

THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

After surviving abortion attempts and enduring a painful childhood, Archer turned tragedy into triumph.

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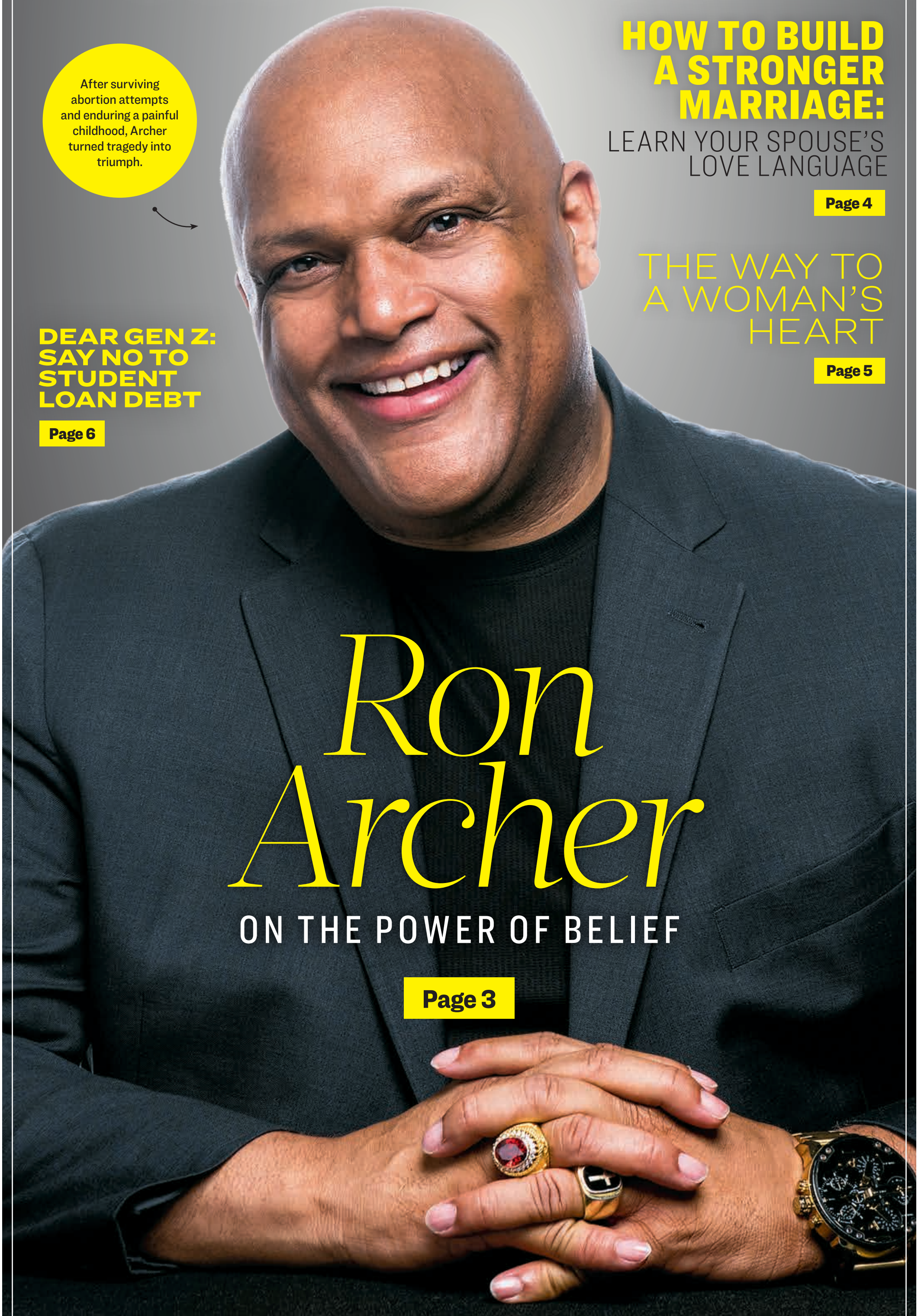
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THE EPOCH TIMES

COURTESY OF HEIDE PRESSE

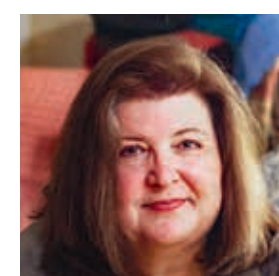


Pioneer Keturah Belknap in "Not an Idle Minute," 2019, by Heide Presse. Oil on linen panel; 30 inches by 22 inches.

FINE ARTS

Painting American History Journal by Journal

Artist Heide Presse shares her history paintings



Artist Heide Presse paints mid-19th-century Americans as true to life as she can, from her studio in Tampa, Fla.

LORRAINE FERRIER

Artist Heide Presse paints mid-19th-century American life as authentically as she can. Farmers, homesteaders, and pioneers are a few of the folk who are captured on canvas, taken from firsthand historical accounts. In her paintings, women read Bibles, sew quilts, or tend children; and men work the land, herd cattle, and drive wagons.

Presse's paintings are full of color, playful light, and sometimes dust, as America's past comes to life through her canvases. She starts painting only after an often lengthy process of research that enables her to depict a real-life event or scene as true to the past as possible, Presse explained by phone. Through years of research, she has built up not only a fine knowledge of the time but also a collection of period needle-

work that she makes and uses as props in her paintings. In her 20s, while studying fine art and graphic design at college, Presse visited colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, where her eyes were opened to the world of historical reenactments. Little did she know then that 20 years on, she herself would reference historical reenactments so strongly in her art.

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THE
EPOCH
TIMES

TRUTH and TRADITION

A NEWSPAPER ABRAHAM LINCOLN WOULD READ

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POETRY

HOLY WORDS:

Poetry, Vocation, AND THE Sacred

JEFF MINICK

In the last millennium, and even earlier, poets of the West have devoted reams of verse to an exploration and celebration of their Christian faith. Dante, Milton, Spenser, Blake, the Americans Anne Bradstreet and Emily Dickinson, John Newton, Christina Rossetti, Francis Thompson, G.K. Chesterton, and T.S. Eliot: These and many other poets wrote verses centered on religion and worship.

And then there are the poets whose paper and pen walked hand in hand with their religious vocations.



A line engraving of Hildegard von Bingen by W. Marshall. Iconographic Collections, Wellcome Collection.

The Nun and the Monk

Famous visionary and Benedictine nun St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) wrote verse as well as prose. Here is her tribute to God, “The Love of All”:

Love overflows into all
Glorious from the ocean’s depths beyond
the farthest star,
Bounteous in loving all creation;
For to the King most high
Love has given her kiss of peace.

Like Hildegard, mendicant monk St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) tied the wonders of nature to the Almighty. In his beautiful piece “The Canticle of the Sun,” Francis praises “my Lord” for gifts like “Brother Wind,” “Sister Moon,” and “Brother Fire.” Francis also wrote “Prayer for Peace,” a poem recited and sung even today.

Many readers will be familiar with these words; for those who have no acquaintance, let me do the introductions:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

Divine Master,
Grant that I may seek not so much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.

Metaphysical Poets

In “Flowers of Heaven: One Thousand Years of Christian Verse,” Joseph Pearce writes of Robert Southwell (1561–1595) that “in his short and dramatic life he wrote some of the finest religious poetry in the English language.”

Caught up in religious struggles of his day—England was becoming Anglican, and the court and Parliament suppressed Catholicism—Southwell left his native land for France and Italy, and became a Jesuit priest. Returning to England to serve his fellow Catho-

lics, he was arrested, imprisoned in the Tower of London, and after three years of torture and degradation was executed.

Many of Southwell’s poems, most of which he composed during his six years as an underground priest, are too lengthy to include here, but here is a compressed version from the Poetry Foundation of “The Burning Babe,” a poem much admired by Ben Jonson:

As I in hoary winter’s night stood shivering in the snow,
Surpris’d I was with sudden heat which made my heart to glow;
And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,
A pretty Babe all burning bright did in the air appear;
Who, scorched with excessive heat, such floods of tears did shed
As though his floods should quench his flames which with his tears were fed.
“Alas!” quoth he, “but newly born, in fiery heats I fry,
Yet none approach to warm their hearts or feel my fire but I!
My faultless breast the furnace is, the fuel wounding thorns,
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke, the ashes shame and scorns;
The fuel Justice layeth on, and Mercy blows the coals,
The metal in this furnace wrought are men’s defiled souls,
For which, as now on fire I am to work them to their good,
So will I melt into a bath to wash them in my blood.”
With this he vanish’d out of sight and swiftly shrunk away,
And straight I called unto mind that it was Christmas day.

John Donne (1573–1631), George Herbert (1593–1633), and Richard Crashaw (1613–1649) were all three men of the cloth whose metaphysical poetry has won praise down through the centuries. Donne died as dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London; Herbert was an Anglican priest in a small parish. Richard Crashaw, an Anglican clergyman, converted to Catholicism, fled England, and spent the rest of his brief life in Europe.

Dappled Things

One other poet needs inclusion in this all-too-brief and most incomplete of lists. Like the poets of the English Reformation, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) suffered for his religious views, having not only converted to Catholicism but becoming a priest as well, a move that left him estranged from many friends and family members. And like Hildegard and Francis, Hopkins celebrated the sacred by what he discovered in nature in verses like “God’s Grandeur,” “A Kingfisher Catches Fire,” and especially, in “Pied Beauty”:

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-color as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plow;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change;
Praise him.

By now, some readers may be wondering, “Yes, yes, Jeff Minick. We take your. Some writers who pursued reli-



Sir Roger Scruton, writer and philosopher at Princeton University in New Jersey on April 3, 2017.

gious vocations produced some worthy poetry.”

To See Beyond What We See

But my conclusion will reach beyond that observation.

A friend of mine believes that modern artists have lost touch with the sacred purpose of art. She and I have batted this idea around several times, and though I am heavily read in modern writers, I am more and more inclined to agree with her.

In his address “Beauty and the Restoration of the Sacred,” delivered at a Catholic Art Guild Conference in 2017 in Chicago, philosopher Roger Scruton spoke of the idea of beauty and the sacred in all the arts. Long a critic of modernity, particularly of our architecture, near the end of his talk Scruton remarked: “This is one of the problems we’re living through. People don’t seem to accept that there is any other way of understanding things than the scientific way, and this leads to scientism, which is a kind of systematic misunderstanding of the human world.” He then advocates teaching the idea of the sacred and the beautiful to our children.

The poets mentioned above, those who embraced a religious vocation as well as those who followed other paths, acknowledged in their verse that something—a power, a force, a deity, if you will—lies beyond what we can feel, hear, touch, and see. Even Hopkins, who lived



Gerard Manley Hopkins, in a photo taken before 1889, was an English poet, Roman Catholic convert, and Jesuit priest.

in the Industrial Age when theories like communism and evolution were undermining this sacramental view of life, possessed the eyes to look beyond physical reality and point his readers to a higher realm.

In discussing Giovanni Bellini’s painting of a Madonna and child during the address mentioned above, Scruton states that “the real artist wants us to look beyond what we see.” Have we, and our artists, lost that ability to look beyond what we can see, to perceive, as did our ancestors, the great mystery behind our physical world? If so, does that loss of vision diminish us as human beings? Without the transcendental, without the sacred, without beauty, are we not in danger of becoming the creatures described by T.S. Eliot in “Choruses From the Rock?”

And the wind shall say: “Here were decent Godless people:
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls?”



The monk and poet St. Francis of Assisi as the painter Cigoli depicted him in the late 1590s. Hermitage Museum.

Unless otherwise noted, all poems are from Joseph Pearce’s book “Flowers of Heaven: One Thousand Years of Christian Verse.”

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C., Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

“People don’t seem to accept that there is any other way of understanding things than the scientific way.”

Roger Scruton, philosopher

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FINE ARTS

Painting American History Journal by Journal

Artist Heide Presse shares her history paintings

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Today, Presse is an acclaimed artist nationally, with a busy schedule of gallery and museum exhibitions including “Quest for the West” at the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis and “Buffalo Bill Art Show and Sale” at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming, among others. Between these commitments, she’s been working on a personal project—to paint the lives of the people who opened up the West in the early years of the westward trail movement, the late 1840s and early 1850s. She believes these trailblazers were the ones who took the most risk.

Here, she shares that project and how she paints “living history” while staying true to America’s past.

THE EPOCH TIMES: How did you begin to paint history paintings?
HEIDE PRESSE: I always had an interest in history. If you look back at my older work, you can see a thread of it. But I didn’t get really serious about it until the early 2000s, when I was asked to contribute paintings for a corporate commission, which had to feature historic situations in Virginia. I had to create paintings dating from George Washington’s time all the way through to the Civil War.

I would go to historical reenactments and living history museums, and I would just paint subjects that interested me. At the time, I didn’t have a thorough understanding of the details of period clothing.

I started to really dive into this historical world and learned how to conduct research for the corporate commission; I realized that I had to learn this all myself. I couldn’t trust other people to be accurate with their period clothing. I learned that if I wanted my paintings to be right, then I needed to understand what was right. So I started what was to be about a 10-year journey, finding my own historical reenactor sources.

I had some wonderful people who took me under their wing because they liked what I was trying to do with my art: people who have degrees in historic costuming, museum curators, and really good historical reenactors, for example. They helped me learn a great deal. I learned how to do period sewing and how to study original clothing like bonnets from them, for example.



Keturah Belknap in the doorway of her family home in Oregon, in “Home Is at the End of the Trail,” 2017, by Heide Presse. Oil on linen panel; 36 inches by 27 inches.

I like sewing, so it was not a hardship for me; it was actually quite enjoyable. I have made my own bonnet patterns after studying original bonnets, but I mostly use patterns drafted by historic costumers. I’ve sewn a variety of garments, and I also purchase accurate reproductions, so that I have enough clothing to dress people at

my home studio when I need to.

I am not an expert in any of this by any means, but I learned enough.

When I was first starting to learn the history, I actually had clothing made for myself and went to a really top-notch reenactment in the Shenandoah Valley on a farm. Because I wanted to understand

how to dress women, I needed to do it myself. And that was a good thing because I understand what it feels like to wear the clothes, and it just gave me a good understanding and grounding.

But my best-case scenario and what I seek out first when I’m planning a painting is to photograph historic interpreters who know



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEIDE PRESSE

Pioneers travel in the wagon train on the westward trail in the 1840s. “Westward Ho!” 2016, by Heide Presse. Oil on linen panel; 24 inches by 42 inches.

“
God
just poured
all these
opportunities
into my lap to
get this done.”

Heide Presse, artist



In 1848, Keturah Belknap and her family travel in a wagon train through sagebrush desert in central Wyoming on the overland trail to Oregon. “Destiny,” 2018, by Heide Presse. Oil on linen panel; 20 inches by 36 inches.



Tender family moments in Heide Presse’s “We Set Our Faces Westward...One Woman’s Journey 1839–1848” project sketchbook.

what they’re doing. And they have the period clothing, and it’s lived in, and they look like history.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Part of researching your paintings involves reading about your current project “We Set Our Faces Westward...One Woman’s Journey 1839–1848.”

MRS. PRESSE: When I was working on the corporate commission pieces, I was always going to historic sites or doing research and visiting museums to get references for those paintings. Every time I would go to those places, I would always explore the bookstore, and I started picking up books that contained journals.

I love reading journals because if I am trying to get into the heads of people I want to depict in my painting, I feel the best way to do it is to read their own words. It’s the best way for me to put myself into their shoes, so to speak. And also, when I went through this process of learning how to research, of course, one of the first things I learned is to find primary documentation first, so I was always looking for that sort of thing.

One time, I picked up this book that contained journals written mostly by women as they traveled the trails west, and I was just hooked. I started reading all these journals. And for the first time, it gave me an understanding of getting into the wagon and spending several months relocating. Before, I had this kind of romanticized image in my mind, and I didn’t really think that much about it. But the

situation was far more complex, as you can imagine. So that led me to where I am today.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Please tell us about your current project “We Set Our Faces Westward...One Woman’s Journey 1839–1848.”

MRS. PRESSE: Since that first book that I picked up that contained several journals, I’ve read a lot of journals and, of course, I get ideas for paintings. But there was this one particular journal (it’s not a very long journal, really), but the woman who wrote it, Keturah Belknap, was just incredibly descriptive about how she did things and most journals are not. In the case of the Oregon Trail or California Trail, they mostly talk about how many miles they traveled, if they had good water, good grass, and they talked about landmarks along the way. They pretty much traveled all the same trails, so it’s the same thing over and over. So if you read a bunch of those journals, they can be a bit redundant.

But Belknap’s journal just stood out because she talked about how she did things, everyday things, and that’s what fascinates me. In 1840, she wrote:

“Now it is spring and we have got a few sheep on the shares and they are sheared. All this winter I have been spinning flax and tow to make some summer clothes. I have not spent an idle minute.

“Now the wool must be taken from the sheep’s bag, washed,

picked, and sent to the carding machine and made into rolls. Then it must be spun, colored, and wove to have it ready for next winter.”

So I started to get this vision of doing a series of paintings depicting the life of one person who went through this process.

Belknap and her husband were newlyweds in their early 20s, who went from Ohio to Iowa to homestead in 1839. Half of my project covers the time that they homesteaded in Iowa from 1839 to 1847, so I am basically painting a picture of everyday life during that period. Then the other half of the project is their journey from Iowa to Oregon in the covered wagon. Belknap and her immediate family went to Oregon from Iowa in 1848.

In 1847, when the gold rush began in California, the gold rush stories started to hit the publications in the Northeast and everywhere, and people started migrating to the West. And that started a big change for this country.

I think so many people kept journals during the trip because they knew they were making history.

Belknap just resonated with me. I was just fascinated by her feistiness and everything she went through, and the way she described in such detail how she did every little thing. She also had a very deep Christian faith and spoke of it frequently. It’s also a huge presence in many of the journals that I read, because those people generally had a really deep faith.

The only thing Belknap didn’t really talk about is that she happened to be pregnant and gave birth on the trail. It’s interesting that they never talked about really personal things like being pregnant. You never find out that they were pregnant on the whole trip until the baby is born. But that’s the way it was.

The first thing I had to do was to find a young woman who was going to be my model. I was at a historical reenactors’ conference in Pennsylvania where anyone who wants to learn about the mid-1800s goes to understand the culture, dress, and all that stuff. I knew there would be a lot of good reenactors there, so I was hoping to find somebody. There was

a young woman there who was an acquaintance of mine. I didn’t know her well, but she’s an outstanding reenactor and she sews most of her own clothing. She lives in New York, in the western part of New York state.

So I talked to her and I thought, “How in the world am I realistically going to do this living in Florida?” Once I sat down and had the conversation with her, it was like God just poured all these opportunities into my lap to get this done. It was amazing. Because at that time she happened to work for Genesee Country Village and Museum, which is a really good living history museum in New York state that is set-up as a village of 68 historic structures, the majority of which fit into the time-frame of what I needed for my project. All I had to do was to fly up to New York and go to this village, and she pretty much opened the doors to almost everything I needed, including introducing me to other top-notch historical reenactors.

One of the most lucky finds was someone to pose as her husband, the man in the story. At the time, I really did not know much about men’s impressions or have much knowledge of agriculture in that period. She introduced me to a young fellow who worked in the agriculture program at this living history museum where they have heritage breed animals, including the shorthorn Milking Devon oxen. There, they plow the land, grow and harvest crops, and all in the period manner.

For about three years, I would visit the museum a couple of times a year and spend several days there. So that just parlayed into the most perfect situation for me. That’s where I got a lot of my reference material.

I’m just always astounded at how lucky I am. These are incredibly talented individuals who know how to create history, and they agree to pose for me. Because the painting is only going to be as good as the subject, and some of this stuff I can’t just make up, I have to have a good reference. And I need to understand what I’m painting.

This article has been edited for clarity and brevity.

The transcription of the Keturah Belknap diary comes from the Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections at the Washington State University Libraries in Pullman, Wash.

To find out more about Heide Presse’s work, visit HeidePresse.com

(Left)
Heide Presse’s mid-19th-century props in her exhibition at the Steamboat Art Museum, in Colorado, in 2019. Presse sewed the bonnet by hand.

(Right)
Heide Presse’s 2019 exhibition, “We Set Our Faces Westward...One Woman’s Journey 1839–1848,” at the Steamboat Art Museum in Steamboat Springs, Colo. The exhibition introduced her creative process on the project, which will be completed around 2022.



THEATER REVIEW

RUSSIAN MASTERS' WORKS

Brought to the Stage

DIANA BARTH

NEW YORK—Can short stories morph into theatrical entities? British playwright and actor Miles Malleon has theatricalized two short stories by great Russian authors Anton Chekhov and Leo Tolstoy. These are now being presented by the Mint Theater at its Off-Broadway venue in Manhattan.

By Chekhov

First up of this dual bill is "The Artist," adapted by Malleon from Chekhov's "An Artist's Story," in which painter Nicov (Alexander Sokovikov) is seen practicing his art in the garden of a country house somewhere in Russia.

Nicov is interrupted by a lovely young neighbor, Genya (Anna Lentz), who waxes enthusiastically about the landscape on Nicov's easel. Moved by her charm, the painter offers the painting to her as a gift.

Genya's older sister Lidia (Brittany Anikka Liu) has a negative attitude toward art, considering it a useless pursuit. Strict and disciplined, she is self-supporting as a teacher, and devotes herself to social causes: helping the poor and seeing to it that the town's schools and hospitals are kept functioning smoothly.

The girls' mother (Katie Firth) leaves the running of their household to the dominant Lidia. Byelkurov (J. Paul Nicholas), owner of the nearby house where Nicov is staying, sometimes appears and spars intellectually with Nicov.



It becomes clear that Nicov and Genya are strongly drawn to one another and make plans to be together. Fate—or Lidia—(and Chekhov) intervene. The play's ending is abrupt and startling.

While Nicov and Lidia spout their opposing views, it's clear that these two major characters are spokespeople for Chekhov's own political and social views. So we have a fascinating look into his concerns.

Chekhov (1860–1904), during his brief 44-year lifetime, wrote an astonishing multitude of short stories and many notable plays, including the masterful quartet of "The Seagull," "Uncle Vanya," "The Three Sisters," and "The Cherry Orchard." Yet he found time to perform his duties as a medical doctor.

Under Jonathan Bank's astute direction, the cast performs ably. A particular plus is the presence of Alexander Sokovikov, an authentic Russian actor, graduated from Moscow's Russian Academy of Theatre Arts.

By Tolstoy

The next play "Michael," adapted from Leo Tolstoy's "What Men Live By," is in the style of an allegory.

A poor peasant shoemaker, Simon (J. Paul Nicholas), takes home with him a naked man he has discovered on the road. Simon's wife Matryona (Katie Firth) at first objects to this deed, but she soon relents out of sympathy for the man, called Michael (Malik Reed).

Michael proves to be a godsend (in more ways than one, as we will discover). He is a master shoemaker and attracts a lot of business, making the couple prosperous.

It turns out that Michael is being punished, apparently by a higher power. However, odd events occur that enable him to redeem himself, and he can return to his rightful home—which is not of this earth.

Alexander Sokovikov plays a Russian noble who needs new boots, and Anna Lentz is his servant. A Woman is played by Brit-

tany Anikka Liu, and it is a pleasure to see Vinie Burrows, who is in her 90s, acquit herself nicely as the servant Aniuska.

Sound designer Jane Shaw, a longtime colleague of Mint artistic director Jonathan Bank, acquits herself well here in her directorial debut.

Tolstoy lived to the ripe old age of 82 (1828–1910). He wrote a great number of short stories, some plays, and some novels. Arguably, he is best celebrated for his masterly novels "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina," both known to millions via cinematic and televised versions. He is lauded for the Christian views that permeate his works.

Recommended for lovers of Chekhov and Tolstoy, and for anyone who views the theater as a place to think, as well as to be entertained.

Diana Barth writes for various theater publications, including "New Millennium." For information visit diabarh99@gmail.com

ALL PHOTOS BY MARIA BARANOVA



1. Alexander Sokovikov and Brittany Anikka Liu play characters with opposite ideals in "The Artist," an adaptation of a short story by Anton Chekhov.

2. (L-R) Katie Firth, Vinie Burrows, J. Paul Nicholas, and Malik Reed in "Michael," part of the Mint Theater's world premiere of "Chekhov/Tolstoy Love Stories."

Recommended for lovers of Chekhov and Tolstoy, and for anyone who views the theater as a place to think.

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