

Alberto Vargas

Joaquin Alberto Vargas y Chavez (1896-1982) was born in Peru in 1896. In 1911 he went to Paris with his brother and father. The boys were on their way to Switzerland for schooling and eventual apprenticeships, but the Paris stopover changed Alberto's life forever. There Vargas discovered his two great artistic idols: Ingres and Raphael Kirchner. Kirchner was a premier artist for La Vie Parisienne. Vargas was profoundly influenced by his technique and his approach to the female figure. Vargas was summoned to England in 1916 to begin his apprenticeship with a major English photography house. With World War One swirling around him, he found it impossible to get from Paris to London. It was, however, feasible to get to America and then back to Peru, so he headed for home, but Vargas didn't make it.

Vargas stayed in New York and found work retouching photographs, drawing and painting. In 1919, Vargas became the primary Ziegfeld artist for twelve years, painting portraits of all the stars of each season on Broadway. Vargas was never a very successful businessman and when the Follies work ended in 1931 he found himself in financial hardship and desperate for work. Then, in similar fashion of his replacing Kirchner at the Ziegfeld Follies, Esquire hired him to replace George Petty, another well-known pin-up artist of the time. In 1958, Vargas finally returned to Peru for a much-needed break from his commercial artist career. The late fifties were a time of little paying work for Vargas. Instead Vargas spent those years perfecting his technique and fine-tuning his skills.

Hugh Hefner then hired Vargas in 1960 to paint foldout nudes for Playboy magazine. At the age of 64, when most people are considering the notion of retirement, Vargas began a new career that would finally give him the respect and financial security he merited. He worked for Playboy for 16 years during which time he produced 152 paintings. Many of them were masterpieces, but the constant need to create a glamorous painting of a sexy 19 year old month after month often resulted in some formulaic and occasionally perfunctory work.

Vargas had an intuitive ability to paint an idealized female form glorified but never vulgarized. Vargas' art was all about sensuality and seduction, but the sex was never blatant.

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