

## MINNA KEENE

(b. 5 April 1861, Arolsen, Germany; d. November 1943, Oakville, Canada)

Minna Keene, née Bergman, lived in Great Britain, South Africa, and Canada. She emigrated to the United Kingdom in approximately 1880 to become a Governess in Scarborough. While in Scarborough, she met Caleb Keene (b. 1862) a “decorator's apprentice”, who she married in Chelsea, London, in 1887. Caleb Keene was a noted painter and brother of the landscape painter cum “photographic artist” Elmer Ezra Keene (1853–1929). Minna decided to experiment with photography while recovering from a toothache, and eventually became a member of the London Salon of Photography, a fellow of the Royal Photographic Society (1908), and a nominee for membership in the Linked Ring (1909), although the society disbanded before it could conduct a vote to admit her.

Minna's first photographic work was of plant life, for which she made exposures during different stages of growth. Later, she made a successful series of ornithological photographs that were illustrated in English textbooks which remained in use over several decades. Her first mention in photographic literature occurred in the late 1890s while living in Bristol, UK, by submitting to exhibitions and earning recognition in the art journal the *Studio*.

In 1903 Minna emigrated to Cape Town, South Africa, where her husband opened a showroom. During this period she made studies of Boer life in South Africa while operating an active photography studio and raising two children. She exhibited her photographs of Boer life at the Lyceum Club, London, in April 1907, which was favourably reviewed by the *British Journal of Photography* and *Amateur Photographer*. In 1909 this work was included in the “Pictorial Photographs by Colonial Workers” exhibition at the Amateur Photographer's Little Gallery in London. In 1910 Minna exhibited in the Fifty-fifth Annual Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, and in each year until 1929. In 1911 her photograph of her daughter Violet, entitled *Pomegranates*, was awarded Picture of the Year at the London Photographic Salon.

In 1913 the Keene family moved to Canada, first settling in Montréal, Québec, with Minna practising as a professional photographic portraitist. She was commissioned by the Canadian Pacific Railway to photograph the Rockies in 1914 and spent several months in Western Canada. In 1919 the family moved to Toronto, Ontario, and opened a studio, and in 1921 moved to Oakville, Ontario.

In 1926, Minna was featured in a Maclean's magazine article that mentions the highlights of her career and enthuses about her being a “home lover!”. In the 1930s she continued to exhibit internationally and was assisted in the studio by her daughter Violet, who eventually succeeded her and became a photographer in demand at the Eaton's photography studio in Toronto.

## EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON  
*Two Generations of Photography*, Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2016 *Painting with Light: Art and Photography from the Pre-Raphaelites to the Modern Age*, Tate Britain, London, England
- 1984 *Rediscovery: Canadian Women Photographers 1841-1941*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON
- 1983 *Rediscovery: Canadian Women Photographers 1841-1941*, London Regional Art Gallery, London, ON
- 1911 *Picture of the Year*, London Photographic Salon, London, England
- 1910 Fifty-fifth Annual Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain
- 1909 Amateur Photographer's Little Gallery, London, England
- 1907 Lyceum Club, London, England

## MEMBERSHIPS

Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, 1908, Fellow (1914)  
Linked Ring, London  
London Salon of Photography

## COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC  
National Gallery of Art, Ottawa, Canada  
Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ  
Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto, ON  
Science and Society Picture Library, Science Museum Group, London, England  
The National Archives, Kew, London, England

## FILE & ARCHIVE LOCATIONS

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC  
Archives of American Art, Washington, DC  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON  
National Gallery of Art, Greater Landover, MD  
Library and Archives, Ottawa, ON  
Art Gallery of Ontario - Edward P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Toronto, ON  
Canadian Women Artists History Initiative Documentation Centre, QC  
Library and Archives Canada / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, QC

## **PUBLICATIONS WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY MINNA KEENE**

*Rediscovery: Canadian Women Photographers 1841–1941*. North London, Canada: London Regional Art Gallery, 1983. By Laura Jones. ISBN 978-0920872253. With work by 13 women: Rossetta E. Carr, Clara Dennis, M. J. Dukelow, Millie Gamble, Mattie Gunterman, Elsie Hollway, Minna Keene, Hannah Maynard, Annie G. McDougall, Geraldine Moodie, Gladys Reeves, Madge Smith, Edith S. Watson; exhibition catalogue; paperback, 36 pages. Includes 14 photographs and brief biographies of 12 of the photographers.

Royal Photographic Society. *Women by Women*. Rohnert Park, CA: Pomegranate, 1996. With work by 12 women: Anne Brigman, Pamela Booth, Eleanor Parke Custis, Gertrude Käsebier, Madame D'Ora, Adelaide Hanscom, Minna Keene, Rosalinda Maingot, Gisela Markham-Szanto, Eveleen Myers, Hilda Stevenson, Dorothy Wilding; calendar format; 24 pages.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Rosenblum, Naomi. *A History of Women Photographers*. New York: Abbeville, 2000.

Rodger, Andrew C. "Minna Keene, F.R.P.S." *The Archivist* 14.1 (Jan. - Feb. 1987).

Pedersen, Diana, and Martha Phemister. "Women and Photography in Ontario, 1839-1929: A Case Study of the Interaction of Gender and Technology." *Scientia Canadensis: Canadian Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine / Scientia Canadensis: Revue canadienne d'histoire des sciences, des techniques et de la médecine* 9.1 (1985): 27-52.

Koltun, Lilly ed. *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada 1839-1940*. Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1984.

"Mrs. Caleb Keene: Noted Photographer was World Traveller." *Globe and Mail (Toronto)* 6 Nov. 1943: 7.

*The First International Tokyo Salon of Photography*. Tokyo: Tokyo Salon of Photography, 1935.

Irwin, Alan Maruice. "How a Woman Found Fame With a Camera." *MacLean's Magazine* 39.7 (1 Apr. 1926): 72-4.

Guest, Antony. "Mrs. Minna Keene's Exhibition at 'The A.P. [American Place]' Little Gallery." *Amateur Photographer and Photographic News* (30 Mar. 1914): 306.