

of these tribulations by referring to primary documentation such as contemporaneous reviews of Nicol MacLeod's exhibitions and the artist's own writings. A Montreal Star reviewer is quoted as observing that "Miss Nicol is making her own way of painting, and some of the pictures seem to be experiments of which the results do not quite carry out her intentions" (52); while reference to a 1942 letter from Nicol MacLeod to her friend and colleague Madge Smith provides "I am trying hard in between house cleaning to finish up a lot of my paintings. I can't tell you how poor I found them when I expected them to seem very beautiful" (160). Because Brandon recounts the difficulties that Nicol MacLeod faced in such depth (a necessary step towards creating a layered and colourful portrait of her subject) while keeping the art historical analysis of her paintings to a relative minimum, at times these somewhat disconsolate sentiments seem to overwhelm the artist's achievements and place in Canadian art history.

Yet Brandon's regard for her subject's work seems undoubted - in early 2005, Pegi Nicol MacLeod: A Life in Art, an exhibition curated by Brandon, opened at the Carleton University Art Gallery and went on to travel to three other Canadian venues. This exhibition, which brought together more than fifty of Nicol MacLeod's paintings and works on paper, is a notable celebration of the artist's achievements. Perhaps it is by considering the biography and exhibition together, however, that we can best understand Nicol MacLeod as a woman whose remarkable artistic achievements were but one part of a complex and multifaceted life.

Michelle Jacques
Art Gallery of Ontario

Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation. Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, with contributions by Leon Botstein, Shira Brisman, Barbara

Hahn, and Lucia Re. New York: The Jewish Museum and New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005; 280 pages; ISBN 0-300-10385-9; \$50.00US (cloth).

For the art historian the term "salon" denotes the high cultural enfranchisement of the bourgeoisie that marks modernity, while "conversation" carries connotations of the ancien régime and the pre-modern sensibilities of the aristocratic, ruling European elite. "Salons were among the first institutions of modern culture," write Bilski and Braun on the first page of the introductory chapter to their catalogue of an innovative exhibition of the same name that was held at the Jewish Museum in New York. "From the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries they fostered the decline of aristocratic castes and the rise of new egalitarian elites." The conventions for the kinds of discussions that made up the conversations of the older elite had been outlined in a variety of manuals that appeared beginning in the fifteenth century, most prominent being Stefano Guazzo's *La Civil Conversatione* published in Brescia in 1574.¹ In all of the subsequent books in this genre, which proliferated in early modern Europe, "civilized" discussions emphasized the informed judgement and choices of the gentleman. In the words of the art historian Rudolf Wittkower, "select models - epitomes of ideal nature - rather than select nature were recommended for imitation" - both in the life one lived and in art.²

By the late 1660s this ideal for the social mores, speech, and writing of the elite class had become a truly "continental" phenomenon in which art and artists played a central role, not least in the dissemination of the model and its conventions abroad.³ For example, Queen Cristina of Sweden's move to Rome at this time might be seen as a direct result of her attraction to the conversations of *honnestes gens*, e.g., gentlemen, their families and acquaintances, and the papal and foreign courts, which resided in the Eternal

City. By the eighteenth century the grand tour led more and more European elites, among them artists, to the palaces and villas of the Roman aristocracy and of the papacy. In the conversations that took place there the texts and material remains of classical antiquity far outweighed any more recent topics, excepting those of Catholicism.

This ideal of discourse changed dramatically over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, arguably because salon culture, with its democratic insistence on natural models and contemporary topics, including politics, replaced the aristocratic court culture from which it had come. While it would be overly simplistic to state that once Roman *virtù* and Christian piety no longer prevailed as the topics of civil discourse women were able to actively participate in conversation, something of this notion lies behind the concept of Jewish Women and Their Salons. So too does the spreading emancipation of the Jews which took place in Europe during this same period of time, having begun at the time of the French Revolution. The authors explicitly address this as a causal factor in their introduction. What the exhibition and the book, including fine essays by contributors Barbara Hahn, Leon Botstein, and Lucia Re, set out to show - and the book does this quite admirably - is that when Jewish women direct the conversation in their salons of nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe and America, the earlier masculine models for polite discourse and, indeed, to a certain extent, behaviors, transform. Although the book both brings together for the first time and documents the best-known examples of the Jewish salonnières, the reasons for the transformation of the earlier model of civil conversation into the bourgeois epitome of polite conversation remain unspoken. But as *Jewish Women and Their Salons* reveals, there can be no doubt of the significance of that transformation for the acculturation of European

and American Jews, which itself presents another significant characteristic of modernity.

The essays collected in this volume illustrate clearly the complexity and significance of Jewish acculturation into and its effects upon "the new egalitarian elites," most particularly in Germany and France. While Americans certainly participated in many of the most famous salons, such as the vibrant gatherings that took place in Paris at the home of Leonard and Gertrude Stein in the early years of the twentieth century, the three Stettheimer sisters of New York City constitute the only fully discussed salon that took place on the other side of the Atlantic. Sections on Oscar Wilde, both in the introduction and in the rich essay by Lucia Re on the effect of Jewish salons on literary modernism, give some idea of the salon culture in Britain and Ireland. Continental European culture, however, which may be said to include American Francophiles such as the Steins, constitutes the major part of this volume. Even the Stettheimers' avant-garde gatherings on the Upper West Side appear to have originated in their experiences in Europe, particularly Paris, which were brought home, so Bilski and Braun argue, as a result of World War I.

As it to be expected, the focus in this volume is arts and letters writ large: particularly painting, music, and literature. Some of these art forms may have been "feminized" through the institution of the bourgeois salon itself, as Botstein's fine essay on the privileged tradition and legacy of the Berlin and Viennese musical salon suggests: "Whether construed as abstract, nonrepresentational, sentimental, or even illustrative of emotions and events, music came to be an aesthetic and social arena in which Jews could openly participate in public and in private on an equal footing, without conversion or concession vis-à-vis the daily conduct of Jewish life." These musical characteristics of sentimentality, abstraction, and visible emotion would

never have been considered masculine in early modern civil conversation, yet by the 1790s they appear to have dominated in the secular music heard in the salons of Berlin and Vienna. The overtly feminine traits found in the music were seen to be reflected in the women who both listened and played in these gatherings. Botstein, like others, notices that music assumed a particularly important role in Jewish acculturation. No doubt the kind of freedoms enjoyed by Jews in these musical environments appeared, like the music itself, unthreatening to the more powerful segments of society, just as did the hostess of the salon in comparison to her wealthy and usually more politically engaged husband. Nonetheless, as Hahn's study of the early Berlin salonnieres demonstrates, freedom, even when practiced in the safety of the salon, sometimes resulted in the overthrowing of societal conventions, if only by individual women, and often at great cost to themselves.

However, as the section of the introductory essay on "The Political Salon" argues, most of these cultural spheres intersected to some greater or lesser extent with the politics of the day. While this aspect of salon conversation is most obvious in the studies of the Italian milieu, for example when the authors use the Milanese salon of the Russian exile Anna Kuliscioff to illustrate the role of subversive politics among the cultural elite, politics surface throughout all of the studies. Indeed, the power to which the authors refer in their title would be nonexistent unless the conversations that took place in the salons of modernity had some connection to those who were engaged in social and political actions of consequence at the time. Such connections may not always be demonstrable, nor are they overtly sought by some of the individual contributors to this volume, but Bilski and Braun are surely correct to presume that cultural significance ultimately depends on power.

It should be noted that this volume is handsomely produced with numerous illustrations in color. Furthermore, it contains a valuable array of scholarly apparatuses, most notably a carefully researched section by Shira Brisman containing biographies of all of the major Jewish women discussed in the other essays. Both a useful bibliography and a meticulous index enhance the overall contribution of this book to the growing literature on Jewish identity and visual culture.

Notes

1. For Guazzo, see the important volume edited by Giorgio Patrizi, *Stefano Guazzo e la Civil Conversazione* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990).
2. Rudolf Wittkower, "Imitation, Eclecticism, and Genius," *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, Earl Wasserman, ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1953, pp. 149).
3. Francis Haskell's seminal study of art patronage in the seventeenth century made this point admirably; see Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations Between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963).

Catherine M. Soussloff
University of California - Santa Cruz

Silk Stocking Mats: Hooked Mats Of The Grenfell Mission. Paula Laverty. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005; 92 colour illustrations + 198 pages.; ISBN 0-7735-2506-8; \$44.95 (paper).

Paula Laverty, curator of three major Grenfell mat exhibitions, has successfully translated these exhibits into a sumptuously illustrated new book. With 92 full-colour illustrations, as well as numerous black and white images of the workers and related ephemera, *Silk Stocking Mats: Hooked Mats of the Grenfell Mission* is a