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Minerva Teichert, *The Seduction of Corianton*. Sketch, oil on paper, 10 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 15 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". Courtesy Mark Callister. Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 2015

Minerva Teichert's *The Seduction of Corianton*

Herman du Toit

A previously unknown oil sketch by Minerva Teichert (1888–1976), the pioneering LDS woman artist, was recently acquired by an art collector when it came up for sale in Salt Lake City. This small painting depicts the temptation of Corianton, who was the son of Alma the Younger in the Book of Mormon; it captures the moment spoken of in Alma's words to his wayward son: "Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel. Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son" (Alma 39:3–4).

This painting had been owned for many years by a Wyoming rancher who received it from Teichert as a birthday gift when he was a boy in the early 1950s. The boy's family had lived near the Teicherts in Cokeville, and although he and his family were not members of the LDS Church, the two families became good friends. They helped each other with yard work, and the children often played together. The painting's longtime owner believes that Teichert had presented this birthday gift to him with the added hope that it would cultivate in him an interest in the Book of Mormon and its teachings.

The sketch is not dated, but it was likely painted in the early 1950s as part of a series of such small color sketches that Teichert produced based on her charcoal drawings illustrating scenes from the Book of Mormon.¹

1. John W. Welch and Doris R. Dant, *The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 11, 21.

She began this project on March 21, 1949, less than two years after completing the murals for the Church's Manti Temple.² In her monthly letters, from that March until May the following year, she communicated her enthusiasm for this project:

I have started Book of Mormon sketches. Ought to be great. . . . I am on my third illustration for the Book of Mormon—very good. . . . It should bring that Book to life. . . . Am really painting! Have three illustrations going on at once but they do not go very fast at that. I'm getting where there are wars and conflicts and trials before judges that call for figures and action. . . . Am back into illustrations so won't be writing letters for a little bit. . . . I do wish I could get these illustrations done but there is as much composition and good drawing on one as on a larger painting. It just takes time and I must tell my story well. . . . I'm doing nothing I don't have to until these B[ook of] M[ormon] illustrations are finished. . . . I think I'll be about two weeks on the illustrations then I'll be down and turn them in.³

She had hoped that these Book of Mormon paintings would also be accepted by Church leaders in Salt Lake City for use by the Church, but this was not to be the case, and she was advised by unknown sources to reproduce these illustrations on a larger scale and with stronger color.⁴ She dutifully set to work, at her own expense, and by late 1951 she completed a new series of forty-two larger murals, painted on Masonite. These paintings were also not accepted by the Church, and after seventeen years of trying to have them placed, Teichert eventually donated the entire series to Brigham Young University on September 16, 1969.⁵

This newly discovered color sketch depicts Corianton reaching out to Isabel, spoken of by Alma as a harlot (Alma 39:3). Corianton had accompanied his father, Alma, on a mission to reclaim the apostate Zoramites (Alma 31:7), but forsook his ministry and went over to the land of Siron to seek the favors of Isabel among the wayward Lamanites. Teichert depicts the moment Isabel is about to pour some drink into Corianton's raised cup. Corianton is restrained by another figure on the

2. For information on the Manti Temple murals, see Doris R. Dant, "Minerva Teichert's Manti Temple Murals," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 7–39.

3. Laurie Teichert Eastwood, ed., *Letters of Minerva Teichert: 1930–1970* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1997), excerpted in Welch and Dant, *Book of Mormon Paintings*, 162–63.

4. Marian Wardle, *Minerva Teichert: Pageants in Paint* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 2007), 103.

5. Welch and Dant, *Book of Mormon Paintings*, 168.

right (perhaps his brother Shiblon or a missionary companion). This figure clutches Corianton by the left arm as he futilely tries to hold him back from Isabel and the revelry represented by the dancing women on the left in this opulent setting. However, in the end all is not lost, as Corianton soon repents, is again called to preach (Alma 42:31), and serves successfully with his brothers and the sons of Mosiah (Alma 49:30). He will eventually go into the land northward, not to be mentioned again in the Book of Mormon (Alma 63:10).

The account of Corianton's fall and rescue captured the fascination of none less than the relatively young B. H. Roberts, who embellished this story into a five-installment serial in the *Contributor* magazine in 1889,⁶ whose pages were then reworked into a stage play by Orestes U. Bean. That story also had an early influence on Minerva Teichert. As a young girl she was treated to a performance of Bean's play *Corianton* by her art teacher, Isabel Ballantyne West. First performed in August 1902 in the old Salt Lake Theatre, that play received great acclaim and rave reviews nationwide. Teichert also owned a copy of the play. According to Marian Wardle, Curator of American Art at the BYU Museum of Art, who has written extensively on the life and work of Teichert: "Evidence of the lasting impression this play made on Minerva Teichert appears in a handwritten manuscript, seemingly an introduction to a volume she intended to write about the Book of Mormon. In her dedication of the volume, she wrote: 'I dedicate this volume to Isabell Ballantyne West, my early teacher, and friend, who made it possible for a little waif of a girl like me to see the great play Corianton by that first company who had such magnificent scenery and costumes.'" ⁷

Notwithstanding the early decision by the Church not to use Teichert's Book of Mormon illustrations, several of her works have since been accepted into the Church's canon of approved images for reproduction and use by Church members worldwide. The recent acquisition and surfacing of this color sketch represents another step in the growing recognition of Minerva Teichert as a legendary pioneering woman artist in the history of Mormon culture in the West.

6. B. H. Roberts, "Corianton: I: The Prisoner; II: In the Hall of Justice; III: The New Convert; IV: Joan; V: Isabel," *Contributor* (1889): 171–76, 206–10, 245–48, 286–90, 324–30; reprinted as a booklet, "Corianton—a Nephite Story" (Salt Lake City: B. H. Roberts, 1902), and in B. H. Roberts, *A Scrap Book*, comp. Lynn Pulsipher (Provo, Utah: Pulsipher Publishing, 1989), 1:72–117.

7. Wardle, *Minerva Teichert*, 104.