

Hanson, Marin F. and Patricia Cox Crews. American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940.

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scholarly discussion around her topic. Making the social history of Canadian landscape art accessible for both social historians and art historians is certainly one of *Picturing the Land*'s best qualities.

Especially valuable is McKay's treatment of the cultural work of Tom Thompson and the Group of Seven. While this is a well-covered topic, McKay discusses the Group's popularity while also offering strong points of criticism against them. She discusses the importance of the relationship between landscape representation and national identity, which, as she points out, could not have occurred without a growing desire for visual representation of Canadian landscapes. Although McKay's examination of the importance of landscape art for various articulations of Canadian nationalism are quite insightful, I would like to have seen more attention given to how the author defines this nationalism. Given the wide historical scope of the work, it would be nearly impossible to have one definition act as a framework, but a more detailed overview of the shape of Canadian nationalism as it evolved would have been helpful.

The quality of the book itself is worth noting. Not only are the images well chosen and carefully reproduced, but the quantity adds clarity and support to McKay's analyses. Containing more than 150 plates of Canadian landscape art, *Picturing the Land* covers an assortment of artistic styles, giving credence to McKay's categorical methodology. More important, however, is how she connects these as pieces of evidence. Her framework of five conceptions of territory allows for a detailed analysis of why the

shape of Canadian landscape art changed and was embedded with new meanings as Canadians altered their understandings of national identity. McKay is careful to note how representative each image is of the broader contemporary Canadian art scene, thereby clarifying and making an argument about the social significance of the landscape piece in question.

Despite *Picturing the Land*'s many positive attributes, a more detailed discussion of the media used by the Canadian artists under study would have been helpful. Suggesting why painting, rather than other kinds of visual representation, was popular among landscape artists would help further establish this work as a bridge between scholars of Canadian history and Canadian art history.

Nevertheless, McKay's work is a significant contribution to the literature on Canadian landscape art because it considers the importance of landscape art to Canadian history, thus creating wider avenues of discussion for scholars of Canadian culture. It is significant that this is the third addition to the McGill-Queen's/Beaverbrook Canadian Foundation Studies in Art History series. The series directly addresses Canada's visual material culture but, until now, has only examined individual artists, and so, McKay's work is a welcome addition, providing a broader viewpoint in a series that has had an otherwise narrow focus. Overall, *Picturing the Land* presents an effective balance between the social history of Canadian art and Canadian art history.

CYNTHIA BOYD

Review of

Hanson, Marin F. and Patricia Cox Crews. 2009. *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Pp. 490, black and white and colour illustrations, endnotes, bibliography, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8032-2054-6, \$90.00.

From Log Cabin quilts to Colonial Revival quilts to quilts created from patterns and kits, *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940* is truly a quilt reference of grand proportions—both in its physical heft and the quantity of information found between its covers—whose fascinating and highly visual text will be a boon to quilt

historians, folklorists and textile and museum specialists alike.

This work delves much deeper than most quilt histories, for its main focus is an impressive collection of quilts held at the International Quilt Study Center & Museum at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The editors, Marin F. Hanson

and Patricia Cox Crews, have assembled quilts from the collection into separate chapters that decipher the inherent characteristic features of specific quilt designs by way of examining, in vivid detail, numerous examples. Their descriptive essays on individual quilt patterns are further enhanced by “galleries” (i.e., beautiful photographs) that depict those particular patterns. Just a cursory glance through any one chapter’s gallery and the reader, researcher and/or quilter will be bowled over by the magnificence in quilt designs that have been extensively documented and preserved by members of the International Quilt Study Group.

While Hanson and Crews have provided a fundamental introductory chapter recognizing the significance of quilts from this particular period in history, readers will be interested to know that several other quilt historians and scholars have made substantial contributions to various chapters. In the first chapter, “American Adaptation—Block-Style Quilts,” Hanson and quilt fabric historian Barbara Brackman discuss the origins of the Kansas Sunflower quilt created and worked upon by four generations of quilt-making women from Nebraska, Minnesota, and several states in between (54-57). Brackman reveals evidence not only of the quilt’s extensive family history, but also of its fabric history:

Many of the fabrics in the sunflower blocks are typical of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: they feature vibrant, neon prints on black backgrounds, white prints on indigo and claret grounds, and woven plaids and gingham, all of which were common from the 1880s through the 1920s. (55)

This quilt’s intricate story is just one of multitudes of fascinating narratives surrounding the hundreds of quilts featured in this book. In another chapter, contributor Beverly Gordon assists Hanson in examining a plethora of amazing Crazy quilts. Crazy quilts’ wide range of applied needlework techniques and infinite fabric choices and colour combinations have allowed for this quilt style to appear as a “mere hodgepodge” in design. As Gordon indicates, however, “the busy and seemingly random quality of the quilts often masks skilful planning and compositional treatment. Many Crazy quilts were veritable showpieces and true labors of love” (131). Perhaps one of the most eye-catching Crazy quilts featured from the collection is an

example from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, dating 1880-1890 by an unknown quilt maker. Entitled simply Crazy Quilt, with only the initials “K” and “K. G.” to identify the quilter(s), this example was made predominantly from dress silks, and it fairly shimmers off the printed page. Floral embroidered embellishments throughout the quilt but especially along the entire border are evocative of a blowsy cottage garden on a summer’s day (140-41).

Toward the end of the book, the editors draw attention to the proliferation of quilt patterns and kits whose popularity and commercial success can be directly linked to advertisements for such kits in women’s periodicals and mail-order catalogues. One of the more well-known patterns discussed in chapter six, “Repackaging Tradition: Pattern and Kit Quilts,” is Grandmother’s Flower Garden from the 1930s, a pattern that made use of colourful pastel fabrics and exhibited symmetry throughout. Regardless of their origin as commercial patterns and kits, these quilts were made in a traditional manner and provided beauty, pleasure and warmth to women and their families during the difficulties of the Depression Era (334-47).

This book features more than 800 colour photographs of more than 587 quilts; many examples are extremely well documented, with memorable narratives alongside striking photographs of whole quilts, as well as full page photographs depicting specific details. The editors have provided a useful and effective quilt glossary following extensive “notes” from the text. A selected bibliography, contributors’ page and well-organized index are also provided. My only criticism, and it is a minor one, of this otherwise thorough reference work is the lack of representation of African American and Native American quilts and quilt-making traditions. In all probability, this is because very few examples of such quilts existed in the collection. *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940* is highly recommended to university libraries, museum special collections, quilter’s groups and individual quilters and/or researchers for its extensive photographic and contextual record of quilts from the International Quilt Study Center and Museum. If you cannot make a special trip to Lincoln, Nebraska, to see this collection first hand, Hanson and Crews’ phenomenal work is a particularly excellent alternative.