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Matisse's Cosmopolitans in the New South: The Cone Sisters Collect Modern Art

by

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Sisters Claribel and Etta Cone seemingly defy the stereotypes of southern Jews. Rather than "fitting in," as southern Jews allegedly admonished themselves to do, they became daring collectors of modern art, conspicuously challenging the conservative culture of their native Baltimore. Living in the decorous, upper-class German-Jewish enclave of Eutaw Place, they hung audacious nudes on a dining room wall. In a South that Baltimore journalist H. L. Mencken infamously denigrated as "The Sahara of the Bozart," they opened an art gallery called The Moderns.[1] Habitues of Paris, they hobnobbed with the avant-garde, associating with a bad boy like Picasso and cavorting with the outrageous Gertrude Stein. Their dear friend Henri Matisse, whose art was widely reviled when they first purchased his paintings, visited their apartment. Rather than provincials, distant from the centers of high culture and worldly sophistication, they were cosmopolitans habituating salons, galleries, and concert halls in Paris, Florence, and Munich and circumnavigating the globe.[2]

The sisters' role as pioneering art collectors has been well documented in exhibits, books, articles, catalogs, theses, and websites. The Cone Collection at the Baltimore Museum of Art is widely regarded among the premier global assemblages of modern art, particularly of Matisse. The sisters as art patrons have been assessed from various perspectives—feminist, aesthetic, and art historical. Their tastes and aesthetic choices have been much presented and debated. Barbara Pollack in

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The Collectors: Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta Cone and Mary Gabriel in *The Art of Acquiring: A Portrait of Etta and Claribel Cone* draw full-length portraits in book-long biographies. Memoirs by family members—notably by Ellen Hirschland and Nancy Hirschland Ramage, an art historian, and Edward Cone, a musicologist—have vividly evoked their character, family, and social setting and learnedly and perceptively limned the cultural context of their careers as art collectors. Dianna Cameron and Carrie Streeter edited an exhibition catalogue, *Modern Visions, Modern Art: The Cone Sisters in North Carolina*, an anthology of family memoirs and scholarly essays that locates the sisters in their time and place. Noted but less considered is their situation as second-generation German-Jewish women in the New South. The Cone sisters in their modernism and cosmopolitanism were exceptional but not unique.[3] The choices that they confronted, the contradictions they negotiated, were representational of southern Jewish women of their time and place, although admittedly in high relief given their extraordinary wealth and pioneering art collecting.

Indeed, the Cone sisters self-consciously thought of themselves as southern ladies. Their family roots extended not just to urban Richmond and Baltimore, but to small-town Lynchburg, Virginia, and Jonesboro, Tennessee, Claribel's birthplace.[4] They frequently sojourned with their sister Carrie in Asheville and their brothers in Blowing Rock and Greensboro, North Carolina. Like their mercantilist father and industrialist brothers, the sisters pioneered as enterprising marketers not of manufactured goods but of culture. Like their family members, too, they served as harbingers of modernity who aspired to transform an agrarian society that stood outside the national mainstream not only economically but also culturally. The role of southern Jews as cultural entrepreneurs paralleled their economic contributions.

Raised as southern ladies, Claribel and Etta joined the ranks of the New Women who aspired to roles outside hearth and home, independent of fathers and husbands, but having to find their way in a society that still expected that they would conform to traditional gender roles. Claribel pursued a career in medicine contrary to her father's wishes. In Paris, Florence, and Munich the sisters found independence, yet they always returned home. Complicating matters, conscious of their southern and German-Jewish identities, they lived largely but not entirely within a circumscribed Jewish family and social circle. Their art collecting reflected a

Claribel Cone in a light-colored dress with puffed sleeves, approximately age nineteen, c. 1883. (Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 26, folder 1, CC.1.)

Etta Cone in a dress with a ruffled neck and puffed sleeves, early 1900s. (Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 26, folder 13, CP26.13.3.)

habitual negotiation between the local and the cosmopolitan, tradition and modernity, across many spheres of their lives. If their artistic ambitions anticipated the future, they were also very much of their time and place. How, then, did two daughters of a German-Jewish immigrant peddler and storekeeper become connoisseurs of avant-garde art? What in their provincial southern upbringing could have inspired such an aspiration?

Family, Values, and Business

Claribel and Etta's father Herman Kahn and mother Helen Guggenheimer arrived in the American South with the mass antebellum migration of Bavarian Jews. However much the German states restricted their rights, taxed them into penury, and encouraged their assimilation, Jews adopted German culture as the portal into modern civil society. The German enlightenment promised to emancipate Jews politically, granting them civil rights and integrating them into society, with the expectation that they would assimilate into Christianity. Jews readily embraced enlightenment values and joined liberal political movements, aspiring to citizenship. These movements provoked a conservative retrenchment, particularly after the failed liberal revolutions of 1848, which dashed Jewish hopes of emancipation. Jews fled to America at rates doubling that of the general population. German-Jewish writer Berthold Auerbach spoke of a Jewish "addiction to America."[5]

Pulling Herman Kahn to America in 1846 was a typical family chain migration. Herman first resided with an older married sister, Elise Kahn Hirsh, in Richmond, where he peddled the countryside, while Helen's family had settled in nearby Lynchburg. Herman joined his brother-in-law, Jacob Adler, a merchant in Jonesboro, Tennessee, where he and Helen began a family that ultimately grew to thirteen children. Herman had carried to America an ethical letter from his brother-in-law Joseph Rosengart that many Cones to this day honor as a family covenant. Rosengart recommended to Herman "the faith of your fathers as the most sacred and the most noble." Herman was entering "a new country where . . . the Jew is not excluded from the society." "Wealth" should be used for "the best purpose and for charity," Rosengart wrote. "Be known as a philanthropist," but "live with your income."[6] Such letters, historian Jacob Rader Marcus notes, were a Jewish genre typically written by an Orthodox Jew

to a young immigrant expressing their "hopes and fears" for the dear one departing to a Jewish terra incognita. The message was covenantal, that God will care for them if they remain obedient to God, advising the young immigrant to remain loyal to family and Jewish community. One of Herman's sons, likely Julius, later wrote that his father came to America with the "intangible possession" of a "vitalizing heritage."[7] For Etta and Claribel this legacy provided guidance for their lives. They remained within the family and religious fold however much they exercised their freedom, and as philanthropists they bequeathed their riches to public charity.

Herman had been a village Jew raised in a traditional religious culture where the forces of enlightenment and emancipation were less deeply felt. In America, he renamed himself Cone and joined Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, which, although of Orthodox heritage, was wavering in its ritual practices, responding to the "acculturationist tendencies" of the times.[8] A gold plaque marked Herman's pew. Helen was a faithful worshiper, but the household was not recalled as especially religious. Synagogue movement labels did not necessarily reflect the varied practices of members.[9] The sisters were raised in a household shaped by German *Kultur*, which found expression in *Bildung*—moral education and self-improvement—which for emancipating German Jews, according to historian Michael Meyer, became the "culture . . . of their age."[10] *Bildung* was an aspiration for "higher things," a questing for truth, beauty, and goodness. Through *Bildung*, Jews would emancipate themselves, shedding their allegedly primitive religious ways, adopting German over Yiddish. German Jews flocked to museums, concert halls, intellectual salons, and art galleries as if they were houses of worship.[11] Jews cultivated an aesthetic sensibility. The Moorish, Romanesque, and neoclassical architecture of their newly erected cathedral-like temples attested not just to aestheticism, but to cosmopolitanism and civic respectability.

The Cones thus illustrated great historic trends that in the nineteenth century transformed the Jewish people: immigration to America, political emancipation, religious liberalization, and upward social mobility that took Jews from rural poverty to the urban bourgeoisie, from a nation apart to citizenship. No longer practitioners of an allegedly primitive religion speaking a guttural Yiddish, Jews integrated socially and culturally into civil society. In their mobility southern Jews were a portion of the global Jewish people. Their European families underwent a similar acculturation

as they migrated from the impoverished countryside to the cities where, pursuing careers in places and professions once closed to them, they rose into the middle class.

In eastern Tennessee Herman found some success as a merchant, investor, and landowner. A Confederate sympathizer, he owned three enslaved people in a region noted for its Unionist sentiment.[12] The Cones settled in Baltimore in 1870, where Herman opened a wholesale grocery house. Claribel, born in 1864, was the fifth and Etta, born in 1870, the ninth of thirteen children. The younger siblings were in thrall to the older, their place in the family hierarchy securing their identities.[13] In her youth Etta adored "Sister Claribel" and idolized oldest "Brother Mosie," as they called them. Typical of Jews, business was a family enterprise, and Herman employed his eldest sons, Moses and Ceasar, as drummers for his wholesale grocery. The brothers headed South to promising territories where a new railroad line might lead to the opening of a mill and the growth of a city. In 1890 the Cone brothers organized the Cone Export and Commission Company. Investing in North Carolina textile mills, Moses and Ceasar relocated to Greensboro where they built an industrial empire.

Jews played instrumental economic roles in the rise of a New South, helping to transform a traditionally agrarian society into a modern, urban, industrial one. The Cones exemplified the mobility of enterprising Jewish immigrants as they rose from peddlers to storekeepers to wholesalers to investors and to industrialists. From regional distribution hubs like Baltimore, Jews created networks of credit and commerce along rivers, coastal sea lanes, and railroad lines into heartland America. For Jews, Baltimore, the religious and commercial, if not political, capital of the region, served as the gateway city to the Southeast. A port situated on the border of North and South, it served as a "bridge" not only geographically but also culturally.[14] Coming and going from city to country, the Cone sisters trod a well-worn path. Cones were members of German-Jewish Baltimore, and Greensboro was its colony.

Etta and Claribel: The Mixture of Cultures

External forces of discrimination and internal forces of social cohesion shaped the world of Etta and Claribel Cone. Friendships, charitable organizations, and club memberships kept them in the Jewish fold, and the brothers partnered in business with fellow German Jews. In newly

urbanizing societies Jews staked a civic place. Their children took varied Jewish paths. Although their parents had kept kosher, not all the children did so.[15] Neither Claribel nor Etta evinced much religious interest, although their sister Carrie, with whom they were close, served as president of the North Carolina Association of Jewish Women, and with her husband, Moses Long, was a charter member of Asheville's synagogue, Beth HaTephila. Their bachelor brother, Frederic, who later lived with the sisters, served as Beth HaTephila's president for five years. Ceasar Cone hosted a Sunday school in his Greensboro home, and Cones endowed Temple Emanuel.[16] In their temples Reform Jews practiced a modern, progressive, rational religion with decorous rites and a social-justice agenda, akin to their Protestant neighbors' Social Gospel. Such respectability entitled Jews to citizenship in the civil state and membership in the middle class, opening doors socially and economically.

In an era of spiritualism, Jewish women explored Unitarianism or Ethical Culture. In their circle several Jewish women, notably Sally Stein, were drawn to Christian Science. In a Rosh Hashanah letter Etta playfully wished Gertrude Stein a "Happy New Year to you, you heathen."[17] Stein as an undergraduate at Radcliffe had written an essay, "The Modern Jew Who Has Given Up the Faith of His Fathers Can Reasonably and Consistently Believe in Isolation." Yet later in life she informed an interviewer, "Now I, I am a Jew, orthodox background, and I never make any bones about it." She felt Jewishness gave her the liberty of saying whatever she wanted.[18] When Claribel was asked to list her religion when registering at a German hotel in 1919, she wrote "Freiglaubig," literally translated as "free belief," implying agnostic or freethinking.[19] With the rise of an American-born, acculturated generation, perhaps a minority of American Jews affiliated with synagogues. Generational conflict on religion was common with the second generation of American Jews.

Although secular, nonobservant Jews, the sisters never left the bosom of their extended family, and their social associations consisted largely of people like themselves. For many, being Jewish was a matter of peoplehood rather than of faith.[20] In her correspondence Claribel demonstrated consciousness of who was and who was not a Jew. Sailing to Europe in 1910 the haughty Claribel expressed her disdain for a lower class of Jews aboard, whose society she avoided, but wrote glowingly of her conversations with an erudite German doctor with whom she spoke

at length on "the Jewish question."[21] When Carrie asked Claribel in 1907 to speak before the local chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women, she obliged.[22] The sisters contributed to Jewish causes, although Etta demurred about contributing to a public Jewish charity in the 1930s when European Jewry was endangered, fearful of the consequences of revealing her wealth. Yet she wrote her nephew Richard Guggenheimer, an aspiring artist whom she supported, that she was cutting back on her art buying as "many German refugee relatives are absorbing all I can afford to give them."[23] In her will the first beneficiary after the bequest of the art collection was Baltimore's Associated Jewish Charities.[24]

Their feeling of German-Jewish community explains the sisters' celebrated friendship with novelist Gertrude Stein and her brothers Leo and Michael. The Steins had moved to Baltimore from San Francisco in 1892 to live with an aunt after their parents had passed away. There the Steins joined the German-Jewish social crowd and came to know the sisters, meeting in the salons that drew those intellectually and culturally engaged. Leo, an aesthete and aspiring artist, guided the sisters to galleries and museums. Gertrude, like Claribel, had been a medical student, and their paths crossed. In Paris, both Gertrude and Etta delighted in sharing Baltimore gossip, celebrating the marriage of a Stein cousin to a Guggenheimer cousin that linked their families. In 1904 Etta hosted Gertrude at the North Carolina mountaintop home of brother Moses.[25]

The Cone parents spoke German at home, and Claribel traveled to Germany with her father.[26] Visits to the *Heimat* (homeland) typically included reunions with German family and to his native Altenstadt. Obsessed with German culture and people, Claribel took German lessons. Etta, drawn to sunnier Italy and France, was aesthetically sensitive, even in high school writing an essay extolling the artistic treasures of Florence.[27] Claribel exulted in a Cone and Guggenheimer quality that she identified as a "fineness sensitiveness refinement—consideration—goodness."[28] Not a conscious ideology, the household *Bildung* was consonant with the zeitgeist; the prophetic idealism of Reform Judaism, the civic and economic boosterism of the New South, and the social uplift of America's Progressive Era seamlessly blended. The sisters attended concerts and lectures, sat on museum and hospital boards. Addressing students at Woman's Medical College in 1896, Claribel quoted Goethe, high priest of *Bildung*, on "working upon the world which surrounds us." She expressed

Helen and Herman Cone playing cards in their home at 1607 Eutaw Place in Baltimore, 1895. (Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 27, folder 7, CP27.7.2.)

Bildung's essence when she wrote Etta, "It is the craving for beauty that is such a vital function of the human soul—that's it—the craving for beauty—for perfection—[that] is one way . . . of finding the path to God—is[n't] it?"[29]

However cosmopolitan, the sisters remained acculturated southern ladies. "Etta was first and foremost a lady," her great-niece Ellen Hirschland recalled, while Claribel thought that the "Cone quality" was "enhanced through the southern influence and training."[30] Etta more befit the Southern Lady stereotype: polite, modest, deferential, and domestic. Both were well coiffed and attired. Eschewing the sexualized fashions of the twenties, they dressed in Victorian black, their collars high and skirts

long. Hats and gloves were de rigeur. For Jews who allegedly admonished themselves to fit in, Claribel dressed conspicuously, favoring layers of shawls, a silver skewer piercing her hair. "Jewels have spotted us as ladies of good taste," Etta noted, "even here in Asheville."[31] As they bought avant-garde art and frequented bohemian society, the sisters evoked days gone by. A Johns Hopkins professor who knew them well observed, "They had something of the nineteenth century in their manner."[32] In 1934 Matisse in a letter described Claribel as "a great beauty" while Etta was "a Queen of Israel"[33]

Claribel Cone as a resident physician at the Blockley Almshouse, approximately age twenty-seven, c. 1891–92. (Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 26, folder 2, CC.2.)

Both sisters were aspirational, with Claribel achieving academic distinction in the sciences and Etta a passionate reader in the arts and history. In an era when graded school systems, based on German models, were becoming more expansive, especially for women's education, both attended Western Female High School. Etta became an accomplished pianist with a preference for Schubert, and Claribel also played and painted. Less than 3 percent of American women attended college, although Jewish girls in diaries and journals often expressed a desire to excel beyond their

domestic roles.[34] When Claribel shocked the family by announcing her intention to enroll at the Women's Medical College of Baltimore, her father sought to dissuade her by suggesting that she study art and invited her to visit Germany with him.[35] Claribel wanted the independence and intellectual challenge of a medical education and career and graduated first in her class from the Women's Medical College of Baltimore in 1890. Finding limited opportunity for women, she interned at the Philadelphia Hospital for the Insane. Later she pursued postgraduate work at Johns Hopkins University Hospital and dedicated herself to the research laboratory as a pathologist. Except for a brief teaching stint, Etta never aspired to a career. In their youth the sisters thus confronted the choices available to women of their generation living in transitional times. Etta would be, as Gertrude Stein described her, a "homemaker," a favorite aunt, and Claribel would pursue a professional career in defiance of family.[36]

We speak of the "Cone Sisters" as if they were joined at the hip—Picasso called them "le Miss Cones"—but they lived and traveled apart, and their relations were often contentious.[37] In "Two Women," Gertrude Stein's thinly veiled sketch of Etta and Claribel, she observed: "They were very different one from the other of them."[38] Claribel was bright, argumentative, and independent and often socially off-putting—one medical colleague described her as a "society woman sort" who "put on airs." Etta acted shy socially but was warm among friends and often disappeared in her sister's shadow.[39] Claribel was more so the New Woman, Etta the southern lady, although each partook of both roles.

Neither married. When the sisters were born, rates of unmarried women stood at about 10 percent. An unmarried daughter at home, a parental caretaker, was a social tradition among German Jews.[40] The sisters idolized and found protection in an older brother, in their case Moses.[41] Whatever his misgivings about Claribel's medical career, their father had generously supported and educated his daughters, and, after Herman's death in 1897, Moses, by then a textile magnate, became family patriarch. Moses provided a substantial stipend that underwrote the sisters' upper-class domicile and travels as well as their art collecting. Indeed, Etta made her first art purchase in 1896 when Moses gave her five hundred dollars to decorate the family parlor. She boldly purchased not rugs or furniture but four small paintings at auction from the estate of the American impressionist Theodore Robinson, a student of Monet. Despite the

impressionist palette, these small paintings were sentimentally rendered depictions of a girl in the woods, a girl with a violin, a horse drinking, and a mother and child.[42] The purpose of this first art purchase was thus domestic, interior decorating. Etta felt at home on Eutaw Place, feeding her brothers and perpetually tardy sister. Etta escaped by heading to North Carolina to visit her sister and nieces in Asheville or her brothers and their families in Greensboro.[43] After Moses and Bertha established themselves at baronial Flat Top Manor in Blowing Rock, a mountaintop estate, Etta persuaded Claribel to join her sojourns there. With Moses's death in 1908, Etta became a companion to his widow, Bertha, summering in Blowing Rock and wintering in Baltimore.[44]

Degrees of Modernity and Travel Abroad

Beneficiaries of the Gilded Age, the sisters came to maturity in the Progressive Era. They wished both to enjoy themselves and to be socially useful. Thorstein Veblen's popular *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, published in 1899, described wealthy ladies of leisure whose lives were "unproductive" as they spent lavishly, entertained extravagantly, and grumbled about the help. The sisters did not compromise on enjoying privileged lives while educating themselves, whether in the arts or medicine, and serving as civic activists and philanthropists. Another popular book, addressed to educated women, asked, *After College, What*? The manual observed that if women did not marry or teach, they still needed "something to do." Women were educated for careers not yet open to them, and their families still consigned them to traditional domestic roles as spouses and caretakers. In 1897 Claribel invited Gertrude Stein, a fellow medical student, to speak in Baltimore on "The Value of a College Education for Women," and in 1900 Dr. Claribel lectured at Woman's College in Greensboro on "Careers for Women."[45]

As Etta wrote to Stein, the "social pressure to do charity work was heavy." She identified two alternatives as "philanthropy and woman Suffrage—questions that have put old Baltimore in a real state of turmoil." Beyond art and medicine, Claribel advocated for modern causes like woman's education and suffrage, maternity hospitals, and birth registration, although neither sister seemed politically partisan. Claribel would be eulogized as one of "Baltimore's first feminists." But she also observed in a letter to Etta, "There is nothing in the world for you and me to do but

Etta Cone standing in the Roman Forum, 1913.
(Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 26, folder 11, CP26.11.13.)

have a good time in our own way—and there is nothing in the world for us to be—but be happy—This is my will and testament."[46]

In 1903, a year after their mother's death, the sisters exercised their freedom by sailing to Europe. The grand European tour was conventional among those of their social class, and the immigrant heritage kept them tied abroad not just through family but through culture. Southern Jewish women like Ida Weis Friend of New Orleans or Gertrude Weil of Goldsboro, North Carolina, traveled abroad to polish their domestic educations. Gertrude Stein's German-born parents had taken her as a child to Austria and France. Etta headed to Florence and Tuscany while Claribel went to the Senckenberg Institute in Frankfort where she worked with Nobel laureate Paul Ehrlich. Claribel remained three years. Etta went back

to her family in Baltimore and North Carolina, but eight months later returned to Europe for two years.[47] Their friends Gertrude Stein and her brothers Leo and Michael and sister-in-law Sally had established themselves in Paris, and Claribel and Etta resumed their Baltimore relationship abroad. Gertrude became fascinated with Claribel, a spellbinding storyteller with a melodic voice who read Stein's fiction with hypnotic effect. Etta agreed to type Gertrude's manuscript of *Three Lives*, a story collection.[48]

The Steins ushered Etta and Claribel into the modernist orbit. Gertrude's charismatic older brother Leo was an aspiring painter and friend of the great art connoisseur Bernard Berenson, a fellow Harvard alumnus. As he had in Baltimore, Leo guided the sisters to galleries and museums including the Uffizi Gallery in Florence and the Louvre in Paris. In 1905 the Steins invited Etta and Claribel to join them at the Paris Salon

Gertrude Stein, Etta Cone, and Claribel Cone sitting on a bench, July 2, 1903. (Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 27, folder 1, CG.10.)

d'Automne which was exhibiting fauvist paintings by Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, and Rouault. Claribel at first found the "color madness" to be "grotesque," questioning whether the artists were "to be taken seriously."[49]

Whatever the sisters thought of the art, the artists' bohemian poverty touched them. From 1905 to 1906 Etta, living in Paris, purchased twenty-eight works by six artists, including the then unknowns Cezanne and Picasso as well as the widely reviled Matisse.[50] The Steins attributed the Cones' art buying to "romantic charity." The sisters were enamored of Matisse, who affectionally called them "my two Baltimore ladies," and a friendship blossomed.

In 1906 and 1907, the sisters joined brother Moses and sister-in-law Bertha on an around-the-world tour. The itinerary included Jerusalem, Cairo, and Constantinople. Etta wrote of the stirrings of her "Oriental blood."[51] All came home with artwork and global bric-a-brac. Upon their return Claribel took rooms at the Marlborough Apartments in Baltimore while Etta found shelter with her brother Ceasar in Greensboro. Claribel assigned Etta the formidable task of unpacking her purchases and belongings.[52]

From 1914 to 1920 Claribel lived in Munich, stubbornly resisting family overtures to return to Baltimore even when Ceasar died and even as war anxieties roused anti-German feelings. Claribel wrote that she felt more at home in Germany. Her German sympathies abated when America entered the war, and she declared her neutrality. Cut off from her American family, she lived on loans from her German Rosengart relatives.[53]

Entrepreneurs of Modern Art

Claribel had abandoned her medical career. She now belatedly confronted the question of after college, what? She wrote Etta, "I am trying to think out some scheme of life."[54] Claribel expressed love of her family, but unlike the devoted, obedient Etta, she found it difficult to consider the feelings of others. She wrote of her "mania for living alone."[55] Claribel recognized that she was too much the lady of leisure for the Parisian bohemian life.[56] When deciding to return from Europe to Baltimore, Claribel, sounding very much like a southern lady, wrote of her "old habit of clinging to the old things—things as they were and tradition."[57] Claribel left Munich intending to turn her Baltimore apartment into a

private museum to exhibit her paintings, fabrics, sculpture, furniture, boxes, and jewelry. Her avocation became her vocation: she would be an art collector.

The sisters were now ensconced at the elegant Marlborough Apartments in the Eutaw Place enclave favored by Baltimore's German-Jewish elite. Etta, who had been collecting art since she decorated her parents' parlor, resided in one apartment adjoining Claribel's museum while Claribel lived in a studio apartment on another floor. Claribel left it to others to describe their art as a collection, she said, noting that she had collected "beautiful things" since girlhood when she picked up seashells.[58] The sisters educated themselves, taking classes in aesthetics at Johns Hopkins from art historian and philosopher George Boas, who became their mentor. By the 1920s they had become recognized players on the Paris art scene.[59]

As consumers of modern art, the sisters entered a new, fluid field that lacked an established elite that could block the progress of Jewish parvenus. Historian Charles Dellheim observes, "Marketing modern art—like many of the endeavors in which Jews clustered—was a middleman business that offered few barriers to entry."[60] Their European dealers—Bernheim, Rosengart, Rosenberg, and Kahnweiler—were, like them, Jews who were also upwardly mobile, culturally and economically, whose families had migrated from the countryside to the cities. The Swiss Matisse dealer Siegfried Rosengart was their cousin, grandson of the author of the letter their father had carried to America.[61] From 1920 to 1922 the sisters purchased fourteen Matisses. In 1922 Picasso drew Claribel's portrait. They also bought Manet, Cezanne, and Renoir along with objets d'art from around the globe. Claribel, previously a lecturer on medicine, now spoke before museums and women's clubs on modern art, illustrating her talks with prints, etchings, and lithographs from her collection. In 1929 at sixty-four, Claribel took to the radio on Wednesday afternoons to lecture on modern art.[62]

Throughout the twenties the sisters annually traveled to Europe with Paris as home. Claribel methodically reported to Etta on every gallery and museum visit, detailing the cost of everything from antiquities to the breakfast melon. By the dozens Claribel bought silk stockings and handkerchiefs at Le Bon Marché in Paris and silk scarves at Liberty in London. Travel companion Nora Kaufman opined, "She loved to buy."

Claribel noted, "I enjoy the study of things so much—and most people irritate me."[63]

Of course, Claribel's and Etta's art purchases had a financial component. Raised in a family immersed in commerce, the sisters meticulously accounted for their spending. The sisters at first lived on a yearly stipend of $2,400 from their father's estate, supplemented by their older brothers who had given them their inherited shares. Moses bequeathed half his exceedingly ample estate to his surviving siblings. In the 1920s, as Cone Mills prospered, their stock holdings ballooned into a fortune, and the sisters went on a buying spree. From Paris Claribel in 1925 telegraphed Cone Export in New York: "Bought pictures. Cable me through American Express, Paris, twenty-thousand dollars."[64] They were mindful of the market value of their art, so that when their brothers questioned their purchases, they assured them that they were the wiser investors. Claribel bought Van Gogh's "A Pair of Boots," less because she liked it than as an investment in an emerging artist.[65]

Paintings and sculpture provided only one part of enormous expenditures on lace, jewelry, shawls, fabrics, rugs, draperies, portieres, embroideries, bronzes, antique furniture, marbles, and other curiosities as well as a library of books, pamphlets, and catalogues.[66] In their apartments modernist art cohabited with lace, furniture, and textiles dating to the sixteenth century. Etta and Claribel engaged in what a biographer calls "perhaps the longest and least-advertised shopping spree in the annals of American womanhood."[67] When attending opera or theater, the sisters purchased an extra seat to hold that day's shopping. Expeditions to Le Bon Marché, antique stores, or art galleries, preceded a visit to the Louvre. Consumerism was an outgrowth of the industrial revolution, which came late to the South. The Blowing Rock mansion, like Vanderbilt's Biltmore House in Asheville or Reynolds' Reynolda House in Winston-Salem, attested to conspicuous consumption in stark contrast to the modest wood-framed mill or farmhouses which were the iconic dwellings of hardscrabble North Carolinians. For Etta and Claribel, North Carolina was the "country," but one where they enjoyed glamping as ladies of leisure.[68]

Parallels can be drawn between the economic role of the Cone brothers as industrialists in helping to create a modern New South and the cultural role of the sisters as art entrepreneurs in bringing cosmopolitan culture to a provincial region, one that Mencken complained had "not a

single picture gallery worth going into."[69] Routes of commerce also provided pathways of culture. Picasso in Paris drew a self-portrait that Gertrude Stein mailed to Etta in Greensboro. The sisters had served as guides for brother Moses and his wife Bertha in their European excursions, and Etta had taken Moses to Matisse's studio. Bertha bought a Picasso pencil sketch.[70] Their mountain retreat in Blowing Rock was decorated with global souvenirs, and Renoir and Picasso hung on the walls.[71] Not only money and merchandise had ridden the rail lines down south, but also new ideas, new art, and new ways of connecting to the world. Like their brothers, the sisters had been raised in an entrepreneurial household that proved adept at opening new markets for new commercial products. Like their industrialist brothers, too, the sisters participated in the global economy linked to New York financial markets and European export houses.

Modernist art was a new enterprise, inviting to a newly emancipated people aspiring for affluence and social integration. Although not dealers and occasionally deaccessioning art, Claribel and Etta played the classic Jewish role as middle persons, positioning themselves between the art makers and the consuming public whom they sought to educate. As presenters and educators, they helped create market demand for modern art, if not for buyers at least for patrons of museums and galleries. One art student who visited Etta and Claribel's private gallery was inspired to create modernist works, but the art-school director refused to exhibit her art, fearing it would infect other pupils. Claribel helped form a group called The Modernists. Inspired by Parisian exhibitions, as they explained to the press, they opened a gallery in Baltimore to exhibit modernist art.[72]

In bringing commerce and industry southward Moses and Ceasar had also been modernists transforming a traditionally agrarian society. Cosmopolitanism was a Jewish contribution to southern culture, and the appearance of Jews was a sign of its local presence. The Cone brothers opened global markets and introduced mechanization and new labor organization that changed the social order of the region. The brothers named one mill Revolution. As farm families flocked to the mills, the brothers constructed mill villages on scientific principles of sanitation. In mill-built schools they extended the school day and term. Moses and Bertha endowed Watauga Academy, forerunner of Appalachian State University. The Flat Top country estate featured a beaux-arts home with the latest

technology, architectural landscaping, and scientific forest and agricultural management. In a region long sustained by subsistence agriculture, they established on their estate a commercial dairy and apple orchard based on modern production and distribution principles.

Cone enterprise, whether industrial or cultural, underscores the Jewish role in the transition from Old South to New, and in this they were not alone. Another set of antebellum German-Jewish brothers, the Wallaces of Statesville, North Carolina, opened markets in Europe and Asia for berries, roots, and herbs that country folk collected in the Blue Ridge mountains. Jewish merchants conventionally advertised imported European fashions as up to date as anything not just in New York or Baltimore but in Paris or London. Their stores bore internationalist names like The Globe, Palais Royal, or Bon Marché. Southern Jewish impresarios like Mark Klaw and Simeon A. Schloss in their opera houses brought Caruso and Paderewski down home. As cultural entrepreneurs, the Cone sisters, too, acted to transform a provincial, traditional society into a modern, urbane one.

The sisters expressed the contradictions found in progressive southerners. However modernist, these southern ladies were not the radicals that their unconventional art collecting may suggest. Etta was passionate about beauty and sure of her taste, but her conservative southern upbringing largely shaped her sensibility. Although Leo Stein educated the sisters in artistic formalism, and they appreciated color, perspective, and composition, the sisters—Etta especially—were drawn to representational art. Their portraits, interiors, landscapes, and still life paintings depicted familiar, comfortable subjects, not the distortions of abstraction, notably of cubism.[73] Etta's tastes changed little from the impressionistic Robinsons that she first bought to her later Matisses. Etta exhibited limited understanding of modernism. If she bought avant-garde works, they tended to be the least radical. The sisters' collection, an art critic assesses, "represents Matisse at his most conservative and traditional," "decorative" rather than experimental, typified by paintings like "The Yellow Dress."[74] Etta preferred portraiture, whereas Claribel bought landscapes, including masterpieces by Courbet and Cezanne. In 1926 the bolder Claribel bought the most audacious painting in the collection, Matisse's "The Blue Nude," for 101,000 francs. Claribel excitedly hung it in her Baltimore living room. The more demur Etta would not question the genius of the artist who

Front back room with Redon's "Peonies," Renoir's "Les Oliviers" and "Les Roses," and Matisse's "La Leçon de Musique," after 1926. (Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 28, folder 4, CECHOMES.15.)

Dining room with Matisse's "Large Cliff with Fish," 1941. (Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 28, folder 14, CH.30.A.

created such an expressive canvas. She recognized her contradictions: "Do not confuse the terms beautiful and pretty," Etta wrote. "Art is not always beautiful nor even pretty, but it can be both," which she preferred.[75]

The sisters largely lost interest in Picasso as his work became more extreme under the influence of cubism and African sculpture, whereas the more radical Gertrude Stein abandoned Matisse for the Spaniard. The sisters' Picasso collecting focused on his Blue and Rose Periods, less so his cubism. Among Etta's purchases was Picasso's sentimental "Mother and Child." Etta confessed to Picasso's Parisian dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who visited their Baltimore apartments, that she "could not understand Picasso and Cubism."[76]

Etta held a romantic view of artists, tolerating their licentious behavior as the privilege of genius.[77] Unlike the notoriously libertine heiress Peggy Guggenheim, a New Yorker settled in Venice, who collected lovers as well as modern art, the sisters were outsiders to the avant-garde. In Paris they observed without participating in the adulteries, addictions, and libertinism of Stein, Picasso, or Matisse. In her home Etta, ever the lady, refused to tolerate off-color stories, and when guests came to the apartment she put a tea caddy over a Degas nude sculpture that sat on her piano. Offered Picasso's "Boy with Horse" at a reasonable price, Etta declined, informing her nephew Edward that she did not want to see full frontal nudity at her dining table.[78] Contrarily, Claribel prominently displayed "The Blue Nude" to the outrage of unsuspecting guests. The family was "perplexed" how very proper Etta could entertain an audience with tales of bohemian artists and was bemused by her naivete. When her brother Julius questioned placing Matisse's "Large Cliff with Fish," with its unappetizing dead fish, in the family dining room, Etta responded that Matisse had personally assured her that he had hired a waterboy to refresh the fish.[79]

Baltimore looked askance at the sisters. They were a sight to behold: ample, portly Victorian women, Claribel stylishly accessorized to call attention to herself. As social outsiders, Jews found through modern art "an entrée into high culture" and were its patrons.[80] However much attached to Baltimore and active in its cultural life, the sisters, after cavorting in Paris and Munich, had no illusions about their native city's appreciation of their collection. Baltimore arrived late among cities to create cultural institutions—the Baltimore Museum of Art was founded in 1923—and the

Henri Matisse in the dining room of Etta Cone's apartment at the Marlborough Apartments, December 17, 1930. (Courtesy of the Claribel Cone and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art, box 29, folder 2, CP26.2.2.)

cultural ethos was conservative. The director of its arts school dismissed modern art as "poppycock."[81] The sisters found refuge in a circle of sophisticates including Dr. George Boas, a philosopher at Johns Hopkins, and Florence Levy and Adelyn Breeskin, directors of the Baltimore Museum of Art.[82]

By 1929, with the walls of two apartments covered with Picassos, Renoirs, Van Goghs, and Matisses especially, Claribel began considering the collection's ultimate disposition. In her will she left the collection to Etta but specified her preference that it go to the Baltimore Museum of Art with

the qualification, "if the spirit of appreciation of modern art in Baltimore should improve."[83] As patrons and educators, they had done much to promote that appreciation, and Claribel left a grant of one hundred thousand dollars to support the collection. Claribel died that year while vacationing in Europe with Etta and brother Fred. A devastated Etta took as her mission to preserve the memory of her beloved sister. Etta maintained Claribel's apartment as a memorial museum, keeping her clothes hanging in a closet and decorating it daily with fresh flowers. When Matisse visited, she commissioned him to do a portrait of her late sister. She had the apartments professionally photographed and published a memorial catalogue. She distributed the catalog of what was now formally named the Cone Collection to artists and professionals. Assuming her sister's mantle, she opened her parlor doors to artists, students, professors, and curators, and became a public spokesperson for "The Development of Modern Art," as she titled her lecture.[84]

For her last twenty years, Etta gloried in her role as docent and guardian of the Cone Collection. Nor was she immune to the flattery of visiting museum directors who coveted the collection. She supported young artists associated with the Maryland Institute, several of whom were Jews, by buying their paintings. Emerging from Claribel's shadow, she eagerly recounted stories of their Paris days. She continued to collect, filling the collection's gaps in nineteenth- and twentieth-century French art and enjoying the attention of the Paris art world.[85] She followed her sister as a public lecturer on modern art. Unusual for her, Etta even purchased Picasso's "Nude with Raised Arm," a cubist painting. With the European political situation worsening in 1938, Etta made her last trip abroad. She divided time between Baltimore and North Carolina until her death at Blowing Rock in 1949. In her will Etta granted the Baltimore Museum of Art its choice of the Cone Collection with four hundred thousand dollars to house it while the remainder, including duplicates, would go to Woman's College in Greensboro, where it is now held at the Weatherspoon Gallery. That collection includes prints and Matisse bronzes.[86]

Part of Broader Patterns

In bringing their art collection to conservative societies that little knew or even disdained modern art, the sisters acted as New Women, cosmopolitans in the provinces. In this, they were hardly alone among a

community of second-generation German-American Jews who helped bring global enterprise and high culture to the South. Such networking typified Jewish enterprise. Beyond their cousin Siegfried Rosengart, Picasso's dealer in Lucerne, Daniel Kahnweiler, Picasso's dealer in Paris, also could claim southern family ties. The Kahnweiler brothers, antebellum Bavarian Jewish entrepreneurs in Wilmington, North Carolina, had commercial links to Baltimore, New Orleans, New York, and Europe. If Etta Cone played Brahms and Schubert on the piano, Mrs. Kahnweiler sang Verdi and Meyerbeer arias at the Wilmington Opera House. Daniel Kahnweiler also visited the Cone sisters' Baltimore apartment. Ties of family, landsleit, and commerce intertwined, linking Jews internationally.

Not only as Jews but as women, the sisters also found opportunity through collecting modern art.[87] Southern Jewish women in Etta and Claribel's circle shared Claribel and Etta's sensibilities and activities as modern art entrepreneurs. Their sister-in-law, Laura Weill Cone, a native North Carolinian, urged Etta to bequeath Cone art to her hometown of Greensboro, a Piedmont mill town not otherwise mistaken as a global center of artistic modernism. Laura had lobbied for an art department as an alumna and board member of the state's Woman's College. Its first director was an advocate of modernism, and Laura's daughter married the modernist architect Edward Loewenstein.[88] The Cones' Baltimore cousin Saidie Adler May, daughter of a wealthy shoe manufacturer and a twice-divorced woman, traveled to Europe in 1924, befriended abstract expressionist Hans Hofmann, and later was among the first to collect Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell. In the 1930s she began donating to the Baltimore Museum of Art, bequeathing it three hundred thousand dollars, and, with her sister Blanche, a significant modernist collection. Saidie often consulted with cousin Etta, and they coordinated their philanthropy.[89]

In Charleston Anita Pollitzer, a national suffragist leader, had studied art at Columbia where she had befriended her classmate Georgia O'Keefe, whom she famously introduced to Alfred Stieglitz. Theresa Pollak as an artist and educator is credited with introducing modern art to Richmond. As leader of the city's School of the Arts, she shocked public morals by introducing nude models into the classes. Later, Alice Rubinstein Ehrlich played an influential role as a teacher and abstract artist in Raleigh. Patsy Rabinowitz Nasher with her husband Ray was a globally significant patron of painting and sculpture whose collection is now held

by namesake modernist museums in Dallas and Durham.[90] However individualistic, even eccentric, the Cone sisters, however exceptional their wealth, they were very much women of their time, class, and ethnicity.

The paradoxical attitudes toward tradition and modernism, domesticity and freedom that informed the sisters' art collecting can be seen in other dimensions of endeavor for Jewish women who felt loyal to family and community even as they aspired to personal fulfillment. It reflected the sensibility underlying the emergent Reform Judaism as articulated in its Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. Reform Judaism would be a "progressive religion," egalitarian, "adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization" while also "convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past."[91] Suffragists justified the then disruptive notion that women deserved the vote by arguing, as one southern Jewish activist put it, that women "shall use it in our old, time-honored business of housekeeping, of making life fair and clean and sanitary for our families."[92] Popular opinion at first disdained birth control as feminist, anarchist, or even communist, but women proclaimed it protective of maternal and family health. Newly established progressive fields like home economics and domestic science empowered women to fill traditional roles in modern ways that utilized new technologies.

That Etta and Claribel collected art by radicals who were upsetting conventions in their work and challenging social propriety in their lives did not mean that they spurned traditional values. Hannah Solomon, founder of the National Council of Jewish Women, expressed the feminist sensibility at the heart of these women: "Who is this new woman? . . . She is the woman who dares to go into the world. . . . She is the woman who stays at home."[93] Even in death the sisters expressed their independence while remaining mindful of family, propriety, and Judaism. The freethinking sisters were interred with their brother Fred in a neoclassical mausoleum in a nonsectarian cemetery, but a rabbi performed the funeral rites. At Etta's service Rabbi Morris Lazaron spoke warmly and familiarly of her as a "sweet friend," extolling her personal qualities of modesty and refinement. He noted that "for many of us you linked us with the precious past" even as her enduring legacy was to bring the South into the present.[94]

New York Jewish matriarch Annie Nathan Meyer, founder of Barnard College, explained the paradox of such women: "To put any radical

scheme across, it must be done in the most conservative manner possible."[95] How the Cone sisters envisioned their art can be seen through the frames that encased their paintings. Most were purchased in the 1920s and 1930s and tended to be gilded and ornate, traditionally Victorian, compatible with the interior decoration of their Marlborough apartment. The frames domesticated the radical, asking viewers to transform what was conceived as startling into something that was decorous and beautiful. In 1986 art historian Brenda Richardson, then Baltimore Museum curator, reframed the paintings with minimalist strips to emphasize their modernism, but a subsequent curator restored the original Cone frames.[96] That act presented the paintings as the sisters intended them, as timeless masterpieces. In 2001 the museum "reconceived" the collection and recreated a room that replicated the Marlborough Apartment, restoring the art to its domestic setting evocative of how the sisters had lived with it.[97]

This controversy—modern art seen through a vintage frame—encapsulates the legacy of the Cone sisters as the second-generation daughters of Jewish immigrants aspiring to be both New Women and southern ladies. Their art collecting reflected the spirit of their time and place. The New South myth promulgated a new, disruptive urbanity and industrialization even as southern society remained framed in conservative social and cultural hierarchies. As George Boas writes, the Cone sisters' collecting reflected an "expression of their personalities," consistent with other spheres of their lives.[98]

Negotiating among competing family, social, and cultural demands, the Cone sisters pursued freedom but within limits. They remained Jews although they thought freely as they entered new social and cultural realms. The German heritage of *Bildung* infused their lives with high culture and moral purpose even as their art collection challenged classical ideals. As rooted cosmopolitans, they would live in avant-garde Paris, cavort with Gertrude Stein, but also be devoted Baltimore and Blowing Rock daughters, aunts, and sisters. They traveled but came home.

NOTES

[1] H. L. Mencken, "The Sahara of the Bozart," accessed June 3, 2024, https://thegrandarchive.wordpress.com/the-sahara-of-the-bozart. The essay first appeared in 1917 in the *New York Evening Mail*.

[2] For the case for Southern Jews as provincials see Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973).

[3] Barbara Pollack, *The Collectors: Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta Cone* (Indianapolis, 1962); Mary Gabriel, *The Art of Acquiring: A Portrait of Etta and Claribel Cone* (Baltimore, 2002). Dianna Cameron and Carrie Streeter, eds., *Modern Visions, Modern Art: The Cone Sisters in North Carolina* (Blowing Rock, NC, 2019); Nancy Hirschland Ramage, "Mothers, Sisters, Cousins, Aunts: At Home with Women of the Cone Family," in *Modern Visions, Modern Art*, 25–47; Edward Cone, "The Miss Etta Cones, the Steins, and M'sieu Matisse," in Cameron and Streeter, *Modern Visions, Modern Art*, 111–29. See also Ellen Hirschland and Nancy Hirschland Ramage, *The Cone Sisters of Baltimore: Collecting at Full Tilt* (Evanston, IL, 2008).

[4] Ramage, "Mothers, Sisters, Cousins, Aunts," 25–26.

[5] Quoted in Emily C. Rose, *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside* (Philadelphia, 2001), 282.

[6] Quoted in Leonard Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 64–65.

[7] Jacob Rader Marcus, *This I Believe: Documents of American Jewish Life* (Northvale, NJ, 1990), 10–11, 79.

[8] See Eric Goldstein and Deborah Weiner, *On Middle Ground: A History of the Jews of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 2018), 80.

[9] Pollack, *Collectors,* 15; Goldstein and Weiner, *On Middle Ground,* 77–80.

[10] Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York, 1988), 72.

[11] Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743–1933* (New York, 2002), 260. In 1809 Herman's father, Moses Kahn, had had his portrait painted in oil.

[12] Mary Gabriel notes that during the war the Cones had retreated to a farm, perhaps in response to U. S. Grant's notorious General Order 11, which had called for the expulsion of Jews as allegedly illicit cotton speculators. She furthermore notes that after the war Cone and his partner Adler sought cover by taking on as a partner a local sheriff who had been a Unionist. Hirschland and Ramage cite a memoir by Sam Adler that recalled no experience of antisemitism in Jonesborough. Gabriel, *Art of Acquiring*, 4; Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters*, 17. On General Order 11, see Jonathan D. Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* (New York, 2012).

[13] Edward Cone, "The Miss Etta Cones, the Steins, and M'sieu Matisse," *American Scholar* 42 (Summer 1973): 441. Another Bavarian-Jewish immigrant family in North Carolina, the Weils exhibited a similar custom of addressing older siblings as "Sister" or "Brother."

[14] See Goldstein and Weiner, *On Middle Ground,* 2. Cincinnati in the Mideast, St. Louis in the Midwest, and San Francisco in the Far West performed similar roles as regional hubs for economic networks extending into the countryside.

[15] Ramage, "Mothers, Sisters, Cousins, Aunts," 31.

[16] Sharon Fahrer, *A Home in Shalom'ville: The History of Asheville's Jewish Community* (Asheville, NC, 2015), 67; Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 34; Greensboro: Historical Overview, Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, accessed May 23, 2024, https://www.isjl.org/north-carolina-greensboro-encyclopedia.html.

[17] Gabriel, *Art of Acquiring*, 72.

[18] Quoted in Samuel M. Steward, ed., *Dear Sammy: Letters from Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas* (New York, 1977), 9.

[19] Ibid, 108. Religious alternatives like Ethical Culture and Christian Science did not require formal conversion. Sally Stein gravitated to Christian Science as did Harriet Lane Levy, a San Franciscan born into an affiliated Jewish family who came to Paris with Alice B. Toklas and joined the Stein social circle. Toklas, who later converted to Roman Catholicism, and Gertrude Stein remained in France during the Nazi occupation, controversially accommodating to the Vichy regime however fearful they felt as Jews. Hirschland translates *freiglaubig* as "agnostick," but one scholar of German Jewry, Anton Hieke, suggests "'Freiglaube' or 'Freireligion'" is indeed more than simply agnostic. "There was a movement in the 19th century that aimed at finding community and commonality in a shared belief in god freed by the corset of dogma or religion as such. Faith without religion." Anton Hieke, e-mail to the author, February 21, 2024. See also Benny Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler* (Cincinnati, 1979); Ellen M. Umansky, *From Christian Science to Jewish Science: Spiritual Healing and American Jews* (New York, 2005).

[20] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, 2004), 206.

[21] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 108. Letters cited were sent shipboard to Blowing Rock: Claribel Cone to Etta Cone, June 1, 1910; Claribel Cone to Etta Cone, June 3, 1910. Although Claribel did not specifically identify these Jews ethnically, at the time social relations between the Americanized Germans and the less acculturated, more recently arrived eastern Europeans were fraught, especially in Baltimore. See Goldstein and Weiner, *On Middle Ground*, 126–27.

[22] Ramage, "Mothers, Sisters, Cousins, Aunts," 31, 33; Etta Cone to Richard Guggenheimer, n.d., Etta Cone Letters, 1927–1949, University of North Carolina at Greensboro Libraries, accessed February 16, 2024, https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/mss%3A189285. Etta's values and interests are reflected in the four hundred thousand dollars she left the Baltimore Museum of Art in contrast with the five thousand dollars left to the Associated Jewish Charities.

[23] Brenda Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta: The Cone Collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art* (Baltimore, 1985), 80. Etta also protested that "income taxes" pressed upon her. Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 200.

[24] Etta Cone to Richard Guggenheimer, n.d., Etta Cone Letters, 1927–1949, University of North Carolina at Greensboro Libraries; Last Will and Testament of Etta Cone, University of North Carolina at Greensboro University Libraries, 7, accessed February 15, 2024, https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/cone%3A29028#page/1/mode/1up.

[25] Dolene Guggenheimer married Simon Stein. Pollack, *Collectors,* 84; Dianna Cameron and Carrie Streeter, "'The Spirit of Appreciation': Seeing Two Sisters' Vision," in Cameron and Streeter, *Modern Visions, Modern Art*, 6.

[26] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 70; Pollack, *Collectors*, 15, 31. Pollack claims the household language was English.

[27] Pollack, *Collectors*, 18, 19–20.

[28] Quoted in Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 76; Claribel Cone to Etta Cone, December 7, 1910, Baltimore Museum of Art Archives. Claribel noted that this refinement was present in each family member although in lesser or greater degree. Whereas the two eldest

sons were destined for careers in their father's business, younger sons pursued law and medicine.

[29] Claribel Cone, "Introductory Address to the Medical Class of the Woman's Medical College," 1896, quoted in Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 226; quoted in Pollack, *Collectors*, 179.

[30] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 63, 69, 76.

[31] Karen Levitov, *Collecting Matisse and Modern Masters: The Cone Sisters of Baltimore* (New Haven, CT, 2011), 15; Cameron and Streeter, "'Spirit of Appreciation,'" 11.

[32] George Boas, "The Cones," in *Cone Collection: A Handbook with a Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture* (Baltimore, 1955), 11.

[33] Baltimore Museum of Art, "The Cone Collection," accessed June 3, 2024, http://52.2.241.195/collections/cone.html; Henri Matisse to Simon Bussy, May 24, 1934, quoted in Gabriel, *Art of Acquiring*, v.

[34] Leonard Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil: A Jewish Progressive in the New South* (Chapel Hill, 2017), 32–34. Weil was a North Carolina contemporary of the sisters with Baltimore Jewish social and family ties.

[35] Pollack, *Collectors*, 20.

[36] Ibid, 149.

[37] Cone, citing Gertrude Stein, said Picasso called them "the Miss Etta Cones," while Carolyn Burke claims "les Miss Etta Cone." Cone, "The Miss Etta Cones," 441; Carolyn Burke, "Gertrude Stein, the Cone Sisters, and the Puzzle of Female Friendship," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Spring 1982): 549.

[38] Gertrude Stein, "Two Women," in Pollack, *Collectors,* 279. In the story Claribel is Martha and Etta, Ada.

[39] Pollack, *Collectors*, 18–19.

[40] William Toll observed bachelorhood and spinsterhood as a "social tradition" among German Jews in Portland, Oregon. Of the twelve Cone siblings to survive into adulthood, three of the nine men remained unmarried as did two of the three women. William Toll, *The Making of an Ethnic Middle Class: Portland Jewry over Four Generations* (Albany, 1982), 52–55; Cone family tree, accessed May 13, 2024, https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/cone%3A67374.

[41] Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta,* 64–65.

[42] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 55; Pollack, *Collectors,* 34.

[43] Pollack, *Collectors*, 33–34.

[44] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 60.

[45] Cameron and Streeter, "'Spirit of Appreciation," 23.

[46] Etta Cone to Gertrude Stein, February 11, 1910, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts, Yale University Library; Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 5; quoted in Cameron and Streeter, "Spirit of Appreciation," 29, 178.

[47] Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta*, 79, 81.

[48] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 67.

[49] Quoted in Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta,* 89.

[50] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 58.

[51] Quoted in Pollack, *Collectors,* 91.

[52] Ibid, 95.

[53] Claribel Cone to Etta Cone, August 22, 1910, quoted in Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 73. See Gabriel, *Art of Acquiring,* 109–13. Although Claribel, who continued to admire the German spirit, did not cite antisemitism as a reason for her return to America, Gabriel notes that she left the very year that Hitler was proclaiming his antisemitic manifestos in Munich. Antisemitism was pervasive in the city, climaxed by the assassination of the socialist revolutionary Kurt Eisner, a Jew, in 1919. Revolutionaries searched Claribel's hotel room—after all, she was a rich Jewish bourgeois—but left her undisturbed, taking only a box of bon bons. Claribel's lack of reaction to the effusion of antisemitism—she seemed mostly concerned about packing her books and boxes—suggests a lack of political consciousness.

[54] Pollack, *Collectors*, 114.

[55] Quoted in Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta*, 70.

[56] Ibid., 115–16.

[57] Ibid., 119.

[58] Ibid., 101.

[59] Pollack, *Collectors,* 124–26.

[60] Charles Dellheim, *Belonging and Betrayal: How Jews Made the Art World Modern* (Waltham, MA, 2021), 159, 161.

[61] Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta*, xvi.

[62] Cameron and Streeter, "Spirit of Appreciation," 16–17, 18.

[63] Pollack, *Collectors*, 137, 134, 135, 152.

[64] Ibid., 182. The sisters were prescient. Cone Mills Corporation, after buy outs and takeovers, filed for bankruptcy in 2003 while the Cone Collection was valued at some one billion dollars.

[65] Pollack, *Collectors*, 304.

[66] Ibid, 304.

[67] Ibid., 304.

[68] Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta*, 99.

[69] Mencken, "Sahara of the Bozart."

[70] Pollack, *Collectors,* 89.

[71] Cameron and Streeter, "Spirit of Appreciation," 7; Ramage, "Mothers," 38.

[72] Cameron and Streeter, "Spirit of Appreciation," 17.

[73] Ibid., 58, 102; Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey, *Great Women Collectors* (New York, 1999), 154.

[74] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 101. Art critic Alfred Barr characterized Matisse's Nice period, when the sisters were his most avid collectors, as his "easiest," "relaxed," and most decorative, that would appeal to "amateur" collectors like the Cone sisters. Dominique Fourcade, in a 1986 exhibition catalog, challenges Barr, arguing that Matisse in Nice was at his most original, radical, and innovative. However, Barr's judgment has largely prevailed. For a discussion of this debate see Joan Leslie Horn, "Claribel Cone and Etta Cone: Collecting Matisse, Entering History" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1991), 12.

[75] Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta*, 94; Pollack, *Collectors*, 189; quoted in Cameron and Streeter, "Spirit of Appreciation," 21.

[76] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* xvi; Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta*, 91, 15.

[77] Quoted in Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters,* 65. This opinion was attributed to Laura Cone, Etta and Claribel's sister-in-law.

[78] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters*, 65; Pollack, *Collectors,* 238.

[79] Hirschland and Ramage, *Cone Sisters*, 119; Cone, *The Misses Etta* Cones, 457.

[80] Dellheim, *Belonging and Betrayal*, 159.

[81] Mary Gabriel, *Art of Acquiring*, 144.

[82] Cameron and Streeter, "Spirit of Appreciation," 17.

[83] Pollack, *Collectors*, 193.

[84] Ibid., 239; Cameron and Streeter, "Spirit of Appreciation," 21.

[85] Richardson, *Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta*, 150; Pollack, *Collectors,* 236.

[86] The committee appointed to oversee the deposition of the collection consisted almost entirely of Jews—Laura Cone, attorney Philip Perlman, and art restorer David Rosen, as well as museum director Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, a Christian who carried the Jewish surname of her ex-husband. Dr. Gertrude Rosenthal served as the Baltimore museum's senior curator. Pollack, *Collectors,* 252.

[87] The earliest major modernist collectors were men: Albert Barnes, Stephen Clark, John Quinn, and Sergei Shculkin. The Parisian gallery of Berthe Weill, an Alsatian Jew, was the first to sell works by Picasso and Matisse. American heiresses Isabell Gardner and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney at first rejected purchasing Matisse, but eventually added modernist art to their masterwork collections. Another wealthy art patron, Mabel Dodge, enjoyed a bohemian lifestyle that included Gertrude Stein in her circle. Pollack, *Collectors*, 187; Gabriel, *Art of Acquiring,* 91.

[88] Cameron and Streeter, "Spirit of Appreciation," 22; Ramage, "Mothers," 44; Patrick Lucas, "Edward Loewenstein's Midcentury Architectural Innovation in North Carolina," *Southern Jewish History* 16 (2013): 43–88.

[89] Susan Helen Adler, *Saidie May: Pioneer of Early 20th Century Collecting* (Baltimore, 2008), 1–5, 81, 239.

[90] "Patsy Nasher, 59, Dies, Was Sculpture Patron," accessed May 31, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/09/obituaries/patsy-nasher-59-dies-was-sculpture-patron.html.

[91] "The Pittsburgh Platform," accessed May 31, 2024, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-pittsburgh-platform.

[92] Quoted in Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil*, 126.

[93] "Women of Valor: Hannah Greenebaum Solomon," Jewish Women's Archive, accessed November 29, 2022, https://jwa.org/womenofvalor/solomon.

[94] Quoted in Hirschland and Ramage, "Cone Sisters," 206. Lazaron was an accomplished painter besides serving as a pulpit rabbi. An ecumenicist, in 1949 he had broken with Baltimore Hebrew Congregation over his outspoken anti-Zionism although later he reconciled with the temple.

[95] Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting, The National Council of Jewish Women* (Tuscaloosa, 1993), 6.

[96] Brenda Richardson, "What's in a Frame?," 4, quoted in Hirschland and Ramage, "Cone Sisters," 211.

[97] Carla Brenner, *The Baltimore Museum of Art: Celebrating a Museum* (Baltimore, 2001), 20.
[120] Pollack, *Collectors,* 124–26.