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***Hugh Nibley Observed***

About the Portrait of Hugh Nibley  
Rebecca Fechser Everett

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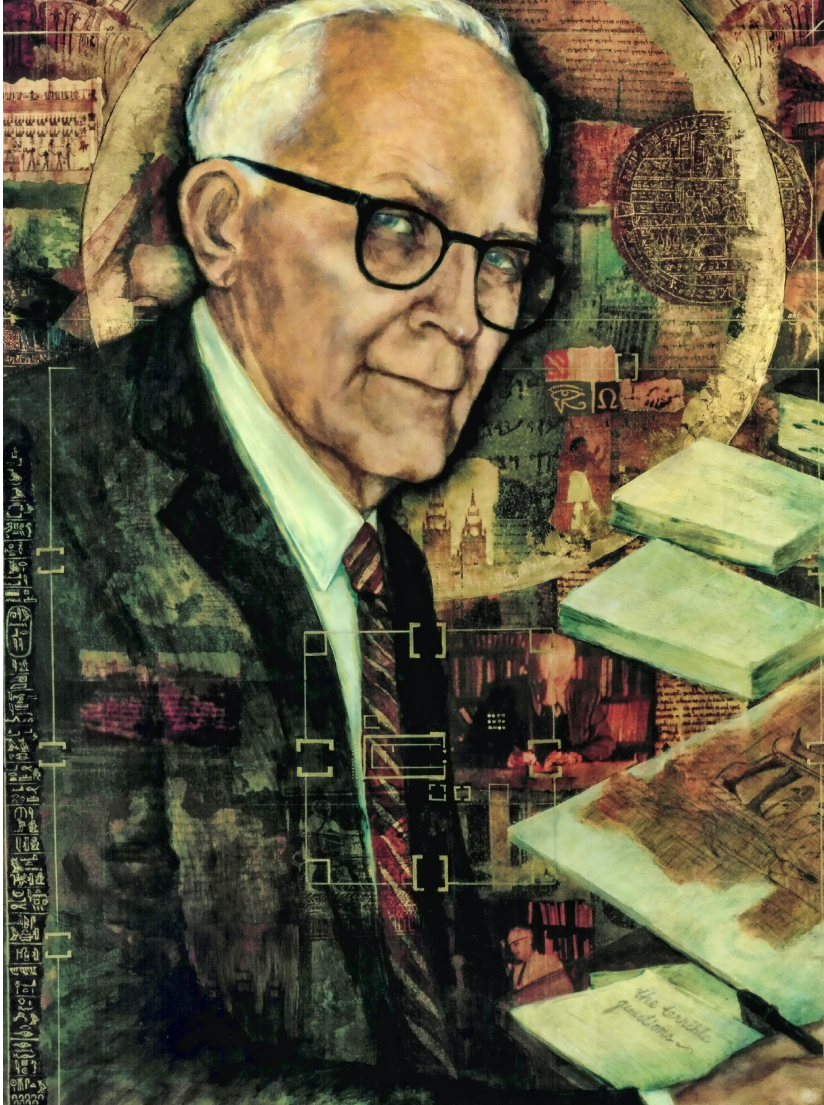
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*Portrait of Hugh Nibley by Rebecca F. Everett*

## ABOUT THE PORTRAIT OF HUGH NIBLEY

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**Rebecca Fehser Everett**

I have enjoyed the whole process of creating this portrait from thought to finish. I've developed the piece to attempt to include as many images as I could associate with Brother Nibley and his life's interests. It is built upon a collage of images from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi manuscripts, the Book of Abraham facsimiles, drawings of various temples (ancient and modern), photos from the Holy Land, and images of the BYU campus area where he has spent so much of his time in teaching and research.

Placed above the collage is a large circle—a reminder of the prayer circle, the sun, a symbol for time or of day, the disk of the sun god Ra, the ouroboros, a ring, eternity, and so forth. I have delineated this circle in 18-karat gold leaf with a sketchy inner edge and a defined outer edge, aligning with arches on the upper corners of the piece formed by images of papyrus-headed pillars from an Egyptian temple. Up in the bits of sky visible outside the arches and bounded by linear representations of the square and the compass are constellations of (on the left) the Big Dipper, by which we orient ourselves to find the North Star, and (on the right) Orion—of all the constellations perhaps the one most easily recognized by anyone. Perhaps, then, this is an entry point, or a first step toward a personal and intimate contemplation of the mysteries of God.

The portrait itself is superimposed over the collage and further developed in many layers of glazes so that the underlying images are secondary to the portrait, yet still discernible. I wanted to portray the nobility of scholarship, the quizzical disinterest in the honors of men, and a subtle but definite twinkle in his eye that speaks of the deep joy he derives from the daily study of the gospel

and the surprise and fun of encountering truths dressed in types and metaphors.

Also inscribed in gold ink, forming a sort of frame to the bottom third of the painting and into which descends the lower third of the large circle (making a sort of overall underimage, if one might be permitted, of the hieroglyphic symbol for the horizon), is the outline of the temple plan as found on the Qumran Temple Scroll. I especially liked how the east gate centers upon Brother Nibley's point of concentration in the small image of him at work on the image from the Book of Breathings.

Included in the piece are his ubiquitous stacks of handwritten three-by-five cards, which I felt *must* be a part of any true portrayal of the man, along with a book of scripture close at hand. And of course, the wonderful bit of papyrus that shows the image of what we call "Facsimile 1" had to be included as well. My husband, Dennis, has recounted to me his memories of Brother Nibley's office in the Joseph Smith Building when he had a janitorial job as a freshman back in 1969. He will never forget the frisson of heightened feeling, a sort of reverence that fluttered over him as he attempted to sweep while maneuvering between the walls of shoeboxes full of documents and carefully dusted around the stacks of note cards without disturbing anything. He knew that office was the workplace of a true scholar!

Along the left edge of the piece I've inscribed a column of hieroglyphics that were designed to read as follows:

I, Rebecca, make this offering; this portrait, or image; this likeness or similitude; by my two hands, actually; as an honor, or in honor of ~(Hugh Nibley)~ [written in a cartouche]. He who perceives and understands truth; discovers or uncovers things that are hidden; pertaining to ancient documents or manuscripts; an instructor or teacher; a very learned and educated man; a just and truth-speaking man; an un-tier of knots or a solver of difficulties; an expert, an adept; concerning old records and ancient laws; a truthful scribe; a whole lifetime; his heart was glad to do it. In celebration of his 90th birthday. All Life! All health! All prosperity! All stability! All joy of heart!

It took me days of happy study to figure out how to write it all. I can only hope that the inscription means what I meant it to say!



*Figure 1. Rebecca Everett and Hugh Nibley with Everett's portrait in the BYU Ancient Studies Room, October 30, 2000. The room would be renamed in Hugh's honor on November 14, 2001.<sup>1</sup>*

I wanted the overall tone of the piece to be warm and quite rich, in deep sepias, siennas, ochres, golds, the colors of old parchment, reddish-sandstone colors with some gray-blues and deep greens. The portrait is approximately 22 × 30 inches unframed. I have framed it in a wonderful large but simple molding in an antique finish of mottled green and gold with a flax-colored liner. I am also a framer and felt it would not be right to leave the final presentation to another. I am very pleased with how the framing suits the portrait. It is elegant, but not grand or fussy.

I am delighted to have had the wonderful experience of creating the painting. It was a particular honor since I have been a hungry student of Brother Nibley's writings all of my adult life. I will confess here that throughout my artistic endeavors there have been many instances where a concept or a turn of phrase first encountered in my reading proceeded to a finished artwork. Thus, many of my etchings have begun as sparks of inspiration during study of Nibley.

I will be very glad if this portrait is considered in some small degree worthy.



## The Blueprint

(Upon Pondering Nibley's *Temple and Cosmos*)

In the beginning, God put forth His beautiful hands  
and dipped them deep into the long blue-black night;  
brought up and shaped with perfect fingers,  
His every most exquisite thought.

Each fervent element rejoiced to have been called and named aloud  
by His galvanizing voice, and brought within His powerful cognition.

Like pearls the chosen worlds were gathered up,  
warmed and rolled between His palms, caressed and pressed,  
each crystal core not stone, but holy nacre layered on.

Next cast He out into the purple net of space the spinning universes,  
whole and entire, luminously spiraling, still glowing from His touch.  
He traced their architectural trajectories in heaven's vast and rolling span,  
numbering unto Himself the limitless multiplicity of worlds:

appointing and fixing their bright orbits,  
and naming to each turning sphere its purpose.

Then in answer to questing Enoch and lone Abraham's implore, and to Moses,  
awestruck before the bush, and to humble Lehi in a dream,  
and to stalwart Nephi's query, and young Joseph's prayer,  
scrolled He back the starry curtain, revealing thus the ordered gates  
of His eternal timepiece.

Oh, the wonder, the astonishment, the awe!

To be granted the privilege of seeing!

The hair on end! The reeling mind!

The racing heart! The burning breast! To know!

That He took of the host of glimmering intelligences  
and made He them His children.

And loved, and taught and knew them each by name,  
and planted them upon the endless earths.

To understand the elegant simplicity of God's eternal plan!

To then be taught to build the distilled cosmos  
of His holy edifice, and enter in, and covenant,

and there, enlightened, to align ourselves with His celestial compass.

To begin to comprehend the garden dramas, the Sacrifice,  
and the long enduring battle.

To have written in our hands the shining answers  
to all the Terrible Questions!

*Rebecca Fechser Everett is an artist and poet. During her studies at Brigham Young University, she focused primarily on figurative and portrait painting in oils. She has also completed studies in weaving, stained glass, pottery, photography, and printmaking. In creating handmade artists' books, she combines four passions: books, beautiful papers, writing, and making art. Everett's favorite achievement was the commissioned portrait of Dr. Hugh W. Nibley, which hangs in the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU and was also used as the cover art on the authorized biography of Hugh Nibley. She helped to restore a Main Street building in downtown Keokuk, Iowa, that became the Lock 19 Gallery for displaying the works of featured artists. Everett and her husband currently live in Utah, where she makes her own paint from foraged earth pigments and botanical lakes.*

### Notes

1. Photo courtesy of Rebecca Everett. Photo ID: 3X5 Nibley 'n Me-E.jpeg. Everett later described additional details about the event, saying that the presentation of the portrait to Nibley "was such a remarkable and deeply rewarding experience. He was so warm and lovely and so pleased! He looked and looked, finding all the important things I'd included in the collage, and just remarked over and over at the details. He pronounced my hieroglyphics as correct (!) and upon my turning the piece over to reveal the etching and poem on the reverse, asked me to read it. We all had tears at the conclusion, and he said, "You have got it! Captured it perfectly!" I was on cloud nine for days. . . . After we got the snapshot with him and the painting, I thanked him for the privilege of literally studying him, and he said, "Why, I thank YOU, the result is marvelous. You've signed it haven't you?" And I showed him my signature. "Oh, my, it's so small! It should be writ large!" he said, with a sweep of his arm. What a dear darling man!" (E-mail messages of Rebecca Everett to Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, March 5 and 6, 2021).