

RECORDING HISTORY THROUGH ART WORK A Personal Experience

By Le'Ruth Ward Tyau

One of the purposes of the Mormon Pacific History Society is to teach those skills helpful in recording historical information. The word 'History' has four dictionary meanings:

1. An account of what has happened, narrative, story, tale;
2. What has happened in the life or development of a people, country, institution, etc.;
3. All recorded events of the past;
4. The branch of knowledge that deals systematically with the past; a recording, analyzing, coordinating, and explaining of past events.

Usually when we say we are recording history as historians, we think of recording with words. Therefore, to teach skills helpful in recording history, we usually are dealing with written recordings or oral recordings.

However, there are other ways to record history. One way is through the use of photography which we commonly use to enhance and document written histories. Another way to record history is through the use of the fine arts—drawing, painting, and sculpture. It is these latter three methods of recording history that I would like to enlarge upon. I will not be able to teach you the skills of art in order for you to record history, but rather I hope to encourage all of you as potential artists to make use of drawings, paintings, and even sculpture in recording your personal history.

Some of you will immediately think you do not have the ability to produce works of art. Others of you will think, Yes, I've always had the desire to draw or paint, I want to try. All artists have varying abilities to produce works of art: from the primitive, crude beginnings to the skillful, masterfully executed renderings and all the variations in between. The limited abilities of the artist need not stop one from recording history. There is great charm in so-called primitive or folk art which training in art often negates. All artists have elementary beginnings; it is only with practice that skills are perfected.

Artists are the reproducers of earth scenes and people and the transient episodes of life for the enjoyment of the present and for the future. Throughout history, artistic recording and reproducing has been done by craftsmen and architects as well as fine artists. Let me share four examples:

1. In Egypt, the great pyramid of Gizeh was built about 2700 B.C. Many artistic treasures were found inside. One of the treasures was a carved drawing of a man in Egypt. It was carved on the wooden doors of the tomb. We know something

- about the stature and clothing of men of that time because of that carved drawing. It is preserved in the Cairo Museum.
2. A fragment of a harp was found in Ur, the homeland of Abraham. It is gilt and inlaid wood with graceful figures of animals on the harp. It is believed to have been made about 2800 B.C. and is preserved in the London British Museum.
3. Chinese art has historical references from 1100 B.C. Pottery, with decorative designs, is thought to be 6,000 years old.
4. Polynesian art; rock painting and carvings, date back to 1600 B.C. Design systems on pottery is traced back to 3000 and 4000 B.C. There are thousands of art objects in Museums throughout the world which testify to the fact that History has been recorded by art work. History and Art are inter-related.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American Philosopher of the nineteenth century, said, "faith in the spirit of God gives man immense scope and gives every moment tremendous significance. Man will come to see that the world is the perennial miracle which the spirit worketh, and be less astonished at particular wonders; he will learn that there is no profane history; that all history is sacred; that the universe is represented in an atom, in a moment of time." In his Essay on Art, Emerson wrote, "The artist must employ the symbols in use in his day and nation to convey his enlarged sense to his fellowmen. Thus the new in art is always formed out of the old. The Genius of the Hour sets his ineffaceable seal on the work and gives it an inexpressible charm for the imagination. As far as the spiritual character of the period overpowers the artist and finds expression in his work, so far it will retain a certain grandeur, and will represent to future beholders the Unknown, the Inevitable, the Divine. . .No man can quite emancipate himself from his age and country. . .he cannot wipe out of his work every trace of the thoughts amidst which it grew . . .Above his will and out of his sight he is necessitated by the air he breathes and the idea on which he and his contemporaries live and toil, to share the manner of his times, without knowing what that manner is. Now that which is inevitable in the work has a higher charm than individual talent can ever give, inasmuch as the artist's pen or chisel seems to have been held and guided by a gigantic hand to inscribe a line in the history of the human race. This circumstance gives a value to the Egyptian hieroglyphics, to the Indian, Chinese and Mexican idols, however gross and shapeless. They denote the height of the human soul in that hour. Shall I now add that the whole extant product of the plastic arts has herein its highest value as history; as a stroke drawn in the portrait of God, perfect and beautiful, according to whose ordinations all beings advance to their beatitude. Thus, historically viewed, it has been the office of art to educate the perception of beauty. . .The virtue of art lies in detachment, in sequestering one object from the embarrassing variety." In this process, Emerson says, are we able to have deep thought. "From this succession of excellent objects we learn at last the immensity of the world, the opulence of human nature, which can run out to infinitude in any direction."

Art has been a part of recording L.D.S. Church History since the beginnings of the restoration of the Church in the 1800's. The Church is currently building a new Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City just west of Temple Square (Public opening will be June 1, 1983). There will be several art galleries for changing exhibitions. In preparation for the museum, the Curator of Collections, is obtaining resumes, slides of art work, and biographies of L.D.S. artists.

The history of the Church in Polynesia is not only the past but is being made daily by us as we live our lives. We are urged to keep journals and histories of our thoughts and events in our lives. We treasure our photographs but there is something very special about drawings, paintings, or sculpture as recorded history. As we endeavor to record the history of people in the Church in Polynesia we should not hesitate to use all methods available to us—written history, oral history, photographic history, and history recorded by art.

I have a quote posted on a wall of our home which I read frequently. It is a quote from Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish Secretary-General to the United Nations during the fifties: "Let me read with open eyes the book my life is writing—and learn." As an artist-historian I often think of how I can illustrate the 'book my life is writing' with photography and art work such as drawings, paintings and sculptures.

Art is a sacred commitment in my life, part of a four-fold purpose for being—Family, Religion, History and Art have been my life work. My parents, George David Ward and Callie Belle Arrington Ward provided me with a very good first family experience. My husband, Elmer Doong Shing Tyau, and our three sons and four daughters, have provided me with opportunities to learn the art of companionship and the art of parenting. Tracing my husband's genealogy back 23 generations into China gave me the experience of research and genealogy and recording history. Having the opportunity to hear and learn the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and being a part of the Church organization has taught me the Art of Living. Getting my Bachelor of Art degree in World Religions enhanced my love of the religious and the Spiritual.

I would like to share examples of my personal experience of recording history through art work, fully aware as I do so, of my inabilities and limitations as an artist. I have had some periodic training in art since the age of 10, but much has been trial and error and experimentation. Much of my art work is the result of just having the courage to 'dive in' and start—all the while relying on the spirit to help me as much as possible. I hope it will encourage each of you to have confidence that if you have the desire you, too, can make historical recordings in art work.

I thought of myself as an 'artist' from a very early age. Examples of my early art-history include a childlike drawing of our home in Declo, Idaho; my sister, Elaine Ward Mayfield, in her hair curlers; and a drawing of Elaine asleep in our old brass bed. At the

age of 8, I began copying pictures of flowers in seed catalogues. At the age of 10, I attempted to copy the great masters like Landseer and the Dutch artists.

At the age of 12, we moved to Logan, Utah. Some examples of recordings from this period of my life include: Watercolors of a tumble-down structure of our neighbors and the apple tree in our backyard. Two drawings of my sister—one showing her listening to our big radio in 1946 and another when she was ready for bed.

During College days there were drawings of San Jose, California and beginning still life studies. The afternoon light on a farm house was recorded during those years.

Following marriage to my husband, Elmer, I have art work which records our seven-year history in Utah and California: Our prefab apartment in Logan, Utah while attending Utah State University; my husband studying at an old desk; my husband holding our baby, Warren; on the shore of Bear Lake on a grey, overcast, chilly day; watercolor scenes of Logan, Utah street scenes; our neighborhood grocery store; a pastel sketch of baby, Warren, sleeping; and a drawing of Jeffrey sleeping; two awkward attempts at pastel drawings on black paper; one of our son, Jeffrey; one of my husband; the young children playing on a California beach; sculptures of my husband and daughter done in terra cotta; sculpture in plaster of our son, Winston; a plaster carving inspired by our baby Jeffrey's position of sleeping. In my first oil portraits, we can still see young Winston and Jennifer as they posed for Mama's first attempts in a life-size portrait; a conte drawing of young Jeffrey with his arms around his Dad—I wanted so much to show the tender love that can exist between a father and child; and a pencil drawing of my father carrying the milk buckets.

It was in 1962—the year we moved our family to Hawaii—my Hawaiian-art-history began. I became a part of Polynesian Church history. I produced some art work for two years. Examples of my work during this time show portraits of models at the Art Academy where I took a class: A watercolor of the Polynesian Cultural Center; the children on the beach at Punaluu in the early morning sun rendered in pastel; cousin Dora and Joe Hao's daughter, Betty; two sisters from Makiki Ward; George Moa's fishing boat (George Moa was my husband's home-teaching companion when he was a young man); Elmer's grandfather, King Tong Tyau, had a store on the corner of Kuakini and Lusitana Streets. I painted a watercolor of the store before it was torn down in 1965; a sketch of Aunt Mary Fernandez done on the inside of a brown shopping bag; a drawing of Aunt Alice done on the same brown paper; a drawing of Auwaiolimu Ward; and finally two drawings of our fifth child, Jacqueline.

Following the complications of the traumatic birth experience of our fifth child, I became a 'hibernating artist' until the time was right to continue actively in art work. I focused my energy on the challenging art of parenting and in between I recorded history in written form.

During the seventeen years that followed, I used my art for lessons taught in church and particularly in the summers, I exposed my children to the use of various painting mediums and drawing materials. As a result of these summer classes the seven children are all artists of one type or another.

Since the summer of 1981 I felt it was time to return to my art work. There has been a new surge of creativity in my life. I have produced 52 major works of art since that time: Portraits of my family and children, our beautiful Hawaiian environment, and many portrait commissions for others. Examples of my art work which records history would include the following: Charcoal portraits of my parents, George David Ward and Callie Belle Arrington Ward, as they were in 1960.

Charcoal portraits of my husband's parents, Khi Fong Tyau and Mary Ah Ping Kalaupapahiwa Wong Tyau. Mary was very active in the building of the Church in Hawaii. She was known and loved by thousands as she fulfilled her callings as a leader in the Primary, MIA, and Relief Society. It was, of course, necessary to work from old photographs to render life-size portraits of these, our parents.

An oil portrait of my handsome husband, Elmer Doong Shing Tyau, is an important highlight of my history rendered in art. I wanted to show he was in the image of his mother; so he is squinting with the sun in his eyes, as his mother was in her portrait. I have painted him with a background of sky, ocean, and rocky mountains of the blow-hole region of Oahu hoping to communicate that he is a part of Hawaii. The viewer is perhaps next aware that my husband has but one full arm and can know that here is a man who has suffered much in his life. In the moment I have recorded on canvas he is seriously contemplating his own future on earth which he fears is limited all too soon in time, but today is his day in the sun and he is thinking deeply about it. I titled the portrait, "Elmer Doong Shing Tyau—His Day in the Sun" and it was awarded the Grumbacher Gold Medallion in the 1982 Easter Art Festival. I see this portrait as a 'visual-biography' of my husband.

Another visual-biography is the portrait in oils of our eldest daughter, Jennifer Lei Tyau, whose interest in fashion designing seemed to call for showing her in an elegant setting. So, I painted Jennifer with a penetrating gaze and wearing a satin dress. We did not have the elegant setting necessary in our home so I borrowed the chair and the backdrop from a painting done by John Singer Sargent in the early 1900's of Lady Agnew. I have titled the portrait, "Miss Jennifer Lei in Lady Agnew's Chair."

A drawing in conte-pastel of our third son, Warren Khi Fong Tyau, at age three, was recently transferred to canvas in oil paints and rendered in monochromatic browns. It will preserve for posterity the small size and gentleness of our little boy as he stood barefoot, curling up his big toe dressed in a baggy shirt and pants holding a toy in his hands. I have titled this portrait, "Our Little Warren."

Another visual-biography is the portrait in oil painted on masonite rather than canvas of our Warren as a 22-year-old 'returned missionary'. He is dressed in his suit. He holds his scriptures in his own unique way and I hope to communicate that here is a young man who loves the Lord and his revelations to us. I show Warren standing on the side of Round Top Drive with Diamond Head and the City of Honolulu and heaven behind him. I wanted it to say that Warren is a 'Hawaiian boy' who loves the Lord and is ready to go forth in life to teach the Gospel by his actions and precepts to all he comes in contact with. Warren was painted life-size but I have striven to give the illusion of greater height because I wanted to say, "He's a giant in spirit." I have titled this portrait, "Warren Khi Fong Tyau, a Giant in Spirit."

A portrait of our daughter, Jacqueline, at the age of 18 shows her in her lovely pink prom dress. I painted Jacqueline standing in front of a drapery used by the artist, James Whistler, in his portrait of a young woman titled, "Symphony in White." I also painted Jacqueline in the same pose as his famous portrait. I wanted to show Jacqueline's gentle sweet spirit and the depth of being which she possesses. If I have given a glimpse of Jacqueline's great beauty, this visual biography was accurately recorded. I have titled this oil portrait, "Jacqueline Laulani—Symphony in Life."

A double portrait of Jacqueline shows her as she looked during her high school days at Kamehameha School. The left portrait is done in oil paints using only shades of the color burnt umber. The right portrait was painted identical to the left one and then was color glazed in an attempt to understand some of the techniques of the 'old masters'. I titled this double portrait simply, "Jacqueline." It was in the 1982 12th Annual Aloha Exhibit at the Federal Building.

A charcoal portrait of our daughter, Michele, was rendered as a surprise for her birthday. It is life size, and was enlarged from a photograph.

A visual-biography painted in oil of our daughter, Michele, shows her in a lovely two-tone purple dress which she made during the summer of 1981. I wanted to show what a loving and sweet young woman she is. This is our Michele at age 13. I have titled this portrait, "Michele Kalaupapahiwa—Extremely Precious One."

A portrait of our seventh child, MaryCallie Uilani Tyau, shows her standing by her daddy at Kapiolani Park in Waikiki. This portrait was painted from a photograph that MaryCallie had framed in the camera, put on time setting, and then rushed into the picture! I felt the photograph captured a special love, warmth, and compassion which I wanted to portray in an oil painting of them both. Her daddy is always saying to her, "I'm so glad I've got you." I felt that they both looked like they were glad they had each other. This painting was selected to be in the 1983 Easter Art Festival at Ala Moana Center and earlier it was in the 1982 'Summer Dreams' show at the Honolulu Hale. It is titled, "Daddy and MaryCallie—I'm So Glad I've Got You."

A watercolor painting shows the view we see from our living room window looking up Ohelo Lane. It was in the 1982 Hawaii Watercolor Society's 20th Anniversary Exhibit at the AmFac Plaza in Honolulu.

My husband's ancestors came to Hawaii from China as merchants. A watercolor of the Oahu Fish Market and adjoining stores on King Street was painted to represent those early stores of the ancestors. I titled it, "They Came as Merchants." It was selected to be in the 1982 Hawaii Watercolor Exhibit at the AmFac Plaza.

An oil painting of the Koolaus records a view of the mountains which we enjoy seeing on our drive from Laie to Honolulu. I titled it, "The Koolaus." It won the "Jurors Award" in the 1982 Aloha Exhibit at the Federal Building in Honolulu.

A watercolor showing the Hawaii I love—the sky, mountains, ocean, and rocks. I titled it "Paradise Found." It was selected to be in the Association of Honolulu Artists Prelude to Spring Show at Ala Moana Center in 1982.

An acrylic painting of a horse, bathed in the late afternoon setting sun, was painted because it reminded me of the happy days of my youth when I rode a horse on our Idaho farm. I titled this painting, "The Grass is Greener on the Other Side," all the while thinking of "the next life". The painting was selected to be in the AHA show at Ala Moana Center in 1982.

An oil painting of the unique coral flower. I desired to paint this as a study in light and shadow. It is history in that it portrays one aspect of our environment in Hawaii. It is titled, "Coral Flowers in Hawaii." It was in the AHA show at Ala Moana Center in 1982.

An acrylic painting shows the view from the top of Tantalus mountain. Our family has many times hiked a certain Tantalus trail and sat on a platform at the top and viewed the island. I titled the painting, "A View from Above," thinking in my mind of the view of Heavenly Father. It was selected to be in the 1982 Easter Art Festival at Ala Moana Center.

Our two sons away from home, Winston and Jeffrey, have yet to be portrayed by their mother's history motivated paint brush in the last two years. Five years ago I did unfinished head studies of them but I look forward to painting visual-biographies of our two fine, returned missionary sons and their companions and our grandchildren.

I have hundreds of drawings, paintings, and sculptures in my mind. If I am privileged to live longer on earth, I shall endeavor to record more of our history in art work.

A number of sisters in the Church have asked me to paint portraits of themselves, their husbands, parents or children, so they

could have visual biographies as a treasure for their posterity: Ina Lunt, Vivian Apo, Abbie Dela Cruz, Darlene Ching, Grace Hemenway, Velma Francisco, Helen Hew Len, Flora Tano, Beverly Wilson, Muriel Fong and many other family and friends. As time permits I hope to record history by art work for others.

Artists who have a testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ have a special responsibility in their art endeavors. Art work cannot be separated from the artist anymore than any work cannot be separated from the doer. There cannot be genuine appreciation and recognition of art without appreciation and recognition of the artist. Artists striving to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ have high artistic standards to uphold and high ideals to work towards. Eventually our art should not only record history of earth life, but should foreshadow the goals of Eternity. This can only be done when the artist has insights into spiritual and eternal values. This is the only way that religion can spiritualize art. When religion spiritualizes the artist, then the art is uplifted and spiritualized.

Jesus used parables, homey illustrations, to teach great eternal principles. The artist may see people, mountains, water, rocks, trees, flowers, vegetation, animals, and objects of our environment, and they may be reproduced as illustrations of eternal symbols.

In viewing art work I hope you will notice how variety is essential to the concept of beauty and art. The artist is largely involved with unifying contrasts—contrasts of light and dark and of shapes and spaces. Yet, may I add, there is something greater than all art work—and that is the work of art that can take place in each person on earth! Each of us can be true artists and unify the contrast of a mortal man or woman with our Divine Spirit. In the oneness we can achieve with the spirit; we can move toward our Eternal Destiny to become perfect in our sphere, as God is in Heaven.

A human being in the process of transformation!
A carnal being who is born of God!
The Finite becoming Infinite!
Mortal becoming Immortal!
Man and woman becoming a living work of art—a masterpiece!
The artist becoming an art!

These are the goals of Human-Divine Art.

"Let me read with open eyes the book my life is writing—and learn." Yes, our lives are the history of the Church in Polynesia. It is my hope that we will all be diligent in recording our histories in written form as well as on tapes and through the use of photographs, drawings, paintings, and sculpture. May my personal sharing of history recorded by art work encourage you to use art work in your histories. Remember that Art and History are combined in an embrace of Love and Beauty—a legacy for all time.