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ART PHOTOGRAPHY



JAMES VANDERZEE

James VanDerZee was born in 1886, in Lenox, Massachusetts, and moved to New York in 1905. He worked at a number of odd jobs (including darkroom assistant to a Newark department-store photographer), but when his sister, who ran a music conservatory out of her Harlem home, asked VanDerZee to work there with her, his career as the preëminent photographic eye of the Harlem Renaissance took off. VanDerZee documented the streets and photographed local luminaries and schoolchildren, often in elaborately art-directed tableaux. Portraits such as "At Home, Josephine Becton," from 1934, which shows a proud matron in hat and gloves, place the subject firmly in an haut-bourgeois milieu. VanDerZee was also the official photographer of Marcus Garvey's organization, the United Negro Improvement Association, and a politicized perspective comes through in a picture taken in 1924 of a gorgeous black woman with her hands on the shoulders of her young white charge, who in turn holds a sign that says "Service with a Smile." Opens Sept. 12. (Rosenfeld, 24 W. 57th St. 247-0082.)

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