

A LABOR OF LOVE

The Life and Art of Vinnie Ream

by Glenn V. Sherwood

The book presents the life and work of Vinnie Ream, the first woman and the youngest artist to ever receive a U.S. Government commission for a statue. Her full-size marble figure of Abraham Lincoln in the U.S. Capitol rotunda was unveiled in 1871. She received the coveted commission in 1866 at the age of 18. In a speech made at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Vinnie Ream said, "It had been indeed a Labor of Love, not without its trials, but well rewarded by its final triumph." This book gives the true story of that dramatic struggle. It chronicles a young woman artist's spiritual mission and triumph over adversity amid the fight for final acceptance of Abraham Lincoln's ideas.

Vinnie Ream was awarded the job over many experienced competitors. This brought flak in the press toward the artist and her supportive congressmen from journalists who favored other sculptors. Her departure from the cloying conventions of the times brought down the wrath of neoclassic art critics. She was called a "fraud" and a "humbug" by male competitors and by envious women detractors and eastern art cliques who paraded the distortion that "men did her work." As an attractive woman, she was accused of influencing congressman with "feminine wiles." Allegations that the artist and her family were "secessionists" and her true role in the Civil War and post-war politics is studied. The artist's eviction from the U.S. Capitol due to her perceived role in the failed 1868 impeachment of Andrew Johnson is examined.

The book presents Vinnie Ream's inspiring story and ardent philosophy of life. The information it contains came from hundreds of sources and is the end result of many years of study. It shows the known art of Vinnie Ream in many rare, unpublished pictures and contains over 30 portraits of the artist--along with selected poems, writings and lectures by this great woman who had a key influence on our culture. For the first time, it presents a detailed inventory of her work and gives a compilation of its symbolism from many viewpoints. One purpose of an in-depth analysis is to challenge the assumption often paraded in the past that Vinnie Ream was only an artist of "secondary importance." It attempts to transcend both the "Cinderella" and notorious elements written in the past by giving more original and more balanced information. Uncut speeches, debates, news stories and letters have been included to let the historical characters speak for themselves.

What they're saying about the book:

"Vinnie Ream has long needed a full-length study of her life and work. The tale of this spirited woman's career is a fascinating one and this richly illustrated biography establishes her rightful place in the history of American art."

BETSY FAHLMAN, Professor of Art History, Arizona State University.

"Glenn Sherwood's revelations are especially startling, persuasive, and riveting. He has placed Vinnie Ream within the fascinating intrigue of Washington politics during the 1860s and revealed the impact of those entanglements with the creation of one of the most controversial works of art of the decade."(1870)

WILLIAM H. GERDTS, Professor of Art History, The City University of New York; author of: *American Neoclassic Sculpture* and *The White, Marmorean Flock*.

"A prodigiously researched and enchantingly written account of one of the most original, most unusual, and most often overlooked figures of 19th-century American art. Blessed with a keen sense of what made art popular, Vinnie Ream lives again on these pages."

HAROLD HOLZER, co-author of: *The Lincoln Image* and *The Lincoln Family Album*.

"A fascinating, thoroughly researched and well-told tale that opens new windows into the political and cultural life of the 19th century. Moreover, it is such a colorful story that it makes most costume dramas of the period pale by comparison."

DONALD R. KENNON, Chief Historian, United States Capitol Historical Society.

"Vinnie Ream's story is a kind of *Gone With the Wind* in which an actual woman of noble soul replaces the vicious fictional heroine. Indeed, the history of American women sculptors reads like fiction, because these women had to be unusual and unconventional in order to accomplish what they did in the face of tremendous obstacles."

CHARLOTTE S. RUBINSTEIN, author of: *American Women Artists* and *American Women Sculptors*.