

Mormon Missionaries at the Académie Julian

In 1890, devoted members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were still gathering in the Mountain West of Utah, as they had been doing since 1846, fleeing religious persecution and mob violence in the Midwest.

At the same time, a pair of these Mormon men, recognizing their isolation from the cultural centers and seeing painting as integral to their efforts to bring culture and beauty to their growing settlements, worked out a special arrangement with the church leaders.

If the church would pay for their professional art training and the journey it would entail, they would return to Salt Lake City and assist the church in its most important art endeavour: the temple.



Figure 1

The men, John Hafen (Figure 1) and Lorus Pratt, had made a proposal to the First Presidency of the church that they be called for two years as art missionaries to Paris, where they could study painting. They agreed to return after their training and paint the murals on the interior walls of the near-complete Salt Lake temple.

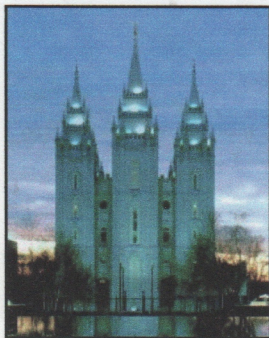


Figure 2

Being a firm believer that the highest possible development of talent is a duty we owe to our Creator, I made it a matter of prayer for many years that He would open a way whereby I could receive that training which would befit me to decorate His holy temples and the habitations of Zion - John Hafen.¹

After going to the Church and requesting the necessary financial assistance so that they and several other promising artists could receive the training they needed, the men were informed by a member of the church's First Presidency in June of 1890 that their proposal had been accepted and that they would be going to Paris as "missionaries

¹ Linda Jones Gibbs, Harvesting the Light: The Paris Art Mission and Beginnings of Utah Impressionism (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 3.

with special purpose."² Even though the church was suffering from adverse financial conditions, it supported these students with the understanding that they would return to paint murals for temples.³

In addition to Hafen and Pratt, three other missionaries were called to serve in the Paris Art Mission of 1890. John B. Fairbanks was called and set apart with Hafen and Pratt, while Edwin Evans would join them three months later and Herman Hugo Haag (Figure 3 - standing) would arrive the next year.

The first three missionaries departed Utah on June 23, 1890.



Figure 3

*I bade farewell to my wife, my family, and my home, and set out for a foreign land. Four of my darling little ones accompanied me to the depot, where I kissed their little faces, knowing I would not see them again for two years. On the Denver and Rio Grande train, I found Lorus Pratt, one of my fellow students. At Springville, a large crowd had assembled. In the midst of the crowd we saw John Hafen. . . . His eyes were red as he slowly made his way to the train. "All aboard" came the cry of the conductor and we were soon speeding eastward. After a few moments of silent reflection, we began to talk of our plans for the future. In that we found consellation [sic]. [Condensation by Florence Fairbanks Cope of a history by Florence Gifford Fairbanks, artist files, Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah; quoted in Gibbs, *Harvesting the Light*, 18–19]*

Paris was the natural choice for the missionaries after deciding to receive the best training they could find. Paris was widely known to Americans in the 19th Century as the key to artistic quality and prestige. By the 1890s, Paris was an accepted feature of American culture, a customary compliment to artistic life and training in the United States...Even if the Parisian experience could not instill artistic genius, most believed it could reveal it.⁴

² Gibbs, *Harvesting*, 3.

³ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience – A History of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 256.

⁴ Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *American Artists in Paris, 1919-1929*, (Ann Arbor / London: UMI Research Press, 1988), 9-10.

In reality, few prominent American artists had failed to take advantage of the opportunities for European training. Indeed, the men would be following in the footsteps of other notable American artists who had studied in Paris, namely James McNeill Whistler, John Singer Sargent and Mary Cassatt, not to mention Thomas Dewing, John Henry Twachtman and Childe Hassam, who had actually studied at their same destination, the Académie Julian.

With its numerous ateliers, Paris provided Americans with a milieu unmatched in the United States; it was a living example of art functioning as a part of daily life. Americans believed that study and exhibition in such a forum, while providing support, would test the meddle of budding artists, weeding out the dabblers and cultivating those talents who would transform America into an artistic force.⁵

The Mormon missionaries' journey to refine their skills would take them to the Académie Julian (Figure 4), an alternative to the École des Beaux-Arts popular among foreign art students, especially Americans. Indeed, the school became "home away from home" for Americans, where their compatriots could provide introductions, translations, explanations of procedures, and extracurricular society.⁶



Figure 4

Other attractions of the private academy to Americans were the lack of rigorous entrance examinations typical of the government schools, low enrollment fees, no age or gender restrictions, long open studio hours, a system of *concours* or competitions and the chance to study under influential artists such as Gustav Boulanger, William Bouguereau, Benjamin Constant, Jules Lefebvre and Tony Robert-Fleury.

The founder of the Académie Julian, Rodolphe Julian, a wrestler and circus manager in the early 1860s, had also studied painting under. In 1863, he had a few pieces accepted to the Salon des Refusés and in the Salons between 1865 and

⁵ Elizabeth Hutton Turner, American Artists in Paris, 1919-1929, (Ann Arbor / London: UMI Research Press, 1988), 14.

⁶ H. Barbara Weinberg, The Lure of Paris – Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1991), 227.

1878. During that time (1868), he founded the Académie Julian as a place where men and women could study art from a living model without formal teaching, to act as an educational stepping stone to entering an established Parisian studio or the École des Beaux-Arts. Seeing his entrepreneurial efforts better rewarded than his artistic ones, by 1878 Julian decided to stop creating art and to concentrate on creating artists.⁷

During the greatest influx of American artists to Paris in pursuit of French training – in the 1870s, '80s, and '90s – Julian's was an essential resource. Although it, and the French academic tradition in general, would become increasingly irrelevant as modernism prevailed, the phenomenon of Julian's success clearly reflects international – and especially American – aspirations at the turn of the century.⁸

The Mormon students from Utah excelled, winning several of the weekly *concours*. Such regular contests allowed students to demonstrate their skills in the drawing of models and outdoor sketches. After critiques were given, winners were selected and prizes were distributed, with notification being affixed to the works



Figure 5

(sometimes directly to the work on its front or back, and occasionally on its frame).⁹ Lorus Pratt was the first of the art missionaries from Utah to have a winning drawing chosen for the *concour*. The artists from Utah distinguished themselves, winning a number of competitions.¹⁰ Success in the competitions had several advantages for the artists braving difficult conditions with food and lodging, such as first choice of work places the next week and the ability to enter work into the monthly *concours*. Winners sometimes, especially in the advanced painting contests, received cash prizes that could afford the student a certain peace of mind while they pursued their education and allowed them to stay in Paris longer.

The education of the artists not only included studio time, but was enhanced

⁷ Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris*, 221.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁹ Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker, Eds, *Overcoming All Obstacles – The Women of the Académie Julian* (New York: The Dahesh Museum, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 21.

¹⁰ Giles H. Florence, "Harvesting the Light: The 1890s Paris Art Mission," *Ensign*, Oct. 1988, 35.

with gallery and museum field trips. In addition to drawing or painting académies in class, students independently practiced composition in painted sketches...that would utilize compositional strategies observed during students' frequent studies of works in the Louvre and the Luxembourg Collections.¹¹

For several months in the Académie, the students studies consisted of drawing from casts and live nude models in one of the nine ateliers or studios. However, after a time, the artists seemed to have found the style for which they had been searching. Indeed, heeding the call of the Impressionist movement that had recently experienced its peak, the American artists began to spend most of their time in the French countryside around Paris. They loosened their brush strokes and palettes as they attempted to capture the light and feel of the moment.

*In paintings that you may see hereafter cease to look for mechanical effect or minute finish, for individual leaves, blades of grass, or aped imitation of things, but look for smell, for soul, for feeling, for the beautiful in line and color.*¹²



Figure 6

Edwin Evans, who joined the other missionaries three months into their missions, also enrolled in the Académie Julian, and like many other American students entrenched in academic studies, he sought relief painting outdoors on the weekends and during the summer. The time he spent in the countryside near Paris inspired the major plein air work *Grain*

Fields. (Figure 6)¹³ One can see in this work, the earlier Realist influence of Jean Francoise Millet and Jules Breton, with the subject being a peasant working the wheat in the fields, albeit without the human figure having a compositional prominence. One can see also the influence of Claude Monet in the presence of wheat stacks and the

¹¹ H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris – Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1991), 223.

¹² Linda Jones Gibbs, *Harvesting the Light: The Paris Art Mission and Beginnings of Utah Impressionism* (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 44.

¹³ 150 Years of American Painting, Brigham Young University Museum of Art. http://www.byu.edu/moa/exhibits/Current_Exhibits/150years/820037940.html

effect of light falling upon them. Perhaps combining a joyful American optimism and a Utah/Mormon respect for hard work and industry, Evans' *Grain Fields* celebrates the fecundity of the land and rejoices in a harvest scene that was reminiscent of home.¹⁴ This work, was later exhibited in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where it won an honorable mention.

The love of being outside was undoubtedly more to the missionaries' personal tastes, as opposed to being besieged by the "bohemian" atmosphere of the academy's ateliers and the affront to their sensibilities and values.

In addition, with the importance of the principle of morality and sanctity and private nature of the human body, and their abstinence from tobacco, it must have been a challenge at times to be present in the ateliers. Descriptions of Julian's airless, smoke-filled, noise, and unruly studios abound in students' contemporaneous letters home and later recollections.

*The Académie Julian! Never had I seen or heard such a bedlam – or men waste so much time. I had often seen rooms full of tobacco smoke, but not as here in a room never ventilated... Never were windows opened. They were nailed fast at the beginning of the cold season. Fifty or sixty men smoking in such a room for two or three hours would make it so that those on the back rows could hardly see the model - Henry Ossawa Tanner, student.*¹⁵

One American described the conditions of the academy's studio on the rue Saint Denis this way:

*"I had formed a picture in my mind of the sort of place this Academie Julien [sic] was and I was utterly dumbfounded to see a barn of a place, an ancient warehouse from which, on the second and top floor all partitions had been knocked out and large sky-lights had been let into the north slope of the roof. It was enormous and light filled, with a howling, noisy milling mass of boys and young men. There were probably one-hundred students in that room."*¹⁶

¹⁴ 150 Years of American Painting, Brigham Young University Museum of Art. [http://www.byu.edu/moa/exhibits/Current Exhibits/150years/820037940.html](http://www.byu.edu/moa/exhibits/Current%20Exhibits/150years/820037940.html)

¹⁵ H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris – Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1991), 227.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

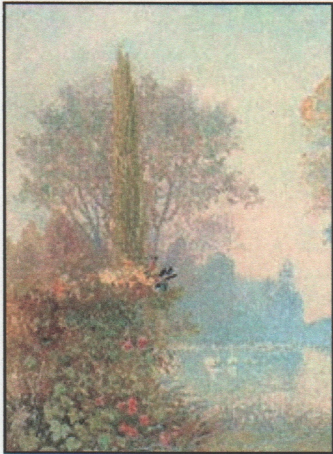


Figure 7

Regardless of the conditions and his unfinished mission, John Hafen returned to Utah after only a year in Paris, due to the economic hardship of his wife and children. Returning to Salt Lake City, he was in turn the first missionary to begin work on the interior murals of the nearly complete Salt Lake Temple. A year later, Hafen and Danquart Weggeland, a Danish convert who had taught the artists before their missions, and who had been working alongside Hafen on the murals, were rejoined by Evans, Pratt, Haag and Fairbanks upon their return from Paris. They were able to complete two

murals for the temple's opening, in the World and Garden Rooms, on April 6, 1892. All five artists collaborated on the Garden Room mural, while Edwin Evans, John B. Fairbanks and Dan Weggeland worked together on the World Room.

Upon the completion of the temple project, each of the "Art Missionaries" continued to devote their talents and training to the church and its cause, contributing to other temples' artistic needs and instructing future Utah artists in what was to become known as "Utah Impressionism."

Edwin Evans painted nine rooms of the Cardston, Alberta temple and taught art at the University of Utah before returning to Paris for two years. He continued to paint until his death in 1946.

John B. Fairbanks (Figure 8) became the first supervisor of arts in the Ogden, Utah, public schools. His posterity contained several noted artists.

Lorus Pratt painted the agrarian development of some Utah valleys while farming and caring for his family.



Figure 8

John Hafen went on to paint during many trips to the east and west coasts of the United States and is the most well-known of the art missionaries and his art is in the greatest demand. He died in 1910 at age 56.

Upon his return from Paris, Herman Haag also taught at the University of Utah

until his untimely death in 1895 at age 23.



Figure 9

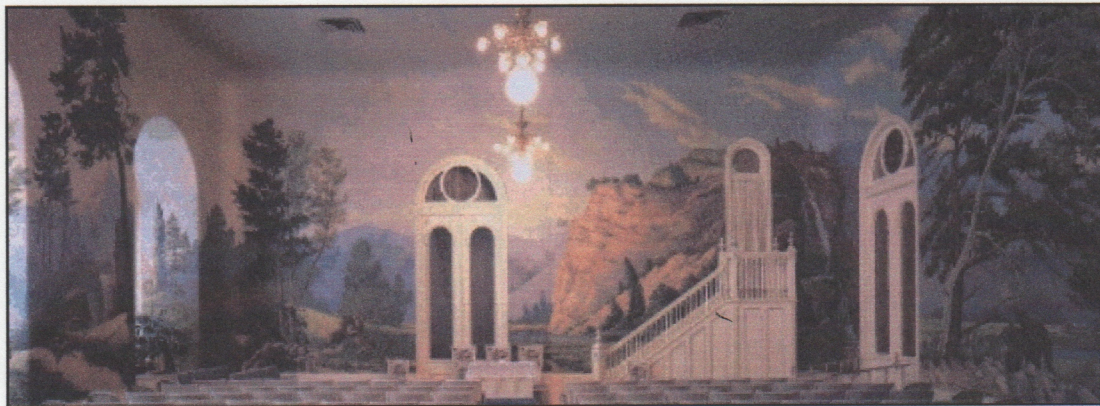


Figure10

Even though the French Impressionist movement lasted only about 10 years, from 1870 to 1880, these artists would return to their homes around Salt Lake City, bringing with them a love of the Impressionist style and its rendering of light and nature. They would go on to establish what would be known as Utah Impressionism. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints more than received a return on its investment, sending these men to Paris. At the same time, these men were not only able to partake of the incredible experience of studying in Paris at the Académie Julian, but were able to come home and assist in the adorning of the walls of the temple of their God and witness their art affecting the lives of its viewers on a grand scale.

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ILLUSTRATIONS:

Figure 1

Artist John Hafen about 1878.

Figure 2

Salt Lake Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Figure 3

Herman Haag (standing) with older brother Richard in 1887.

Figure 4

Atelier at the Académie Julian, Paris, no date. Caleb Arnold Slade (1882-1961), Oil on canvas, 42 x 57 in., William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs; Alumni Annual Giving Program.

Figure 5

Pastoral Scene, South Salt Lake City, 1890s, Lorus Pratt.

Figure 6

Grain Fields, 1890, Edwin Evans (1860-1946). Oil on canvas, 39 x 57 7/8 in. Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

Figure 7

Garden of Eden, ca. 1892, unsigned study for the Salt Lake temple murals.

Figure 8

John B. Fairbanks sketching in Utah Valley about 1897.

Figure 9

The Garden Room, 1892. John Hafen, Lorus Pratt, John B. Fairbanks, Herman Haag, Edwin Evans, Dan Weggeland. Salt Lake Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah. (Photo Source: *Ensign Magazine*.)

Figure 10

The World Room, 1892, Edwin Evans, John B. Fairbanks, Dan Weggeland. Salt Lake Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah. (Photo Source: *Ensign Magazine*.)