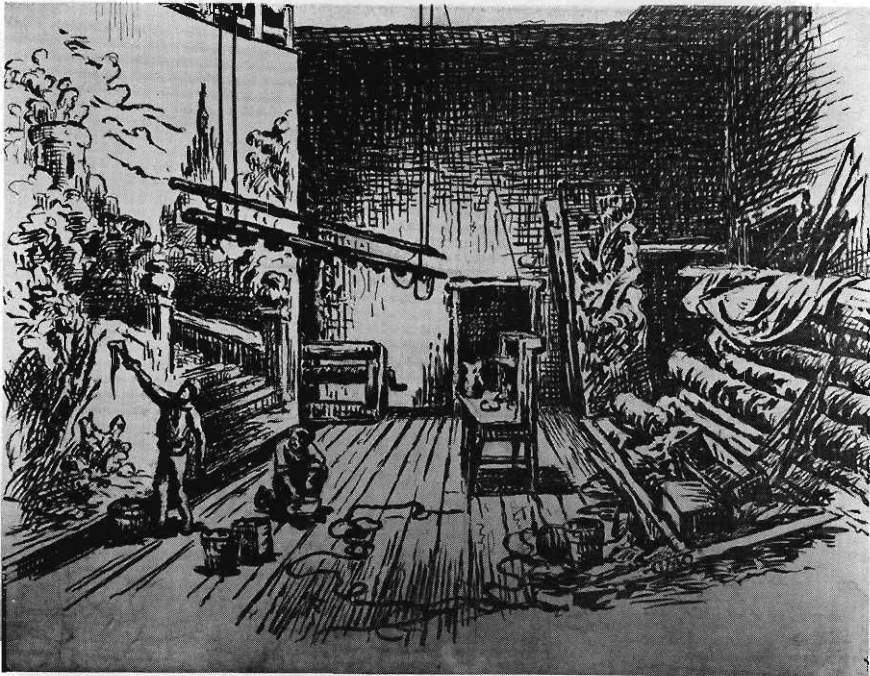


GEORGE M. OTTINGER: *The Ideal The Real*



GEORGE M. OTTINGER: *Painting Scenery for Salt Lake Theatre*

in the community, far in advance of that in surrounding territories and greater than the newness of the country would seem to promise."⁶ He cites two reasons for this phenomenon: a larger than average proportion of citizens very recently from the Old World, where they were in the habit of visiting galleries, and the fact that these citizens were "the reverse of a floating population."⁷ Some of the pioneers brought pictures across the plains; a number of works by William Warner Major, who was active in Nauvoo and Winter Quarters, and by itinerant artists who visited the early Mormon settlements survive today in Utah collections.

A love of art apparently existed, and Brigham Young apparently encouraged it. He took delight in pointing out to visiting dignitaries the Weggeland painting of his estate, hanging above his fireplace. Trained as a carpenter, Young understood craftsmanship and could appreciate a well-wrought painting. He evidently approved of the sculpture of the lion, which still crouches over the Lion House entrance, carved by William Ward in 1855, and admired the wood carvings of Ralph Ramsey which embellished the Tabernacle, Salt Lake Theatre, Beehive House and Eagle Gate. Beauty for Brigham Young was "a natural and necessary accompaniment of productive work."⁸

The performing arts, however, received much stronger support from the Church and its leaders. That this was so, and that the pattern thus set continues to this day, is not too difficult to understand. Performing arts — music, drama, dance — are essentially group arts. And the solidity of the group, of the gathered people, is essential to Mormonism. In pioneer days a song, a skit, a dance served to unite the flock as well as provide much needed recreation and diversion from the hostility of nature and, often, the hostility of other men.

But the visual arts of painting and sculpture are essentially individual arts. The heart of the esthetic experience is the quiet contemplation by one individual of one object created by one man. It is often a demanding experience and usually affords less recreational or entertainment value than its sister arts. The continuing interest of the Mormon Church in performing arts has done much to enrich our culture. It has helped create a climate in which a fine choir, an excellent symphony, and extraordinary modern dance and ballet companies can flourish. Its less active encouragement of the visual arts has been a serious deterrent to artistic growth.

⁶ Edward W. Tullidge, *History of Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City: Star Printing Co., 1886), p. 810.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Mrs. Kenneth Smith, "Utah Artists." Unpublished, undated typescript.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints no doubt feels that it has been, throughout its history, a strong supporter of the painter, sculptor and architect. In a sense this is quite true. Few churches or their members in the last century have commissioned as many works of art. Utah may have more portraits per capita than any other state, as a result of the Mormon's intense interest in visual recordkeeping and of orders for several identical portraits during the days of polygamy. The Salt Lake Theatre, built by Brigham Young, furnished welcome employment for almost all the pioneer artists as scenery painters. And the Mormon temples abound with murals, paintings and sculpture.

The painting of the Salt Lake Temple murals may be, in fact, a unique episode in religious art of America. The story begins as the second generation of Utah painters were studying under the pioneer artists Dan Weggeland and George M. Ottinger. Both instructors, feeling perhaps a growing provincialism in Utah art, urged their students to study abroad. The first to take their advice was James H. Harwood, who in 1888 enrolled at the Academie Julian in Paris; the sculptor Cyrus E. Dallin arrived two weeks later. As a result of this precedent, Weggeland and others were able to persuade George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency of the Church to send John Hafen, John B. Fairbanks, and Lorus Pratt on "a mission to Paris to study painting,"⁹ with the understanding that they would decorate the Salt Lake Temple upon their return. In a letter to Lorus Pratt, who was selected to preside over the mission, Apostle Heber J. Grant stated, "We bless you that you may take joy in your labor and delight in your studies, that you may become proficient, and fitted and qualified and prepared through your labors and studies to beautify and decorate the House of God that shall be erected and the Temple of the Lord for the administering therein of the living and the dead."¹⁰

The three landed in Liverpool on July 2, 1890, and were in Paris by August, commencing their studies at the Academie Julian. Edwin Evans joined the mission in the fall. Two others were later to receive official church sanction and support for their studies: Herman Haag, who began his Paris training in 1889 and John W. Clawson, who studied abroad from 1890 to 1896. These "pioneers

⁹ "BLESSINGS upon the head of LORUS PRATT, given by Apostle Heber J. Grant, June 4, 1890. Reported by John M. Whitaker." In the possession of Alton M. Pratt, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*