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***Minerva! The Story of an Artist with a Mission* Elaine Cannon and Shirley A. Teichert**

Robert C. Freeman

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ELAINE CANNON and SHIRLEY A. TEICHERT. *Minerva! The Story of an Artist with a Mission*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997. 156 pp. Index. \$19.95.

Reviewed by Robert C. Freeman, Assistant Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University.

Enthusiasts of the art of Minerva Teichert will welcome the book *Minerva!* Elaine Cannon's collaboration with Minerva's daughter-in-law Shirley Teichert brings an abundance of personal detail to the story of one of Mormonism's truly gifted artists.

Cannon's narrative, written as if Minerva herself were telling the story, paints Minerva's life in vivid detail and takes us beyond the art and into the heart and mind of the woman and the artist. As readers we come to see that everything about Minerva is unusual—her tastes, her passions, and her vision. We see her spirited youth and her early fascination with art. While we are not surprised by her preoccupation with the color red, we are nevertheless enamored by it. We observe her talent developing as she matures into adulthood and watch as others begin to realize what she has known all along—that God has endowed her with an unusual gift of vision and expression.

Cannon and Teichert portray a woman who seems misplaced in time and tradition. Although raised in humble circumstances, Minerva eventually finds her way to distant centers of art such as San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City. In these places and under the tutelage of renowned artists, Minerva's skills are trained and honed. The most notable of these mentors is Robert Henri, who takes an unusual interest in the young artist's work and who challenges Minerva to fulfill her "birthright" to tell the "Mormon story" in art (67).

Minerva! takes the reader on a journey to remote and hidden places on the western frontier and confronts the reality of Teichert's obstacle-filled life. Minerva's path towards fame as an artist is not an easy one. Her life is spent in the world of cattle and cowhands, and in some ways her mission seems to be at odds with the reality of her life as a rural Mormon woman.

We admire Minerva's patience in waiting for the harvest of her superb training and her conviction that her talent was to be used in God's own due time. Realizing her challenges and poor health, we are especially inspired by Minerva's capacity to bless countless family and friends through her art. At times, we sense the tension between her call as a wife and mother and her contribution as an artist. We admire her determination that family would always come first, even when she is enticed by a unique opportunity to advance her training (87).

We experience with Minerva her disappointment as her goal to convey the story of the Book of Mormon in art is dealt a setback as another's

paintings are published first (112). We rejoice at the eventual harvest of Minerva's creative genius as she is invited to paint murals for the Manti Temple at an age when most would be preparing for retirement.

As any work about the life of an artist should, this story of Minerva gives context and meaning to her art. It enriches our appreciation for the master painter that she was. We gain insights into her use of color, symbols, and patterns. We come to understand why particular themes in art attracted her attention, and we feel her affinity for the Book of Mormon. Finally, we understand her focus on faithful women as key figures in her art. Cannon's effort is a tribute to a woman who dedicated her full faith and energy, even at the expense of her own health (109), to fulfill her mission as an artist and as a daughter of God.

Although Elaine Cannon met Minerva Teichert only once, her collaboration with Shirley Teichert brings an intimacy to this volume that allows the reader to accept Cannon's creative use of first-person narrative. There are attendant risks with writing a story such as this in semi-autobiographical style. One such risk is certainly the constant tension between reality and creation. Nevertheless, telling Minerva's story in the first person may well be the most palatable and direct way of introducing the reader to this remarkable woman. Another approach simply might not have captured Minerva.

Any who may be hesitant about Cannon's choice to write in the first person may benefit by starting at the back of the book. The addenda, chronology, acknowledgments, and sources are quite helpful and reassuring. Parenthetically, the index for this text could have been strengthened. Some index pagination is incomplete (Manti Temple), some topical listings are vague, and some interesting topics are omitted (Arnold Friberg, BYU). On the whole, however, the resources found in the back will likely assist the reader in gaining confidence that the story line is rooted in fact and that even creative expressions are at least close to the real thing. A comment made by one of Minerva's sons after reading a draft of the book speaks to the integrity of this work as he said, "It is as if Mother were speaking to me again!" (xiv).

Like the woman Minerva, this book is a special kind of success. It incorporates the human element with an appropriate and proportionate amount of attention being given to the raw accomplishments of this colorfully brilliant artist. A great sense of appreciation must accompany a work such as this, for without the participation of the Teichert family and the literary talent of Elaine Cannon we may well have missed the celebration of a unique and gifted life that is *Minerva!*