Write a museum label for this object

George Oscar Baker
American, 1882–1948
The Chinese Gown, 1918
Oil on canvas

In the early 20th century, American painters were deeply influenced by "Japonisme"—the Western fascination with East Asian aesthetics. In this intimate interior, George Oscar Baker utilizes the dark, floral-patterned robe and decorative folding fan to create a scene of refined cosmopolitanism. The woman's downward gaze and the letter in her lap suggest a narrative of quiet contemplation or perhaps a private correspondence interrupted.

Baker employs a sophisticated play of light and reflection, a hallmark of the Boston School of Impressionism. By including the sitter's profile in the mirror behind her, he expands the pictorial space and offers a dual perspective of her form. The loose, energetic brushwork in the white skirt contrasts with the more meticulous rendering of the brass tea service, demonstrating the artist's ability to capture the diverse textures of a modern, upper-middle-class domestic life.

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Gemini read the plaque in the frame and initially attributed the work to American Impressionist George Ames Aldrich. It recognized that Aldrich painted landscapes and pastoral scenes, but hand waved away the genre difference to justify its attribution. It was able to successfully correct when prompted.

Orientalism is critically important for understanding this work, and the chat oversimplifies the discussion. It fails to address how the opening of Japan to trade in 1864 reignited a centuries long fascination with Asian goods or how Asian art catalyzed *avant garde* experimentation because of its novel forms. Perhaps most glaringly, it doesn't address how new political, colonial, and industrial relationships between the East and West permitted the mass manufacture and acquisition of Asian décor as a display of burgeoning middle-class wealth, and it certainly doesn't explain why the inclusion of Chinese objects is still considered Japanism.

After updating the artist's name, Gemini still lumped him in with other American Impressionists, but Baker studied in Paris at the Académie Julian and Académie Colarossi. The Boston School is irrelevant here.

Hallucination.

George Oscar Baker
American, born 1882

The Chinese Coat
1912

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Christine M. Schwartz, 2021.1.1

Gemini's assessment of Japonisme, though perhaps better classified as orientalism considering the title, carefully skirts the racist reality of modernist imperialism while centering the elegance of the Western middle-class. Gemini softens the language of appropriation and fetish into "fascination," and before a viewer can think too deeply, they are carried away with a discussion of the work's "sophisticated" brushwork.

Ultimately, Gemini's understanding of art history is restricted to what has been, with limited capacity to consider what contemporary audiences need and demand in the current moment. The public may always have a desire to admire beautiful artwork, but curators have a responsibility to engage with non-visual aspects like culture and history to weave a fresh, engaging, and valuable narrative.