hudson Museum. 18355c. On reverse of this photo is written, "He was so mad because they made him hold her hand."

Right: Grace Carpenter, 1877. Photograph by A.O. Carpenter. Grace Hudson Museum. 18349a



Grace Carpenter in a romantic costume, ca. 1885. Photograph by A.O. Carpenter. Grace Hudson Museum. 18386



Grace Carpenter Hudson and her husband with their Saint Bernard, Mascot, ca. 1892. Photograph by A.O. Carpenter. Grace Hudson Museum. 18300

GRACE HUDSON



Painter of the Pomo People

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Photo above: Grace Hudson in her father's Ukiah studio, circa 1897. Photograph by A. O. Carpenter. Grace Hudson Museum. 18382b