Motherhood

Young Zeeland Mother with Two Children in the Dunes
Oil on canvas
100 × 100 cm
Signed: lower left

Exhibited:

Laren, 27 May – 9 July 1967, Ferdinand Hart Nibbrig 1866–1915: Retrospective Exhibition, Singer Museum, no. 51; Commemorative Exhibition of Works by F. Hart Nibbrig, Gooische Painters' Association, Kunstzaal Hamdorff, Laren, 24 July – 16 August 1953, no. 10.

Every summer, Hart Nibbrig set out on excursions and continued to visit Walcheren until the final years of his life. In 1910, he even commissioned the architect George Sturm to design a house for him in Zoutelande, which he named Santvlugt. In a letter to Plasschaert, Hart Nibbrig wrote: "Let me be among the first to tell you. We have bought a small but beautiful piece of land here. I find Walcheren more delightful with each passing day."

In a subsequent letter, Hart Nibbrig wrote to Plasschaert: "We are still in Laren, but time is passing quickly. We leave for Zoutelande on 1 June, and then I will finally be able to work regularly again."

Hart Nibbrig regularly travelled in search of light effects, studying them outdoors and capturing them in his artworks. He moved away from the brown and sombre tones of his earlier work. It was primarily his Zeeland paintings that reflected his new aim of incorporating more light into his buildings, landscapes and portraits. In his portraits, in particular, this approach resulted in works that were no longer conventional likenesses but rather universal representations of humanity.

A clear development can be seen in Hart Nibbrig's portraiture. Initially, he focused on portraying patrons, family members and friends in a more realistic style. In portraits commissioned by patrons, a recognisable likeness was especially important. This changed during his years in Zoutelande. From that point onwards, he no longer painted commissioned portraits. His realistic approach also gave way to Pointillism, a technique he had discovered during his youth in Paris. It involved applying unmixed colours through small dots and strokes. He was also deeply impressed by the way the Impressionists Claude Monet (1840–1926) and Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) explored the effects of sunlight and light more generally. He brought this knowledge back to the Netherlands, becoming one of the early artists in the country to apply the pointillé technique.

As Hart Nibbrig continued to develop as a mature artist, he increasingly turned to portraying the local population.

Hart Nibbrig found many of his Zeeland subjects near the church, which stood close to the beach and the dunes. Like many other painters, he set up his easel there. Remarkably, he paid local people to pose for him. Schoolgirls, in particular, would queue to be painted by Hart Nibbrig. Many were classmates of his sons and daughter. The generous fee of ten cents per hour was an attractive incentive for the inhabitants of Zoutelande, most of whom worked as agricultural labourers or small traders.

Among those he portrayed were Oude Martine, Willem Flipse, Neeltje Melis and Lange Kees.