

PIONEER IMAGES OF UTAH

ARTIST: Minerva B. Kohlhepp Teichert (1888-1976) North Ogden, UT and
Cokeville, WY

TITLE: *Madonna of 1847* 1936

MEDIA: oil on canvas

SIZE: 72" x 132"

COLLECTION: Museum of Church History and Art

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Minerva Bernetta Kohlhepp Teichert was born August 28, 1888, in North Ogden, Utah. She grew up on a remote ranch in Idaho, the second of ten children. Her mother, Ella Hickman, was the daughter of one of the bodyguards of Brigham Young. Her father, Frederick John Kohlhepp, had been disowned by his prominent family when he joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From her parents she gained a knowledge of the scriptural stories she would later portray as well as the indefatigable spirit that would characterize her life.

In addition to her formal schooling, Minerva was taught by her parents to love reading and to appreciate good music, literature, drama, and art. She and her sister acted out plays in a willow copse on their ranch. When Minerva was four years old, her mother gave her a set of watercolors, and from that time forth, Minerva considered herself an artist. She carried sketch pad and charcoal with her constantly, sketching even the wild horses that were brought in to the corrals. After she was married, she drew everything, including fresh-caught fish before cooking them. Her skilled rendering of life and action is the result of this early preoccupation with drawing.

When Minerva was 14, she went to San Francisco to work as a nursemaid for a wealthy family. During this time she was able to observe great paintings at the Mark Hopkins Art School. After she returned home and graduated from Pocatello High School at age 16, she taught school at Davisville, Idaho, saving money to attend the Art Institute of

Chicago. When the time came for her to leave for Chicago, her father refused to let her travel alone.

After being "set apart" as an LDS Church missionary, she traveled east with a church group, the first woman to be sent for art lessons with the official blessing of the LDS Church leadership.

In Chicago, she studied under John Vanderpoel, a master of the academic school of painting. She returned home periodically to earn money by teaching or by working in the fields so she could continue her studies. When her studies in Chicago were completed, she returned to Idaho to "prove-up" her own isolated homestead, living by herself and sleeping with a revolver under her pillow. She was courted by two young men, one wealthy (whom she rejected) and the other, a cowboy. When she received a scholarship and left for New York City to study at the Art Student's League, she told the cowboy, Herman Teichert, to marry someone else.

The League was one of the most important art centers in the world, and Minerva studied under Robert Henri and George Bridgeman, eminent realist art instructors of the time. She periodically used various skills to pay her way. She sketched cadavers for medical schools, illustrated children's books, painted portraits, and performed rope tricks and Indian dances on the New York stage. While in New York she, and other students, had paintings exhibited in the immigrant receiving station on Ellis Island.

Minerva became close friends with her mentor, Robert Henri, who called her "Miss Idaho." Although her artistic subjects and interests were very different from Henri's, she did develop a vigorous style with broad brush strokes that owes an obvious debt to his bold technique. Though rated with the top artists of the time, she returned to Idaho instead of taking advantage of an opportunity to study in Europe or of stepping into a professional career. Her teacher, Robert Henri, told her to go home and paint the history of the Mormon people.

She returned to the West feeling she had a mission to perform.

Minerva married Herman Teichert, kept books for the ranch, cooked for the hands, raised their five children, and painted. Her studio was their narrow living room, where she tacked up her canvases to paint. The room was too small for some of her works, which had to be folded as she painted. Since she could not get far enough away from her large paintings to get the correct perspective, she looked at her work through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. Teichert sent her children to bed at eight o'clock each night and then painted until midnight. Some nights, she set the clock ahead so she could send the children to bed earlier and have a little more time to paint.

Minerva painted on everything she could find: boards, aprons, flour sacks, the margins of books, walls and doors, and on brown paper bags.- She loved to paint the western wilderness with its predominance of blues and grays, but seldom painted just the land. Human figures and work animals, usually in a narrative, were her most common

subjects. She used neighbors and family members as models, providing herself with a wide variety even though she lived in a rural area.

Although Teichert's colors are generally subdued, she frequently used bright red paint to emphasize the central character or focal point. Her paintings are large and mural-like, to be viewed from a distance. The strong composition and draftsmanship combine with delicate colors and lines and compelling narrative to produce powerful works of art, which she hoped would motivate people "to build Zion."

Women figure prominently in Teichert's works. She also did smaller paintings of flowers, still lifes, and scenery, which were usually intended as gifts.

Teichert was a prolific painter, painting more pioneer and Indian subjects than any other Utah artist. Today, her best-known works are those published on the covers and in LDS magazines and lesson manuals and her Book of Mormon series of over 40 paintingsówhich can be seen at Brigham Young Universityóand the huge mural in the World Room of the Manti LDS temple. In addition, the Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City owns several large pieces, including *Madonna of 1847*.

Pinborough, Jan Underwood. "Bold Brush." *Ensign*. 34-41 Salt Lake City

St. George Art Museum Brochure. 1992. *A Touch of Minerva Teichert*. St. George.

Swanson, Vern G., Robert S. Olpin, and William C. Seifrit. 1991 Utah Art Layton: Gibbs Smith

Information also provided by Miriam Wardle, a descendent of Minerva Teichert

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ARTIST: Minerva K. Teichert (1888-1976) North Ogden, UT and Cokeville, WY

TITLE: *Madonna of 1847* 1936

MEDIA: oil on canvas

SIZE: 72" x 132"

COLLECTION: Museum of Church History and Art

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING (History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

What scene does this painting depict? Why did Minerva Teichert make so many paintings of the early Utah pioneers? (hundreds-see Biographical Information) What is a narrative painting? How is this painting narrative? What does Madonna mean? Why

might Teichert have chosen to call this painting *Madonna of 1847*? Describe the style of this painting. How has Teichert conveyed a feeling of movement in this piece? Would more detail help or hinder this painting? Justify your answer.

Why is narrative art valuable? What specific things do you enjoy or find valuable about this painting? (Use what you know about the principles and elements of design to help you answer this and the following questions.) In what ways is the painting beautiful? What do you dislike or wish were different? How does the painting affect you/make you feel? Why?

ACTIVITIES

Art History, Criticism, and Art Production

Objectives: 1. The students will gain an understanding of how techniques and skill can create style in an artwork by comparing two or more artworks and listing similarities and differences.

2. The students will demonstrate their understanding of style by creating an artwork in a particular style, using chosen techniques.

1. Show the students the slide of *Madonna of 1847* and discuss her muralist style using some of the **QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING** and the following information from Dr. Vern G. Swanson, director of the Springville Museum of Art.

Minerva Teichert was a muralist with a mission. (See Biographical Information) Her major works were intended to teach and to inspire through the recording of western and Mormon history. She developed a style that is uniquely hers—bold brushwork with flat, thin, grayed-out and muted colors, often with a touch of red for focal points. The paintings do not contain the deep diagonals that reproduce the effects of deep space, instead, the murals have the quality of a stage set, like a frieze or processional. Teichert drew extensively with charcoal before she began painting and used turpentine rather than oil, painting on a thin ground. These techniques are responsible for the delicacy and thinness of the paint; some of the original charcoal drawing often remains visible and if touched, can rub off.

In addition, Teichert uses few details, is able to evoke the power and movement of animals, and while simply painted, her figures have a feeling of solidity and purpose.

Now show the students slides of artworks of differing styles or of other works by Teichert. (For young students, comparing two works may be enough.) Have the students make a list of qualities the works share and a list of qualities that differ. For example, lack of details, feeling of "being" there (immediacy), flatness, muted colors, loose drawing, or a feeling of deep space, many details, intense colors, realistic colors, etc.

Show the students several additional examples of artworks by the same artists as previously shown or examples of artworks of similar style. Have the students identify

which works have styles that are similar to the original artworks and justify their responses by specifying at least five qualities from the class-made lists that support their choices. You may choose to have this part of the activity be a continuation of the class discussion or you may want to have students each write down their responses in test form.

Evaluate the activity by determining the number of appropriate responses for the class as a whole or for each individual student.

Note: The activity outlined above can be used either to introduce the idea of style and some of the vocabulary needed to discuss it before students learn to identify major styles and art movements; or, the activity can be used after the students have learned about several major styles and are ready to expand their understanding to include less easily classified styles.

2. After completing the previous or a similar activity, have the students create a piece of art that demonstrates a chosen style. The following is a list of possible projects. Pick one suited to your class' age and art background.

• Give the students large pieces of paper and charcoal pencils, pastels, crayons, or markers. Have the students do a series of gesture drawings (loose drawings that capture the feeling of movement). (See Mahonri Young, Activities, p. 1, this pkt)

• Have the students arrange several still-life groupings of various objects, or have the students draw an outdoor scene visible from the school grounds. The students will list three to five techniques that will help them create a particular style. (Young students may need to focus on only one or two techniques.) Using pastels, the students will make drawings that incorporate the chosen techniques. Remind students to use whatever specific skills and concepts they have studied in your class or in previous classes.

• The activity detailed above can be repeated several times over a period of one or two weeks. Have the students compare and critique their drawings. When critiquing their drawings, the students can follow whatever critical model you have taught them (see below for a simple model and past packets for more complex models), you can use this part of the activity to teach the students a critical model, or they can write an evaluation along the following lines:

List qualities you feel you were successful in achieving.

List qualities you had difficulty achieving.

Briefly discuss the differences among your several drawings.

Choose the most successful piece and justify your choice using everything you know about art criticism.

Note: young students, if taught a simple critical model, such as the following four-step example, can have effective discussions-don't be afraid to try!

The Critical Model: (first make sure you label the work by artist, title, medium, and date.) Then ask the students the following questions:

1. What do you see? (visual elements, principles, and subject matter)
[description]
2. How was it done? [technical process]
3. What do you think the artist was trying to say? [meaning]
4. How do you feel about this work? [evaluation]

Extension or Variation: One reason Minerva Teichert was probably so good at depicting animals is that she grew up on farms, drawing the animals. Like people, animals move often and can be challenging subjects. Arrange an outing to a farm, zoo, or other place where the students can observe animals. Have the students make gesture drawings of the animals using the same principles used for gesture drawings of humans.

For Advanced Students: Give the students several opportunities to do gesture drawings of humans and animals and quick studies of outdoor scenes. Then have the students create a painting using pastel, watercolor, or oil that combines the three elements. Or, have the students each choose their favorite drawing and use it as the basis for a painting.

Art History

Objective: The students will increase their understanding and appreciation of art by studying biographical information about an artist and relating the information to the artist's works.

Show the class the slide of *Madonna of 1847* and let class members respond to the work briefly. Then, using the information about Minerva Teichert in the Biographical Information and from other sources (see note), make an interesting presentation to the class.

Again show the students the slide of *Madonna of 1847* and the slides of *Spinning* (**Art of the West**, Oct. 18, 1995 pkt) and *Indian Captives at Night* (**Drama, the Use of Contrast in Art**, Mar. 10, 1993 pkt) as well as reproductions of other works. (see note below) Have the students discuss Teichert's work in light of their new knowledge. Use questions, as needed, to prompt thoughtful responses.

For example: What interests you most about Minerva Teichert? Would you have left a promising career in the East to return home and paint the story of your people? How does knowing that Minerva Teichert managed to paint hundreds of large canvases while raising five children and helping her husband on the farm affect how you feel about her work? Why do you think Teichert used her father (the man on the horse to the left of the wagon) and her son (the boy in the wagon) in this painting? Does knowing they're her family members affect how you feel about this painting? Do you think it may have affected how Teichert felt about the painting? Why? Does Teichert's strong belief in her role as a chronicler of Mormon and Utah history and in art as a teacher, come through in her paintings? How?

As always, you will need to adapt the complexity and number of questions to match your students' abilities. Although there may be exceptions, the majority of students will probably discover that an artist's work becomes more interesting when the students know enough about the artist to see him or her as an individual and to know or surmise links between the artist's life and art.

Variation: As an artist, Minerva Teichert seems to be particularly well suited to this activity—she lived an interesting life—however, another artist (and artwork subject) may fit your class' curriculum better or be of more interest. Other possibilities include using an artist who lived or lives locally, one whose art depicts local scenes, an artist whose subject matter relates to a course of study such as botany, geographical formations, or a specific time period. The possibilities are endless.

Variation: Use art by a living local artist who is willing to come to the school and discuss his or her life and work with the students. Conclude the activity by asking the students to consider and explore the effects their knowledge has on how they view the artist's work.

Variation: After, or instead of the outlined activity, have students choose an artist and research the life of that artist. The product can be a short report, a presentation to the class, or both. Ask the students to include how their increased knowledge of the artist affects their response to the artist's work.

Art Production

Objective: The students will explore the possibilities of narrative art and increase their drawing skills by creating a visual journal.

Show the class the slide of *Madonna of 1847* and other narrative artworks. Lead a discussion about what makes an artwork "narrative." Then assign students to keep a visual journal for a specified length of time. The journal should consist of narrative drawings about the students' daily lives. Have interested students share one or more of the drawings with the class.

Extension: After completing the journal activity, have students choose their favorite drawing and create a painting or more detailed drawing based on the journal entry.

Variation: Have students create a narrative drawing or painting that relates to the Social Studies curriculum for your class. Students should include appropriate details in their artworks. The research or information needed can be included as part of Social Studies lessons.

Social Studies

Objective: Students will learn about pioneer and Native American life in Utah by studying artworks that depict that life.

Show the class selected slides from this and other packets as well as posters and other reproductions of art that illustrate pioneer or Native American life. Choose art that focuses on a particular area or theme pertinent to your class, or use the art as an introduction, to give the students a feel for life in early Utah.

Because 1997 is the Sesquicentennial Anniversary of the first Mormon pioneers' arrival in the Salt Lake valley, a wealth of information has been made available about the trek west and the early days in the new territory. Judicious editing of some materials may be necessary to maintain an accurate historical setting while keeping the religious aspects at an appropriate level for use in public education.

Math/Social StudiesóMap-reading Skills

Objectives: 1. Students will practice computation skills by calculating distances associated with the Utah pioneer trek west. 2. Students will practice map-reading skills by plotting actual pioneer or proposed trails and trips.

1. Show students the slide of *Madonna of 1847* and talk briefly about the method(s) of travel. Give the students maps with the major trail(s) west marked and a scale of miles. Also provide the students with information such as rates of travel over flat, rough, and mountainous country. Have the students measure the trail using the legend information, compute the total distance traveled, the percentages of travel that fit in the three categoriesóflat, rough, and mountainousóthe average speed per day, the total travel time, etc. Use computations the students have learned in Math. If possible, compare the students' figures with actual results. You may want to include a short discussion of the kinds of factors that affected actual travel time such as weather, illness, time of year, provisions, etc. This activity can also be structured as estimation skills practice.

2. Show this and any other slides that seem appropriate as an introduction to a lesson on map reading. Provide the students with maps of age-appropriate complexity. Have the students plot the course of one or more of the major western trails. Older students can be asked to plot an actual course using a topographical map or to plan a proposed course over a specific section of country. You may choose to use an actual journey made by explorers or pioneers, or you may want students to chart a proposed course from a specified location to your school or city.

Variation: Divide students into small groups and assign each the same starting and destination points but different circumstances. For example, a family with a wagon, pair of oxen, horses, a milk cow, and adequate supplies; a single mother with several children and a handcart; men on horseback, etc. Ask each group to plot the best route for their circumstances and to justify their decisions.

Combined Activity--Language Arts, Social Studies, Art, Music, Dance, Drama

Objectives: To increase students' knowledge of early Utah life, to demonstrate relationships among various disciplines or subjects, to increase research skills and higher

order thinking skills, and to allow students the opportunity to immerse themselves in an important period in Utah history.

This activity can be as simple or complex as the teacher(s) involved desire. Because the fourth and seventh grades study Utah History as part of their curriculum, this activity is particularly pertinent for those grades, but a simplified version could be incorporated at any grade level.

Although an individual teacher could arrange this activity, it is designed for a group of teachers so the division of responsibilities places reasonable burdens on the individual teachers and so teachers can use their particular talents, interests, or knowledge. In addition, your community or state or local arts groups may be good resources for help.

The activities outlined above may be used or may spark ideas for related activities. Previous packets also contain many appropriate activities. The following list briefly outlines additional ideas:

Language Arts-read actual journal entries, write own journals, write a short story, listen to or tell stories.

Social Studies-research information about almost anything related, use in other activities, as presentation(s).

Art-look at examples, at artists as chroniclers, create own art, explore native art forms, local decorative arts.

Music-explore the role of music in the lives of pioneers and Native Americans, learn examples.

Dance-explore the role of dance in the lives of pioneers and Native Americans, learn examples.

Drama-write own, watch a performance, study history of early theater, the theatrical qualities of Native American ceremonies.

Structure possibilities: One teacher takes the responsibility for one specific activity in one area, then all the classes do that activity. Each class explores one area in depth, then shares what they've learned with other classes, involving the other classes in some way. For example, one class learns Native American dances and music, performs several and then teaches one dance to other classes. For grade levels above elementary, teachers of different subject areas can schedule activities so all areas coordinate. Teachers may want to keep their classes separate but on a planned and coordinated schedule or may want to take a more flexible approach, combining classes or switching teachers to produce a more intense experience for the students.

NOTE

Other sources for information about and reproductions of Minerva Teichert's work:

Images of Faith, Art of the Latter-day Saints. Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, Utah 1995

Utah Art. Swanson, Olpin, and Seifrit. Gibbs-Smith, Peregrine Smith Books, Layton, Utah 1991

Dictionary of Utah Art. Olpin, Robert S. The Salt Lake Art Center, SLC, UT 1980

The Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City

Because much of Minerva Teichert's art is of early Utah pioneer and Native American images and because many of her large works are owned by Brigham Young University and the LDS church, many of the paintings have been reproduced on the covers of and in LDS publications. Copies of these publications should be available locally, often for a minimal price at thrift stores. The reproductions can be trimmed and mounted so the religious context of the publication is eliminated.

Posters of some works or reproductions in catalogs may be available at BYU's Museum of Art or at the Museum of Church History and Art.