

Decorative Painting and Politics in France, 1890-1914

by

Katherine D. Brion

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(History of Art)
in the University of Michigan
2014

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Howard Lay, Chair
Professor Joshua Cole
Professor Michèle Hannoosh
Professor Susan Siegfried

© Katherine D. Brion 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will begin by thanking Howard Lay, who was instrumental in shaping the direction and final form of this dissertation. His unbroken calm and good-humor, even in the face of my tendency to take up new ideas and projects before finishing with the old, was of huge benefit to me, especially in the final stages—as were his careful and generous (re)readings of the text. Susan Siegfried and Michèle Hannoosh were also early mentors, first offering inspiring coursework and then, as committee members, advice and comments at key stages. Their feedback was such that I always wished I had solicited more, along with Michèle’s tea. Josh Cole’s seminar gave me a window not only into nineteenth-century France but also into the practice of history, and his kind yet rigorous comments on the dissertation are a model I hope to emulate. Betsy Sears has also been an important source of advice and encouragement.

The research and writing of this dissertation was funded by fellowships and grants from the Georges Lurcy Foundation, the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan, the Mellon Foundation, and the Getty Research Institute, as well as a Susan Lipschutz Award. My research was also made possible by the staffs at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Institut nationale d’Histoire de l’Art, the Getty Research Library, the Musée des arts décoratifs/Musée de la Publicité, and the Musée Maurice Denis,

among other institutions. Special thanks go to a number of individuals who provided particular assistance. I would like to express my gratitude to the late Françoise Cachin for allowing me access to the Signac Archives and to Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon for devoting her time to those archival visits and to subsequent questions and requests, as well as to Charlotte Liébert Hellman for related permission requests. At the Musée Maurice Denis, Marie El Caïdi could not have been more welcoming and informative, while Fabienne Stahl, working nearby on the artist's catalogue raisonnée, has been generous both with information and images. Others I would like to thank for research assistance are Michèle Jasnin and Virginie Vignon at the Musée de la Publicité, Anne-Marie Sauvage at the BN's Département des estampes et de la photographie, as well as Laurence Camous and François-Bernard Michel.

I would also like to take the opportunity to highlight three professional opportunities that played a particularly strong role in furthering my reflection, and the people who made those opportunities possible. *New Directions in Neo-Impressionism*, organized by Tania Woloshyn and Anthea Callen at Richmond, the American International University in London on November 20, 2010 led to an issue of the same name in *RIHA Journal*, edited by Woloshyn and Anne Dymond. Their feedback on my submission, along with that of Robyn Roslak was instrumental in shaping the core of chapter three (which also benefitted from editing by Regina Wenninger). Having welcomed my attendance at sessions of her graduate seminar, Ségolène Le Men kindly invited me to contribute to a stimulating Journée d'étude (*Jules Chéret, un pionnier à la*

croisée de l'art décoratif et de l'affiche) at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs on October 20, 2010, she co-organized with Réjane Bargiel in conjunction with the museum's exhibition of the artist's work. This experience, as well as the exhibition itself and its catalog/catalogue raisonnée, helped me to define the argument(s) of chapter two. It also led to many fruitful discussions on posters and other subjects with Karen Carter. Chapter two has also benefitted from thinking and research prompted by my contribution to a forthcoming volume edited by Anca I. Lasc, Mark Taylor, and Georgina Downey, and entitled *Designs on Home: The Modern French Interior and Mass Media, 1770-1970*.

The University of Michigan, and the Department of the History of Art in particular, has been a very supportive community. In addition to the faculty, many of them mentioned above, I would like to thank the former and current staff members in the department and at the Fine Arts Library for all their help, in particular Debbie Fitch, Jeannie Worrall, Jeff Craft, Meghan Musolff, Sally Bjork, Deirdre Spencer, Myrtle Hudson, and Nancy Damm. My fellow graduate students had a huge role in making UofM such a friendly place. I am so glad to have met Melanie Sympson, Monica Huerta, Monique Johnson, Heather Vinson, Chris Leichtnam, Kirsten Olds, Katie Hornstein, Kathy Zarur, Pam Stewart, Antje Gamble, and Alex Fraser, as well as to have met up again with Jessica Fripp (particular thanks go to Chris for his feedback and editing on parts of this dissertation, and to Alex for help with images). Yuriko Jackall, though not from UofM, also belongs on this list for making the BN such a fun place to be.

Profound thanks go to my mother, Carlette Hartsough, and my aunt, Cecile Thompson, for their love and encouragement throughout this entire process, and to Gabriel Loiacono for his advice and careful editing. I am above all grateful for the steadfast love and support, as well as the ironic humor, of Sébastien Brion, who helped me to think about other things besides art history (and also formatted this dissertation). Finally, I thank Nico, Jack and Thomas Brion for helping me to grow in more ways than I ever thought possible. Some of that growth is, I hope, registered here.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ABSTRACT.....	xvi
CHAPTER 1	
Introduction.....	1
The Politics of Decorative Painting	5
Case Studies	13
CHAPTER 2	
Decorative Aesthetics and the Search for a Modern Morality	18
Modernity, Solidarity, and (Im)morality.....	23
Maurice Talmeyr and the Immorality of the Poster	43
Modern Morality and the Poster.....	47
Disenchantment with the Commercial Poster	81
Conclusion.....	86
CHAPTER 3	
Paul Signac’s Decorative Propaganda of the 1890s.....	88
Propaganda and Revolution	91
Art and Propaganda.....	95
“Un Félix décoratif”	99
Decorative Harmony	108
Decorative Painting in the <i>Ère des attentats</i>	116
Thwarted Ambitions.....	132
Conclusion.....	136

CHAPTER 4	
Maurice Denis, Decorative Painting, and the Politics of Feeling.....	142
Emotion, Sentiment and the Decorative.....	145
The Turn to Classicism and Decorative Painting.....	159
Classicism and Nationalism	174
<i>Gaucherie</i> and the Fracturing of Decorative Harmony.....	190
The Action Française	195
Doubts about Symbolism and Classicism.....	224
Conclusion.....	239
EPILOGUE	
The Subject in Art.....	243
FIGURES.....	254
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	349

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1.1 Jean Auguste Ingres, *L'apothéose d'Homère (The Apotheosis of Homer)*, 1827, oil on canvas, 386 x 512 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris..... 254
- Figure 1.2 Eugène Delacroix, *Le combat de Jacob avec l'Ange (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*, 1861, fresco, 758 x 491 cm, Église de Saint-Sulpice, Paris 255
- Figure 2.1 Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Bois sacré cher aux arts et aux muses*, 1884, oil on canvas, 460 x 1040 cm Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lyon 256
- Figure 2.2 Jules Chéret, *Exposition universelle de 1889, Le Pays des fées*, 1889, color lithograph, 83 x 66 cm..... 257
- Figure 2.3 Jules Chéret, *Musée Grévin, Pantomimes lumineuses*, 1892, color lithograph, 124 x 87,5 cm..... 258
- Figure 2.4 Jules Chéret, *Bal du Moulin Rouge Place Blanche*, 1889, color lithograph, 130 x 92 cm 259
- Figure 2.5 Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, *Le pauvre pêcheur*, 1881, oil on e, 155 x 192 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris 260
- Figure 2.6 Épinal image, *Bonaparte touchant les pestiférés (Bonaparte touching the Plague Victims)*, 1835 261
- Figure 2.7 Jules Chéret, *La Loïe Fuller*, 1893 color lithograph..... 262
- Figure 2.8 Alfred Choubrac, *L'originale Loïe Mystérieuse*, 1892, color lithograph .. 263
- Figure 2.9 Jules Chéret, *La Pantomime*, 1891, color lithograph, 127.5 x 90 cm..... 264
- Figure 2.10 Jules Chéret, *La Musique*, 1891, color lithograph, 128 x 90.5 cm 265
- Figure 2.11 Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Le collin maillard (Blind Man's Bluff)*, 1769 oil on canvas, 117 x 91 cm, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio..... 266
- Figure 2.12 Jules Cheret, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, installed in Paris Hotel de Ville in 1902, oil on canvas..... 267
- Figure 2.13 *L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève (Childhood of St Genevieve)*, 1896 Printed after a work by Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes by Alexandre Lauzet

- (version shown here from a reproduction that appeared in *Maîtres de l’Affiche*), 150 x 450 cm. 268
- Figure 2.14 Panel from *L’Enfance de Sainte Geneviève (Childhood of St Genevieve)*, 1896 Printed after a work by Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes by Alexandre Lauzet. 269
- Figure 2.15 Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, panels from *L’Enfance de Sainte Geneviève*, 1877-78, oil on canvas, Pantheon, Paris 270
- Figure 2.16 Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, decorative panel from *L’Enfance de Sainte Geneviève*, 1877-78, oil on canvas, Pantheon, Paris 271
- Figure 2.17 Anonymous, *Biscuits Vendroux*, 1894, poster (reproduced in black and white)..... 272
- Figure 2.18 Theophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Affiches Charles Verneau (“La Rue”)*, 1896, color lithograph, 301 x 237.5 cm 273
- Figure 2.19 Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, *Centenaire de la Lithographie*, 1895 color lithograph, 147 x 110 cm 274
- Figure 2.20 Hugo d’Alesi, *Centenaire de la Lithographie*, 1895, color lithograph, 152 x 107 cm 275
- Figure 2.21 Willette, *La Pieuse Erreur (The Pious Error)*, original design for the 1899 *Les Maîtres de l’affiche*, lithograph 276
- Figure 2.22 Jules Chéret, *Pippermint*, 1899, color lithograph 277
- Figure 2.23 Jules Chéret Ceiling of the Billiards room, Villa la Sapinière, Évian 278
- Figure 2.24 Jules Chéret, *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe (Luncheon on the Grass)*, 1904, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nice 279
- Figure 2.25 Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Alsace*, 1896 color lithograph, 88 x 62.5 cm.. 280
- Figure 2.26 Henri Rivière, *L’Hiver (Winter)*, 1896, color lithograph, 66 x 90 cm..... 281
- Figure 3.1 Paul Signac, *Au temps d’harmonie: l’âge d’or n’est pas dans le passé, il est dans l’avenir (In the Time of Harmony: The Golden Age Is Not in the Past, It Is in the Future)*, 1894-95, oil on canvas, 300 x 400 cm, Mairie de Montreuil, Montreuil 282
- Figure 3.2 Paul Signac, Projet pour la décoration de la salle des fêtes de la mairie d’Asnières: Esquisse du panneau central no. 3 (Project for the Asnières

	City Hall Decoration: Sketch for the Central Panel no. 3), 1900, oil on canvas, 49 x 224 cm, Private Collection	283
Figure 3.3	Paul Signac, <i>Projet pour la décoration de la mairie d'Asnières: Esquisse de la voûte unique</i> (Project for the Asnières City Hall Decoration: Sketch for the Single Vault), 1900, oil on canvas, 49 x 120 cm, Private collection	284
Figure 3.4	Paul Signac, <i>Portrait de M. Félix Fénéon, Opus 127</i> (<i>Portrait of Félix Fénéon</i>), 1890-1891, oil on canvas, 73.5 x 92.5 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York	285
Figure 3.5	Paul Signac, <i>Un Dimanche</i> (<i>A Sunday</i>), 1888-90, oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm, Private Collection	286
Figure 3.6	Paul Signac, <i>Application du Cercle Chromatique de Mr. Ch. Henry</i> , 1888, color lithograph printed on a program for the Théâtre-Libre, 16.2 x 20 cm, Private Collection	287
Figure 3.7	Paul Signac, <i>Femmes au puits, Opus 238</i> (<i>Women at the Well</i>), 1892, oil on canvas, 195 x 131 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.....	288
Figure 3.8	Paul Signac, <i>Femme se coiffant, Opus 227</i> (<i>Woman Arranging Her Hair, Opus 227</i>), 1892, oil on canvas, 59 x 70 cm, Private Collection	289
Figure 3.9	Georges Seurat, <i>Jeune femme se poudrant</i> (<i>Young Woman Powdering Herself</i>), 1889-90, oil on canvas, 95.5 x 79.5 cm, Courthould Institute of Art.....	290
Figure 3.10	Paul Signac, <i>Le démolisseur</i> (<i>The Wrecker</i>), 1897-1899, oil on canvas, 250 x 152 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris	291
Figure 3.11	Paul Signac, <i>Les démolisseurs</i> , 1896, Lithograph, 52 x 36 cm	292
Figure 3.12	Paul Signac, Marseille, <i>La Bonne Mère</i> (<i>Notre Dame de la Garde</i>), 1905-1906, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 116.2 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Robert Lehman, 1955 (55.220.1).....	293
Figure 3.13	Paul Signac, Collioure, <i>La Plage de la Ville, Opus 165</i> , 1887, oil on canvas, 62.9 x 80 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.208).....	294
Figure 3.14	Paul Signac, <i>Concarneau, Calme du soir, Opus 220</i> (<i>allegro maestoso</i>), 1891, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 81.3 cm (framed: 102.2 x 86.4 cm), The	

	Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.209)	295
Figure 4.1	Maurice Denis, <i>Mystère catholique (Catholic Mystery)</i> , 1889, oil on canvas, 97 x 143 cm, Musée départemental Maurice Denis, Saint Germain en Laye.....	296
Figure 4.2	Maurice Denis, <i>Panneau pour une chambre de jeune fille: Soir de septembre (Panel for a girl's bedroom: September evening)</i> , 1891, oil on canvas, 38 x 61 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.....	297
Figure 4.3	Maurice Denis, <i>L'Échelle dans le feuillage or Arabesques poétiques pour la décoration d'un plafond (Ladder in Foliage or Poetic Arabesques for a Ceiling Decoration)</i> , 1892, oil on canvas, 172 x 235 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	298
Figure 4.4	Maurice Denis, <i>Les Muses (The Muses)</i> , 1893, oil on canvas, 137 x 171 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris	299
Figure 4.5	Maurice Denis, <i>Le Chemin de la Vie (The Path of Life)</i> , 1895, stained glass window executed by Henri Carot, 305 x 100 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	300
Figure 4.6	Maurice Denis, <i>Le Départ (The Departure)</i> , 1897, oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	301
Figure 4.7	Maurice Denis, 1897, <i>Le Lâcher des chiens (The Release of the Dogs)</i> , oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	302
Figure 4.8	Maurice Denis, <i>Le Bien-aller</i> , 1897, oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	303
Figure 4.9	Maurice Denis, <i>Le Miracle (The Miracle)</i> , 1897, oil on canvas, 225 x 212 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	304
Figure 4.10	Maurice Denis, <i>Le Défaut (Losing the Scent)</i> , 1897, oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	305
Figure 4.11	Maurice Denis, <i>La Chasse infernale (The Devil's Hunt)</i> , 1897, oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye .	306
Figure 4.12	Maurice Denis, <i>L'Arrivée à l'ermitage (The Arrival at the Hermitage)</i> , 1897, oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain- en-Laye.....	307

Figure 4.13 Maurice Denis, <i>Hommage à Cézanne (Homage to Cézanne)</i> , 1900, oil on canvas, 180 x 240 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.....	308
Figure 4.14 Chapel of the Collège Ste Croix (Le Vésinet), Photograph c. 1900.....	309
Figure 4.15 Photo-montage (by Fabienne Stahl) reconstructing <i>L'Exaltation de la Croix</i> in situ.....	310
Figure 4.16 Maurice Denis, Detail from <i>L'Exaltation de la Croix (Anges et enfants aux encensoirs)</i> , 1899, oil on canvas, 225 x 225 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris	311
Figure 4.17 Maurice Denis, Detail from <i>L'Exaltation de la Croix (Anges et enfants lançant des pétales)</i> , 1899, oil on canvas, 225 x 225 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris	312
Figure 4.18 Maurice Denis, Detail from <i>L'Exaltation de la Croix (Paysage)</i> , 1899, oil on canvas, 115 x 164 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.....	313
Figure 4.19 Maurice Denis, Detail from <i>L'Exaltation de la Croix</i> , 1899, oil on canvas, 220 x 597 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris	313
Figure 4.20 Maurice Denis, ceiling decoration of the Chapelle de la Vierge, Église de Sainte Marguerite, 1901, oil on canvas, Le Vésinet, France.....	314
Figure 4.21 Maurice Denis, ceiling decoration of the chapelle du Sacré Coeur, Église de Sainte Marguerite (prior to 2009), 1901, oil on canvas, Le Vésinet, France	315
Figure 4.22 Maurice Denis, <i>La Vierge à l'École (Our Lady of the Schools)</i> , 1903, oil on canvas, 158 x 200 cm, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles.....	316
Figure 4.23 Maurice Denis, ceiling decoration of the chapelle du Sacré Coeur, Église de Sainte Marguerite (prior to 2009) including view of Montmartre, 1901, oil on canvas, Le Vésinet, France	317
Figure 4.24 Maurice Denis, view of the chapelle du Sacré Coeur, <i>Coup de lance</i> is visible to the right, Église de Sainte Marguerite (prior to 2009), 1901, oil on canvas, Le Vésinet, France.....	318
Figure 4.25 Photograph of <i>Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie (Latin Earth, Muse of Art and Poetry)</i> in situ prior to 1924	319
Figure 4.26 Photograph of <i>Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie (Latin Earth, Muse of Art and Poetry)</i> in situ prior to 1924	320

Figure 4.27 Maurice Denis, <i>Les arts plastiques (The Fine Arts)</i> , part of <i>Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie</i> , 1907, oil on canvas, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	321
Figure 4.28 Maurice Denis, <i>La poésie (Poetry)</i> , part of <i>Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie</i> , 1907, oil on canvas, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	322
Figure 4.29 Maurice Denis, <i>Le paysage (Landscape)</i> , part of <i>Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie</i> , 1907, oil on canvas, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	323
Figure 4.30 Maurice Denis, <i>La musique (Music)</i> , part of <i>Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie</i> , 1907, oil on canvas, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	324
Figure 4.31 Maurice Denis, <i>Les arts plastiques</i> , part of <i>Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie</i> , Detail with Aristide Maillol, 1907, oil on canvas, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	325
Figure 4.32 Maurice Denis, <i>Le Bain (The Bath)</i> , panel from <i>Éternel Printemps (Eternal Springtime)</i> , 1908, oil on canvas, 246 x 102 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	326
Figure 4.33 Maurice Denis, <i>La Couronne de fleurs (The Wreath of Flowers)</i> , panel from <i>Éternel Printemps</i> , 1908, oil on canvas, 246 x 154 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	327
Figure 4.34 Maurice Denis, <i>Les Musiciennes (The Musicians)</i> , panel from <i>Éternel Printemps</i> , 1908, oil on canvas, 246 x 150 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	328
Figure 4.35 Maurice Denis, <i>La Madone (The Madonna)</i> , panel from <i>Éternel Printemps</i> , 1908, oil on canvas, 246 x 150 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	329
Figure 4.36 Maurice Denis, <i>Temps des lilas</i> or <i>Le Printemps (Time of Lilacs or Springtime)</i> , 1896, oil on canvas, 190 x 210 cm, Private Collection ..	330
Figure 4.37 Maurice Denis, <i>Avril (April)</i> , 1894, oil on canvas, 182 cm diameter, Private Collection	331

- Figure 4.38 Maurice Denis, *Le Mois de Marie (The Month of Mary)*, 1907, oil on canvas, 115 x 147 cm, The Yamazaki Mazak Museum of Art, Nagoya 332
- Figure 4.39 Maurice Denis, *Captifs (The Captives)*, 1907, oil on canvas, 80 x 121 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Reims 333
- Figure 4.40 Maurice Denis, *L'Amour s'éprend de la beauté de Psyché, objet innocent du culte des mortels et de la jalousie de Vénus (Cupid Falls for the Beauty of Psyche, Innocent Object of Mortal Worship and of Venus's Jealousy)*, panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 394 x 269 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg..... 334
- Figure 4.41 Maurice Denis, *Le Zéphyr, sur l'ordre de l'Amour, transporte Psyché dans une île de délices (Zephyr Transporting Psyche to the Island of Delight as Ordered by Cupid)*, panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 395 x 267 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg..... 335
- Figure 4.42 Maurice Denis, *Psyché découvre que son mystérieux amant est l'Amour (Psyche Discovers that Her Mysterious Lover is Love)*, panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 395 x 274 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg 336
- Figure 4.43 Maurice Denis, *Soumise par Vénus aux plus dures épreuves, Psyché, pour son malheur, cède une seconde fois à la curiosité: dans cette extrémité, elle est secourue par l'Amour (Psyche Having Opened the Box with the Dreams of the Underworld is Falling Deeply Asleep)*, panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 395 x 272 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg 337
- Figure 4.44 Maurice Denis, *Jupiter, en présence des dieux, accorde à psyché l'apothéose et célèbre son hymen avec l'Amour (Jupiter Bestows Immortality on Psyche and Celebrates Her Marriage to Cupid)*, panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 399 x 272 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg 338
- Figure 4.45 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Vénus anadyomène*, 1848, oil on canvas, 163 x 92 cm, Musée Condé, Chantilly 339
- Figure 4.46 Giulio Romano, *Wedding Banquet of Cupid and Psyche*, Palazzo del Te, Mantua, Italy 340

Figure 4.47 Maurice Denis, <i>Histoire de la Musique (The History of Music)</i> , 1912, oil on canvas, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris	341
Figure 4.48 Maurice Denis, <i>L'Orchestique grecque (Greek Song and Dance)</i> , part of <i>Histoire de la Musique</i> , 1912, oil on canvas, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris.....	342
Figure 4.49 Maurice Denis, <i>La Symphonie (The Symphony)</i> , part of <i>Histoire de la Musique</i> , 1912, oil on canvas, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris.....	343
Figure 4.50 Maurice Denis, <i>L'Opéra (The Opera)</i> , part of <i>Histoire de la Musique</i> , 1912, oil on canvas, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris.....	344
Figure 4.51 Maurice Denis, <i>Le Drame Lyrique (Lyric)</i> , part of <i>Histoire de la Musique</i> , 1912, oil on canvas, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris.....	345
Figure 4.52 Maurice Denis, preparatory drawing for <i>Presto, figure de l'Exèdre, Natalia Trouhanowa</i> , 1913, Charcoal, white chalk and pastel on paper, 78 x 103 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye	346
Figure 4.53 Maurice Denis, <i>Les jeux des laveuses (Washerwomen's games)</i> , 1914, oil on canvas, 160 x 386 cm, Private Collection	347
Figure 4.54 Maurice Denis, <i>Le Réveil d'Ulysse (The Awakening of Ulysses)</i> , 1914, oil on canvas, 160 x 285 cm, Private Collection	347
Figure 4.55 Maurice Denis, <i>La Galatée (Galatea)</i> , 1917, oil on canvas, 112 x 88 cm, Musée de peinture et de sculpture, Grenoble	348

ABSTRACT

“Decorative Painting and Politics in France, 1890-1914” examines the preoccupation with “decorative” painting and aesthetics in France, from the 1890s to World War I, a period in which artists and design reformers challenged the subordination of the decorative arts to the fine arts and the restriction of both to the elite. It demonstrates that this decorative ideal was not merely a response to the commercial potential of the increasingly fashionable decorative arts or of a sensually appealing formal harmony. Rather, it brought together multiple, sometimes contradictory, paradigms: older traditions of history and mural painting—both associated with elevated subject matter and grand architectural settings—along with newer, avant-garde conceptions of visual form as a universal language that spoke directly to the senses. The critics and artists examined in this dissertation turned to decorative aesthetics in the hopes of communicating with, and even acting upon, a wider public. In doing so, they asserted a social, political role for art. They nevertheless struggled to articulate the exact nature of this role, and which elements of the decorative ideal best furthered its aims.

This struggle is traced through three case studies. The first highlights the use of the term “decorative” to describe the (seemingly opposed) work of the painter Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes and the commercial artist Jules Chéret: the shared label communicated a desire to combine the accessible, modern aesthetic of the poster with the

collective significance of monumental civic decorations. The second foregrounds Neo-Impressionist Paul Signac's combination, via decorative painting, of the didactic logic of anarchist propaganda with the "purely aesthetic emotion" of visual form. The final case study examines a similar effort, with opposite ideological aims, on the part of Maurice Denis to reconcile his Symbolist belief in the emotional power of formal distortions with the reason, order and technical perfection advocated by nationalist politics. These case studies complicate the enduring association of the decorative with an empty visual harmony. Rather than divesting art of its social character, decorative aesthetics signaled an (albeit, fraught) attempt to find an integral role for visual form in social and ideological engagement.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This dissertation explores the complex connotations of the term “decorative” in France from the 1890s to World War I, a period during which artists and design reformers challenged the subordination of the decorative arts to the fine arts, as well as the affiliation of both with the elite. The seeds of this examination were sown by T.J. Clark’s analysis, in his *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, of the preoccupation with the decorative in the context of 1890s French painting. At the end of a lengthy chapter focused on Camille Pissarro’s 1892 *Two Young Peasant Women*, Clark laid out the word’s key claims to significance—its association with both architecture and unalloyed “visual delight”—but ultimately dismissed its attempt:

to do the (magic) work, which modernism still believed possible, of soldering together the aesthetic and social. [...] [I]n the form it mostly took in the early 1890s the decorative [...] gave an alibi to weightless simplification, and coquetted with the idea of the architectural—hence presumably the social—while all the while pressing the visual arts toward whimsy and nostalgia.¹

He concluded that, in most cases, the emphasis on the decorative indicated a preemptive surrender of painting’s cognitive potential in favor of a superficial, facile prettiness.

Despite the increased scholarly attention paid to decorative painting and the decorative arts since the publication of *Farewell to an Idea*, this association—the “decorative” as an empty visual pleasure/harmony divested of intellectual heft or social engagement—

¹ T.J. Clark, “We Field-Women,” in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2001), 130-31.

lingers.² As Jenny Anger and Katherine Kuenzli have indicated, the decorative is rarely dealt with on its own terms or in its entirety: when taken as a worthy object of study, it is often through the evacuation of its feminine, material and/or domestic connotations, or through the assertion that certain decorative works, despite their purported intentions, were never about harmony at all.³ Henri Matisse has received so much attention in part because scholars dispute his stated goal of “an art of balance, of purity, and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art that could be for every intellectual laborer, for the businessman as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair that provides relaxation from fatigue.”⁴

I have set out to determine whether or not there was more to the decorative than Clark allowed, particularly in terms of that other problematic category he invoked, the

² As a representative example, see Patricia Leighton’s discussion of Picasso’s 1907 *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)*: “Picasso’s primitivizing style [...] aspires, like the African sculptures he admired, to an act not of mere decoration, but of power: a bid to recapture kinds of representational power that the arts of Enlightenment Europe had putatively lost.” Patricia Dee Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). 80.

³ See the introduction (p. 4 in particular) and conclusion in Jenny Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Katherine Marie Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010). 19-22.

⁴ “Ce que je rêve, c’est un art d’équilibre, de pureté, de tranquillité, sans sujet inquiétant ou préoccupant, qui soit, pour tout travailleur cérébral, pour l’homme d’affaires aussi bien que pour l’artiste des lettres, par exemple, un lénifiant, un calmant cérébral, quelque chose d’analogue à un bon fauteuil qui le délasse de ses fatigues physiques.” Matisse, “Notes d’un peintre,” *La Grande Revue* 52 (December 25, 1908), 731-45 (quotation p. 741-2), reproduced in facsimile in Roger Benjamin, *Matisse’s “Notes of a Painter”*: *Criticism, Theory and Context, 1891-1908* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987). Translated and discussed in Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*: 215-16 and 227. See, for example, interpretations of Matisse’s work in: Margaret Werth, “Le Bonheur de Vivre,” in *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); Alistair Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004). Ch. 4 and 6. Wright, in particular, opposes the pleasure and harmony of the decorative (“le décoratif”) to what he sees as the ultimately disruptive force of the artist’s work. He identifies this disruptive quality with Matisse’s invocation of, among other references, the commercial/industrial, the primitive, and the foreign (whether the German enemy or colonized other). See also footnote 2.

social. Though this question has been explored through an examination of practices associated with the decorative arts, I was ultimately most interested in the tensions raised by the ambiguous category of “decorative” painting, caught as it was somewhere between the decorative arts, discourses on formal expression and harmony, and a grand tradition of history painting.⁵ Despite the frequently acknowledged importance of the decorative as a criterion for painting in this period, scholars have rarely made it the central focus of their attention. Notable exceptions include Kuenzli and Gloria Groom’s work on the Nabis, a substantial body of literature on Matisse, and analyses of the Third Republic’s official decorative campaigns, particularly in the work of Jeannine Marie Aquilino.⁶ Among scholarship addressing the decorative in a more peripheral or punctual fashion, I have found the work of Margaret Werth, Jennifer Shaw, Robyn Roslak, Joyce Henri Robinson, Steven Levine, David Cottington and Christopher Green most helpful for my purposes.⁷ Werth’s *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art* was a particular inspiration

⁵ See, for example, French scholarship associated with “art social,” in particular Rossella Froissart Pezone, *L’Art dans tout: Les arts décoratifs en France et l’utopie d’un art nouveau* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2004); Catherine Meneux, ed. *Roger Marx, un critique aux côtés de Gallé, Monet, Rodin, Gauguin...* (Paris: Ville de Nancy and Éditions Artlys, 2006). Debora Silverman and Nancy Troy have also examined the decorative arts in this period, but focused on the aristocratic, conservative and/or nationalist tenor of French efforts. Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). Chs. 1 and 2.

⁶ Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*; Gloria Groom, *Edouard Vuillard, Painter-Decorator: Patrons and Projects, 1892-1912* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993); *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001); Marie Jeannine Aquilino, “Painted Promises: The Politics of Public Art in Late Nineteenth-Century France,” *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 4 (December 1993); “Decoration by Design: The Development of the Mural Aesthetic in Nineteenth Century French Painting” (Brown University, 1989). The following work on Matisse was most pertinent to my project: Benjamin, *Matisse’s “Notes of a Painter”*; “The Decorative Landscape, Fauvism and the Arabesque of Observation,” *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 2 (June 1993); Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism*.

⁷ Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley University of California Press, 2002). particularly 51 and 94-99; Jennifer L. Shaw, *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002); Robyn Roslak, “Symphonic Seas, Oceans of Liberty: Paul Signac’s *La Mer: Les Barques (Concarneau)*,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2005), <http://19thc->

in terms of her case-study format, her selection of artists, and her analysis of the association, embodied in depictions of idyll, of harmonious form with social harmony.

As a result of my combined interests in decorative painting and the question of its social instrumentality, I have focused on artists and critics—principally Roger Marx, Paul Signac and Maurice Denis—who were invested in combining a more traditional conception of decorative history painting (typically associated with the term *décoration*) with the contemporary emphasis on the emotional power of form. They believed that this combination was the surest means to a social (i.e. collective) art that might address the turbulence of their historical moment. The 1890s were bracketed by anarchist bombings and the Dreyfus Affair, a crisis that fostered key features of the ensuing quarter century: conflicts between Catholic and secularizing forces and the rise of nationalist politics. In this context the stability and, it sometimes seemed, the very existence of the Third Republic was challenged.⁸ Though the harmony associated with decorative painting might at first appear as a clear-cut attempt to avoid acknowledging these conflicts, I demonstrate the way my figures' preoccupation with the decorative was as much or more tied to the turbulent politics of 1890-1914 as it was a retreat from those politics.

artworldwide.org/index.php/component/content/article/64-spring05article/302-symphonic-seas-oceans-of-liberty-paul-signacs-la-mer-les-barques-concarneau; *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France: Painting, Politics and Landscape* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007). 5-6 and chapter 6; Joyce Henri Robinson, "'Hi Honey, I'm Home': Weary (Neurasthenic) Businessmen and the Formulation of a Serenely Modern Aesthetic," in *What is Architecture?*, ed. Andrew Ballantyne (New York: Routledge, 2002); Steven Z. Levine, "Decor/Decorative/Decoration in Monet's Art," *Arts* 51 (February 1977); David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: the Avant-garde and Politics in Paris 1905-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). 67-73 in particular; Christopher Green, *Art in France: 1900-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). 82-91. Jenny Anger also rehearses the bibliography on the decorative in France in the introduction (page 3) to her work on Klee.

⁸ The impact of the social turbulence of the 1890s on French visual culture is discussed in Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Thomson pays particular attention to the themes of sexuality, the crowd, religion, and the ongoing desire for *revanche* in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war.

The Politics of Decorative Painting

As I indicated above, part of the interest of the decorative as an object of study lies in the myriad, sometimes conflicting associations it evoked in France in this period.⁹ At its most basic, decorative painting referred to large-scale painting integrated or at least associated with architecture. As Nicholas Watkins has highlighted, decorative painting was, by virtue of its scale and setting, connected to the venerable tradition of history painting epitomized in *décorations* such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *The Apotheosis of Homer* (Figure 1.1) or Eugène Delacroix's paintings for the Church of Saint Sulpice (Figure 1.2).¹⁰

Marie Jeannine Aquilino has also traced the fin-de-siècle discourses on decorative painting back to a specific set of criteria established for mural painting in the mid-Nineteenth Century. This category of painting was associated with a set of anti-illusionistic formal effects intended to promote the integration of painting with architecture: clearly defined contours, a simplified, synthetic treatment of subject matter, and flat areas of color. Aquilino highlights how “[t]his systematic and rational process [of creating mural paintings], embodying restraint, sobriety, and directness, was a privileged

⁹ I use “the decorative” as a noun in order to invoke these multiple significations, and to indicate its emergence as an autonomous conceptual category at the fin-de-siècle, but the term’s ambiguity derives in part from the fact that it did not exist as such. Functioning only as an adjective, as Émile Littré’s dictionary suggests, the word meant different things depending on the noun that it modified. Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: L. Hachette, 1873-4). 992.

¹⁰ His essay remains one of the most useful texts in teasing out the different associations of the decorative. Nicholas Watkins, “The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic,” in *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930*, ed. Gloria Groom (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

model for public art under the Second Empire.”¹¹ Since the spaces adapted to wall paintings tended to be monumental, associated with religious, governmental, or other forms of public institutions, mural painting was thought to have a didactic role, leading the critic Théophile Gautier to oppose mural painting (which he proposed in 1848 as a suitably collective, Republican endeavor) to the “art for art’s sake” of the easel.¹²

Yet the designation of decorative painting was distinct from that of *décoration* and even from mural painting in that it was increasingly used to emphasize an artwork’s overall formal harmony, and the ability of that harmony to express the essence of the work’s subject. This framework was already visible, for example, in Charles Baudelaire’s 1846 analysis of Delacroix:

A painting by Delacroix [...] always leaves a profound impression whose intensity increases with distance. Constantly sacrificing the detail to the ensemble, and fearing that a clearer and more calligraphic execution will weaken the vitality of his thought, he exploits fully the elusive originality that is the intimacy of the subject.¹³

In Baudelaire’s account, Delacroix ruthlessly synthesizes in order to distill the essence of the subject, thereby endowing his work with more intensity. These attributes were to be a recurring refrain in later discourses on decorative painting and form, which would come to privilege an overall formal synthesis and harmony over *décoration*’s association with a particular architectural setting.

¹¹ Aquilino, “Painted Promises,” 697.

¹² Théophile Gautier, “L’Art en 1848,” *L’Artiste* 1, no. 5 (May 15, 1848).

¹³ “Un tableau de Delacroix [...] laisse toujours une impression profonde, dont l’intensité s’accroît par la distance. Sacrifiant sans cesse le détail à l’ensemble, et craignant d’affaiblir la vitalité de sa pensée par une exécution plus nette et plus calligraphique, il jouit pleinement d’une originalité insaisissable, qui est l’intimité du sujet.” “Salon de 1846,” Charles Baudelaire, *Baudelaire, œuvres complètes*, ed. Michel Jamet (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999). 651. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

An even more evocative example of this proto-decorative discourse can be found in Baudelaire's revolutionary call for a modern art, the 1863 "Le peintre de la vie moderne" ("The Painter of Modern Life"). In a section entitled "L'art mnémonique" ("Mnemonic Art"), Baudelaire portrayed the formal synthesis he saw in Delacroix's painting as the result of a battle between reality, demanding to be represented with a photographic exactitude, and the artist's synthetic memory and imagination, which strives to reveal reality's essence:

A duel is established, then, between the will to see all, to forget nothing, and the faculty of memory, which has learned to fervently absorb general color and silhouette, the arabesque of contour. An artist with a perfect sense of form, but accustomed to exercising chiefly his memory and his imagination, then finds himself assailed by a riot of details, all demanding justice with the fury of a mob in love with absolute equality. All justice is of course violated; all harmony destroyed, sacrificed; many a triviality becomes enormous; many a commonplace, a usurper. The more the artist turns to the detail with an impartial eye, the greater the state of anarchy. [...] [A]ll hierarchy and all subordination vanish.¹⁴

Baudelaire, himself a disillusioned revolutionary after 1851, described reality as a mass of details akin to an enraged revolutionary mob. Only the artist's faculties of synthesis, which fuse and suppress this anarchic mass as color and arabesque, can impose harmony and justice in the artwork and in the viewer: "the viewer's imagination, subjected, in turn, to so despotic a prompt [cette mnémonique si despotique], sees clearly the impression

¹⁴ "Il s'établit alors un duel entre la volonté de tout voir, de ne rien oublier, et la faculté de la mémoire qui a pris l'habitude d'absorber vivement la couleur générale et la silhouette, l'arabesque du contour. Un artiste ayant le sentiment parfait de la forme, mais accoutumé à exercer surtout sa mémoire et son imagination, se trouve alors comme assailli par une émeute de détails, qui tous demandent justice avec la furie d'une foule amoureuse d'égalité absolue. Toute justice se trouve forcément violée; toute harmonie détruite, sacrifiée; mainte trivialité devient énorme; mainte petitesse, usurpatrice. Plus l'artiste se penche avec impartialité vers le détail, plus l'anarchie augmente. Qu'il soit myope ou presbyte, toute hiérarchie et toute subordination disparaissent." *Le peintre de la vie moderne*, ed. Silvia Acierno and Julio Baquero Cruz (Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2009). 24.

produced by the external world in the mind of [Constantin Guys].”¹⁵ So, although the essay celebrates transitory practices like fashion and makeup, this passage makes it clear that they enter the realm of art only when their specificity is filtered and ultimately abstracted as a harmonious visual ensemble composed of generalized color, silhouettes and arabesques.

Despite Baudelaire’s emphasis on capturing modern life, and the politicized character of the rhetoric in the passage cited above, this transmutation of reality into decorative arabesques could be viewed as evacuating social and political realities (and thus prefiguring Clark’s evaluation of the decorative). This was the point of view taken by the critic Edmond Duranty in 1876, despite the fact that he, akin to Baudelaire, was celebrating an artistic movement—Impressionism—for its depiction of modern life. But Duranty urged painters to be sensitive to modern life in all its specificity, since he believed part of its social truth was embedded in a photographic attention to detail. Rather than identifying a synthetic formal harmony as the means to transform modern life into art, Duranty saw a decorative vision as a barrier to the representation of that life:

It is not the calligraphy of line or contour, it is not a decorative elegance in the lines [...] that is pursued at present. [...] Adieu to the human body treated like a vase, with an eye to the decorative curve; [...] what is needed is the particular note of the modern individual, in his clothing, in the midst of his social habits, at home or in the street.¹⁶

¹⁵ “[L]’imagination du spectateur, subissant à son tour cette mnémonique si despotique, voit avec netteté l’impression produite par les choses sur l’esprit de M.G.” Ibid., 23.

¹⁶ “Ce n’est pas la calligraphie du trait ou du contour, ce n’est pas une élégance décorative dans les lignes [...] qu’on poursuit à présent. [...] Adieu le corps humain, traité comme un vase, au point de vue du galbe décoratif; [...] ce qu’il nous faut, c’est la note spécial de l’individu moderne, dans son vêtement, au milieu de ses habitudes sociales, chez lui ou dans la rue.” Edmond Duranty, “La Nouvelle Peinture,” in *Les écrivains devant l’impressionnisme* (Paris: Éditions Macula, 1989), 124. This is a reprint of the critic’s 1876 brochure.

For Duranty, the term “decorative” indicated a preoccupation with an empty formal beauty disengaged with the times. In a similar vein, when the Republican writer Eugène Véron published his influential *L’Esthétique* (*Aesthetic*) two years later, he distinguished between decorative art and expressive art. While the latter, according to Véron, was a higher form of art seeking to express ideas and sentiments, decorative art sought only to give visual (or aural) pleasure.¹⁷ Véron believed that expressive art, which encompassed but also went beyond decorative beauty, was the art of the future.

Yet Véron’s *L’Esthétique*, by highlighting physiological experience as the foundation of aesthetic response, also pointed to the way pure pleasure could be invested with greater significance, particularly when viewed as the source of intense sensations and emotions.¹⁸ Pertinently, Aquilino has argued that the fin-de-siècle shift in emphasis from mural painting to decorative painting, above all in the context of official public commissions, signaled a shift from “public edification [...] to a new and intimate mode of public art.”¹⁹ She holds that the many decorative programs initiated under the Third Republic served to extend the logic of mass-culture and consumption—defined by sensual and emotional appeal—to the civic realm. Though a set of vocal critics continued to promote the ideals and aesthetic associated with mural painting, according to Aquilino they were the exception rather than the rule.

Aquilino’s scholarship helps put in perspective the strong emphasis on sensation/emotion in the aesthetic discourses (including Véron’s) of this period, an

¹⁷ Eugène Véron, *L’Esthétique* (Paris: C. Reinwald et C^{ie}, 1878). 130-52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39-43 and 61-64.

¹⁹ She also evoked the role of Véron’s *L’Esthétique*, with its emphasis on the appeal of decorative art to the general public, in this shift. Aquilino, “Painted Promises,” 704.

important theme in all of my case studies. It indicates that this emphasis was not merely the manifestation of an old paradigm, but also a response to particular historical circumstances, above all the liberalization of politics and commerce under the Third Republic. This recognition is particularly relevant for my first case study, which centers on the critic and Republican arts administrator Roger Marx and the promotion of the commercial poster as a decorative art. But my analysis also nuances certain features of Aquilino's argument: Marx's conception of decoration encompassed not only the mural aesthetic epitomized in Puvis de Chavannes's painting (as Aquilino emphasized) but also the colorful commerce of posters. Furthermore, for Marx and many of his contemporaries, emotion was a force for collectivity as well as individualization.

Their emphasis on emotion also reflected a larger change in how the senses were valued. Sensation and emotion had come to be seen as powerful motivators, a point of view exemplified by the "scientific aesthetic" of Charles Henry (and prefigured by Véron's *L'Esthétique*).²⁰ Beginning in 1885, Henry argued that the particular qualities of abstract formal elements (notably colors, lines and angles) generated either pleasurable or painful sensations in the viewing subject. In other words, formal elements were able, in and of themselves, to act upon the viewer. As my case studies indicate, the action of form upon the senses came to be seen by many as more universal and powerful than other means of representation—hence the Third Republic's emphasis on the sensual and emotional appeal of art. In keeping with the contemporary preoccupation with design/decorative arts reform, Henry had in fact imagined his scientific aesthetic to be

²⁰ Véron is cited as a precursor to Henry in Jonathan Crary, "1888: Illuminations of Disenchantment," in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 170. Henry's aesthetic is discussed further in chapter three.

most useful to the decorative arts, dominated as they were by abstract or stylized motifs.²¹ But his ideas encouraged artists to see both painting and the decorative arts as joined by their shared use of line and color. As a result, a set of formal qualities and effects came to be associated with the decorative, whether in painting or the decorative arts: 1) the self-sufficiency of pure form, denuded of any representational function; 2) the emotion produced by these abstracted elements in and of themselves; and 3) formal harmony.²²

Jenny Anger has distinguished between French and German conceptions of the decorative, arguing that the former (“le décoratif”) was focused on the arrangement of color on flat surfaces and that the latter was more linear in conception.²³ Though my research has indicated that the French saw both line and color as central features of the decorative, this distinction does point to a shift in French decorative practice over the course of the 1890s. While artists like Signac and Denis foregrounded abstract, linear patterns in their painting of the early nineties (intentionally associating their work with the decorative arts), as the decade progressed they placed more and more emphasis on

²¹ *Liste des travaux de M. Charles Henry*, (Rome: Imprimerie des Sciences mathématiques et physiques, October 1880). 6. The figures I examine in my case studies were all connected, one way or another, to the decorative arts reform that characterized this period. Roger Marx credited his own advocacy in getting the fine art salons opened to the decorative arts, while Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes was a member of the first (the Salon of the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts) to include the decorative arts. Jules Chéret, Paul Signac and Maurice Denis all experimented with the decorative arts at one time or another, while Denis made the creation of ensembles encompassing the fine and decorative arts a central feature of his artistic practice.

²² For the association of these qualities with decorative painting, see Watkins, “The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic,” 1-6; Benjamin, “The Decorative Landscape.”; Robinson, “‘Hi Honey, I’m Home’,” 114-19. Critics such as Alphonse Germain and Georges Lecomte tied the expressive “harmonie des lignes et des couleurs” to decorative painting. See, for example, Georges Lecomte, “Société des artistes indépendants,” *L’Art moderne* 10(March 30, 1890). See also Aquilino, “Painted Promises.” Germain’s conception of decorative painting has been analyzed by both Benjamin and Robinson. The emergence and evolution of the idea of form as independently expressive is analyzed in the first chapter of Todd Cronan, *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). Cronan labels this idea “affective formalism,” and argues that it increasingly evacuated artistic intention and, therefore, meaning.

²³ Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative*: 20-30.

decorative harmony rather than decorative pattern. This change indicated the extent to which a synthetic formal beauty came to predominate over other criteria associated with decorative painting, whether expressive form (“aesthetic emotion” in Signac’s formulation) or the architectural constraints of *décoration*. It also, I argue, indicated a greater concern with posterity as opposed to the immediate moment, and thus with the “eternal” half of the modern art described by Baudelaire in “Le peintre de la vie moderne”: “Modernity, it is the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent, one half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable.”²⁴

Nevertheless, this emphasis on decorative harmony should not be viewed as a retreat from politics. Baudelaire’s description of a harmony won at the expense of a revolutionary mob demonstrates the extent to which politics were inscribed in decorative harmony even before the term “decorative” was being used to describe it. As Michèle Hannoosh has argued, Baudelaire’s emphasis on synthesis need not be read as purely anti-revolutionary: ultimately, what Baudelaire espouses is not so much autocracy as the subordination of the self to a collective, the detail to the ensemble. His emphasis on order and unity could incorporate both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary readings, depending on which impulse—revolutionary or counter-revolutionary—was interpreted as the strongest force for signification (the production of meaning) and collectivity.²⁵ The political implications and ambiguity of Baudelaire’s conception of formal synthesis are equally relevant for the turn-of-the-century, when groups ranging from anarchists to

²⁴ “La modernité, c’est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l’art, dont l’autre moitié est l’éternel et l’immuable.” Baudelaire, *Le peintre de la vie moderne*: 20.

²⁵ Michèle Hannoosh, *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992). 129-36.

integral nationalists were obsessed with the question of social solidarity. Each of my case studies reveals the extent to which decorative unity and harmony were imagined as enacting the negotiation and eventual synthesis of different forms of collectivity.

Case Studies

Each of my three case studies has thus been chosen to highlight the role of decorative painting and aesthetics in relation to an important force in French political life 1890-1914: primarily Republican Solidarism, anarchism, and conservative Catholicism and nationalism. In each one, the investigation is anchored by a central, influential figure for conceptions of “the decorative” and its political implications: the Republican critic Roger Marx, the Neo-Impressionist artist Paul Signac, and the painter (and one-time Nabi) Maurice Denis.

The second chapter was inspired by the observation that, starting in the late 1880s, the term “decorative” was used to characterize the seemingly disparate artistic practices—history painting and a nascent mass cultural form, respectively—of the painter Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes and the poster artist Jules Chéret. I argue that this designation pointed not only to the visual harmony of their work and to the way it functioned as architectural or urban decoration, but also to its association with a growing conviction in art’s ability to speak to, and ultimately unify, the masses. Roger Marx had an especially important role in synthesizing and disseminating a “social” (i.e. democratic, collective) view of these artists’ work, and in tying it to the decorative, particularly in the

case of Chéret.²⁶ With Marx as my guide, I connect the fin-de-siècle discourse on social solidarity to that on decorative harmony: first, critics believed that artists modeled the integration of the individual and the collective by adapting their individual aesthetic to a particular architectural/urban context; second, they saw in the formal simplifications associated with this adaptation the promise of an art that could speak simultaneously to both elite and popular audiences.

What, then, would this collective art say? Puvis and Chéret's work accomplished their decorative syntheses by very different means, and achieved different results: the former's decorations were most often associated with temporal and psychological refuge, while Chéret's posters were deeply embedded in the modernity of Parisian life. Yet both artists ultimately trespassed on one another's domains, as Chéret increasingly shifted his focus to painting private and civic decorations, and Puvis's work made its way into two posters. These forays implicitly posed the following questions: could Puvis's idyllic "truths" be connected in a direct, positive way to the present? Could the joyous, fleeting energy of Chéret's posters become something deeper and more durable? In many ways, I argue, the reception of these efforts revealed that they could not. Instead, the artists' oeuvres remained the divided halves of the (increasingly unattainable) synthesis of the contingent and the modern outlined by Baudelaire in "Le peintre de la vie moderne."²⁷

Both Puvis de Chavannes and Jules Chéret were important inspirations for Signac and Denis, the focus of my second and third case studies. Denis knew his decorative projects were successful when he was hailed as a worthy successor to Puvis, while

²⁶ For discussions of the significance of Marx's thought and activities in this period, see Meneux, *Roger Marx, un critique*; Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*: chapters ten and twelve in particular.

²⁷ See footnote 24.

Signac's admiration for Puvis was manifest, for example, in a special visit he made to that artist's decorations at the Musée de Beaux-Arts de Lyon while preparing his own monumental *Au temps d'Harmonie*.²⁸ As for Jules Chéret, Signac's colleague George Seurat had associated his commercial posters with theories of formal expression including that of Charles Henry.²⁹ Signac's decorative works of the 1890s can in many ways be seen as the attempted synthesis of Puvis's ordered, harmonious idylls with the vibrant color and emphatic, expressive forms of Chéret's posters. Katherine Kuenzli has read the early poster designs of Denis and his fellow Nabis as an indication of their preoccupation with the public implications of even their "intimate" decorations for domestic interiors.³⁰

As evoked above, in the 1890s Signac's political and artistic ambitions were embodied by a series of decorative projects. In chapter three I contend that Signac, inspired by anarcho-communist discourses and the prospect of revolution, attempted to synthesize in these works the didactic logic of propaganda and "purely aesthetic emotion." This synthesis was epitomized by the explicit deployment of two systems: Neo-Impressionist divisionism and decorative pattern. With these systems, Signac hoped to initiate contemporary viewers into the aesthetic and social harmony of an anarcho-communist future. When a wave of anarchist terrorism made revolution seem imminent, he deployed them in large-scale decorations with the intent of addressing larger

²⁸ As discussed (along with Puvis's general significance for Signac) in Werth, *The Joy of Life*: 94-96. For invocations of Puvis in Denis's reception, see my discussion in chapter four.

²⁹ Notably in Seurat's *Chahut* (1889-90) and *Cirque* (1890-91). See Robert L. Herbert, "Seurat and Jules Chéret," in *Seurat, Drawings and Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Ségolène Le Men, *Seurat & Chéret: le peintre, le cirque et l'affiche* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1994), 148; Howard G. Lay, "Pictorial Acrobatics," in *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 166-76.

³⁰ Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*: 33-62.

audiences. In particular, he imagined proletarian spaces and viewers for his work. But throughout this period the didactic elements of Signac's painting met with critical resistance, and the public sites he envisioned never materialized. Faced with this lack of recognition, and with a diminished revolutionary outlook in the wake of the 1894 *Procès des Trente*, Signac focused his painting on the decorative synthesis (as opposed to decorative pattern or the implied collectivity of large-scale decorative painting) of atemporal landscapes. This trajectory has been read, whether positively or negatively, as the sacrifice of politics for aesthetic liberation. I seek to nuance this reading by rehearsing the extent to which this freedom was born of constraint: circumstances—notably the eclipse of anarchism as the center of national turmoil—frustrated Signac's political aspirations, severing the connection he had seen between propaganda and aesthetic emotion. These circumstances reoriented Signac to a politics of the individual, the private, and small-scale collectivity. This shift was reflected in his increasing focus on dialectical harmony (as opposed to large-scale works for public spaces) as the key component of the decorative.

My final case study examines a similar attempt, with opposite ideological aims, on the part of Maurice Denis. In the early Twentieth Century, Denis found that his Symbolist belief in the emotional power of formal distortions and simplifications conflicted with his more recent investment in nationalist politics, which emphasized reason, order and technical perfection. At the same time, the religious convictions that had inspired his nationalism encouraged Denis to view feeling as central to authentic artistic expression. His attempt to reconcile these concerns through the practice of decorative painting is the central focus of chapter four. While Signac's disillusionment

with historical events led him to ultimately privilege transcendent aesthetic emotion over didactic imagery, Denis would come to see aesthetic emotion as an unsustainable paradigm for an increasingly fragmented culture. After World War I, religious decoration gave him the opportunity to nourish a collective, Catholic culture in large-scale works that sought to be both didactic and harmonious.

As the dissertation will attest, I found that Clark was both right and wrong. He largely ignored the ties between the decorative and both progressive and reactionary politics, and barely alluded to the expressive theories that underpinned the fascination with the decorative. It was these theories—particularly Charles Henry’s psychophysical, “scientific” aesthetic—that encouraged artists to view form, sometimes in quite literal ways, as a social force. My case studies aim to complicate the enduring association of the decorative with an empty visual harmony. Rather than divesting art of its social character, decorative aesthetics signaled an attempt (albeit fraught) to find an integral role for visual form in social and ideological engagement. Yet Clark was correct in highlighting the ultimate difficulty “of soldering together the aesthetic and the social.” The more invested they became in politics, the more my selected critics and artists felt the need to supplement the action of decorative form, whether through naturalistic representation or institutional reforms.

CHAPTER 2

Decorative Aesthetics and the Search for a Modern Morality

In many ways the gulf between painter Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes and poster designer Jules Chéret could not be wider. Puvis was celebrated by figures across the political spectrum for having revived the elevated tradition of history painting, above all in monumental ensembles for civic institutions like the Pantheon, Paris's Hôtel de Ville, the Sorbonne, and provincial museums in Amiens and Lyon. Works like *Le Bois sacré cher aux arts et aux muses* (*The Sacred Wood Dear to the Arts and Muses*, 1884) (Figure 2.1) were seen as bringing together history painting's edificatory function with its fundamental, and too often forgotten, purpose as decoration.¹ Their muted colors and matte, sometimes scumbled, surface deferred to the wall and surrounding architecture, endowing their subject matter with a transcendent, elusive reality: simultaneously *here* and *elsewhere*. Honoring the artist after his death, critic and arts administrator Roger Marx noted that it was mural painting's "privilege to steal us away from ourselves, away from the present, *anywhere out of the world*; from it we can still learn to scorn the ephemeral, and hope for a temporary respite from fever and anguish."²

¹ This work was later joined by *La Vision Antique* (*Antique Vision*, 1885) and *L'Inspiration Chrétienne* (*Christian Inspiration*, 1886).

² In this 1899 homage to Puvis, Roger Marx offered a summation of the painter's reception and significance. Like many others, he emphasized the way in which mural painting, and Puvis's decorative works in particular, offered an alternative to the troubled, ephemeral present: "C'est son privilège de nous ravir à nous-même, de nous entraîner hors du temps présent, *any where out of the world*; d'elle encore on peut apprendre le mépris de l'éphémère et espérer une passagère trêve à la fièvre et à l'angoisse. Ainsi, à

If Puvis's work seemed to have been "completed [...] far from the whirlwind of human affairs [and] the disease of modern neurasthenia," Chéret's participated fully in that very context.³ His ephemeral color posters—a commercial genre for which, in France, he was largely responsible—sold an endlessly changing array of products through vivid, emphatic forms and eroticized imagery (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3 for examples). They provided multiple forms of stimulation, whether the attraction of commodities, sex, or color, thus epitomizing "the accelerated pace and sensual distractions of modern existence" that were associated with the neurasthenic condition.⁴ And if Puvis's work drew on the venerable tradition of decorative history painting, Chéret's evoked a tradition that had been framed as its antithesis since the time of Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne: the Rococo, whose sensual pleasures were divested—according to La Font—of any moral message.⁵ In 1896 the Catholic critic Maurice Talmeyr used the poster to characterize and indict the modern, futile ephemerality of his time: "the poster is the art, and almost the

l'expiration de ce siècle, tourmenté, inquiet, plus d'un s'en vient oublier auprès de *L'Enfance de sainte Geneviève*, auprès de *L'Été*, le malaise qui nous opprime.

La paix souriante de l'esprit, la grâce heureuse d'un songe durable, tels sont les bienfaits que dispense libéralement l'œuvre de Puvis de Chavannes. On la pressent accomplie dans la retraite, loin du tourbillon des affaires humaines et des orages de la vie; la contagion de la moderne neurasthénie ne l'a pas désenchantée; saine et planante elle oppose au pessimisme ambiant la réconfortante vision d'un monde autre, meilleur, où se meuvent des êtres qui nous ressemblent comme des frères." Roger Marx, "Puvis de Chavannes," *Revue encyclopédique* 9, no. 329 (December 23, 1899): 1077. Margaret Werth has examined the prevalence of this interpretation in the reception of Puvis's work, though she also highlighted the extent to which it was haunted by the perceived loss or emptiness of this ideal. Margaret Werth, "Idyll of the Living Dead: Puvis de Chavannes," in *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 23-39 in particular.

³ See previous footnote.

⁴ Christopher E. Forth, "Neurasthenia and Manhood in Fin-de-Siècle France," in *Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War*, ed. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter (Amsterdam: New York, NY: Rodopi, 2001), 331. See also Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 77-9.

⁵ La Font's critique of his society's neglect of history painting and its elevating moral messages is analyzed in Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). See the introduction and Chapter 4, in particular. There is also a brief overview in Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*: 207-8.

only art, of this age of fever and laughter, of struggle, of ruin, of electricity and oblivion.”⁶ He argued that it “is not, and cannot be, moral.”⁷

In this light, the artists appear as the separate halves of art that Baudelaire suggested must be synthesized in “Le peintre de la vie moderne” (“The Painter of Modern Life,” 1863): “Modernity, it is the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent; half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable.”⁸ Talmeyr’s essay revolved around an opposition between an ephemeral modernity, embodied by the poster, and the permanence of the monument. Yet the fin-de-siècle was precisely the moment when such hierarchies were being challenged. Talmeyr himself concluded that “[v]iewed from a certain height, the eternal and the ephemeral are no longer distinguishable, and in the infinite, stone and paper are all one.”⁹ He nevertheless believed that modernity had accelerated this process, rendering the stone of the monument as transient as paper. The

⁶ “[L]’affiche est l’art, et presque le seul art, de cet âge de fièvre et de rire, de lutte, de ruine, d’électricité et d’oubli.” “Futility” was also one of the words Talmeyr used to describe the poster. Maurice Talmeyr, “L’âge de l’affiche,” in *La cité du sang: Tableaux du siècle passé* (Paris: Perrin, 1901), 277 and 288. The essay originally appeared as “L’âge de l’affiche,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 137 (September 1, 1896). Talmeyr was a Catholic novelist and critic (and future anti-Dreyfusard and later supporter of the Action Française) who contributed to a wide range of newspapers and journals, particularly the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The Bibliothèque nationale de France’s catalogue identifies Maurice Talmeyr as the pseudonym for Marie-Justin-Maurice Coste, based largely on an obituary by the Abbot A. Mathet: “Maurice Talmeyr,” *La Croix*, no. 14935 (November 4, 1931). Mathet identified Talmeyr as a promoter of social order in the face of the period’s anarchic tendencies.

⁷ Talmeyr saw the poster medium, aesthetic, and contents as, like all art worthy of the name, the logical manifestation of its context and purpose. Thus “l’affiche, en raison même de cette logique, de cette harmonie entre le principe et son but, n’est pas, et ne peut pas être morale.” “L’âge de l’affiche,” 276.

⁸ “La modernité, c’est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l’art, dont l’autre moitié est l’éternel et l’immuable.” Charles Baudelaire, *Le peintre de la vie moderne*, ed. Silvia Acierno and Julio Baquero Cruz (Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2009). 20.

⁹ Talmeyr associated this leveling with the passage of time, as the context of the phrase makes clear: “Il n[e] restera rien [de l’affiche]? Sans aucun doute ! Mais que restera-t-il aussi un jour des plus indestructibles pyramides ? Vus d’une certaine hauteur, l’éternel et l’éphémère ne se distinguent plus, et la pierre et le papier se confondent dans l’infini.” His conclusion both undermined and affirmed the stark distinction he outlined between the poster and the monument. It implied that time rendered these distinctions meaningless, but also suggested that this conclusion itself was tied to modernity. Talmeyr, “L’âge de l’affiche,” 288.

radical urban transformations of Haussmannization, which continued under the Third Republic, provided the physical and commercial circumstances conducive to the poster's triumph, which flourished on the new boulevards and the palisades of construction sites.¹⁰ In this context, the hierarchical height separating Puvis and Chéret was converted into a horizontal spectrum that emphasized continuity rather than rupture. Their work was often reviewed by the same critics, who used similar frameworks—notably of decoration, suggestion, and individualized contemplation—for both artists.¹¹

Moreover, as Baudelaire's text argued, the apparent gulf between the contingent and the immutable had to be bridged. If it were not, the modern period risked losing the significance and vitality that had characterized past art.¹² As Margaret Werth has highlighted, the vision of art epitomized in Puvis's decorative paintings—art as a refuge from modern life—was haunted by a sense that it was sterile and ultimately deadly.¹³ Could it be made to speak more directly to the present, and to its new publics? This was what Chéret's art seemed to offer: it had a joyous energy, and by the 1890s critics were

¹⁰ Both H. Hazel Hahn and Karen L. Carter have highlighted the inextricability of Parisian modernity, particularly in terms of the physical characteristics of its renovated urban fabric, and the poster's success. Hahn also traces the connection between urban modernity and publicity (a more general category that encompassed the poster) back to the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Karen L. Carter, "The Spectatorship of the *Affiche Illustrée* and the Modern City of Paris, 1880-1900," *Journal of Design History* 25, no. 1 (March 2012): 12-13. H. Hazel Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), particularly chapters 4, 6 and 9.

¹¹ Carter argues that, by the fin-de-siècle, commentary on posters had shifted from accounts of collective reading/viewing to focus on individual reception, a shift remarked upon by some of the critics themselves. Carter, "The Spectatorship of the *Affiche Illustrée* and the Modern City of Paris, 1880-1900," 12-17. Both Werth and Shaw have pointed to the way critics tended to frame their accounts of Puvis's painting in terms of individual viewing, as well as to the widespread characterization of Puvis's oeuvre in terms of reverie and dream (Shaw in particular saw dream as the defining framework for the painter's reception). These same themes and frameworks are found in discussions of Chéret, including those of Roger Marx, discussed in this chapter.

¹² "En [...] supprimant [la modernité], vous tombez forcément dans le vide d'une beauté abstraite et indéfinissable [...] [P]our que toute *modernité* soit digne de devenir antiquité, il faut que la beauté mystérieuse que la vie humaine y met involontairement en ait été extraite." Baudelaire, *Le peintre de la vie moderne*: 20.

¹³ Werth, "Idyll of the Living Dead: Puvis de Chavannes," 23-39 in particular.

hailing commercial posters for transforming the street into an open-air exhibition or museum, accessible to everyone.¹⁴ But once elevated as an art form, commercial posters became highly visible symbols of the possibilities, for good or for ill, opened up by the liberal economic and media policies initiated under the Third Republic, and by democracy and capitalist modernity *tout court*. Did Chéret's frolicking figures have any greater purpose or meaning than the visual seduction of the consumer? Would his art be able to provide a meaningful perspective on modernity, revealing the essence of modern existence as Baudelaire had suggested a painting of modern life should do? These questions seemed all the more pressing in a period in which new conceptions of social solidarity—and the role that art might play in that solidarity—were emerging.

In the 1890s, supporters of Puvis and Chéret provided some answers to these questions, as they attempted to infuse each artist's aesthetic with elements of its (apparent) temporal antithesis. One of Puvis's decorations was transformed into a poster, while Chéret's work was promoted as the renewal of a French decorative tradition, and thus appropriate not just to the street but also to civic and private decorative cycles. This chapter is about the hopes, successes and failures of these attempts.

¹⁴ For example, an anonymous chronicler in *Le Temps* wrote that "Chéret aura des successeurs qui [...] feront de nos rues un véritable musée. L'affiche illustrée aura remplacé, comme ornement des murailles, la fresque des beaux jours de la Renaissance. Ce sera une sorte de musée populaire où l'art, l'industrie et la réclame se tiendront étroitement: utile dulci." "Les Affiches Estampes," *Le Temps*, no. 9132 (May 3, 1886). This kind of observation was so common in fin-de-siècle poster reception that it provided the name for a recent exhibition/catalogue: Marie-Jeanne Geyer and Thierry Laps, *Le Salon de la rue: L'affiche illustrée de 1890 à 1910* (Strasbourg: Éditions des Musées de Strasbourg, 2007).

Modernity, Solidarity, and (Im)morality

Talmeyr's attack on the poster and its historical moment as fundamentally immoral can only be fully understood when placed in the context of a wider debate about morality under the Third Republic, driven by the secularization of French primary schools and the consequent replacement of religious instruction with the promotion of an increasingly secular morality (*morale laïque*). This debate, in turn, was tightly entwined with arguments about the nature of solidarity. At the heart of both was a conflict over the significance of individuality and its role in social unity. As I will discuss more fully later in the chapter, one of Talmeyr's primary critiques of the poster was its supposed promotion of individualism. Marcus Verhagen has interpreted Talmeyr's preoccupation with individualism as one symptom/source of his fears about the economic and social instability ushered in by liberal capitalism.¹⁵ But I would like to recuperate the extent to which Talmeyr's argument about individualism lay at the heart of the matter, for he saw it as the foundation of central, detestable features of modern life—whether capitalism, democracy, or the looming menace of revolution. According to Talmeyr, all of these forces eroded morality, which was ultimately a question of the relationship between the individual self and society.

Ferdinand Brunetière

The reasoning behind Talmeyr's assertions becomes clearer when his text is compared with the writings of Ferdinand Brunetière, a literary critic, academician and director of

¹⁵ Marcus Verhagen, "The Poster in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris: 'That Mobile and Degenerate Art'," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 116.

the influential *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the journal in which Talmeyr's condemnation of the poster appeared.¹⁶ There are a number of similarities, in particular, between Talmeyr's themes and an earlier, 1892 article by Brunetière protesting a proposed commemoration of Baudelaire (in the form of a public statue).¹⁷ Jennifer Shaw has analyzed this text for its critique of Baudelaire as the originator of Symbolism, which Brunetière sought to eradicate from contemporary literature and from the reception of Puvis's painting.¹⁸ She has focused on Brunetière's denunciation of the suggestive—as opposed to explicit and/or idealist—character of Symbolist form and exegesis, seeing in it an ultimately failed attempt to ward off the modernist threat to stable signification and subjectivity.¹⁹

For my purposes, Brunetière's argument is most interesting for his contention that Symbolism had not so much destabilized as abandoned meaning for pure form and

¹⁶ Brunetière was elected to the French Academy on June 8, 1893, beating out Émile Zola. Having written and served as copy editor for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* since the 1870s, he became its director in December 1893-January 1894.

¹⁷ Ferdinand Brunetière, "La statue de Baudelaire," in *Nouveaux essais sur la littérature contemporaine* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1895). The essay first appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (September 1, 1892). For the debate set off by this article, see *La querelle de la statue de Baudelaire, août-décembre 1892*, ed. André Guyaux, *Mémoire de la critique* (Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007).

¹⁸ It was in reading Shaw's analysis of Brunetière in relation to Puvis that I first noticed the similarities with Talmeyr's arguments. Jennifer L. Shaw, *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002). 29-31 and 185-198. See also her "The Wandering Gaze: Modernism, Subjectivity and the Art of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes," in *Moving Forward, Holding Fast: The Dynamics of Nineteenth-Century French Culture*, ed. Barbara Cooper and Mary Donaldson-Evans (1997), particularly 183-186. She analyzes Brunetière's praise of Puvis as an ultimately ineffective defense against a Symbolist interpretation—with its emphasis on subjective dream as opposed to a fixed moral message—of the artist's oeuvre. Though Werth has also emphasized instability in the reception of Puvis's work, she insisted much more than Shaw on the order and clarity associated with his oeuvre: "Puvis had avoided the taint of extravagance, exoticism, or perversity: he was a 'dreamer'—his work allowing the dream to proceed unhindered by distractions and futilities—but only once this word had been cleansed of all that was vague or unclear." Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley University of California Press, 2002). 27.

¹⁹ "Symbolism thus threatened to unseat both stable signification and the conception of subjectivity implicit in it—one in which the *moi* was whole, autonomous, and free from the influence of desire and the unconscious." Shaw, *Dream States*: 31.

sensation, thereby depriving art of its central role: giving meaning to life (ironically, very similar to Baudelaire's sense of art's purpose) and communicating it in a form that was legible to society as a whole.²⁰ He insisted that Baudelaire's poetry had disconnected art from life, placing beauty and talent in the service of artifice and individual predilection rather than of elevating nature and humanity.²¹ In Brunetiere's account, Baudelaire did little more than revel in his ability to orchestrate unusual combinations of forms/sensations, isolating his art and himself from the world. This respect for nothing but the individual self, the critic argued, was "the true definition of immorality," resulting in "the very negation of solidarity."²² Brunetiere's equation of egotism with immorality reveals the extent to which he saw morality as an essential element of social interdependence and unity, both of them predicated on collective meaning and communication.

With his use of the term "solidarity," Brunetiere invoked an ideal shared by a diverse spectrum of groups, whether Catholics, socialists, anarchists, or Republicans. Though the term had a longer history, by the end of the century it had come to broadly designate social interdependence, a combination of the legal and common understandings

²⁰ "Baudelaire, égaré par ce mépris transcendant du vulgaire qui a perdu tant d'artistes et tant d'écrivains, a voulu que l'art devint proprement un grimoire, dont la lecture ne fût permise qu'à de rares initiés, et d'ailleurs dont les caractères cabalistiques ne cacheraient ni n'exprimeraient rien." Brunetiere, "La statue de Baudelaire," 150.

²¹ Ibid., 148-50.

²² "L'une des pires conséquences qu'elles puissent entraîner, c'est, en isolant l'art, d'isoler aussi l'artiste, d'en faire pour lui-même une idole, et comme de l'enfermer dans le sanctuaire de son *moi*. [...] sous prétexte de développer dans le sens de ses aptitudes, il n'y a plus rien qu'il respecte ou qu'il épargne, s'il n'y a plus rien qu'il ne se subordonne, ce qui est, pour le dire en passant, la vraie définition de l'immoralité. [...] c'est la glorification de l'égoïsme, et par suite la négation même de la solidarité." Ibid., 150-51. With this characterization of the poet, Brunetiere followed in the footsteps of Paul Bourget, who had identified excessive individualism with decadence in his "Théorie de la décadence," a subset of an analysis of Baudelaire in an 1883 anthology of his essays based on articles published in *La Nouvelle Revue*. Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine: Baudelaire, M. Renan, Flaubert, M. Taine, Stendhal*, Seventh ed. (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1891). 24-29 in particular.

outlined in Émile Littré's 1873-4 dictionary: the first defined as an explicit "[c]ommitment in which people put themselves under obligation to one another, and each for all," and the second as "mutual responsibility established between two or more people."²³ Littré's definition emphasized the role of individuals in establishing solidarity, but it was increasingly used to describe a larger social unity (whether as an existing state of affairs or as an ideal) determined by forces outside the individual.²⁴ But while the term transcended ideological boundaries, its various proponents profoundly disagreed as to the source of collective unity. Brunetière (and Talmeyr) believed that solidarity was founded on morality, which entailed the subordination and sometimes near-dissolution of the self in favor of larger ideals: to "social or religious duty," as Talmeyr would explain.²⁵ Thus Brunetière's demonization of individualism, which was even more pronounced in a speech entitled *The Renaissance of Idealism*: "individualism, [...] it is the cult of the self, it is egotism, it is the resources and means of civilization taken from the community to

²³ "Engagement par lequel des personnes s'obligent les unes pour les autres, et chacune pour tous. [...] responsabilité mutuelle qui s'établit entre deux ou plusieurs personnes." Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Paris: L. Hachette, 1873-4). 1968. Republican politician Léon Bourgeois referred to the latter definition in the preface of his influential treatise on the concept and its potential applications, using it to highlight the absence of a rigorous theory of solidarity. Léon Bourgeois, *Solidarité* (Paris: A. Colin, 1896). 6. See my later discussion of Bourgeois and Solidarism.

²⁴ Both Werth and Shaw have highlighted the importance of the discourse on social unity/solidarity, particularly as it pertained to decorative painting. Their primary discussions of this theme can be found in Werth, *The Joy of Life*: 49-58; Shaw, *Dream States*: 62-64. Note that they return to this issue throughout their analyses of Puvis (see in particular Shaw's discussion of Puvis's murals for the Hôtel de Ville in chapter five of her book). Debora Silverman and Rosalind Williams (both focused on the decorative arts rather than decorative painting) have tied the theme of social unity more specifically to political debates around solidarity, notably in terms of the Republican program known as "Solidarism" (which will be discussed below). Williams even proposed, consciously echoing the fin-de-siècle Solidarists, the concept of solidarity as a way to transcend consumerist social models. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*: 43-51; Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). 269-70 and 403-5 in particular. See also discussions of Solidarism in French scholarship on "art social": for example, Catherine Meneux, "Le Solidarisme et l'art selon Roger Marx," in *Regards de critique d'art: Autour de Roger Marx (1858-1913)*, ed. Catherine Meneux (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008).

²⁵ See later discussion, and footnote 76.

become nothing but the servants of our instincts and appetites, of our whims and fantasies.”²⁶

For Brunetière, individualism was the greatest evil of his time because it elevated the immediate, and selfish, material benefits demanded by individual interest over the higher, collective ideals needed to sustain solidarity. He accused liberalism of elevating individual interest as its core principle, a position epitomized in Yves Guyot’s 1896 *La morale de la concurrence*.²⁷ Guyot, an influential Republican politician and writer, argued that economic competition was the only effective moral force, because only competition harnessed the “objective reality” of individual interests for altruistic, social purposes.²⁸ This was exactly the kind of attitude, in which base material reality (“nature”) was accepted rather than challenged, that Brunetière abhorred. In his conference he displayed more sympathy for socialism, due to what he perceived to be its idealist foundations.²⁹ He argued that socialism could only be combatted with an equally

²⁶ “[L]’individualisme, [...] c’est le culte de soi, c’est l’égoïsme, ce sont les ressources et les moyens de la civilisation détournés de l’usage de la communauté pour n’être plus que les serviteurs de nos instincts ou de nos appétits, de nos caprices ou de nos fantaisies.” Ferdinand Brunetière, *La renaissance de l’idéalisme* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et C^{ie}, 1896). 82. The lecture was given at Besançon on February 2, 1896.

²⁷ Brunetière made explicit reference to Guyot several times in the published version of the lecture, once in the preface and also in two extended footnotes. Elsewhere, the phrase “morale de la concurrence” appears to be short-hand for Guyot’s ideas. *Ibid.*, x, 38, 69, 72-74 and 78-79. See also “L’idée de la solidarité,” in *Discours de combat: Nouvelle série* (Paris: Perrin et C^{ie}, 1904), 68.

²⁸ In introducing his identification of morality with competition, Guyot argued that it was based on observable reality: “Au lieu de croire qu’on peut forger le ressort moral avec des mots vides, des conceptions subjectives, je soutiens qu’il a pris place dans la civilisation moderne depuis un siècle et demi à peu près. Bien plus. Il agit tous les jours avec une remarquable puissance, si méconnu qu’il soit. Il a ce qui a manqué à tous les ressorts métaphysiques et religieux, une sanction implacable et immédiate qui frappe tous ceux qui veulent s’y dérober. Il a une réalité objective.” Yves Guyot, *La morale de la concurrence* (Paris: Armand Colin et C^{ie}, 1896). 8.

²⁹ Brunetière said of socialism, “je regrette qu’un mot [...] qu’on n’avait inventé que pour être l’antithèse du mot égoïsme et le synonyme de solidarité, en soit venu jusqu’à signifier que haine et misérable envie [...] Mais [...] s’il se dissimule sous son nom plus d’un sentiment méprisable, la vraie force du socialisme, qui la rend redoutable, et dont nous ne saurions triompher qu’en lui opposant une force de la même nature, c’est d’être un idéalisme.” He pointed to the emergence of a Catholic socialism as proof of this idealism, and also noted with glee, in a footnote to the published version of the lecture, Yves Guyot’s disapproval of

powerful, anti-naturalist ideal, enforced by a strong institutional authority.³⁰ Despite the moderate Republicanism of his early career, Brunetière increasingly identified this ideal and authority with the Catholic Church: only the Church, he concluded, possessed the necessary will and institutional clout to tear man away from his natural instincts, ensuring morality, humanity and civilization through a belief in God and the afterlife. According to Brunetière, man and society should not accept nature, but rather attempt to transcend it by striving toward an ideal.³¹

Brunetière, Puvis de Chavannes and the Ideal of Decorative Painting

Art, he thought, should do the same. Like so many of his compatriots, Brunetière was an ardent admirer of Puvis. But while some celebrated the artist for the suggestive sensuality and ineffability of his painting (as Shaw has highlighted), Brunetière was among those who instead saw the value of his work in its idealist transcendence of form.³² He promoted this interpretation of Puvis's art at a January 1895 banquet given in honor of the painter by the distinctly Symbolist journal *La Plume*, where, to the dismay of the organizers, he had insisted on speaking.³³ Presenting Puvis's oeuvre as an antidote to both naturalism and Symbolism, the critic emphasized how the artist had, through

the relatively appreciative view of socialism contained therein. Brunetière, *La renaissance de l'idéalisme*: 71-76 and 78-81.

³⁰ See previous footnote and the next.

³¹ “[L]’homme n’existe vraiment en tant qu’homme et ne se perfectionne qu’exactement dans la mesure où il réussit à se libérer de la nature elle-même; pareillement, l’objet de l’institution sociale est de réparer les maux qui semblent résulter de son fonctionnement [le fonctionnement de la société], et de ne jamais consentir à les reconnaître comme irrémédiables.” Brunetière, *La renaissance de l'idéalisme*: 83.

³² See footnote 18.

³³ Brunetière's speech was reproduced in “Le Banquet,” *La Plume: Littéraire, artistique, et sociale*, no. 138 (January 15, 1895): 49-50. Shaw has analyzed this event in the light of Brunetière's critique of Baudelaire and the Symbolist movement. Shaw, *Dream States*: 190-96.

simplification, subordinated the materiality of nature and form to “ideas.”³⁴ This speech, together with that on “The Renaissance of Idealism,” indicates the extent to which Brunetière viewed morality and solidarity as arising out of ideas that drew on the senses but ultimately addressed the mind. The communication necessary to collectivity was, for him, a matter of intellectual purification, the strength of Puvis’s works derived not so much through his study of nature as from:

interior meditation, and the harmony of the details with the idea that the painter had formed of the ensemble and of the poetic signification of the work. And see the results! [...] from the midst of this play of color—which is more than the joy, it is the sensual pleasure, of the eyes—he has extracted painting’s ideal element. [...] the painter must detect something hidden, intimate, secret [ultérieur] [in things], something that the average person [le vulgaire] has not seen.³⁵

In this passage and elsewhere, Brunetière identified the qualities associated with decorative painting—simplifications, the subordination of details to the ensemble, the de-emphasis of color, modeling and painterly impasto in favor of matte, flat surfaces—as the means by which Puvis “spiritualized” the material and made it an appropriate vehicle for the ideal.³⁶ In *Le Bois sacré* (Figure 2.1), for example, these qualities combine with the

³⁴ “La forme et la couleur en ont aussitôt pris dans votre œuvre une signification et une portée nouvelles. Vous ne leur avez point attribué de valeur ‘symbolique’; vous n’avez point essayé de leur faire parler une langue dont elles ne sont point l’alphabet; vous n’avez point vu d’énigme dans le bleu, ni cherché de mystère dans le rouge. Mais si la couleur et la forme, en raison même du pouvoir de séduction qu’elles exercent sur nos sens, ont quelque chose de trop matériel parfois, vous les avez ‘spiritualisées.’ En subordonnant la signification de la forme aux exigences de la pensée, vous l’avez simplifiée. [...] vous avez demandé à la nature le secret des harmonies enchanteresses qu’elle compose avec des éléments quelquefois si grossiers; vous vous en êtes rendu pleinement maître; et quand vous l’avez été, vous l’avez réduite au rôle d’interprète de l’idéal que vous trouviez en vous. “Le Banquet,” 49.

³⁵ “à la méditation intérieure, et à l’harmonie des détails avec l’idée que le peintre s’était formée de l’ensemble et de la signification poétique de son sujet. [...] et, du milieu de ces jeux de couleurs qui sont plus que la joie, qui sont la volupté des yeux, il en a dégagé l’élément idéal de la peinture. [...] pour admirer selon le mot de Pascal ces ‘imitations de choses dont nous n’admirons pas les originaux,’ il faut que la pensée de l’artiste ait démêlé en elles quelque chose de caché, d’intime, et d’ultérieur, que n’y discernait pas le regard du vulgaire.” Brunetière, *La renaissance de l’idéalisme*: 65-66.

³⁶ Brunetière himself implicitly associated this sense of a deeper meaning with the kind of monumental (whether in size or ambition) painting associated with decoration: “je puis lui [Puvis] appliquer un mot d’un autre peintre et dire à son propos que, si la ‘pensée, quand elle prétend s’introduire dans les petites

arrangement of the figures and landscape to project a nature that is always structured and mediated by the artist's intellect and art, just as the muses and the allegories of the arts structure and mediate the landscape. The figures form a frieze that gently undulates in height and depth within the scene; clumps of flowers and bushes create similarly alternating patterns in the landscape, patterns that recall the decoration's tapestry-like border yet are also more natural in that they are more irregular. The landscape cradles the figures and responds to their bodies: this aspect is particularly visible in the way the reflections in the lake echo the slight curve of the flying muses, or the alignment of the reclining muse with the lakeshore. The allegories of the arts are framed by a pine tree and an element of classical architecture, as if to make explicit the artist's ability, and duty, to detect underlying, ideal forms in nature and render them in art. Similarly, the scumbling and often rough modeling of the figures' bodies evokes stone as much as it does flesh, suggesting their enduring, rather than warm, living, character, and their gestures are similarly ponderous. They are only prevented from entirely resembling sculpture by the contrast between this rougher handling and the treatment of the architecture and bench upon which one of the allegories is seated. It was through such choices, Brunetière evidently believed, that Puvis had managed to emphasize the ideal even in a medium utterly implicated in the material, sensual attractions of form and color.³⁷

toiles, les rapetisse,' et en fait des anecdotes plus ou moins habilement coloriées, il n'y a pas de grande peinture sans pensée, j'entends sans quelque chose qui dépasse l'imitation de la nature et de l'histoire et qui se les subordonne." Ibid., 63.

³⁷ It was in these terms that Brunetière cited Puvis as an example of the rebirth of idealism: "dans tous les arts, même dans ceux dont les moyens, dont les procédés demeurent comme engagés encore dans la matière et ne sauraient jamais s'en affranchir—que serait-ce en effet que la peinture, si les séductions de la forme et de la couleur n'en étaient pas le premier attrait?—même en peinture, nous assistons à une renaissance de l'idéalisme." Ibid., 67.

A Natural, Secular Morality?

If Brunetière was so emphatic in his defense of an ideal—whether morality, solidarity, or the values embodied in Puvis’s allegories—that transcended nature and the individual, it was because he felt that this ideal was under threat in contemporary French society.

Despite what Brunetière had to say about socialism’s idealist underpinnings, socialists, anarcho-communists and even Republicans were emphasizing the biological, evolutionary foundations of solidarity.³⁸ Depending on their political convictions, these groups blamed the rigid hierarchies of monarchy or the Church—so admired by Talmeyr and Brunetière—for preventing individuals, and thus society, from developing to their fullest potential, and/or of corrupting humanity’s naturally collective impulses. In the mid-nineties, France’s Prime Minister, Léon Bourgeois, proposed a legislative program—progressive taxation, welfare assistance, free public education, and other social programs—based on this notion of an underlying, natural solidarity. This acceptance of the natural would have sufficed to incense Brunetière, but Bourgeois also posed his program, which was soon labeled “Solidarism,” in moral terms: it was, he argued, the most rational, enlightened—and thus modern—form of morality to date, surpassing previous iterations like Christian charity and Republican fraternity.³⁹

Brunetière, for his part, increasingly looked to Catholicism for a morality that would suppress individualism, using his directorship of the traditionally moderate *Revue des Deux Mondes* to wage a campaign against science, intellectuals, Dreyfusards, and

³⁸ See, for example, Bourgeois, *Solidarité*: 52-58. See also my discussion of anarcho-communist conceptions of collectivity in the next chapter.

³⁹ See in particular *ibid.*, 73-79 and 154-56. Bourgeois believed that his doctrine would raise the (scientifically demonstrated) “fact” of natural solidarity to the level of consciousness, by endowing it with a theory and practical applications, as well as by highlighting the inextricability of the moral and the social.

other elements associated with liberal Republicanism.⁴⁰ Later, in an oration before students at Toulouse's Université Catholique, he would argue that Solidarism was nothing more than Guyot's morality of self-interest and competition in a gentler disguise, and thus not morality at all.⁴¹ For Brunetière, solidarity emerged only when the Christian obligations of charity and fraternity, backed by the *eternal* spiritual authority of God and the Church, led individuals to subordinate their own interest to that of their fellows and the community. The State, with its "contingent and changing" needs, could not hope to serve as a guarantor of morality.⁴²

⁴⁰ Venita Datta has examined Brunetière's attack on individualism in the context of his "Après le procès," which was published on March 15, 1898 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. In this article Brunetière contended that, innocent or not, Alfred Dreyfus had been rightly sacrificed in the interest of social solidarity. Datta has analyzed the article, the most cited of the Affair, as a revealing episode in the ongoing discourses on individualism and solidarity. Brunetière's article prompted the sociologist Émile Durkheim to respond by distinguishing respect for the human individual (and thus for humanity in general) from the type of egotistical individualism condemned by Brunetière. He thus framed individualism as the foundation for, rather than the enemy of, solidarity. Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). 190-195.

⁴¹ In this speech Brunetière made no mention of Guyot, but his use of the phrase "morale de la concurrence" invoked his ideas. As I have already indicated, Brunetière believed that that humanity's social, moral character distinguished it from, rather than assimilated it with, the natural, animal realm. He also highlighted the problematic leap that Solidarism made between a natural fact and a legal obligation enforced by the State; the Solidarists' unease over this transfer had led them to "parle[r] d'une Solidarité à trois degrés, d'abord fatale et automatique, puis quasi volontaire, et enfin tout à fait libre, consentie et voulue. Mais comment libre, et comment consentie? Je conçois qu'un acte originairement libre se transforme en un acte automatique et quasi fatal: c'est un effet de l'habitude, si ce n'en est même la définition. Mais de quelle manière un acte automatique—celui de respirer, par exemple, ou tout autre du même genre—se transformerait-il en un acte libre? Il y a contradiction. Ni en raison, ni en fait, ce qui est solidaire ne saurait être libre; et ce qu'on nous dissimule ici sous le nom de morale de la solidarité, c'est tout simplement la morale de l'intérêt." Brunetière, "L'idée de la solidarité," 59, 67-69, 76-78 and 81. The conference took place on December 16, 1900. Blais analyzes its arguments, as well as the Solidarists' own attempts to deal with the potential contradiction of an automatic solidarity with individual liberty—a conflict exacerbated by their desire to reaffirm the importance of the individual in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair (and Brunetière's "Après le procès"). Marie-Claude Blais, *La solidarité: Histoire d'une idée*, Bibliothèque des idées (Paris: Gallimard, 2007). 242-277.

⁴² "[I] nous faut entendre le mot de Solidarité comme synonyme de Nécessité. Nous sommes entravés, ligotés, si je l'ose dire, emprisonnés dans un réseau de causes et d'effets que nous ne pouvons rompre. Economiques, civiles, politiques, les lois sociales deviennent des 'lois naturelles,' des lois d'airain, comme on l'a dit, et, sous le nom de Solidarité, je ne vois pas de compression ou de tyrannie qu'à un moment donné de l'histoire on ne puisse justifier [...] comment, et par quel prodige, de la Solidarité définie par ses analogies avec la dépendance organique et la relativité naturelle, comment, Messieurs, extraira-t-on, si je l'ose dire, de la morale? Car c'est bien là, n'est-ce pas, que l'on en veut venir? Et ce n'est pas seulement comme fait, c'est comme loi de la conduite et de l'action que l'on oppose la Solidarité à la Liberté, à

But Bourgeois had his own notion of how to provide society with a sense of the eternal: through nature and through art. While Brunetière emphasized the way Puvis's transcendence of the sensual allowed the viewer to access an eternal ideal, Bourgeois emphasized the sensual, emotional pull of art as the means by which transcendence was accomplished. In a speech made at the closing of the Congrès international de l'éducation sociale, held in Paris in the context of the Exposition universelle of 1900, Bourgeois enjured his audience (addressing artists directly at one point) thus:

Do not consider beauty as a personal possession that one has the right to cultivate for oneself or a select few, like a treasure that one can selfishly and jealously guard for oneself at home [dans son coin], to passionately enjoy in individual contemplation and ecstasy [...] Beauty, true beauty, which is only the material [sensible] manifestation, in an object, of universal harmony, is truly for everyone. [...] Ah, [...] it would be the crowning achievement of our endeavor if, in this great, mutual and united association, in which we glimpse the elements of future society, to the shared goal of material and mental well-being is finally added the shared experience [émotion] of beauty: if all men can at last experience that emotion we have all felt at one time or another before a man-made masterpiece or a wonder of the earth, an emotion that allows us to suddenly forget all suffering and misery, that renders the ideal palpable [sensible] and puts our poor self, limited and mortal, in contact for one brief moment with the eternal and the infinite.⁴³

l'Égalité, à la Fraternité, pour ne rien dire encore de la Charité. Les Solidaristes en conviennent, et c'est sur ce point qu'ils font porter leur principal effort [...] mais je dis: 'Par quel moyen parviendrait-on à faire de l'État et de ses besoins, contingents et changeants, la règle du devoir, et le principe de la morale?'" Here Brunetière, having witnessed the turbulence of the Dreyfus Affair (which led him to co-found the anti-Dreyfusard and nationalist-leaning Ligue de la Patrie Française, though he later withdrew his membership), implicitly indicted the State's democratic character. Brunetière, "L'idée de la solidarité," 64-67.

⁴³ "Ne considérez pas la beauté comme un bien personnel qu'on ait le droit de cultiver pour soi-même et pour quelques privilégiés, comme un trésor que l'on puisse emporter, jalousement et égoïstement, avec soi, dans son coin, pour en jouir passionnément dans le recueillement et dans l'extase individuels... Le beau, le vrai beau, qui n'est que la manifestation sensible dans un objet de l'harmonie universelle, est vraiment pour tout le monde. [...] Ah, [...] quel couronnement véritable de l'œuvre entreprise si, dans cette grande association mutuelle et solidaire où nous apercevons les traits de la société de demain, à la volonté commune du bien matériel et moral vient s'ajouter enfin l'émotion commune devant la beauté, si tous les hommes peuvent enfin la connaître, cette émotion que nous avons ressentie à quelque heure choisie, devant un chef d'œuvre de l'art humain ou devant un grand spectacle de la terre, qui fait oublier d'un coup toute souffrance et toute misère, qui rend sensible l'idéal et met notre pauvre moi, limité et périssable, en communication un instant avec l'éternel et avec l'infini." Reproduced in Marc Sorlot, *Léon Bourgeois, 1851-1925: Un moraliste en politique* (Paris: B. Leprince, 2005). 347.

In this passage the politician identified beauty as the means by which men could become aware, through their own senses, of an eternal principle of universal harmony. As a panacea for suffering and as an agent for solidarity, beauty would cement the collectivity promoted by other, more basic forms of well-being. Even further, beauty appears in this text as a form of religion, putting men in contact with the eternal.⁴⁴ It was thus imperative, according to Bourgeois, that it be made available to all.

I will return to this emphasis on the eternal—as well as Bourgeois’s Solidarism—later in the chapter, in relation to Roger Marx’s promotion of the poster. But first I will explore the emphasis, also evident in Bourgeois’s discussion of art, on the sensual/emotional character of aesthetic experience. As I have already indicated, Brunetière saw nature and the senses, when not purified in favor of the ideal, as appealing to base self-interest. In this light, Bourgeois’s conception of art fit in well with Brunetière’s insistence on associating liberal Republicanism, whether that of Guyot or that of Bourgeois, with a doctrine of amoral (i.e. anti-social), self-interested competition.

If one element of fin-de-siècle visual culture were to be singled out for its association with all three of the individualist forces targeted by Brunetière—the liberal Third Republic, capitalist competition, and sensual address—it was certainly the poster. Monumental history painting of the kind practiced by Puvis had long been seen as symptomatic of the health of the government and the nation. But in the Third Republic, the new medium of the lithographic poster began to take on a similar significance: as a product of the government’s liberalization of the press and commerce, placed in the

⁴⁴ The emergence of a religious conception of art—the transfer of religious feeling from organized religion to aesthetic appreciation—is traced in the art criticism of this period in Nella Arambasin, *La conception du sacré dans la critique d’art en Europe entre 1880 et 1914* (Geneva: Droz, 1996).

public space of the street, the poster seemed like a referendum on the government's embrace of capitalism and democracy.⁴⁵ Chéret's colorful advertisements earned him a Legion of Honor in 1890 for his application of art to industry and commerce. Critics—many of whom had lobbied for that award—had already begun in the 1880s to marvel at both the vibrant contrasts and the suggestive, painterly subtlety Chéret achieved with the limited means imposed by the poster's commercial nature. They held that the poster was worthy of attention for more than its promotional efficacy, and the 1890s became, among other things, the decade of *affichomanie*.⁴⁶ "Poster mania" was characterized not only by the proliferation of commercial posters on the street and in public discourse, but also by specialized publications like *l'Estampe et l'affiche*, print publishers and dealers catering directly to collectors, and artists like Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Pierre Bonnard looking to benefit from the medium's new cachet. These efforts tended to reframe the poster as a work of art. Yet the somewhat paradoxical result was to make of the poster not only the purveyor of commodities but a commodity in and of itself.

Morality as Vitality: the Poster as a Source of Individual Morale

The seeds of *affichomanie* were sown by Huysmans, who first took note of Chéret's posters at the end of the 1870s. The novelist also established a sensation-oriented

⁴⁵ As Hahn's work demonstrates, much of the conditions for this emergence were established earlier; nevertheless, the July 1881 law on the freedom of the press diminished many of the administrative barriers and restrictions on bill posting, enabling the expansion of the press and an explosion in advertising. See, for example, Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity*: 155 and 183. Karen Carter argues that this exponential increase in commercial posters in the wake of the 1881 law de-politicized poster viewing: Carter, "The Spectatorship of the *Affiche Illustrée* and the Modern City of Paris, 1880-1900," 14-16. For an explanation and analysis of the law as entwining capitalism and democracy by aligning freedom of the press with a reduction in commercial regulation, see Claude Bellanger et al., eds., *Histoire générale de la presse française: De 1871 à 1940*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972), 7-23.

⁴⁶ *L'affichomanie*, (Paris: musée de l'Affiche, 1980).

framework for their reception: unimpressed, for example, by the “sickly pallor” of Puvis’s painting, Huysmans celebrated the commercial poster as a vibrant dose of energetic line and color.⁴⁷ This appreciation of the poster first appeared in his reviews of the Salons of 1879 and 1880, in which Huysmans presented Chéret’s “chromos” as a healthy, stimulating antidote to the “lugubrious” works dominating those exhibitions.⁴⁸ His 1880 text ended with this recommendation:

Homeopathically, I can only [...] advise those disgusted, like myself, by this insolent display of prints and canvases, to cleanse their eyes outside, through a prolonged stop in front of those palisades where Chéret’s astonishing fantasies burst forth, colored fantasies so energetically drawn and so vividly painted.⁴⁹

Huysmans, who so often condemned adulterated, muddied colors and oozing eruptions of paint (shades of Brunetière’s anti-materialism), seems to have reveled in Chéret’s flat, uniform expanses of contrasting colors.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Though he admired Puvis’s sincerity and independence, and viewed him with favor in relation to most Salon painters, Huysmans thought that the artist’s talent was wasted due to his adherence to a defunct genre and aesthetic ideal. For the description of “la malade pâleur” of Puvis’s *Pauvre pêcheur*, as well as other identifications of his work with the pale and sickly, see Huysmans, *Écrits sur l’art*, ed. Jérôme Picon (Paris: Flammarion, 2008). 54-55, 141, and 247.

⁴⁸ Huysmans briefly referenced Chéret in reviews of the official Salons of 1879, 1880 and 1881, which were all republished in *L’Art moderne* in 1883. These remarks were part and parcel of Huysmans’s general disdain for official art and its institutions, and his promotion of painting by the artists he designated “independents.” Huysmans’s first, 1879 reference to Chéret followed a discussion distinguishing these “independent” artists (now generally grouped under the term “Impressionists,” a label that Huysmans found problematic) from the majority of the official Salon submissions. The critic focused primarily on Edgar Degas, though he included a footnote with a longer list of independent artists, among them Camille Pissarro, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne and others. *Ibid.*, 49-51.

⁴⁹ “Homéopathiquement, je ne puis [...] que conseiller aux gens écœurés, comme moi, par cet insolent déballage de gravures et de toiles, de se débarbouiller les yeux au-dehors, par une station prolongée devant ces palissades où éclatent les étonnantes fantaisies de Chéret, ces fantaisies en couleurs si alertement dessinées et si vivement peintes.” In 1879, Huysmans placed a similar observation in the introduction to his Salon review: “Pour moi, j’aimerais mieux toutes les chambres de l’Exposition tapissées des chromos de Chéret ou de ces merveilleuses feuilles du Japon qui valent un franc la pièce, plutôt que de les voir tachetées ainsi par un amas de choses tristes. De l’art qui palpète et qui vive, pour Dieu!” *Ibid.*, 160 and 51-52.

⁵⁰ Jacques Dupont, “La couleur dans (presque) tous ses états,” in *Huysmans: Une esthétique de la décadence* (Geneva and Paris: Éditions Slatkine, 1987).

His celebration of the poster takes on more significance in light of Huysmans's 1884 novel *À rebours* (translated as *Against the grain* or *Against nature*), which recounted the efforts of Jean des Esseintes, the sole-surviving member of an aristocratic family, to create a retreat from the *ennui* and inanity of the metropolis. Parisian debauches having failed to assuage either his boredom or the increasing enervation and eventual lethargy of his senses (symptoms that bore a number of affinities with neurasthenia), des Esseintes sought out more refined pleasures in the isolation of a provincial home.⁵¹ His careful orchestration of sensation in this interior—through the choice of, for example, his servants' clothing, the color schemes in his rooms, and the texts and artworks to be enjoyed—avoided any evocation of the modern, instead seeking sensual refinement in fantasy or in the past. This episode is frequently cited as an example of a fin-de-siècle retreat into the interior, but what is less often recalled is how this plan backfires: des Esseintes suffers a return of his debilitating lassitude, and the novel ends as he reluctantly prepares to return to Paris's "communal life ["vie commune"]."⁵² His interior proved as noxious as his decadent Parisian lifestyle: his doctor's "verdict—confirmed, moreover, by all diagnosticians of neurosis—was that only distraction, amusement and joy could have an effect on [his] sickness, whose spiritual

⁵¹ For the association of des Esseintes with neurasthenia, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*: 77-79.

⁵² Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004). 240. The view of the fin-de-siècle as a time of interiorization is best represented by Silverman and Joyce Henri Robinson, though Silverman also suggested that the image of the interior as refuge was driven by its inability to truly serve as such: "[the overstimulated citizen] transported with him the propensity for animating the interior by that very same [overwrought] mechanism of the nerves." Nevertheless, this statement still highlighted modern stimulation as the root problem. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*: 79; Joyce Henri Robinson, "'Hi Honey, I'm Home': Weary (Neurasthenic) Businessmen and the Formulation of a Serenely Modern Aesthetic," in *What is Architecture?*, ed. Andrew Ballantyne (New York: Routledge, 2002). In a departure from this tendency, Rosalind Williams analyzed Huysmans's retreat to Fontenay as a failed attempt to escape the reifying logic of bourgeois culture. Williams, *Dream worlds*: 145-49.

element eluded the potent chemistry of medication.”⁵³ Des Esseintes wondered where he might find that joy, disgusted as he was by both the enfeebled, decadent aristocracy and the vulgar materialism of the bourgeoisie.

Yet outside the confines of the novel, his creator had suggested the poster might be a possible solution (or at least one of its elements). Though a later, more extensive, essay by Huysmans associated the poster with some of the neurasthenic pathologies haunting des Esseintes and his interior, it ultimately suggested that Chéret’s work provided a remedy for the excesses of not one but *two* kinds of Parisian modernity.⁵⁴ Huysmans opened the text by describing how Chéret’s posters alleviated the hyper-rational regularity of Haussmannian urbanization: “the sudden intrusion of their joy” disturbed the grey monotony of the city’s ‘rectilinear streets’ and façades, making up for the loss of its “intimate spaces [coins].”⁵⁵ Yet these colorful advertisements also took the sting out of another kind of modernity, the very modernity they so skillfully depicted: the feverish pace and “demented, nearly explosive joy” of Parisian pleasures.⁵⁶ “In distilling the essence of Paris,” Huysmans wrote, “[Chéret] abandons the vile dregs, leaves behind the elixir itself, so corrosive and bitter, gathering only its gaseous effervescence, the

⁵³ The doctor’s “verdict, d’ailleurs confirmé par l’avis de tous les nosographes de la névrose, était que la distraction, que l’amusement, que la joie, pouvaient seuls influencer sur cette maladie dont tout le côté spiritual échappait à la force chimique des remèdes.” Huysmans, *À rebours*: 240-41.

⁵⁴ For the pathological overtones of Huysmans’ later portrayal of Chéret’s work, see Karen L. Carter, “Joris-Karl Huysmans, A *Dénicheur* of Jules Chéret’s Posters,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 41, no. 1 & 2 (Fall-Winter 2012-2013): 130-33.

⁵⁵ “les ingénieurs ont démolis quelques maisons, les quelques sentes qui pouvaient demeurer aimable; tous les coins intimes ont disparu [...] nous ne verrons bientôt plus que des rues rectilignes, coupées au cordeau, bordées de maisons glaciales, de bâtisses peintes au lait de chaux, d’édifices plats et mornes, dont l’aspect dégage un ennui atroce.” The essay was published in Huysmans’s 1889 *Certains*, a collection of essays on art, many of which (though not the essay on Chéret) had been previously published in newspapers and journals. Huysmans, *Écrits sur l’art*: 271.

⁵⁶ “[c]ette joie démentielle, presque explosive.” Elsewhere in the essay Huysmans described this feeling as a “frenetic” joy, “une joie que son excès même exhause, en la rapprochant presque de la douleur.” *Ibid.*, 272-73.

bubbles fizzing at the surface.”⁵⁷ In isolating and distilling the joyous energy buried in Parisian frivolity and decadence, Chéret’s work provided an aesthetic therapy for the excesses displayed in *À Rebours*. The vigorous, yet purified, jolt of his posters inoculated the viewer against the hyperstimulation associated with modern life, precluding the need for the equally destructive refinements invented by des Esseintes to revive his flagging senses.⁵⁸ In other words, Chéret had extracted just the right, invigorating, dose of Paris’s “distraction, amusement and joy,” and distributed it in the vibrant lines and colors of his posters.

By the time of this second essay, the belief in the salutary or deleterious effects of visual form had a much wider purchase. Avant-garde artistic circles were conversant with the psychophysics of Charles Henry’s “scientific aesthetic,” which postulated that pleasurable or painful colors, lines and forms alternately energized (dynamogenized) or inhibited the viewer. In 1888, responding to Paul Signac’s application of Henry’s ideas in a poster advertising the latter’s latest publication, the critic Félix Fénéon suggested that Chéret would do well to take these psychophysical findings into account, particularly the notion that painful visual stimuli could be used to attract the viewer’s attention.⁵⁹

Whether or not the poster artist took such an admonition seriously, or because these ideas were simply in the air, beginning in the late 1880s Chéret’s central motifs (generally a female figure and the product or company name) were increasingly arranged along

⁵⁷ “Dans cette essence de Paris qu’il distille, il abandonne l’affreuse lie, délaisse l’élixir même, si corrosive et si âcre, recueille seulement les bouillonnements gazeux, les bulles qui pétillent à la surface.” Ibid.

⁵⁸ This interpretation was already embedded in Huysmans’s use of the term “homeopathically” to introduce his 1880 discussion of Chéret: in doing so he invoked the treatment of sickness with small doses (in this case, modern stimulus) of the very substances that would have produced analogous symptoms in healthy individuals.

⁵⁹ Félix Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes: Chroniques d’art*, ed. Joan U. Halperin, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1970). 117. See chapter three for more on Charles Henry and this episode.

ascendant lines, sporting dynamogenous reds and yellows and set against inhibitory/complementary blues, greens or violets.⁶⁰ In the 1889 *Bal du Moulin Rouge* (Figure 2.4), for example, the text announcing the attraction arcs upward to the right, its vibrant red (repeated in the central motif of the windmill) offset by a green shadow; this movement is confirmed by the bodies of the two largest female figures, juxtaposed once again with contrasting colors (violet) and movements (the donkey and the angle of the foremost figure's torso).⁶¹ The poster contains all the elements, including the flirtatious, vaguely Rococo female type (the so-called "Chérette") that defined the "gaiety" of Chéret's mature aesthetic.⁶²

In 1888, an article appeared in the *Figaro* that was particularly close to Huysmans's conception of Chéret and other modern artists as the source of an enlivening, vital stimulus. The writer, Maurice de Fleury, described a (probably imaginary) "modernist" house dominated by glass, iron, and the light and air consistent with new ideals of hygiene.⁶³ Chéret's work figured prominently in the interior, alongside works by Impressionists, Neo-Impressionists and other modern artists: his posters decorated the entryway and de Fleury praised a "healthy" gym room, painted with acrobatic scenes by

⁶⁰ Réjane Bargiel and Ségolène Le Men, eds., *La Belle Époque de Jules Chéret: De l'affiche au décor* (Paris: Les Arts Décoratifs and Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010), 61 and 74, n. 36.

⁶¹ The affinities between Henry's precepts and Chéret's evolving commercial aesthetic were no doubt what led Georges Seurat to align the two in the paintings *Chahut* and, most obviously, *Cirque*. See Robert L. Herbert, "Seurat and Jules Chéret," in *Seurat, Drawings and Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Ségolène Le Men, *Seurat & Chéret: le peintre, le cirque et l'affiche* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1994), 148; Howard G. Lay, "Pictorial Acrobatics," in *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 166-76.

⁶² Bradford Ray Jr Collins, "Jules Chéret and the Nineteenth-Century French Poster" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1980), 106-31.

⁶³ Maurice de Fleury, "La Maison d'un moderniste: l'Architecture de demain," *Le Figaro (Supplément littéraire du dimanche)*, no. 37 (September 15, 1888): 147. De Fleury's description of this "modernist" home was in keeping with the rationalist, as opposed to neurasthenic, conception of Art Nouveau highlighted in Meredith L. Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain and the Samaritaine: Art Nouveau Theory and Criticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 61-71 in particular.

Chéret and Louis Forain, as perhaps the most successful of the home's spaces.⁶⁴ The poster artist's oeuvre appears in the text as the aesthetic equivalent of light and air, albeit of a specifically urban vigor. Indeed, de Fleury would go on to write several works emphasizing neurasthenia's ties with heredity rather than modern urban life, its most common association. He valued the modern city as a source of sensation and thus, if properly channeled, of energy and action: "Since sensation is our fuel, since it gives us strength, let us cultivate our sensibility."⁶⁵ De Fleury even argued that this awareness might become the basis for what he believed the Third Republic had failed to articulate: a modern morality worthy of the innovative accomplishments of so many of its citizens (among whom de Fleury cited Chéret), and which could replace the outdated precepts of Catholicism.⁶⁶ De Fleury's description of these precepts echoed in many ways Brunetière's conception of morality, while utterly inverting the latter's system of values: "[Roman Catholic morality] remains communitarian, prohibits individualism, crushes pride, mocks ambition, makes of the healthiest physical love a grave sin, is tolerant of

⁶⁴ Maurice de Fleury, "La Maison d'un moderniste," *Le Figaro (Supplément littéraire du dimanche)*, no. 38 (September 22, 1888): 150-51.

⁶⁵ "Puisque la sensation est notre combustible, puisqu'elle nous donne la force [...], cultivons notre sensibilité" *Introduction à la médecine de l'esprit*, 5th ed. (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1898). 257. De Fleury was still championing urban stimulation as "un bain continu d'énergie vitale" three decades later, even as Le Corbusier was proposing a radical new vision of Paris. "Les névroses urbaines," *Les Cahiers de la République des lettres, des sciences et des arts* 12 ("Vers un Paris Nouveau?") (1929): 109. Cited in Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002). 63.

⁶⁶ This chapter of the book, entitled "La morale moderne," opened with the following statement: "C'est un avis très répandu que, si la troisième république est un jour menacée de mort, ce sera pour avoir omis de se donner une morale.

Rien d'autre ne lui aura manqué. Elle aura eu des marchands de puissante envergure, [he writes also of financiers, politicians, novelists, orators, scientists, philosophers] et des artistes innombrables, dont beaucoup sont vraiment les fils des tendances modernes, depuis J. Chéret, illustrateur des rues, jusqu'à Dalou, statuaire du peuple." Fleury, *Introduction à la médecine de l'esprit*: 437-38.

indolence, recommends mental indifference [incuriosité].”⁶⁷ De Fleury believed that this morality ill-prepared the French for the modern world, notably their Anglo-Saxon and German competitors, and proposed in its place a medical morality consisting of appropriately dosed, energizing stimulation.⁶⁸ Although he unapologetically insisted that this morality was “absolutely individual” rather than “social,” he thought that the individual’s fulfilment would make for a better society: “The day when we will have truly developed our individual self [notre *Moi*, an explicit reference to Maurice Barrès’s emphasis on the cult of the self], we will no longer want to needlessly hurt another, we will have no more brutal malice for animals, nor treachery for men.”⁶⁹ De Fleury believed, not unlike Guyot, that if the individual was allowed to flourish society as a whole would benefit. He aligned morality with physical and mental well-being, rendering morality and morale indistinguishable.

De Fleury’s conception of morality as a matter of stimulation was an extreme case. Yet his ideas, rather like the work of Charles Henry, were nevertheless a more instrumentalized version of those circulating in the wider public. Like Huysmans’s writings on the poster, de Fleury’s texts provide a glimpse into what critics invoked, if ever so obliquely, with their recurring references to the poster’s joyous energy.

⁶⁷ “Elle [la morale catholique latine] demeure communautaire, prescrit l’individualisme, flétrit l’orgueil, rit de l’ambition, fait de l’amour physique le plus sain un péché grave, se montre indulgente pour la paresse, conseille l’incuriosité de l’esprit.” Ibid., 441-42.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 443.

⁶⁹ “Le jour où nous aurons effectivement relevé notre *Moi*, nous ne voudrons plus nuire inutilement à autrui, nous n’aurons plus de brutale malice pour les bêtes, ni de perfidie pour les hommes.” Ibid., 450.

Maurice Talmeyr and the Immorality of the Poster

It is in this context—Brunetière’s attack on individualism, the debates over the nature of morality, and the equation of the poster with a sensual stimulant—that Talmeyr’s condemnation of the poster in the September 1, 1896 *Revue des Deux Mondes* needs to be situated. As I have already indicated, the poster was closely aligned with liberal capitalism and democracy: an element of the new mass culture, it should be noted, that threatened to engulf more established, staid publications like the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.⁷⁰ But it was, above all, the contention that the poster was an art that made it an ideal target for Talmeyr. It not only confirmed the poster as a symbol of modern society, but also allowed Talmeyr to play on what he saw as the incompatibility of its aesthetic beauty and morality:

Leaf through posters in collections, examine closely those in the street, and you will never find [...] a beautiful ‘moral’ poster, whose effect is the exaltation of a noble sentiment. [...] Either a poster is a work of art, and will thus always speak to an appetite, a taste, a need for comfort or pleasure, an instinct of revolt, a vice. Or it will speak to the spirit of submission, of work, of religion, of devotion, of selflessness, and in that case will be nothing more than a pathetic daub [barbouillage] or a beautiful drawing that is no longer a poster. The beautiful poster, stimulating or licentious, can be seen everywhere; the beautiful poster, modest or chaste, is nowhere to be found.⁷¹

⁷⁰ As Thomas Loué has emphasized, in the wake of the Third Republic’s liberalization of the press, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* found its influence as an elite arbiter of opinion diminished, weakened by the proliferation of both mass cultural and specialized publications. He cites this situation as a motivating factor in Brunetière’s increasingly anti-liberal, pro-Catholic positioning of the *Revue*. Thomas Loué, “Une révolte culturelle: l’entrée en catholicisme de la *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1895-1906),” *Cahiers d’Histoire: revue d’histoire critique*, no. 87 (2002): paragraphs 12-17.

⁷¹ “Feuilletez bien les affiches des collections, examinez bien celles des rues, et vous ne trouverez jamais, ni sur un mur, ni chez un amateur, une belle affiche ‘morale,’ dont l’effet soit l’exaltation d’un sentiment noble. [...] Ou bien l’affiche est une œuvre d’art, et s’adressera toujours, alors, à un appétit, à un goût, à un besoin de bien être ou de plaisir, à un instinct de révolte, à un vice. Ou bien elle s’adressera à l’esprit de soumission, de travail, de religion, de dévouement, d’oubli de soi-même, et ne sera plus, en ce cas, qu’un barbouillage attristant ou un beau dessin qui ne sera plus une affiche. La belle affiche, excitante ou licencieuse, se voit partout; la belle affiche, pudique ou chaste, ne se voit nulle part.” Talmeyr, “L’âge de l’affiche,” 274-75.

In other words, the poster's very aesthetic was incompatible with morality. An art, Talmeyr argued, derived its particular beauty from being truthful to its purpose. On those grounds, "the poster [...] is not, and cannot be, moral."⁷²

The reasons Talmeyr gave for that assertion echoed Brunetière's conception of morality: the poster and its aesthetic were meant to speak to the individual. It could only cater to selfish, rather than moral, imperatives.

Born of individualism, and all that follows of appetites, of demands, of whims, of sensuality, of the need for gratification, of the fear of suffering, of intellectual oblivion, of futility, of this intense cult of self, of bored disgust for all that is not oneself, the poster must reproduce and render all of this [...] Thus [...] it will never exhort the respect of women, of laws, of authority, of family, of religion, of propriety, of justice, and all that of which any morality exhorts the respect.⁷³

As a result, he argued, "the artistic poster can do nothing for good and everything for evil."⁷⁴

As Marcus Verhagen has noted, Talmeyr contrasted the individualizing address of the poster with the monument's concretization of a humbling authority.⁷⁵ In the latter's text, the enduring monument represents a dignified, moral past antithetical to the corrupt, unstable present, embodied by the poster:

The monument of the past, with all of the arts it encompassed—painting, sculpture, ornaments and decorations of all kinds—arose from a seigniorial art, eminently aristocratic or dominating, which reflected the social life of the period.

⁷² "[L]'affiche, en raison même de cette logique, de cette harmonie entre le principe et son but, n'est pas, et ne peut pas être morale." Ibid., 276.

⁷³ Née de l'individualisme, de tout ce qui en découle d'appétits, d'exigences, de caprices, de sensualité, de besoin de jouir, d'effroi de souffrir, de néant intellectuel, de futilité, de culte aigu de soi-même, de mépris ennuyé pour tout ce qui n'est pas soi, elle [l'affiche] doit logiquement reproduire et rendre tout cela. [...] Ainsi [...] [e]lle n'engagera jamais à respecter les femmes, les lois, l'autorité, la famille, la religion, la propriété, la justice, et tout ce que toute morale engage à respecter." Ibid., 276-77.

⁷⁴ "[L]'affiche d'art ne peut rien pour le bien et peut tout pour le mal." Ibid., 277.

⁷⁵ Talmeyr's contrast between the monument is briefly discussed in Verhagen, "The Poster in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris," 116. Hahn also alludes to Talmeyr's conviction that paper had conquered stone, though she contrasts this with the decline of the artistic poster as a viable form of street advertising. Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity*: 202-3.

The idea of an authority, something superior to the people, something stronger, greater, other than themselves, emanated from the castle and cathedral, and their stone masses or poems, in spite of all that could enliven them, spoke to the crowd of little more than its social or religious duty [...] and thus the individual, the subject, felt crushed by the weight and scale of a divine or royal interest, next to which his own no longer existed. The poster, in contrast, only speaks to us of ourselves, our pleasures, our tastes, our interests, our food, our health, our life, our vices.⁷⁶

In this passage, the contrast between the poster and the monument is a means of denouncing modern society in comparison to the aristocratic, religious past. Symptomatic of a wider societal decline, this contrast revolved around the relationship between the viewer and the work of art. Talmeyr portrayed past forms of public decoration, associated with the monument, as the physical manifestation of aristocratic glory and religious power. He implied that their visual delights were reserved for the elite. For the people, the magnificence of these arts was impenetrable, serving only as reminder of their religious and seigniorial/feudal duty. It did not speak to them as autonomous subjects but only as an undifferentiated, collective object: “the people,” “the crowd.” In contrast, the poster—and modernity—addressed every viewer as an individual, guided only by his or her desires.

Talmeyr went on to connect this distinction to a wider societal decline, made manifest by the engulfing of the monument by the poster:

And is not [the poster], after all, the natural, logical art of a time of excessive individualism and selfishness? Is it not precisely the modern monument, the paper

⁷⁶ “Le monument d’autrefois, avec tous les arts qu’il englobait, peinture, sculpture, ornements et décorations de toutes sortes, relevait d’un art seigneurial, éminemment aristocratique ou dominateur, qui répondait au train social de l’époque. L’idée d’une autorité, de quelque chose de supérieur au peuple, de plus fort, de plus grand, d’autre que lui, se dégagait du château et de la cathédrale, et leurs masses ou leurs poèmes de pierre, malgré tout ce qui pouvait les égayer, ne parlaient guère à la foule que de son devoir social ou religieux [...] et l’individu, le sujet, se sentait ainsi écrasé par le poids et l’ampleur d’un intérêt divin ou royal auprès duquel le sien n’existait plus. L’affiche, au contraire, ne nous parle que de nous-mêmes, de nos plaisirs, de nos goûts, de nos intérêts, de notre alimentation, de notre santé, de notre vie, de nos vices. Talmeyr, “L’âge de l’affiche,” 271.

castle, the cathedral of sensuality, in which everything we have in us of culture and beauty [esthétique] is employed for nothing more than the exaltation of comfort and the stimulation [chatouillement] of instinctive drives [instincts]? [...] the poster is the true architecture of today, one born of palpitating, ambient life; the monument disappears under its pullulating color, like ruins under a teeming nature. It is the unstable edifice—destroyed every evening, rebuilt every morning—of variable, striking images that enervate and call out to the passerby, flattering him, provoking him, pulling at him, laughing in his face and soliciting him.⁷⁷

In Talmeyr's account the poster is full of "palpitating" and "teeming" life, inadvertently echoing Huysmans and de Fleury's celebration of the medium's energy and vitality. But he rejected this energy as one that undermined the very foundations of civilization, as it did those of the monument: the specter of revolution is omnipresent in his text.⁷⁸ Whether it would be literal revolution or the destabilizing triumph of capitalism, the critic saw its roots in the (supposedly) individualist principle given voice by the poster.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ "Et n'est-ce pas là, en effet, l'art naturel et logique d'une époque d'individualisme et d'égoïsme à outrance? N'est-ce pas bien là le monument moderne, le château de papier, la cathédrale de sensualité, où tout ce que nous avons en nous de culture et d'esthétique ne trouve plus à s'employer que dans l'exaltation du bien-être et le chatouillement des instincts? [...] la véritable architecture, aujourd'hui, celle qui pousse de la vie ambiante et palpitante, c'est l'affiche, le pullulement de couleurs sous lequel disparaît le monument de pierre, comme les ruines sous la nature fourmillante; c'est l'édifice instable, démoli tous les soirs, reconstruit tous les matins, d'images voyantes et changeantes qui agacent et interpellent le passant, le flattent, le provoquent, l'entraînent, lui rient au nez et le racolent." Ibid., 272-73.

⁷⁸ The critic predicted that the advertisements for cabarets and other commercial amusements, for example, would become something much more sinister: "Elle [l'affiche] nous annonce les joies nocturnes, elle nous annoncera celles du 'Grand Soir.'" ibid., 278-79. As Verhagen has highlighted, the poster had close ties with Bohemian Montmartre, particularly with publicist Jules Roques and his *Le Courrier Français*: this propinquity led Talmeyr to associate the medium with a carnivalesque social instability that heralded revolution. At its most basic level, then, this association was due to the Butte's history of working-class insurrection, epitomized in the Commune, as well as the ambiguous class and politics of its more recent Bohemian denizens. Roques' success with *Le Courrier*, for example, enabled his creation of an explicitly political journal, the socialist/anarchist journal *l'Égalité*. Verhagen, "The Poster in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris." The poster's ties to Montmartre and *Le Courrier Français* have also been analyzed by Hazel Hahn, who ties the journal's playful, yet somewhat uneasy, relationship with advertising to societal views of publicity. Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity*: 205-18. Note that Fénéon had already linked posters' "couleurs flamboyantes" with dynamite in "Chez les barbouilleurs: Les affiches en couleur," *Le Père peïnard*, April 30, 1893, reproduced in Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 230.

⁷⁹ Verhagen ultimately tied Talmeyr's fear of revolution back to a deeper, underlying anxiety about capitalism: "the poster, [Talmeyr] implied, was simply the most visible symbol of the market mechanisms that were wearing away the foundations on which class society was built." Verhagen, "The Poster in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris," 124.

Modern Morality and the Poster

Roger Marx and the Poster as Decoration

Just as Talmeyr's critique of individualism can best be understood through that of Brunetière, his opposition of the poster and the monument only makes sense in the context of the discourses that gave birth to *affichomanie*. Much of the praise for the poster as an art framed it as a modern form of fresco or decoration.⁸⁰ This was the approach that Roger Marx selected in a catalog preface presenting Chéret's work, both posters and pastels, in the context of an 1889 solo exhibition at the Galeries du théâtre de l'application.⁸¹ In sharp contrast to Brunetière's distaste for Baudelaire, Marx's text

⁸⁰ Ernest Maindron (one of the earliest figures to lend the poster legitimacy in the eyes of a wider public) identified the poster as a modern form of fresco painting (and of other decorative arts, such as stained glass), though he did not go so far as to say that it had replaced more traditional forms: "je crois que nous pouvons attendre d'elle [de l'affiche] l'idéale formule d'une nouvelle peinture à fresque; je crois que nous devrons à J. Chéret la renaissance d'un art éteint: l'illustration picturale de nos demeures artistiques ou princières; je crois encore que E. Grasset nous donnera, un jour ou l'autre, et cela d'une manière définitive, le vitrail moderne qui ne le cédera en rien aux œuvres admirables du passé et occupera une place haute et respectée dans notre siècle si profondément épris des choses de l'art." Ernest Maindron, *Les affiches illustrées (1886-1895)* (Paris: G. Boudet, 1896). 32. Bradford Collins has analyzed Chéret's consecration as an artist as part of a two-pronged attack on the hierarchy of the arts: one headed by the "naturalists" who wanted a democratization of the arts, and one headed by decorative arts reformers, who wanted to elevate the decorative arts to the level of the fine arts. Collins noted that the rhetoric of the decorative arts reformers became the main drive behind the popularity of the poster and its identification with high art. Bradford Ray Jr. Collins, "The Poster as Art; Jules Chéret and the Struggle for the Equality of the Arts in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Design Issues* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1985): particularly 44-49; Collins, "Jules Chéret and the Nineteenth-Century French Poster," 158-79. The reception, collection, and exhibition of the poster is also examined by Karen Carter in her dissertation, Karen Lynn Carter, "L'Age de l'Affiche: The Reception, Display and Collection of Posters in Fin-de-siècle Paris" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2001).

⁸¹ *Exposition Jules Chéret: Pastels, lithographies, dessins, affiches illustrées (Décembre 1889-Janvier 1890, Galeries du Théâtre d'Application, 18 rue Saint-Lazare)*, (Paris: Imprimeries Chaix (Succursale Chéret), 1889). The retrospective format of the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue sanctioned Chéret's growing reputation as a full-fledged artist, a status that Marx confirmed in his preface. This exhibition was preceded by an exhibition of posters within the 1889 Universal Exhibition, which was curated by Maindron using one hundred posters from his collection. Entitled *Histoire résumée de l'affiche française*, the exhibition followed Maindron's articles and book in emphasizing a historical progression of technical and artistic innovation culminating with Chéret. For more information on this exhibition in the context of the 1889 Universal Exhibition, see Ségolène Le Men, "L'art de l'affiche à l'Exposition universelle de 1889," *Bulletin de la Bibliothèque nationale* (June 1991): particularly 67-68. This first

displayed a distinctly Baudelairean belief in the ability of the poster's contingent elements to become the basis for a reinvigorated modern art. Over the ensuing decade, the poster would figure in Marx's writing as an aesthetic force for social unity rather than destruction: an instrument for Solidarism.

I introduced Marx in the beginning of this chapter as a commentator on Puvis, one among many celebrating his paintings as a refuge from the stresses of modern existence. Marx was an ardent admirer of the artist, praising Puvis's decorations for the Paris Hôtel de Ville as one of the few worthy of a decorative program, and facilitating the entry of his *Pauvre pêcheur* (*Poor Fisherman*, 1881, Figure 2.5) into the State's collections.⁸² As Marie Jeannine Aquilino has shown, Marx was one of the remaining champions of a high-minded "mural aesthetic" in the face of an increasingly eclectic approach to decoration.⁸³ On the surface, this conception of Puvis and of decorative painting is entirely at odds with Marx's promotion of Chéret for having encapsulated ephemeral Parisian modernity in the poster. Yet for Marx, Chéret also presented a "vision of another, better world," a Baudelairean "painting" of modern life that revealed what in modernity was worth preserving. Like Huysmans, Marx suggested that this vision was

exhibition made little noise and was part of the industrial rather than artistic portion of the fair. The retrospective garnered a lot more attention.

⁸² "Quelle ne serait pas la détresse de l'Hôtel de Ville sans les peintures de M. Puvis de Chavannes? On s'est insurgé ferme au palais municipal contre le principe de l'unité décorative, et loin de le défendre, l'architecte n'a eu souci que de polychromer les murs." Roger Marx, "Les Salons de 1895," *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1, 1895): 451. Catherine Meneux, "Roger Marx (1859-1913), critique d'art" (Université Paris IV Sorbonne, 2007), 105.

⁸³ Marie Jeannine Aquilino, "Painted Promises: The Politics of Public Art in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 4 (December 1993). See my discussion of Aquilino's work in the introduction.

perhaps all the more powerful due to its ability to tap into, rather than deflect, the frenetic, yet joyous, rhythms and color of contemporary Paris.⁸⁴

Marx embraced the poster's ability to serve as a vivid allegory for fin-de-siècle modernity. Quickly papered over by a freshly printed successor and left to the mercy of the elements, the poster embodied a world in which "the transitory, the fleeting, and the contingent" had become the rule of the day, instituting a relentless cycle of rupture, loss, and renewal. Marx accordingly opened and ended his catalogue preface by emphasizing both the poster's decorative character and the ephemerality of its medium, imagery, and reception:

Before the sleepy eyes of the new arrival, in the wavering light of dawn, an indistinct fresco begins to appear along the path, is interrupted, then reappears only to stop and begin again. The sun rises, the colors brighten, and from the walls bursts forth a cladding akin to the luxury of the tapestries unfurled, in the past, along the path of holy processions. The remaining mist dissipates; the vision becomes clearer, the forms more legible. In abandoned allegories, shimmering with their brilliance and light, radiant with youth and humor, a modern symbolist has encapsulated Parisian life [...] The astonishing magic, this apotheosis of Pleasure and Grace, installing its blaze of enchantment at the bend of crossroads, on cracked plaster, against buildings' chalky enclosures... and yet from what does our illusion spring? From a lithograph in two or three colors, from an image washed out by the rain, torn by the breeze, tomorrow covered over, destroyed—from a poster by Chéret.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ "On la [l'œuvre de Puvis de Chavannes] pressent accomplie dans la retraite, loin du tourbillon des affaires humaines et des orages de la vie; la contagion de la moderne neurasthénie ne l'a pas désenchantée; saine et planante elle oppose au pessimisme ambiant la réconfortante vision d'un monde autre, meilleur, où se meuvent des êtres qui nous ressemblent comme des frères." Marx, "Puvis de Chavannes," 1077. The larger passage is reproduced in footnote 2. See, for example, Marx's article on Chéret in *l'Image*, in which he associated the poster artist's work with "le spectacle d'une humanité en partance pour une nouvelle Cythère. Le lieu de la scène: au pays de la Chimère, n'importe où, hors du monde." Yet in the same essay Marx reiterated Huysmans's point, that the artist's Chérette "n'échappe pas au tourment de la névrose," and that his work "se parent des grâces oubliées du XVIII^e siècle, sans abdiquer un modernisme aigu qui frémit et tréaille de nos angoisses, de nos fièvres, de nos hantises." "Cartons d'artistes: Jules Chéret," *L'Image: Revue mensuelle, littéraire et artistique*, no. 2 (January 1897): 43-44.

⁸⁵ "Devant les yeux mal éveillés du nouvel arrivant, aux lueurs indécises des aubes, il développe une fresque vague qui borde le chemin, s'interrompt, puis reprend pour s'arrêter et reprendre encore. Le jour se lève, les couleurs s'avivent et le long des murs éclate un revêtement pareil au luxe des tapisseries autrefois déployées sur le parcours des processions saintes. Les dernières vapeurs se dissipent; plus claire devient la

He ended the text on a similar, though inverted, note:

And the fantasy carrying off thought in the endless whirlwind of dreams, for a long time the enchanted vision pursues you [...] Then the apparition grows hazy, the phantoms disappear, the echo fades, and of Chéret's oeuvre the mind retains nothing but the memory of the last graceful smile, the final joyous burst of a fading century.⁸⁶

Marx links the poster's materiality and fate with the fleeting nature of its own time, such that the end of the century seems to herald the demise of this iteration of the color print, described as "the pastime of dying centuries."⁸⁷

Yet these passages simultaneously suggested the eternal half of Baudelaire's aesthetic, since Marx aligned posters with fresco and other past forms of public decoration.⁸⁸ Above all, he attributed to Chéret the same essentializing, synthetic force that Baudelaire had attributed to Constantin Guys and Eugène Delacroix.⁸⁹ Posters were meant to be eye-catching and memorable, even at a distance, but Chéret's "artistic" posters displayed a harmonious synthesis from up close or afar.⁹⁰ Marx emphasized the

vision, plus lisibles les formes. En des allégories emportées, chatoyantes d'éclat, de lumière, radieuses de jeunesse et d'humour, un symboliste moderne a synthétisé la vie de Paris, s'est complu à la figuration de ses spectacles, à la représentation de ses élégances, au tableau de ses modes. L'étonnante magie, cette apothéose du Plaisir et de la Grâce installant au détour des carrefours, sur les crépis lézardés, contre les clôtures plâtreuses des bâtisses son flamboiement de féerie, et d'où vient pourtant nos illusions? D'une lithographie en deux ou trois tons, d'une image délavée par la pluie, déchirée par la bise, demain recouverte, anéantie—d'une affiche de Chéret." *Exposition Jules Chéret*: i-ii. This text was excerpted or reproduced in a number of journals over the course of the exhibition. Marx later published a slightly modified version, entitled "Chéret," in a collection of texts related to his vision of a social art: *L'art social* (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1913).

⁸⁶ "Et la fantaisie emportant la pensée dans le tourbillon sans fin des rêves, longtemps vous poursuit la vision enchantée [...] Puis l'apparition se voile, les fantômes s'effacent, l'écho se tait, et de l'œuvre de Chéret l'esprit ne garde plus que le souvenir du dernier sourire de la grâce, du suprême éclat de joie d'un siècle qui s'éteint." *Exposition Jules Chéret*: ix.

⁸⁷ "Il semble que l'estampe en couleurs soit le passe-temps des siècles expirants. Le XVIIIème oubliait les approches de la Révolution avec les cuivres de Debucourt; le XIXème a pour recréer son déclin les pierres de Chéret." *ibid.*, vi.

⁸⁸ See footnote 8.

⁸⁹ See the introduction to the dissertation.

⁹⁰ The effect of posters was often described from a distance, at which they melded into a colorful, if chaotic, ensemble. Even before Chéret re-introduced color lithography to advertising, posters were a

symbolic, synthetic character of Chéret's work: "a modern symbolist has encapsulated Parisian life," distilling its modernity in "abandoned allegories."⁹¹ Their impression remained with the viewer even after the melancholic fading of the imagery itself, captured in a "memory." Chéret had a talent for capturing the immediacy of the present:

[Chéret's] art, French in spirit, quintessentially Parisian, is all spontaneity; it's the unrestrained gush of a sparkling, generous energy, happy to exhaust itself because it is sure to never weary or repeat itself; transcribed as soon as they are conceived [...] these inventions retain forever the unexpected character of the instantaneous.⁹²

Once again, the contingent and the eternal coincide through the notion of preserving the sensation of the instantaneous. Chéret's creative syntheses revealed what was essential, memorable, and thus eternal about fin-de-siècle modernity, demonstrating that both his artistic posters and their period were worthy of posterity.

In a later text on the poster, a preface for the serial publication *Les Maîtres de l'affiche (The Masters of the Poster)*, Marx was even more explicit about the ways in which artistic posters, through their "decorative" qualities, transformed the ephemeral into the eternal:

Understood by all ages, loved by the people, the poster speaks to the universal soul: it emerged to satisfy new aspirations and this love of beauty that the education of taste endlessly expands and develops; it replaced, outside and in the home, the paintings formerly visible on the thresholds of palaces or under the vaults of cloisters and churches; it is the mobile, ephemeral picture demanded by an age captivated by popularization and eager for change. Its art has no less signification, no less prestige, than the art of the fresco; [...] while decoration's ancient, essential laws are ignored nearly everywhere, and abused at will, they

colorful display due to the requirement that non-official announcements be printed on colored, as opposed to white, paper.

⁹¹ He reinforces this impression by never identifying a particular Chéret poster.

⁹² "son art, d'essence française, de quintessence parisienne, est tout primesautier; c'est le libre jet d'une verve généreuse, étincelante, heureuse de se dépenser parce qu'elle est assurée de ne se lasser et de ne se répéter jamais; ses inventions transcrites dans le moment même où l'esprit les conçoit, [...] gardent en définitive l'imprévu de l'instantané." *Exposition Jules Chéret*: iii.

continue to be respected by the masters of the poster [...] To reflect on their works is to hasten the recovery of a corrupted originality of inspiration, and to stimulate the free expansion of inventive faculties; it is to again grasp the immutable principles that have always governed the arts of décor and of life.⁹³

Once again Marx paired terms like “ephemeral,” “new,” “change,” “popularization,” and “inventive” with their opposites: terms like “universal,” “prestige,” “essential,” “return,” and “immutable principles,” all mobilized to characterize an aesthetic that married a frenetic, mass-cultural modernity with timeless decorative laws. These laws were fundamental both to the poster’s eternal “half” *and* the larger system that held its eternal and contingent elements in balance.

How did the poster simultaneously satisfy the desire for “change” and fulfil the “immutable principles” that Marx suggested were at the heart of the “love of beauty”? In other words, how did the poster synthesize the contingent and eternal “halves” of this aesthetic system into a unified whole? The poster’s modern, contingent character was tied to the elements that responded to the “popularization” required by modern democracy and promoted by the expansion of capital and consumption. These elements included its endless catalogue of fin-de-siècle products and experiences as well as formal characteristics meant to capture the viewer’s attention, quickly and emphatically

⁹³ “Comprise par tous les âges, aimée du peuple, l’affiche s’adresse à l’âme universelle: elle est venue satisfaire des aspirations nouvelles et cet amour de la beauté que l’éducation du goût répand et développe sans arrêt; elle est le tableau mobile, éphémère, que réclamait une époque éprise de vulgarisation et avide de changement. Son art n’a ni moins de signification ni moins de prestige que l’art de la fresque; [...] tandis que les lois essentielles et séculaires de la décoration sont presque partout méconnues, violées à plaisir, le respect s’en est maintenu chez les maîtres de l’affiche [...] Méditer leurs ouvrages, c’est hâter le retour à l’originalité foncière de l’inspiration dévoyée, c’est stimuler la libre expansion des facultés inventives; c’est encore s’élever à la connaissance des principes immuables qui ont, de tout temps, régi les arts du décor et de la vie.” *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche: Publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles Affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers*, 5 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1898). iv. This series was published from 1896-1900 by Chaix, the printing house with which Chéret had long been associated.

communicating its message: the bright colors and dramatically simplified, outlined forms. These qualities are on display in posters such as *Le pays des fées* (*Land of the Fairies*) and *Pantomimes lumineuses* (*Luminous Pantomimes*) (Figures 2.2 and 2.3), the first advertising an 1889 Exposition universelle amusement ride, and the second a proto-cinematic projection of moving images at the *Musée Grévin*. In both posters the relatively unmodeled, simplified forms of the central figures are vehicles for expanses of a vivid, primary yellow, which bursts (like the accompanying commercial text) out against darker, contrasting backgrounds. Added to the dynamism of this play of contrasts is that of movement, whether of bodies, color, or composition. The diagonal orientation and splayed legs of the “fairy,” the arced form of the pale Pierrot behind *Pantomimes lumineuses*’s central figure, and the women’s billowing skirts, for example, give the impression that they have been captured mid-action. Though the posters display a dominant color, it is never entirely solid: the fairy’s gauzy skirt produces flecks and strokes of yellow that echo the background fireworks, the red foreground in *Pantomimes lumineuses* flickers into the blue background, and color shifts in the gradated sky and principal caption of *Le pays des fées*. Aside from the rounded, solid contours of the female figures’ legs and arms, silhouettes are broken and irregular, most visibly in the skirts or the zig-zag and cloud-like interpenetration of red and blue in *Pantomimes*.

Chéret’s posters were thus vehicles for the healthy, modern stimulation foregrounded by both Huysmans and de Fleury. Though the pathological and psychophysical studies underpinning their statements were not much in evidence in Marx’s text, they were echoed in his insistence on the poster’s “sparkling, generous

energy.”⁹⁴ These posters updated popular imagery like those of *Épinal* (see Figure 2.6 for an example) by retaining their frontality, vivid primaries and stark outlines—qualities that promoted legibility—but discarding the static character of their poses, color, symmetry and pictorial space. Chéret’s color variations and darker backgrounds gave a sense of depth and telescoping movement to his posters, and his figures displayed suppler, as well as more sexualized, forms.

Marx in fact praised the poster as a continuation and renewal of popular tradition, though he was rather vague as to the nature of that tradition.⁹⁵ This imprecision was probably strategic: while Huysmans had reveled in the idea of the poster as a subversive alternative to official (bourgeois) culture, Marx was far more invested in its incorporation into that very culture. He therefore emphasized not only the poster’s stimulating attractions and popular, democratic character, but also how these were placed in the service of art. He indicated, for example, that its daily contact with the “teeming, animated street”—a space of “universal suffrage”—was a more advanced form of the public displays of art by the Académie royale or the Académie de Saint Luc in the seventeenth century.⁹⁶ Marx’s discussions of the poster suggested that the medium’s

⁹⁴ See footnote 92.

⁹⁵ “Loin de nous alarmer, sachons gré à l’affiche de favoriser la survivance de la tradition populaire dont elle est la plus haute expression.” *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche: Publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles Affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers.*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1897). iv.

⁹⁶ “[I] [the poster’s success] trouve sa raison dans les ressources infinies du procédé, dans le vaste champ ouvert à l’artiste, dans la publicité promise à l’œuvre par la rue toujours animée, grouillante, ou se discute et se prononce le suffrage universel. Des esprits peu lucides nient le bénéfice du contact avec l’âme populaire. Combien ils s’abusent! [...] Qu’ils méditent encore les exemples transmis par le passé. En plein air, sous la lumière du ciel, se tinrent les premiers Salons de peinture, qui valaient bien ceux de maintenant, et au jugement de la rue en appelaient, tout comme les maîtres de l’Affiche, les membres de l’Académie de Saint-Luc, ‘Messieurs de l’Académie royale,’ lorsqu’ils exposaient, en 1673, leurs ‘tableaux et pièces de sculpture’ sur la place Dauphine ou dans la cour du Palais-Royal.” *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche: Publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles Affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers.*, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1896). ii.

claim to the eternal lay both in its renewal of seemingly universal popular forms *and* in endowing them with more refinement, harmony and unity. He praised the subtle effects that Chéret had brought to the medium, by combining areas of flat color with the depth provided by “tender nuances, toned-down colors and faded grays.”⁹⁷ These painterly effects softened the poster’s visual extremes, and, along with Chéret’s balanced placement of motifs and color, enabled each poster to read as a harmonious “ensemble” in spite of its contrasts. It was this quality that prompted Marx to hail Chéret as a decorator, a view that the poster artist echoed.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ “Jamais mieux ne s’accuseront le victorieux effort et le constant labeur de Chéret pour l’enrichissement de sa palette, sa science des jeux et des combinaisons chromatiques, son habileté à réserver les à-plats pour les enluminures simples ou franches, et à parvenir—en vertu de la loi du contraste simultané et par la juxtaposition de points de tons heurtés, tranchés—aux nuances tendres, aux colorations assoupies, aux gris estompés des lointains.” *Exposition Jules Chéret*: viii.

⁹⁸ “Dessin et lettre s’accordent à se faire mutuellement valoir au profit de l’homogénéité de l’ensemble à laquelle concourt encore la couleur dont l’éclat va s’atténuant selon l’éloignement des plans. Au résumé, nul effet ne fut mieux atteint, nulle tenture ne décéla une plus rare et plus instinctive entente de la décoration.” *ibid.*, iv.

In a letter to the print collector and historian Henri Béraldi, Chéret himself underlined his ability to create harmony out of otherwise harsh colors as a key component of his posters’ “decorative” character. Referring to himself in the third person, Chéret suggested the following variation on Béraldi’s entry on the poster artist for his 1886 *Les Graveurs du XIXe siècle*: “M.C a résolu le problème de produire avec le moins de frais possible un maximum d’effet décoratif.

Ses affiches sont en ce sens un véritable enseignement; c’est ainsi qu’il a su faire chanter et harmoniser la note brutale de rouge (qui est la couleur la plus voyante et tire-l’œil) par des combinaisons que nous avons observées chez les Japonais ces maîtres décorateurs.

Ses affiches sont produites généralement par trois impressions superposées. Une en noir établissant le dessin bien accusé plein de brio et habilement composé pour recevoir en certaines places l’enluminage [sic] violent de la tache rouge qui vient fondre et harmoniser un fond gradué de tons froids bleus et verts en haut et chauds dans le bas.” Chéret to Béraldi, December 29, 1885. He similarly emphasized his artistic, decorative intent in an earlier, May 18th letter to Béraldi: “Je m’appliquai à créer une mode artistique produisant en peu de couleurs le plus grand effet décoratif possible.” Both letters are preserved, along with others, in Béraldi’s copy of his *Les Graveurs du XIXe siècle*, now held at the Bibliothèque nationale’s Réserve du département de l’Estampe. This passage is reproduced in Bargiel and Le Men, *La Belle Époque de Jules Chéret*, 42. Note that their transcription differs slightly from my own: “Ses affiches sont en un sens un véritable enseignement [my emphasis].” The emphasis on the decorative seems to have been Chéret’s own, since it is not in the published text, in which Béraldi remarked only that he possessed “l’art de produire le maximum d’effet avec un très petit nombre de couleurs” (he placed the information about Chéret’s technique in a footnote). Henri Béraldi, “Chéret,” in *Les Graveurs du XIXe siècle: Guide de l’amateur d’estampes modernes* (Paris: Librairie L. Conquet, 1886), 171. Collins has even suggested that Chéret harbored artistic ambitions early on in his career, and thus was an active participant, perhaps even an originator, in the notion that his art was decorative—thus tying it to the cause of decorative arts reform. Collins, “The Poster as Art,” 43-44.

These strategies are on display in *Le Pays des Fées* and even the later, less painterly *La Loïe Fuller* (Figure 2.7). Both have relatively evenly distributed visual “weight”: the flame-colored central figure and text of *Le pays des fées* form an “X,” lending some stability to the fairy’s precarious pose; in *La Loïe Fuller*, Fuller’s bright red hair is echoed and framed by the equally red texts. Note also the variations in color and simulated “texture” that contribute to the gauzy or swirling effects of the foreground figures’ clothing.⁹⁹ These variations produce irregular, permeable silhouettes not quite contained by their black outlines (which are purposefully thin and broken). The darker portions of the figures’ skirts, for example, mediate between the bright costumes and their dark background. Alfred Choubrac’s earlier poster of Fuller (Figure 2.8) displays some of the same effects, but its colors and contours are far more uniform and solid, and there is a certain disjunction between the more naturalized treatment of the face and head and the rest of the poster.

Chéret’s posters, in contrast, both jumped out at the viewer and presented a decorative, harmonious ensemble. As a critic wrote in *Le Petit Parisien*, this was the artistic, Parisian take on the medium, in which “one does not try to attract the eye at all costs; one tries to charm it.”¹⁰⁰ This perception led critics like Marx to hope that artistic posters might offer a different viewing experience than their predecessors. Once Chéret’s posters attracted the viewer’s eye, their adherence to eternal principles of decorative

⁹⁹ Chéret produced these variations by overlapping pigments and using different techniques for their application: various types of brushstrokes, for example, or *crachis*, in which pigment was spattered onto the lithographic stone in an airbrush-like effect.

¹⁰⁰ “On ne cherche pas à tirer l’œil coûte que coûte; on cherche à le charmer.” Jean Frolo, “Les Collections d’affiches,” *Le petit parisien* (December 29, 1889), from the collection of press clippings on Chéret held at the Bibliothèque nationale, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie.

harmony invited contemplation, creating the possibility for a richer aesthetic experience: the kind of experience associated with a museum or private collection, but that the poster extended to the crowded street.¹⁰¹ Marx's 1889 catalog preface modeled this richer experience for the reader/viewer when he wrote of the poster's "enchanted vision" lingering with the passer-by, or imagined Chéret's artistic process as a kind of choreography:

[Chéret's] greatest pleasure is to pursue the ballerina in the dance's flight, to send her floating in a cloud of ribbons and gauze, to note the undulation of her nice [gentil] body, the projection and indentation of the bust, her legs leaping and landing, brushing the ground only to take off again, the rhythmic swaying of her rounded arms.¹⁰²

He certainly saw this experience as worthy of spaces beyond the street, for he advocated adopting the poster and/or its aesthetic in private decoration, and collaborated on *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche* in order to make the poster more accessible in the interior.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Miriam Levin has noted this theme in the reception of the poster (citing Marx, Maindron and André Mellerio in particular), writing that: "It was not simply a matter of mitigating the harsh character of the industrial landscape but of replacing that vista with an entirely new panorama tailored to their definition of the sensibilities of the ordinary passer-by. The vista would be entirely congenial to individual sensibilities and at the same time democratic, because the experience was accessible to everyone on the street." Miriam R. Levin, "Democratic Vistas—Democratic Media: Defining a Role for Printed Images in Industrializing France," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 89.

Karen Carter has analyzed conceptions of poster viewing at the end of the nineteenth century, highlighting a shift from the notion that public postings were a collective experience to the perception that the modern poster solicited the individual gaze, heightening the anomie of the modern city. Though she acknowledges (citing the critic Jean Finot) that certain figures thought the poster might encourage more contemplative forms of viewing, she argues that poster consumption was largely portrayed in terms of a quick, variably attentive gaze. Carter, "The Spectatorship of the *Affiche Illustrée* and the Modern City of Paris, 1880-1900," 12-17.

¹⁰² "son plaisir n'est jamais si grand que de poursuivre la ballerine dans l'envolement de la danse, de la jeter planante dans un nuage de rubans et de gaze, de noter l'ondoiement de son gentil corps, la projection et la retraite du buste, le saut et la retombée des jambes effleurant le sol pour rebondir aussitôt, les balancements cadencés de ses bras arrondis." *Exposition Jules Chéret*: vi.

¹⁰³ "On voudrait retenir la vision, sauver de l'oubli tant de productions charmantes; mais le loisir n'est pas laissé d'opérer un tri rendu de plus en plus malaisé par le nombre toujours croissant des affiches; ceux-là mêmes qui le tentent se trouvent entravés dans leur bon vouloir par l'exiguïté du home, par la difficulté de présenter, de conserver ces feuilles fragiles, délicates à déployer et vastes au point que l'œil ne peut presque jamais, faute de recul, embrasser l'image dans son ensemble. De là est venu le désir d'épargner à autrui la peine d'une sélection, la pensée de ramener l'affiche au format de l'estampe, d'en offrir une réduction, de

Already in the 1889 exhibition catalogue preface, Marx had marveled that Chéret had not yet received any private commissions for large decorations, and in 1891 he welcomed the poster artist's publication of a set of four large lithographs adapted to the domestic interior in scale and palette (which was less saturated, more varied and subtle).¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, the graceful eroticism of a central female figure, legs parted, skirt afloat, and set against a contrasting background and/or the comic grimaces of male companions or masks (see Figures 2.9 and 2.10 as examples), was similar to Chéret's commercial posters, and the critic believed that they performed an analogous function: bringing color and joy into otherwise dreary apartments.¹⁰⁵ Chéret's decorations thus restored beauty to places where it had been lost or perhaps never experienced, whether the street or middle-class apartments.

Chéret's imbrication of loud, even vulgar attractions with eternal aesthetic principles promised, Marx argued, the "unconscious education of taste."¹⁰⁶ The potential

tout point fidèle, commodément maniable, propre à favoriser et l'examen fréquent, rapide, et le plaisir du parallèle." *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche*, 1: iii.

¹⁰⁴ Printed with a wider range of color on high-quality paper and without any text, these allegorical depictions of pantomime, music, dance and comedy were designed for a wallpaper merchant. See Bargiel and Le Men, *La Belle Époque de Jules Chéret*, 230.

¹⁰⁵ "Sur les parois de nos appartements tapissés d'ordinaire de si pauvres façons qu'elles ne le cèdent point, pour la triste, aux murailles grises et mornes de la rue provinciale, voici, au lieu de la répétition obsédante, fastidieuse, d'un motif unique et terne, voici le feu de joie, joie des couleurs, l'évocation de visions rieuses qui s'appellent, se répondent." Roger Marx, "Les papiers de tenture de Jules Chéret," *Revue encyclopédique* (December 15, 1891): 19, reproduced in *ibid.* Marx repeated this sentiment near the end of the decade: "l'intimité de nos demeures ne tarderait pas à se parer, à s'illuminer, elle aussi, de couleur, de joie, et c'en serait fait des habitations mornes et des entours surannés parmi lesquels les jours s'égrènent, un à un, monotones." *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche: Publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles Affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers*, 3: ii.

¹⁰⁶ "Arracher la rue à la monotonie grise et morne des édifices alignés au cordeau; y jeter le feu d'artifice des couleurs, le rayonnement de la joie; convertir les murailles, les soubassements en surfaces décorables et, de ce musée en plein vent, tirer la révélation du caractère d'une race et en même temps l'éducation inconsciente du goût public, c'est cela la tâche de Chéret." *Exposition Jules Chéret*: ii.

weakness of those strident attractions became strengths, since they helped initiated the viewer to subtler pleasures:

A general idea, a system dominates and orders this fantasy, the system of a satirist who always wants to contrast the rough with the delicate, the vulgar with the refined, the crude with the charming. To the sense of “torrential, frenetic” joy so closely analyzed by Huysmans, corresponds, by antithesis, an equal sense of grace—of voluptuous, fascinating, coquettish grace.¹⁰⁷

Here, even more than in Huysmans’s texts, the poster simultaneously distills and contains the “frenetic” energy of modernity. If Puvis created timeless refuges, the poster soothed specifically modern tensions by invoking these tensions and then assimilating them into a regenerative framework. It did so in the street, the context in which capitalist modernity appeared at its most excessive. In this light, artistic posters such as Chéret’s performed a mediating function between more enduring needs of human nature and the modern commercial life that the posters themselves embodied. Marx seems to have believed they might perform an inverse mediation as well, by injecting some of the dynamism of the modern street and commerce into somnolent interior spaces.

This, then, was the conception of the poster that Talmeyr sought to turn on its head. He had taken up the premise that the medium was an art addressing individual viewers, insisting that it spoke of selfish desire rather than universal beauty. His portrayal made the poster appear as an element of social discord rather than individual improvement. Marx nevertheless had an answer for this as well. In the context of *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*, he built on elements nascent in his earlier writing on Chéret in order

¹⁰⁷ “Une idée générale, un système domine et règle cette fantaisie, système d’un satiriste qui toujours voudra mettre en contraste le rude avec le délicat, le vulgaire avec le raffiné, le grossier avec le charmant. A ce sens de la joie ‘torrentielle, frénétique’ si finement analysé par M. J.-K. Huysmans, correspond chez Jules Chéret, par antithèse, un égal sens de la grâce, de la grâce voluptueuse, fascinante, coquetante.” Ibid., v.

to praise the poster as a force for not only individual, but social good. The arguments he put forward were well-suited to Bourgeois's contemporaneous promotion of Solidarism.

In a November 15, 1896 preface for *Les Maîtres*, Marx referred to Talmeyr's article, and spent most of the text refuting the latter's claims.¹⁰⁸ He justified the poster's strong arabesques and striking colors in terms of its context, and then proceeded to defend its subjects. Once again, Marx insisted on the poster's "dual character" and argued that the medium could be serious and dignified when the occasion called for it. However, he also held that it would be a mistake to banish the lighthearted grace, elegance, and joy that it depicted so successfully, and which constituted "essential gifts of the [French] race."¹⁰⁹ He linked this carefree charm with Jean-Antoine Watteau and Jean-Honoré Fragonard but also characterized the poster as "the highest expression [of popular tradition]."¹¹⁰ In invoking race and the Rococo, Marx attempted to align the poster with a sense of national heritage, both in terms of a shared lineage and a shared tradition. I have already indicated how Chéret's commercial posters combined subtle gradations of color and graceful, irregular lines. These were the elements that reminded contemporaries of the aristocratic art of the eighteenth century (see Figure 2.11 for an example), but they

¹⁰⁸ This is the date appended to the preface, which was written for the second year of the serial, 1897. Marx wrote that "'L'Age de l'Affiche,' ainsi la *Revue des Deux Mondes* définissait hier le temps où nous vivons. L'appellation, heureusement trouvée, peut être maintenue si l'on ne se méprend pas sur les raisons qui en autorisent l'emploi." The rest of the preface counters Talmeyr's criticism of the poster's aesthetic and subject matter, without actually explaining his critique.

¹⁰⁹ "Hors de la technique, l'inspiration, l'ordre des sujets a été incriminé. Ne s'est-on pas avisé d'accuser l'affiche française d'être incapable de gravité, de noblesse? C'est outrer le paradoxe et méconnaître que maints chefs-d'œuvre portent la marque profonde de ce double caractère. Vienne l'occasion, l'affiche ne manque pas d'inciter à la charité, à l'admiration, au labeur, aux retours sur soi-même; mais elle sait aussi être pimpante, légère, et nous serions vraiment dignes de pitié, si les dons essentiels de la race étaient soudain abolis, et si la grâce, l'élégance, la joie cessaient de trouver des interprètes et des poètes au pays de Watteau, de Fragonard et de Chéret." *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche*, 2: iii-iv.

¹¹⁰ See footnote 95.

were combined with the primary colors, stark juxtapositions, and synthetic, simplified forms akin to the popular *Images d'Épinal* (Figure 2.6). For Marx, they reconciled aristocratic and popular aesthetics and subjects within a sophisticated, mass cultural form, employing a decorative “system” that contrasted “the rough with the delicate, the vulgar with the refined, the crude with the charming.”¹¹¹ As I argued earlier, this combination promised to educate the taste of the masses by appealing to their instincts but also exposing them to a more elevated, refined tradition: a kind of trickle-down aesthetics in which the people would gradually come to hold the ideals of the elite. But I think it would also be fair to say that Marx championed Chéret and his successors because they appeared to have found a visual idiom with which *both* the elite and the masses could identify. In contrast to Talmeyr, Marx saw in the artistic poster an aesthetic of consensus—one might even say of Solidarism (though he was not yet employing the term).

Marx in fact made similar remarks about Puvis’s work, albeit with a different emphasis. In the same article in which he praised the painter for his creation of an atemporal, “enduring dream,” the critic argued that mural painting’s long existence had led it to “spea[k] to the universal soul” rather than to particular classes or generations.¹¹² Marx also wrote of the wide address of Puvis’s art in terms of oppositions: “Puvis satisfies both imagination and reason. With an infinite tact, he balances, in equilibrium, majesty and ardor, simplicity and elegance, nobleness and informal grace. He brings

¹¹¹ See previous discussion.

¹¹² See footnote 2.

together a taste for humble naïveté and the poetry of sublime inventions.”¹¹³ Like Chéret, Puvis managed to combine elevated and popular registers. Marx similarly emphasized the artist’s ability to communicate abstract ideas through concrete (though generalized) human episodes, rendering these ideas “immediately intelligible to all.”¹¹⁴ The parallels between his discussions of Chéret and his writing on Puvis—made even more evident by Marx’s frequent reuse of his own turns of phrase—reveal the extent to which public, decorative art was imagined as reaching across class boundaries in order to transcend them.

The other parallel in Marx’s reception of the two artists was his emphasis on Chéret and Puvis’s originality *and* their ability to subordinate it to the contextual requirements of decoration. In his 1897 preface for *Les Maîtres*, Marx wrote that “while decoration’s essential, secular laws are ignored nearly everywhere, and abused at will, they continue to be respected by the masters of the poster”; in his 1899 elegy to Puvis he explained that the artist’s mural aesthetic emerged at “a time when the imperatives of function [destination] were ignored, abused at will.”¹¹⁵ The criterion of “destination”—

¹¹³ “[Puvis] satisfait à la fois l’imagination et la raison; il montre balancés, équilibrés avec un tact infini, la majesté et l’enjouement, la simplicité et l’élégance, la noblesse et la grâce familière; il unit le goût de l’humble naïveté à la poésie des sublimes inventions.” Marx, “Puvis de Chavannes,” 1077-78.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1078.

¹¹⁵ “[T]andis que les lois essentielles et séculaires de la décoration sont presque partout méconnues, violées a plaisir, le respect s’en est maintenu chez les maitres de l’affiche.” *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche: Publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles Affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers*, 3: iv. See my previous discussion of this passage in relation to Marx’s conception of the poster as a decorative art, both universal (timeless) and democratic (timely). Referring to the relatively pale coloration of Puvis’s early paintings, which would only increase in future work, Marx wrote that “[c]e qui était, de la part de leur auteur, timidité dans l’abaissement du ton, ne pouvait manquer de sembler une audacieuse nouveauté à une époque où les règles de la destination étaient méconnues, violées à plaisir.” “Puvis de Chavannes,” 1078.

context, purpose, function—was laid out even more explicitly in Marx’s first essay on Chéret:

what is remarkable is that so many works, improvised with an independence and spontaneity typical only of Japanese artists, demonstrate an absolute respect for the necessities of convention and of purpose [destination]. Everything in them is established according to the role the poster must play, the place it must occupy.¹¹⁶

In this passage, Marx emphasized Chéret’s spontaneous individuality, which in turn underscored the subordination of the poster artist’s work (and his individuality) to its context. This contradicted Talmeyr’s notion that the poster’s individualizing address annihilated all other concerns. It also recalls Baudelaire’s precept that details be subordinated to imaginative, and formal, synthesis—the kind of synthesis that fin-de-siècle critics associated with the decorative.¹¹⁷ Incarnated as a crowd or mob “in love with absolute equality,” Baudelaire equated details with a mass of uncompromising individualities that fail to coalesce into a greater whole. Underlying the discourse on decoration was thus another discourse on the relation of the individual to a greater collective. Quoting from his own Salon of 1895, Marx wrote that Puvis’s painting “subordinate[s] itself to the gray or chalky stone of buildings raised to exalt civic and social duty, to glorify art and thought.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ “[L]e remarquable est que tant d’ouvrages, improvisés avec une indépendance et une spontanéité habituelles aux seuls artistes du Nippon, donnent l’exemple d’un respect absolu des nécessités de la convenance et de la destination. Tout s’y trouve établi en vue du rôle que l’affiche doit tenir, de la place qu’elle est appelée à occuper.” *Exposition Jules Chéret*: iii. Here Marx invoked Japan, a common reference for fin-de-siècle design reformers, though not as common as the eighteenth century.

¹¹⁷ See my discussion in the introduction to this dissertation.

¹¹⁸ “[I]l a voulu entre la décoration et le monument une alliance si étroite, une fusion si complète que l’ensemble parût jailli d’un coup, au commandement d’une inspiration unique. Le luxe des dorures, la richesse d’une galerie d’Apollon avait appelé les diaprures et les fanfares d’Eugène Delacroix; plus humbles avec leurs matités et leurs ‘pâleurs,’ les tentures de Puvis de Chavannes entendent ‘se subordonner à la pierre grise ou crayeuses des édifices élevés pour exalter le devoir civique et social, pour glorifier l’art et la pensée.” Marx, “Puvis de Chavannes,” 1079.

Marx's decorative rhetoric, applied to both Chéret and Puvis, was thus an indicator of their art's attunement not only to particular physical settings but also to the larger context of the French Third Republic. As indicated above, the word "destination" evoked the artwork's intended location but also its larger function or purpose. Characterized as they were by universality and unity, Puvis's and Chéret's decorative aesthetics figured in Marx's texts as agents of social harmony. By the time of his 1913 anthology *L'art social*, which included the 1889 preface he had written for Chéret, Marx explicitly identified this harmony with the concept of solidarity (and thus with Bourgeois' Solidarism), viewed as one of art's fundamental roles:

Means of action, universal language, and figurative writing, visible and enduring expression of states of mind and customs, art informs history, stimulates individual energies, and establishes—through the sharing of emotion it inspires—a close solidarity among men, [providing] permanent sources of unity and fellow feeling.¹¹⁹

This passage also suggests what Marx thought the poster had to offer, distinct from other "decorative" arts, in the cause of solidarity. In addition to its reproductive medium, which made its decorative aesthetic widely available, and its ability to invigorate individuals (de Fleury's preoccupation), the poster enabled a shared emotion.¹²⁰ Marx echoed Bourgeois in identifying emotion as the basis of solidarity. Like Brunetière, Marx emphasized the intellectual, rational character of Puvis's work. Though he believed that the latter invoked an essential quality of the French "race," Chéret's colorful work spoke to another, more

¹¹⁹ "Moyen d'action, langue universelle et écriture figurée, expression visible et durable de l'état des esprits et des mœurs, l'art renseigne l'histoire, stimule les énergies individuelles, et le partage des émotions qu'il suscite établit entre les hommes une solidarité étroite, des raisons permanentes de sympathie et d'union." *L'art social*: 3-4.

¹²⁰ In *L'art social*, Marx praised mechanical reproduction for its role in the diffusion of art, to which he argued everyone should have access. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

accessible, national trait: a playful, teasing sensuality linked to passion and imagination more than reason.¹²¹ It thus appeared uniquely qualified to fulfill art's special role vis-à-vis solidarity. While reason was held to emerge relatively late in each individual, and was then differently favored by education and experience, emotion and imagination were open to all.¹²² Marx no doubt approved of Chéret's commission to decorate a room adjoining the Hôtel de Ville's Salle des fêtes, where his work would represent a facet of French existence (Figure 2.12) ignored by Puvis's solemn murals.¹²³

A Moral Poster: The Union pour l'action morale's *L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève*

Marx's promotion of the poster was in keeping with Bourgeois's notion of Solidarism as an appropriately modern form of morality. But just a week after Talmeyr's article

¹²¹ That Marx equated color with passion and emotion is evident in his contrast of Delacroix and Puvis. See footnote 118.

¹²² These ideas were largely developed and debated in relation to education, a domain central to Solidarist philosophy and practice. In his essay "L'art à l'école," which Marx wrote in 1908 and later included in *L'art social*, he quoted Félix Ravaisson on the idea that imagination preceded reason in the natural development of human faculties. Marx, *L'art social*: 74. Ravaisson's work informed Ferdinand Buisson's discussion of art, particularly drawing, in his *Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire*. As the director of primary education Buisson was a promotor of secular education and of Solidarism; in the early 20th century, Ravaisson's pedagogical theory of intuitive, rather than geometrical, drawing was eventually confirmed as the drawing method of choice in French primary schools. See Jocelyne Béguery, "Le dessin: vers un problème d'enseignement artistique," in *L'École républicaine et la question des savoirs: Enquête au cœur du Dictionnaire de pédagogie de Ferdinand Buisson*, ed. Daniel Denis and Pierre Kahn (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003); Rossella Froissart Pezone, "Théories de l'ornement en France au tournant du XIXe siècle: L'abstraction entre nature et géométrie," *Ligeia*, no. 89-92 (January-June 2009).

¹²³ In a February 1890 letter to Marx, the critic and arts administrator Philippe Burty wrote that "[i]l y a quelques semaines, étant membre de la Commission de la décoration de l'Hôtel de Ville, en remplacement de H. Rochefort, j'ai poussé une pointe adressé à ces messieurs: J'ai proposé Chéret pour une surface à décorer. Quelques poils en ont blanchi!" "Lettres de Philippe Burty à Roger Marx," Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris, France. Chéret would again be proposed to decorate a room in that building, and was eventually granted a commission on the grounds that his work suited a room adjacent to the Salle des fêtes. Marx himself became a member of the commission in the late nineties, but only after the décor had been commissioned from Chéret. Ville de Paris, *Commission de Décoration de L'Hôtel de Ville: Procès-Verbaux*, vol. 1. 268-69 and 306-18. By the time the décor was installed in 1903 it was met with acclaim by both critics and the Hôtel de Ville Commission. *Le Triomphe des mairies: Grands décors républicains à Paris, 1870-1914 (Musée du Petit Palais, 8 novembre 1986-18 janvier 1987)*, (Paris: Musées de la ville de Paris, 1986). 446.

Note that Puvis's decorative ensemble, *L'Été* and *L'Hiver*, was located nearby in the Hôtel de Ville.

appeared in *La Revue des deux mondes*, there was an effort more in keeping with Brunetière and Talmeyr's notion of morality: a poster that seemed designed to refute Talmeyr's premise that beauty and morality could not coexist in the medium. The poster in question (Figures 2.13 and 2.14), prominently placed on the palisades of a Grands Boulevards department store construction site, was based on Puvis de Chavannes' Pantheon cycle, *L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève* (*The Childhood of Sainte Genevieve* Figures 2.15 and 2.16).¹²⁴

In keeping with Brunetière's emphasis on the ascetic character of Puvis's art, which he believed allowed the artist's work to transcend the material in favor of the ideal, this poster was far removed from the colorful advertisements usually found at such a location. Significantly larger than the typical commercial poster, it depicted scenes from the early life of Paris's patron saint in discreet colors rather than bright primaries. And in place of a prominent brand and/or slogan advertising a product, the poster merely provided small explanatory texts (reproduced from the painted original) as well as the name of the painter, the printer, and the indication that it had been produced for the Union pour l'action morale (Union for moral action).¹²⁵ The latter was not a commercial enterprise, but rather an association founded in 1892 by the writer Paul Desjardins. The Union's goal was to promote, through action, the moral renewal and edification of society.

¹²⁴ The poster appeared on September 9, 1896 on the palisades of the Grande Maison de blanc, on the Boulevard des Capucines.

¹²⁵ *Le Temps* counted the unexpected nature of this encounter as one of its attractions : "Outre le plaisir des yeux que procure naturellement une œuvre d'art, il y a aussi pour attirer les passants l'étonnement de ne pas voir s'étaler, dans un endroit aussi favorable à la publicité, les réclames habituelles de parfumeurs ou de marchands de poêles mobiles. Le public est intrigué comme par une énigme." "Moralistes modernes," *Le Temps* (September 11, 1896).

A frequent essayist in journals like *La Revue Bleue*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Journal des Débats*, Desjardins had established his status as a modern moralist with the 1892 publication of his *Le devoir présent* (*The Present Duty*), in which he identified the moral ills of the period and potential means for their remedy.¹²⁶ Desjardins proposed a union of positive thinkers (“positifs”) to combat what he saw as the heart of the problem: a current of negative thought that believed humanity to be without any higher purpose or destiny and thus without any moral capacity or obligation to better itself.¹²⁷ He believed that, collectively, like-minded idealists would work to turn this destructive tide. Desjardins’ emphasis on both (non-sectarian) religious belief and the values of liberal democracy placed his thinking somewhere between Catholic conservatism and the liberal secularism of Republicans.¹²⁸ The Union pour l’action morale emerged out of Desjardins’ call to transform positive thinking into action, action in which art, and literature in particular, would play an important role.¹²⁹ In *Le Devoir présent*, Desjardins warned his readers away from the artificiality of a purely aesthetic appreciation, reminding them that “the most important thing is to live, that words and texts are, after all, actions, and are therefore a matter of good and evil. [...] One must thus not hesitate to say, at every opportunity: this book is good; this one is a bad book.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *Le devoir présent* regrouped a series of articles Desjardins had published in 1891 in the *Journal des débats*. For information on Desjardins and the Union pour l’action morale, see François Chaubet, *Paul Desjardins et les Décades de Pontigny* (Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2000). 22-59.

¹²⁷ Paul Desjardins, *Le devoir présent*, Fifth ed. (Paris: Armand Colin et C^{ie}, 1894). 8-12.

¹²⁸ This ambiguity provoked critiques for the willfully indeterminate nature of his moral precepts. See, for example, footnote 155.

¹²⁹ Differences of opinion over the Dreyfus Affair would lead two members of the Union, Maurice Pujo and Henri Vaugois to leave and found the Action Française.

¹³⁰ “ce qui importe avant tout, c’est de vivre, que les paroles et les écrits sont, en somme, des actions, et, comme tel, relèvent de la règle du bien et du mal [...] Il ne faut donc pas hésiter à dire, en toute rencontre: ce livre est bon; celui-ci est un mauvais livre.” Desjardins, *Le devoir présent*: 65.

Talmeyr held that an artistic poster was inherently bad, yet the Union's effort was promptly dubbed a "moral poster" in *Le Temps*. This designation soon became central to journalistic discussions of its merit, as critics debated the nature of its "moral."¹³¹ As Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond has indicated, a number of critics identified the poster's moral character in its differences, in both subject matter and aesthetic, from the typical commercial poster described by Talmeyr.¹³² In other words, they saw the moral of the Union's poster as synonymous with a critique of its commercial counterpart. The Union itself indicated a more positive understanding of the poster's moral lesson: it hoped to

Statements such as these had in fact led Brunetière to open his "Statue de Baudelaire" by expressing surprise that Desjardins himself had not spoken out against the proposed commemoration. "A qui se fier, je vous demande, ô compagnons de la vie nouvelle, et sur qui compterons-nous désormais, si M. Paul Desjardins lui-même fait défaut à la cause du 'devoir présent'? Lorsque j'ai lu quelque part qu'il était question d'élever un buste, ou une statue tout entière, [...] à Charles Baudelaire, je n'ai rien dit; et j'attendais, comme tout le monde, la généreuse protestation de M. Desjardins. Il me semblait bien qu'en effet il nous en devait une [...] [C]omme ouvrier du 'devoir présent,' quelle sera donc cette 'littérature infâme,' qu'il avait pris l'engagement de combattre, si ce n'est celle à laquelle appartiennent *une Martyre* ou *les Femmes damnées* ? Cependant, il a gardé jusqu'ici le silence, et j'en cherche vainement les raisons. Est-ce que peut-être il se réserve pour le jour de l'inauguration? Ou n'a-t-il jamais lu Baudelaire? Ou attend-il à intervenir que l'on ait proposé de dresser sur la place publique, dans une attitude analogue à leurs œuvres, la statue de Restif de la Bretonne, ou celle de Casanova?

Mais, en ce cas, qu'il nous pardonne alors d'être moins ambitieux, ou moins dégoûtés que lui! Assurément, il l'eût mieux dit lui-même—avec plus de pleurs dans la voix, et je ne sais quoi de plus navré, de plus abandonné, de plus démissionnaire dans toute sa personne—mais enfin, si ce serait un scandale, ou plutôt une espèce d'obscénité que de voir un Baudelaire en bronze, [...] il faut bien que quelqu'un le dise. Où les apôtres hésitent, il se pourrait qu'après tout un modeste 'littérateur' réussit." Brunetière, "La statue de Baudelaire," 133-134. For Desjardins's connection to Brunetière's campaign against the statue, see *La querelle de la statue*: 28 and 103. Brunetière perhaps hoped to recruit Desjardins to his cause or more likely to shame him for not having the courage of his left-leaning moral convictions. Although in his text Brunetière wondered whether Desjardins' silence on the subject indicated that he had not read Baudelaire, this seems to have been a rhetorical maneuver: Desjardins had written a largely negative analysis of Baudelaire's work in the *Revue bleue* of July 2, 1887, referencing Brunetière's own critique of Baudelaire earlier that year (*Revue des deux mondes*, June 1, 1887). Brunetière thus may have expected Desjardins' support: André Guyaux suggests that the critic hoped to bolster his campaign by gaining an ally from the "other side," i.e. the left. However, the tone of Brunetière's address to Desjardins was mocking enough that it makes such a purpose seem unlikely. Regardless, the latter remained silent on the subject.

¹³¹ I have found no indication that the close timing of Talmeyr's article and the Union's poster was anything but coincidental. Despite the importance of morality in Talmeyr's text, this label seems to have been solely related to the Union's name. Though several articles on posters discussed both Talmeyr's essay and the Union's poster, they did not directly relate them to one another.

¹³² Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, "L'enfance de Sainte-Geneviève: Une affiche de Puvis de Chavannes au service de l'Union pour l'action morale," *Revue de l'art*, no. 109 (1995). I am indebted to Jumeau-Lafond's analysis of the poster and its reception.

take advantage of the popularity of the poster medium to expose a wider audience to Puvis's art. Articles in the Union's *Bulletin* emphasized the way the poster (and Puvis's decorative painting) made beauty freely available in a public space, where it was capable of benefiting anyone and everyone.¹³³ As I have noted, this was a quality already associated with the "artistic" commercial poster.

Yet it was not entirely off the mark to consider the Union's *L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève* to be a critique of the commercial poster. In the *Bulletin*, the novelist René Bazin distinguished it from the cheap, colorful images promoting a host of commercial products, describing it as "a thought" amongst all the advertisements ("réclames").¹³⁴ The Union was not interested in disseminating just any kind of beauty; its members believed that Puvis's art was imbued with qualities necessary to the moral renewal they envisaged. Desjardins was as concerned as Brunetière and Talmeyr with social unity and elevated purpose. One of the Union's major goals was "social unity" ("rapprochement social"), which was to be achieved by combating materialism (and egotistical self-interest) and by providing society with a set of higher, common principles: what it referred to as "a public spirit" ("un *esprit public*."¹³⁵ Similar to Brunetière, Bazin emphasized the way Puvis's asceticism eschewed sensuality in order to better reveal an underlying, divine order. The artist's "beautiful forms, of a somewhat severe grace, and skillfully ordered," pared the world down to a timeless "essence," putting the viewer in contact with the eternal, divine

¹³³ René Bazin, "Puvis de Chavannes et l'action morale (A propos d'une affiche)," *Bulletin de l'Union pour l'action morale*, no. 1 (December 1, 1896); "Pierre Puvis de Chavannes," *Bulletin de l'Union pour l'action morale* (November 15, 1898).

¹³⁴ "les chromos de la saxoléine, des amers nouveaux, des biborax décollétés, du chocolat Meunier et des romans populaires," "Puvis de Chavannes et l'action morale," 27.

¹³⁵ See in particular numbers 3-5 of the Union's program, as produced in the December 1, 1896 issue of the association's *Bulletin* (the same issue that contained an article on the Union's poster).

element of his or her humanity.¹³⁶ Bazin described the humbling effect of this experience: like Puvis's figures, dominated by, and yet in harmony with, the landscape, "we are small, agitated, and fragile, in an immense, calm and divine world."¹³⁷ The diffusion of Puvis's art thus constituted a moral action, an attempt to counter the harmful influence of the modern visual environment.

It is not anodyne that the Union selected Puvis's *L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève* for its poster: the location, subject matter and formal effects of this decorative cycle exemplified the qualities the Union most appreciated in Puvis's work (as outlined by Bazin). As Aimée Brown Price has shown, its location in the Panthéon endowed it with complex religious and civic associations. Since the French Revolution, the Panthéon's affiliation had shifted back and forth between the Church and the State, serving either as a place of worship or a monument to France's great men—and sometimes both.¹³⁸ By the time of the poster's creation the building had been confirmed as a civic monument, but

¹³⁶ "Il [Puvis] a peint de belles formes, d'une grâce un peu sévère, ordonnées savamment, et dont la vue est parmi les plaisirs supérieurs que nous devons à notre temps"; "Peut-être est-il le seul aujourd'hui dont les œuvres donnent l'impression de la sérénité, d'une peinture dégagée du temps, indifférente aux accidents d'une époque particulière. On les remarque dans la foule des autres, comme certaines figures de passants, qu'on dirait soustraites aux influences de l'heure présente, et qui rappellent non d'autres âges, mais ce je ne sais quoi d'éternel qui persiste dans le type humain. Elles sont une protestation contre la sensualité systématique où plusieurs peintres et plusieurs écrivains cherchent et trouvent leur inspiration." Bazin, "Puvis de Chavannes et l'action morale," 29-30. For the use of the term "essence," see following footnote.

¹³⁷ "M. Puvis de Chavannes est, avant tout, un paysagiste. C'est du milieu où elles vivent que les figures qu'il a peintes tirent leur signification. Elles se surajoutent à la nature pour exprimer la même harmonie ou le même rêve. Voyez comme elles ne gênent jamais les lignes, comme elles sont semées dans les forêts, les ciels, les prés, les eaux, avec un souci prédominant de la beauté du décor. Elles se meuvent à l'aise dans des espaces toujours illimités. [...] Une foule de détails sont négligés [...] Et cependant, nous sentons que la réalité est là, dans son essence et dans sa fleur, et que nous sommes petits, agités, périssables, dans un monde immense, calme, et divin." Ibid.

¹³⁸ For a brief history of these shifts up to the early Third Republic, see Jane Mayo Roos, *Early impressionism and the French state (1866-1874)* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 221. For a discussion of the building's (re)secularization in 1885, and Puvis's concern that this might have a negative impact on his mural, see Aimée Brown Price, *Pierre Puvis de Chavannes: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Painted Work*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 195 and 398.

the painted originals were part of a decorative program intended to highlight the importance of religion to the French nation (“l’histoire religio-nationale de la France”), commissioned during one of its periods as the Basilica of Saint Genevieve.¹³⁹ The saint herself represented an amalgam analogous to that of her monument: as the patron saint of Paris, Saint Genevieve was both an object of piety and, in the wake of the Siege of Paris, of nationalistic fervor. She had diverted the Huns from Paris with collective prayer and came to the city’s aid again when besieged and overrun by the Franks. These episodes had a renewed resonance given France’s humiliating 1870-71 defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, which many had attributed to French moral and military decadence.¹⁴⁰ Saint Genevieve figured as the savior of the French nation. As Price argues, Puvis’s rather severe, archaizing treatment of the saint’s childhood identified the source of her subsequent strength in her religious faith and purity.¹⁴¹

The poster’s design seemed calculated to enhance this interpretation, especially when contrasted with its commercial fellows. Inspired by the painted original, the lithographic *L’Enfance de Sainte Genevieve* worked against the excessive individualism and sensuality that Brunetière associated with the contemporary lack of solidarity and moral purpose, thwarting the poster’s (supposed) address on individual desire. In the typical commercial poster, a central figure either focused attention on a commodity or directed its gaze outward to the viewer, though a number of posters included both types. In the first panel of the Union’s poster—originally the only scene from Puvis’s decorative

¹³⁹ *Pierre Puvis de Chavannes*, 2: 195.

¹⁴⁰ Saint Genevieve was credited with traversing the Frankish blockade to miraculously return with eleven ships full of wheat for Paris’ hungry citizens. This episode was depicted by Puvis in a second decorative cycle for the Panthéon, begun in the nineties and completed only after the artist’s death. *Ibid.*, 195 and 398.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

cycle that the Union had intended to reproduce—a peasant family looks at the praying saint rather than a consumer product. Given that their humble station recalled the Union’s intent to reach the uneducated masses, and that their spatial relationship to the saint was similar to that of the viewer’s with the poster/painting, these figures’ poses invited viewers to imagine themselves in the presence of the saint. The poster could thus be read—and perhaps experienced—as an object of religious and civic reverence rather than as an invitation to consume. Indeed, *Le Temps* made much of the crowd’s respectful attitude, the poster serving as a kind of surrogate for the saint.¹⁴² And by including the other three panels of the cycle in the final project, Puvis’s poster was able to demonstrate the results of this religious piety and admiration: the collective harmony of a large, diverse crowd bearing witness to another episode of the saint’s life.

Incorporating these additional panels also created an exceptionally long poster. Placed at eye-level, its physical expanse embraced viewers as a group: the “crowd” evoked by *Le Temps*, as opposed to the solitary or disparate poster viewers often depicted (see Figure 2.17 for an example). Steinlen’s depiction of a crowd in a similarly large poster (Figure 2.18) confirms the association between the oversized format and collectivity/collective viewing.¹⁴³ Desjardins and his colleagues sought to model the kind

¹⁴² “Durant toute la soirée d’hier les passants se sont longuement attardés devant la nouvelle affiche. Naturellement leur curiosité s’augmentait du fait que l’image ne vantait aucun produit industriel. Mais aussi le public semble bien avoir été quelque peu séduit, puisque l’affiche, placée à peine à un mètre au-dessus du sol, après avoir passé une nuit tout entière sans autre protection que le respect de chacun, est, ce matin, aussi fraîche qu’hier, et qu’on n’a tenté ni de la déchirer ni de la défigurer soit par des dessins, soit par des inscriptions. [...] on peut constater dès aujourd’hui que l’attitude du public devant cette manifestation peu banale, a été parfaitement attentive et respectueuse.” “L’Affiche morale,” *Le Temps* (September 10, 1896).

¹⁴³ Miriam Levin has argued that this poster mirrored “the congenial democratizing environment” thought to be created by posters on the street. “[A] poster like this, when placed on the walls of buildings lining city squares, would [...] suggest integrative patterns of behavior to passers-by from all social classes. Levin, “Democratic Vistas—Democratic Media,” 97-98.

of social and moral unity, inspired by a greater, spiritual authority, that they hoped to recreate in modern society.

The aesthetic choices made for the poster—apparently driven as much or more by Puvis as by the Union—were aimed at enhancing this moral message. Rather than reproducing the artist’s palette, the poster reduced its range and intensity (perhaps in part to recall the discreet color of Puvis’s later decorative works, more subdued than the earlier *L’Enfance*). Its colors were limited to three pastels in order to “make a kind of cameo, whose effect would be as calm as possible.”¹⁴⁴ The result was a monochrome pink bordered by a dark green frieze, upon which the scenes—the forms largely composed of solid outlines and the shadows of short, parallel hatches—were printed in a darker brown (“bistre”).¹⁴⁵ These marks, which reproduced a drawing Puvis had made expressly for this purpose, were more reminiscent of printmaking techniques like etching than modern color lithography. The Union’s poster thus declined many of that medium’s strengths: the intense, sometimes painterly swathes of color showcased in the commercial poster, which were meant to capture attention and stimulate desire. These decisions reduced production costs, but also suggest that the poster medium required additional safeguards if it were to reproduce the effect of “this beautiful image that rests the eyes” and avoid the kind of stimulating, sensual address associated with its commercial

¹⁴⁴ “faire une sorte de camaïeu, dont l’effet serait aussi calme que possible. Le dessin au trait de M. Lauzet fut tiré dans un ton bistre, reproduisant exactement le dessin original du maître. On adopta, pour le fond, un ton rosé.

Enfin, pour la bordure, c’est un ton vert noir qui fut choisi.” “L’Affiche morale.”

¹⁴⁵ See the previous footnote for the description of the poster’s color in *Le Temps*.

counterpart.¹⁴⁶ These changes suggested that the Union wished its poster to instead relate to the viewer on an intellectual and spiritual level.

Compare, for example, an advertisement for the Centenaire de la Lithographie by Puvis (the only other poster he produced) with another by the poster designer Hugo d'Alesi (Figures 2.19 and 2.20). Both depict a woman examining a print, but in entirely different manners. Dressed in modern fashion, d'Alesi's woman has apparently interrupted a stroll along the banks of the Seine to take up a Charlet print. Her raised hands and the proximity of her head to the print suggest that she is astonished and transfixed by it, or possibly by the Chéret poster visible in the upper right-hand corner. D'Alesi integrated the advertising text and exploited lithography's painterly effects in order to create an attractive, believable tableau, into which the viewer might project him or herself.¹⁴⁷ In contrast, Puvis's scene is framed and contained by a fairly traditional use of border and text, deploys its pale colors with little gradation, and seems scraped or etched out. Though the latter does create another kind of material presence, it does so through an ascetic subtraction, a refusal of painting and lithography's potential for aesthetic luxuriousness. Puvis's vaguely classicizing figures are simply arranged, and though the putto might suggest passion, there is little sign of this in the female figure's face. She holds the print away from her body, a distance that is emphasized by the large L (of "Lithographie") that intervenes between her face and the unseen image. She does not

¹⁴⁶ "[C]ette belle image où vos yeux se reposent," as described in the elegy to Puvis that appeared in the *Bulletin* after the artist's death (the article was anonymous, though Jumeau-Lafond has suggested Desjardins was its author). In the text, it is somewhat ambiguous as to whether the writer refers to the painted original, the poster, or both. "Pierre Puvis de Chavannes," 68.

¹⁴⁷ See the journalist Georges Michel's favorable discussion of d'Alesi, in which he categorized his work as an "affiche de paysage" (which he described as an artistic poster genre seeking to create "un petit tableau"). Georges Michel, "Les progrès de la publicité moderne: L'industrie de l'affiche," *L'Économiste français* (August 7, 1897): 177.

appear in thrall to this image, instead constituting an allegory of serene, disinterested contemplation. In order to fulfill its purpose, the poster *L'Enfance de Sainte Genevieve* had to be just as “disinterested,” modeling the renunciation of material concerns for moral ones.¹⁴⁸

A number of critics reacted negatively, or at least mockingly, to this attempt at a moral poster. They seemed to agree with Talmeyr that beauty and morality had become incompatible, if not for the same reasons. Even *Le Temps*'s praise reveals a misunderstanding of the Union's purpose. While the journal suggested that the poster's moral function was integral to its artistic character, this was because it gave that function a rather limited scope: the poster was meant “to propagate a taste for beauty in the public.”¹⁴⁹ And because *Le Temps* argued that beauty must be the sole purpose of the artist—an opinion with which the Union would certainly have disagreed—the journal could only discuss its moral impact in the vaguest of terms: “No doubt, the artist should only concern himself with the beauty of his work, but the profound impression that this beauty, created without any thought to anything but itself, has on those who contemplate it, how could it not have an effect on their whole interior life?”¹⁵⁰ If extra-aesthetic concerns were ruled out of the artistic process, how could specific moral results be expected? The critic Gustave Geffroy's response to the poster was similar to that of the *Le Temps*'s journalist. Having reflected on artistic pedagogy in the context of his *Musées*

¹⁴⁸ In René Bazin's analysis, “[l]’initiative était hardie, puisqu’elle était désintéressée,” while *Le Temps* referred to the poster as “cette ‘réclame’ toute désintéressée en faveur de la beauté.” “L’Affiche morale.”; Bazin, “Puvis de Chavannes et l’action morale,” 27.

¹⁴⁹ “à propager dans le public le goût de la beauté.” “L’Affiche morale.” This statement echoed others made by Marx. See footnote 106, for example.

¹⁵⁰ “Sans doute, l’artiste ne doit se préoccuper que de la beauté de son œuvre mais l’impression profonde que cette beauté, créée sans autre objet qu’elle-même, fait sur les hommes qui la contemplent, comment pourrait-elle n’avoir pas de retentissement sur toute leur vie intérieure?” “Moralistes modernes,” n.p.

du soir, he admired the poster as an attempt to bring art to the masses. But he was wary of:

the ambiguity introduced by the word moral, which for some indicates a sermon against bad morals, and for others, who knows what ulterior motive of evangelism, of born-again Christianity. If Mr. Paul Desjardins and his disciples were simply working for human emancipation, divorced from any religious or moralizing preoccupations, their efforts would be more enduring and fertile. That is actually what they are moving toward, since they call on art, the freest, the greatest, the truest of human religions. Let them then define themselves once and for all, courageously and powerfully, without concern for an already exhausted and dying mysticism.¹⁵¹

These responses tended to confirm Talmeyr's thesis: if the Union had succeeded in producing a beautiful, artistic poster, it was judged to be so in spite of, rather than on account of, its moral intentions.

Le Temps had, however, concluded that the Union should be commended for using advertising's techniques against advertising itself, by subverting them for the antithetical purpose of disinterested aesthetic contemplation.¹⁵² Other critics were more

¹⁵¹ "ce mot de morale qui prête à l'équivoque, qui annonce, pour les uns, un prêche contre les mauvaises mœurs, et, pour les autres, on ne sait quelle arrière-pensée d'évangélisme, de néo-christianisme. Si M. Paul Desjardins et ses adeptes travaillaient simplement pour l'émancipation humaine, en dehors de toutes les préoccupations religieuses et moralisatrices, leur œuvre serait autrement vivace et féconde. En réalité, c'est à cela qu'ils vont, puisqu'ils se réclament de l'art, qui est la plus libre, la plus grande, la plus vraie des religions humaines. Qu'ils se définissent donc une bonne fois courageusement, virilement, sans souci de la mode mystique, déjà épuisée et agonisante." Gustave Geffroy, "L'affiche morale," in *La vie artistique* (Paris: H. Floury, 1897), 119. The original publication date of Geffroy's article was September 28, 1896, a little over two weeks after the poster's appearance.

¹⁵² "On déplore souvent ce qu'on appelle l'américanisation des mœurs modernes. Il faut s'entendre. Dans un conte célèbre, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam a raillé un projet d'affichage céleste, qui aurait consisté à projeter sur les nuages, transformés en écrans lumineux, des annonces commerciales. Il symbolisa, dans cette fantaisie, les procédés d'industrialisation qui, dans un intérêt de lucre, déshonorent des merveilles naturelles. Cette sorte de barbarie utilitaire, d'où le dollar proscrire l'idéal, serait, en effet, la honte et comme la banqueroute de la civilisation. Mais si, au contraire, au lieu de se lamenter dans la solitude, des hommes hardis combattaient cette 'américanisation' déplorable avec ses propres armes; s'ils employaient à une propagande en faveur des choses désintéressées les procédés même dont l'efficacité a été démontrée par les manieurs d'argent, ne devrait-on pas se féliciter d'avoir trouvé dans leurs inventions une force incomparable à mettre au service des idées éternelles? Il faut s'attacher à l'essentiel et ne pas se laisser égarer par l'inattendu de certaines antithèses. Plaisanter la fièvre contemporaine de publicité est peut-être spirituel; mais il vaut encore mieux savoir s'en servir." "Moralistes modernes." Note that the text refers to "eternal ideas," echoing the Union's praise of Puvis.

ambiguous on this point. Léo Claretie discussed such tactics with a hint of regret, as if unsure as to whether it was not the moral, rather than the commercial, that was subverted in the process: “In the past, it would have seemed degrading and contemptible to make use of commercial methods for the purpose of even a pragmatic morality.” Yet he immediately conceded that, “Americanization” being the order of the day, the “moralizing and aesthetic” poster was worth a try.¹⁵³ Claretie nevertheless went on to make what was the most common critique of the Union’s effort:

All means are good when it is for a worthy cause, and in this case, there is nothing reprehensible about the means itself. The only matter left in doubt is whether or not it will be effective. Since it is for the street, is it popular enough? [...] This fresco is too learned, too refined, to entice the crowd.¹⁵⁴

An anonymous chronicler for the Catholic *Le Correspondant* was harsher, seeing in Puvis’s work a symbolist ambiguity analogous to Desjardins’ “vaporous mysticism.”¹⁵⁵ So, while both these writers subscribed to the Union’s project to moralize the masses, they suggested that this goal required another kind of image. Effectively dividing functions that *Le Temps* had seen as synonymous, Claretie assigned a different approach

¹⁵³ “Autrefois, il eut paru dégradant et indigne de mettre au service de la morale même pratique les procédés familiers au commerce. Mais nous nous sommes si bien américanisés, qu’aujourd’hui cet affichage étonne, et demain nous y serons faits.” Léo Claretie, “L’affiche murale et morale,” *Le monde illustré*, no. 2061 (September 26, 1896): 195. In an earlier, shorter article (part of a rubric chronicling current events of interest), Claretie disassociated himself from any distaste with this use of commercial tactics, attributing it to “[d]es esprits chagrins”: “ils gémiront de voir la morale avoir recours aux procédés de l’épicerie; mais le but est si louable que la fin justifie les moyens.” “La vie et les moeurs,” *Revue encyclopédique: Chronique universelle*, no. 120 (September 26, 1896): 153.

¹⁵⁴ “Tous les moyens sont bons, quand la fin est louable, et ici, le moyen n’a rien en soi de répréhensible. La seule question qu’il laisse douteuse est celle de savoir s’il sera efficace. Puisqu’il s’agit de la rue, est-il assez populaire ? [...] Cette fresque est bien savante, bien fine, pour allicier la foule.” “L’affiche murale et morale,” 195. Or, in the *Revue encyclopédique*: “Peut-être serait-il mieux de choisir des artistes plus simples, plus compréhensibles à la foule; Puvis de Chavannes est un raffiné, un compliqué, un savant.” “La vie et les moeurs,” 153.

¹⁵⁵ “On connaît le genre de talent de M. Puvis de Chavannes: sa peinture tient du symbolisme; l’idée qui s’en dégage est vague, brumeuse, difficile à saisir—un peu semblable, il faut le dire, au mysticisme vaporeux de M. Desjardins lui-même.” “Les œuvres et les hommes, courrier de la littérature, des arts et du théâtre: Moralisation par l’affiche,” *Le Correspondant* (September 28, 1896): 1163.

to pragmatic moral instruction versus the more abstract benefits of aesthetic education.¹⁵⁶ He argued that the latter was best served by encouraging the public to go to museums, where it would have access to “works that bear the indelible mark of eternal, immortal beauty, indisputable and universally admired.”¹⁵⁷ In other words, only works whose status had withstood the test of time could be entrusted with this task. As for moral messages, Claretie felt that popular prints—as opposed to the Union’s *affiche artistique*—were perfectly adequate to convey the “simple, clear, [...] unequivocal allegories” he recommended for the purpose. The writer for *Le Correspondant*, who brushed over questions of medium and aesthetics to focus on moral pedagogy, also emphasized the importance of “simple,” “striking” ideas when dealing with “the ignorant, jeering masses.” The writer proposed dramatic, well-known episodes from national history, accompanied by an explanatory legend, if necessary.¹⁵⁸

Ultimately, these commentators were lamenting the absence of elements that had made modern advertising, in the form of the poster, so effective: simple, easily understandable images punctuated by an equally legible text. The effects of an appropriately popular moral imagery (as described in *Le Correspondant*) even resembled

¹⁵⁶ “Une ligue s’est fondée pour ce but noble et élevé [l’éternelle notion du Bien et du Beau], et s’est donné la mission de relever l’esprit public vers les conceptions nobles et pures de l’art.” “La vie et les moeurs,” 153.

¹⁵⁷ “œuvres qui portent le caractère indélébile de l’éternelle et impérissable beauté, indiscutable et universellement admirée.” “L’affiche murale et morale.”

¹⁵⁸ “C’est pur, c’est chaste, c’est aérien, c’est tout ce qu’on voudra, mais un peu vague et compliqué, je crois, pour le but qu’on veut atteindre. [...] Quand on vise la masse ignorante ou gouailleuse, il faut lui parler une langue plus intelligible, plus communicative, lui exposer des idées plus simples et plus pénétrantes, lui présenter des épisodes et des figures qui la saisissent, la remuent, l’entraînent. Etalez sous ses yeux les grands exemples de l’histoire nationale, des actes d’héroïsme, de dévouement sublime, de charité céleste qui en sont l’illustration radieuse. [...] [A]joutez, s’il le faut, une légende à l’image, et alors vous aurez chance d’obtenir une répercussion de votre œuvre d’art dans la vie intérieure et dans les moeurs.” “Les œuvres et les hommes,” 1164. The writer did not mention that there was in fact explanatory text on the Union’s poster, perhaps finding that it was too small or did not clarify the moral intent.

those attributed to the poster: the effective moral image needed to “seize, move, and sweep along with it” the masses. But unlike discussions of the commercial poster, these texts had little to say about the visual attractions a successful moral poster might present. It was the “idea” that needed to be clear and simple: patriotism, charity, etc., distilled in one stirring or poignant episode. In fact, beyond Claretie’s brief evocation of the popular color print, the writers gave little or no indication how these ideas might translate into formal terms.

Roger Marx could have given them a lesson. In the same November 15, 1896 preface in which he refuted Tameyr’s claims, Marx included an apology for the poster’s emphatic forms and color:

Does it follow that every poster has the privilege of embellishing and decorating the wall that receives it? No. It only succeeds in doing so if it fulfills the laws of mural decoration. This occurs to few of the detractors prompt to criticize the effects of a technique demanded by the purpose and context of the poster. But, we must respond, without a strongly accented arabesque the composition would be illegible at a distance and unable to be understood with a glance. Similarly, outdoor exhibition demands just as strongly colors bright enough to vibrate in full daylight.¹⁵⁹

These were precisely the elements that the Union’s poster lacked. Without them, Marx implied, a poster had no chance for success, whether commercial or moral, on the street.

The critic and poster advocate Ernest de Crauzat judged that the Union’s poster had never been intended for the audience that might have most benefited: “our most lowly

¹⁵⁹ “S’ensuit-il que toute affiche ait le privilège d’embellir et d’orne la paroi qui la reçoit? Non pas. Elle n’y réussit qu’à la condition de satisfaire aux lois de la décoration murale. C’est de quoi ne se soucient guère les détracteurs prompts à censurer les effets d’une technique réclamée par le but et la destination de l’affiche; mais, leur faut-il répondre, sans arabesque fortement accusée la composition ne se lirait pas à distance et le premier regard ne pourrait la saisir dans son ensemble; de même l’exposition en plein air commande tout aussi impérieusement des couleurs assez éclatantes pour vibrer sous la lumière crue du jour.” *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*, 2: iii.

contemporaries [...] in populous, working-class neighborhoods.”¹⁶⁰ Instead, it had quickly become a collector’s item, prized for its beauty rather than its moral message.¹⁶¹ Once again, the street was left to the uncontested dominance of commercial posters, which competed only amongst themselves. If the Union’s effort retained any moral instrumentality, it was in the money it earned for the association’s future projects.¹⁶² This episode seems to confirm as much as contest Talmeyr’s opposition of art and morality in the poster. Willette’s later *La Pieuse erreur* (*The Pious Error*, 1899, Figure 2.21) provides a similarly ambiguous commentary. In this image, one of the exclusive prints produced for the *Maîtres de l’affiche*, a young girl prays before one of Alfons Mucha’s posters as if it were a depiction of a saint. On the one hand, it depicts the persistence of faith among all the modern accoutrements of poster, railway, and power lines (elements tied together by Talmeyr in his essay). On the other, it foregrounds art and consumption as new religions, entwined in the poster.¹⁶³ This was one of Talmeyr’s stated fears: that the facile beauty and pleasure embodied by the poster would supplant morality.

¹⁶⁰ “nos plus infimes contemporains [...] dans les quartiers ouvriers et peuplés.” Ernest de Crauzat, “Les affiches illustrées en 1896,” *L’Estampe et l’affiche* 1 (1897): 20. He noted that no more than ten had been posted on large streets in central Paris. Geffroy had not seen any posted aside from the one on the Boulevard des Capucines. Geffroy, “L’affiche morale,” 110.

¹⁶¹ Camille Pissarro, for example, bought the poster for his son Lucien, at the latter’s request. He remarked that “on a beaucoup blaguée [l’affiche de Puvis] ici,” and was not very impressed by it once he saw it in person. See November 15 and December 7, 1896 letters to Lucien Pissarro, Camille Pissarro, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro, 1895-1898*, ed. Janine Bailly-Herzberg, 5 vols., vol. 4 (Paris: Éditions du Valhermeil, 1989). 296 and 304.

¹⁶² This was in fact one of the poster’s stated intents. “Dès maintenant, l’Union pour l’action morale, qui a fait tirer mille exemplaires de l’Enfance de sainte Geneviève, et qui vendra aux amateurs d’art les exemplaires qu’elle ne fera pas afficher, afin de récupérer les 5,000 francs consacrés à la publication de cette première affiche, se propose de publier le Bois sacré cher aux Arts et aux Muses. Ainsi, les 5,000 francs consacrés à l’Enfance de sainte Geneviève sont abandonnés d’une façon définitive par les généreux zélés de l’œuvre. Chaque fois que ce capital sera reconstitué par la vente aux amateurs d’art d’une des publications de l’Union, une nouvelle œuvre d’art sera publiée et mise de nouveau gratuitement devant les yeux du grand public, cependant que quelques épreuves seront réservées pour les collectionneurs.” “L’Affiche morale.”

¹⁶³ See footnote 151 for Geffroy’s identification of art as a religion.

The Third Republic could certainly be accused of fostering such a shift.¹⁶⁴ But this would not have been Marx's interpretation. Like the writers commenting on the Union pour l'action morale's poster, whether *Le Temps's* journalist, Geffroy, or Claretie, Marx attributed a salutary, emancipatory quality to beauty. It figured as a modern religion, one that would allow both individuals and society to flourish: as an art, the poster "stimulate[d] individual energies, and establishe[d]—through the sharing of emotion it inspires—a close solidarity among men."¹⁶⁵

Disenchantment with the Commercial Poster

There are nevertheless indications that by the time he wrote these words for the opening essay of *L'art social*, Marx's view of the poster was less utopian. Miriam Levin has argued that he and other poster promoters had become disenchanted with the medium by the end of the nineties. According to her argument, this shift stemmed from the realization that the poster was too much a commercial instrument to serve as an agent of liberal democracy: "their vision of a liberal democratic communications system based on color lithography raised expectations for poster culture that could only be partially realized—in their case in a carefully controlled, private domestic space away from the market place."¹⁶⁶ She points to the fact that Marx began to campaign for a poster museum beginning in the late nineties as an indication that the "open-air salon" no longer sufficed.

¹⁶⁴ For a discussion of the Republic's embrace of capitalism and mass culture, and the anxieties and problems that this posed, see Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). Aquilino argues that this market paradigm was extended to the government patronage of decorative painting. Aquilino, "Painted Promises."

¹⁶⁵ See footnote 119.

¹⁶⁶ Levin, "Democratic Vistas—Democratic Media." 84

Levin's analysis ignores the extent to which Marx viewed these different manifestations as complementary, but it does point to what I see as a slightly different shift, one that does not always separate neatly along the public space/private interior divide. This shift becomes clearer in the light of Chéret's career trajectory in the 1890s, as well as in another of Marx's efforts: the school poster and the association L'Art à l'école (Art at School). Taken together, Chéret's oeuvre, along with the initiatives for a poster museum and for school decoration, indicate a disjunction between the contingent and eternal elements that Marx had sought to unite in the commercial poster.

As I indicated earlier, Chéret's posters began to take on a more fixed vocabulary in the 1890s. In *Pantomimes lumineuses* (Figure 2.3) and *La Loïe Fuller* (Figure 2.7), the contrasts are starker, the colors more intense, and the treatment less painterly than in the earlier *Au Pays des Fées* (Figure 2.2). These later posters risked tipping the balance too far in favor of the crude and the eye-catching, while in a poster like the 1899 *Pippement* (Figure 2.22) the nuances of Chéret's color and drawing is largely dominated by the contrast between the bright red and rather sickly green of the female figure. The hazy depths celebrated by Marx in 1889 have largely disappeared. In other words, Chéret's posters became less complex and more formulaic in the nineties.¹⁶⁷ By the end of the decade, Ernest de Crauzat was lamenting the retreat of the artistic poster from the space of the street, as well as the utopian hopes it had inspired. According to him, the poster's public and artistic character had split: rather than elevating taste in the public realm, the

¹⁶⁷ Hahn, like Le Men and Collins (see footnotes 60 and 62), has noted this shift. "Whereas many of Chéret's earlier posters were full of characters including real performers, his later posters had simplified silhouettes and often depicted figures of fantasy interchangeable from one poster to another." Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity*: 186.

“artistic” poster had bypassed the street for “the narrow surfaces of the interior,” where it had obediently attenuated its aesthetic; the city’s boulevards and palisades were home to an increasingly mediocre imagery notable only for its quantity.¹⁶⁸ Chéret was certainly focusing his efforts on the interior rather than the street: after 1895 he was less involved in the printing industry, instead devoting his time to pastels, painting and decorative projects.¹⁶⁹ Though some of these works, including the décor for Paris’s Hôtel de Ville, were very similar in spirit to the artist’s posters, many of them eschewed the elements that most recalled the poster’s commercial function. The color of decorative panels for the private patrons Baron Jonas Vitta and Maurice de Fenaille (Figures 2.23 and 2.24) veers toward pastels; the panels also lack the frenetic, structuring outlines deployed to such great effect in the posters.

As if in response to this changing context, Marx began working to preserve the artistic, decorative posters that had combined the elements now being split in Chéret’s oeuvre. Aside from his wide range of poster-related publications, Marx’s impulse to preserve the poster manifested itself primarily in his proposal for a “Musée moderne de l’Affiche illustrée” (Modern Museum of the Illustrated Poster) and his efforts on behalf of *L’Art à l’école*. The museum proposal (unrealized until 1978) sought to preserve fin-de-siècle posters as historical and aesthetic documents. It focused on the contingent

¹⁶⁸ De Crauzat made it clear that the interior’s limitations were social and aesthetic as well as physical: “Après avoir vagabondé, s’être galvaudée et donnée au premier venu, l’affiche se range, s’assagit, préfère les étroites surfaces de l’intérieur aux larges espaces du plein air.” Ernest de Crauzat, “Murailles,” *L’Estampe et l’affiche* (December 15, 1899): 251. The discussion appeared in de Crauzat’s regular rubric in *L’Estampe et l’affiche*.

¹⁶⁹ Bargiel and Le Men, *La Belle Époque de Jules Chéret*, 126.

aspects of the poster's dual temporality in order to demonstrate the need for institutional preservation.¹⁷⁰

The Art à l'école endeavor sought to preserve the poster aesthetic (as opposed to particular posters) by giving it a new function. In the context of schools, Marx emphasized the poster's ability to tap into essential, timeless qualities of the human and natural world. He described line and color as a more powerful means of communication than speech or writing, and as particularly appropriate for children given that imagination developed earlier than reason.¹⁷¹ As a modern popular art, the poster deftly employed this visual language, and could be put to the purpose of gradually preparing the child for the more complex facets of learning. Marx outlined a program that would first emphasize nature and everyday human activities, subjects to be joined later by illustrations of fables, legends, popular songs and history—a program, in other words, that moved from the “universal” to the introductory elements of civilization, culture and history.

Consider two of three 1896 posters produced for diffusion in schools under Marx's initiative (Figures 2.25 and 2.26), prior to his involvement with Art à l'école. Henri Rivière's image of figures gathering wood in a wintry landscape follows Marx's precepts on subject matter and form: the image foregrounds daily activities determined by

¹⁷⁰ Marx first evoked the idea for a poster museum in his preface for *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche: Publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles Affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers.*, 5 vols., vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1899). This led to a survey in *L’Estampe et l’affiche*: Ernest de Crauzat, “Murailles: Une enquête sur le musée de l’affiche,” *L’Estampe et l’affiche* (March 15, 1899); “Murailles: Une enquête sur le musée de l’affiche,” *L’Estampe et l’affiche* (April 15, 1899). Marx responded to the results in his next, and final, preface for *Maîtres: Les Maîtres de l’Affiche: Publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles Affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers.*, 5 vols., vol. 5 (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1900).

Texts Marx had written on the proposed poster museum and on L’Art à l’école’s efforts were included in his 1913 *L’art social*.

¹⁷¹ See footnote 122.

nature's eternal cycle, and the clarity of its stark, outlined silhouettes counterbalances the relatively complex textures and patterns of the trees. As for the image of Alsace, it evoked a recent, and fraught past, but ultimately focused on the eternal through the figure of the *Alsacienne*. Her calm demeanor and traditional folk costume suggested that Alsace was an essential part of the French nation, waiting patiently for its predestined return. Like Rivière, Étienne Moreau-Nélaton privileged simplified, flattened forms, strong silhouettes and an attenuated palette (here, the complexity of the city is subdued within a monochrome backdrop). Confronted with a civic space akin to that of Puvis's murals, Marx commissioned works whose subjects, forms, and attenuated palette recalled Puvis more than Chéret.¹⁷² He later characterized art's role in the school in terms of a soothing timelessness:

Since man is destined for sorrow, let the effusion of bounty forestall the knowledge of grief, let active and unrestrained joy anticipate sacrifice, constraint, and renunciation [...] If we call on nature to provide this festive aspect, it is that it contains the elements of an inexhaustible, infallible joy; if we turn to art, it is so that the work of man shows its own benevolence.¹⁷³

If the commercial poster consoled because it reconciled the modern and the atemporal, the school poster would console by providing atemporal structures in advance of modernity's assault. But the modern, adult world evoked in this passage suggests a modernity characterized less by contingent excitement than by a grinding rationalization.

¹⁷² The subject matter of Rivière's poster recalled Puvis's *L'Hiver* at the Hôtel de Ville even more directly. See footnote 123.

¹⁷³ "Puisque l'homme est voué à la peine, que l'effusion de la bonté prévienne la connaissance de la douleur, que la joie active et libre devance le sacrifice, la contrainte et le renoncement [...] Si, pour composer ce visage de fête, nous faisons appel à la nature, c'est qu'elle renferme en soi les éléments d'une allégresse renouvelable et infallible; si nous avons recours à l'art, c'est afin que l'œuvre de l'homme s'annonce, elle aussi, bienfaisante." Marx, *L'art social*: 82-83.

This was the modernity that an anonymous commentator had already sensed behind the poster's apparent joy in 1889, describing it as:

a gaiety that laughs jerkily and in spite of itself, as if tickled almost to death; a gaiety that one fears is obligatory, like those of clowns whose red lips are like a wound [...] And thus the gaiety of Chéret's posters, which apparently display an alert joy, are at heart artificial and melancholy.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

In Marx's initial essay on Chéret, he expressed surprise that the poster artist had not yet been commissioned to produce large decorative works, but there was no indication that these works should be public in nature. In other words, Marx's early promotion of the poster revealed a greater faith in capitalist modernity and its private networks of diffusion—whether advertising, collecting, or other forms of patronage—to create beauty in everyday life. If this optimism had been dulled over the course of the decade, it was not due so much to disillusion with the poster itself but rather to an increased wariness of liberal capitalism. For Republicans, this wariness coalesced in the Solidarist movement.

Marx's portrayal of the poster's modernity had always been contained by a discourse on decorative tradition, but timelessness, rather than timeliness, began to take on a greater role in his writing. Likewise, while his earlier criticism (no doubt part of the general backlash against Academicism) had held up independence as a value in and of

¹⁷⁴ “une gaieté qui rit par saccades, et malgré elle, comme chatouillée jusqu'à en devoir mourir; une gaieté qu'on craint obligatoire à la façon des clowns dont les lèvres rouges ont l'air d'une plaie [...] Et ainsi, cette gaieté des affiches de Chéret, où se décèle en apparence un sens éveillé de la joie, n'est que factice et mélancolique au fond.” Though the author was not explicit about the cause of this forced gaiety, this passage directly followed a discussion of Chéret's career in London, and his exposure to its “purely industrial” (i.e. commercial) posters. Tout-Paris, “Bloc-Notes parisien: Exposition de Chéret,” *Le Gaulois* (December 22, 1889).

itself, he increasingly looked to State support to accomplish tasks that the private market seemed ill equipped to handle. This shift in orientation is evident in *L'art social*: the first section is devoted to “Initiatives and Reforms” that place aesthetic programs within wider institutional contexts, most often governmental; Marx’s essays on individual creators (including Chéret) appear in a second section entitled “Examples and Realizations,” within a subsection entitled “Precursors.” This organization indicated that a fully social art needed to move beyond individual artists and objects. In his 1912 preface to this text, Marx concluded that the search for a social art was too often limited by a narrow conception of art itself, one that focused on decorative, aesthetic questions in a vacuum, thereby excluding important structural and utilitarian concerns. In a move that parallels the modernist critique of the decorative, Marx maligned “the misguided use of the term decorative to designate social art.”¹⁷⁵ He might as well have been condemning his earlier, fin-de-siècle self, who—like so many others—had sought solutions to social problems in aesthetic experience. This experience, he had concluded, was not an end in itself, but a beginning.

¹⁷⁵ “l’emploi du terme décoratif dont on se sert si malencontreusement pour désigner l’art social.” Marx, *L'art social*: 33.

CHAPTER 3

Paul Signac's Decorative Propaganda of the 1890s

In a 26 December 1894 journal entry, the Neo-Impressionist painter Paul Signac (1863-1935) wrote:

Félix remarks to Thevenot that anarchist terrorism has done much more for propaganda than twenty years of Reclus or Kropotkin's brochures. He demonstrates the logic of the various attacks [...] It's the attack of [Émile] Henry, directed at the electors—perhaps guiltier than the elected, whom they force to serve as deputies—that seems to him the most “anarchist.”¹

Félix Fénéon, Signac's friend and fellow anarchist, was commenting on a series of anarchist terrorist attacks (*attentats*) that struck Paris, beginning in the 1880s and culminating in a wave of terrorist violence from 1892 to 1894.² Fénéon—who had spent much of the preceding summer in Mazas prison, accused of a similar attack on the restaurant Foyot—singled out Émile Henry's bombing of “innocent” patrons at the Café Terminus for particular praise.³ Unchastened by imprisonment or his narrow acquittal at

¹ “Félix fait remarquer à Thevenot que les attentats anarchistes ont fait beaucoup plus pour la propagande que les vingt ans de brochures de Reclus ou de Kropotkine. Il montre la logique des divers attentats [...] C'est l'attentat d'Henry, s'adressant aux électeurs, peut-être plus coupables que les élus, puisque ceux-ci sont forcés par eux de faire ce métier de députés, qui lui semble le plus ‘anarchiste.’” Paul Signac, “Extraits du Journal inédit de Paul Signac I, 1894-1895,” *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 36 (1949): 113. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

² Fénéon was also an art critic and a champion of Neo-Impressionism. A table providing a list of the main anarchist attacks in this period (“l'ère des attentats”), as well as the executions of their perpetrators (when identified), can be found in Jean Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France: Des origines à 1914*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). 214.

³ Émile Henry threw a bomb into the Gare Saint-Lazare's Café Terminus on 12 February 1894—wounding twenty, of whom one died—and was captured (with difficulty) while trying to escape. During the investigation he took responsibility for a previous bomb, which had resulted in five deaths at a police station on the rue des Bons Enfants on 8 November 1893. These *attentats* are discussed in detail in Walter Badier, *Émile Henry: De la propagande par le fait au terrorisme anarchiste* (Toulouse: Les Éditions Libertaires, 2007). 67-97 in particular. The April 4, 1894 bombing of the Foyot restaurant wounded four people, including the poet and anarchist sympathizer Laurent Tailhade. For an account of the implications of the Foyot bombing, see Howard G. Lay, “*Beau Geste!* (On the Readability of Terrorism),” *Yale French*

trial, the Fénéon of Signac's journal argued decisively for a violent form of *la propagande par le fait* (propaganda by the deed): action as the means of gaining adherents to the anarchist cause, and, ultimately, of dismantling the capitalist socio-economic order.⁴ The critic gave theoretical propaganda—the anarcho-communist “brochures” of Élisée Reclus and Pierre Kropotkin—short shrift.⁵ In the debate over what form of propaganda best served anarchist revolution, Fénéon's position was clear.

Events suggest Signac's contrary view on the matter.⁶ Even as anarchist “deeds” continued to strike Paris, and Signac's friends and colleagues fled or were rounded up in mass arrests of anarchist sympathizers, the artist was working on a rather apposite image: *Au temps d'Harmonie (l'âge d'or n'est pas dans le passé, il est dans l'avenir)* (*In Time of Harmony: The Golden Age is not in the Past, It is in the Future*, 1894-95) (Figure 3.1).⁷

Not only did this vision of a harmonious anarchist future occlude the violence that had

Studies, no. 101 (2002). In her biography of Fénéon, Joan Halperin suggested that the critic was in fact responsible for the Foyot bombing, a thesis that has been challenged by Philippe Oriol, among others. Joan Ungersma Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). 275-76; Philippe Oriol, *À propos de l'attentat Foyot: Quelques questions et quelques tentatives de réponses* (Paris: Éditions du Fourneau, 1993).

⁴ Fénéon was tried, in the context of the “Procès des Trente,” in August 1894. His narrow acquittal has been attributed to persuasive character witnesses (including Stéphane Mallarmé and Charles Henry) and his own clever responses to questioning. See Chapter 14, “Imprisonment and Trial,” in Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist*: 279-95; Marie-Louise Fénéon and Félix Fénéon, *Le procès des trente: Vu à travers la presse de l'époque telle qu'elle a été conservée par Madame Fénéon mère et annotée par Félix Fénéon à l'issue de son procès*, ed. Maurice Imbert (Tusson: Histoires Littéraires & Du Lérot, 2004).

⁵ Theory was the term used by the anarcho-communists themselves to distinguish various forms of propaganda, primarily written and oral, from revolutionary action. See, for example, “Lutte et théorie,” *La Révolte, organe communiste-anarchiste* 1, no. 21 (February 11-17, 1888).

⁶ Signac did write the following in an 1893 letter to his friend and colleague Théo van Rysselberghe: “Je regrette plus l'incendie de la maison Hanséatique que la bombe parlementaire...” (the maison Hanséatique was a 16th century building on the Antwerp docks that burnt down in 1893). But this statement should not be taken as an endorsement of terrorist violence, since Signac applied the verb “regret” to both events, and the parliamentary bombing resulted only in minor injuries. Undated [1893], Théo van Rysselberghe Correspondence, The Getty Research Library, Los Angeles.

⁷ The painting, n. 253 in the catalogue raisonné, was exhibited in April and May 1895 at the *Salon des artistes indépendants*. Françoise Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000). 215-6.

become anarchism's public face in this period, it also provided the kind of didactic image demanded by anarchist theorists like Kropotkin and Jean Grave.⁸ Furthermore, Signac's direct involvement with anarcho-communist publications, whether books, journals, or brochures, would only increase over the next decade.⁹

Nevertheless, the relationship between Signac's work and "propaganda by the deed" is more complex than this bare summary allows, and in this chapter I will explore the conceptual space opened up by Fénéon's comment, and Signac's lack of editorial. The painter, I think, was struck by the terms of Fénéon's argument: the privileging of action over theory, and the association of logic with violence. Fénéon's praise of the latter was both analogous and antithetical to Signac's own reflections on the revolutionary efficacy of art. In the 1890s, Signac attempted to transcend the division between theory and action, between propaganda and aesthetics, with an artistic intervention analogous in some ways to propaganda by the deed: the art of painting as a non-verbal act that would unite emotion and reason to "awaken popular consciousness."¹⁰ But in place of explosives, Signac used explicit decorative line and color. In place of mangled bodies, he aimed for the solidarity of free association. And in place of

⁸ See, for example, the discussion of art in Kropotkin's "Aux Jeunes," as published in Pierre Kropotkine, *Paroles d'un révolté* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, Éditeur, 1885). 66-67. Note that discussions of "art" in this period typically referred to literature and music as well as to painting.

⁹ See the appendix of artists' contributions to Jean Grave, as well as a selection of letters from Signac to Grave, in Robert L. Herbert and Eugenia Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and Others I," *The Burlington Magazine* 102, no. 692 (November 1960): 482; "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and Others II," *The Burlington Magazine* 102, no. 693 (December 1960): 519-21. See also Aline Dardel, *Les Temps Nouveaux, 1895-1914: Un hebdomadaire anarchiste et la propagande par l'image* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1987).

¹⁰ The phrase "réveiller la conscience populaire" appeared in an article that has been attributed to Paul Brousse, whom Maitron identified as the main commentator of propaganda by the deed. Anonymous [Paul Brousse], *Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne* (August 5, 1877). Cited in Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, 1: 76-77.

momentary rupture and violence (the “summary glow” of the bomb), Signac sought an enduring aesthetic and social harmony.¹¹

Propaganda and Revolution

As crystallized in the writings of Kropotkin, Reclus and Grave, anarcho-communist theory called for the destruction of the capitalist state and the elimination of its foundation, private property.¹² This revolution would make way for a more “natural” form of existence: a stateless society in which individuals could freely associate in the context of small local communities, each owning the means of production; the loose federation of these communities would mirror the anarchist ideal of individual autonomy within the collective. In contrast to communists and socialists, anarcho-communists stressed the capacity of exemplary actions and words to result in a spontaneous, popular outpouring of revolutionary fervor. The people needed to be made aware, through propaganda, of their ongoing oppression under the current economic and social regime. Propaganda required careful organization; with its success, the revolution would organize itself.¹³ Hence the centrality of propaganda to the anarchist cause. But this focus raised the following questions: how was revolutionary awareness best achieved, and what

¹¹ “Lueur sommaire” was Stéphane Mallarmé’s phrase, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

¹² My presentation of anarchist theory, and its implications for art, are informed by Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, 1; Herbert and Herbert, “Artists and Anarchism I.”; John G. Hutton, *Neo-impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994). 46-144; Robyn Roslak, “The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony: Neo-Impressionism, Science, and Anarchism,” *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 3 (September 1991); *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France: Painting, Politics and Landscape* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007). 1-35; Alexander Varias, “Art and Anarchy,” in *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives during the Fin-de-Siècle* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

¹³ This theme was returned to again and again in the pages of *La Révolte*. See, for example, “Lutte et théorie,” 2. For a discussion of revolution as the abrupt culmination of a natural, evolutive process, see Jean Grave, *La société mourante et l’anarchie* (Paris: Au Bureau de “La Révolte”, 1893). 123-6.

relation would it bear to actual revolt? In late-nineteenth-century France, the answers centered on the debate over “propaganda by the deed” and “theoretical propaganda.”

“Propaganda by the deed”—a concept in keeping with Mikhail Bakunin’s final privileging of action over ideas—emerged out of anti-authoritarian reflection and practice during the 1870s.¹⁴ It was perceived as the solution to an entwined problem: the need to spread revolutionary consciousness among the masses, and the frustration of militants with the failure of their propaganda to generate mass insurrection.¹⁵ Anarchist theorists such as Paul Brousse and Kropotkin concluded that overt insurrectional action was an ideal means to attack the oppressive social order and/or realize anarchist ideals, while providing the people with concrete, exemplary deeds.¹⁶ In the words of Brousse, the anarchist “idea will appear, not on paper, nor in a journal, nor in a painting; it will not be sculpted in marble, nor carved in stone, nor cast in bronze: it will walk, in flesh and bone, living, before the people.”¹⁷ In other words, “propaganda by the deed” bypassed all forms

¹⁴ Upon retiring, in 1873, from his public role at the center of the anarchist movement, Bakunin wrote in a farewell letter (printed in the October 12, 1873 *Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne*) that “le temps des grands discours théoriques, imprimés ou parlés, est passé. [...] Le temps n’est plus aux idées, il est aux faits et aux actes.” Reproduced in Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, 1: 73. The development of the concept of propaganda by the deed is analyzed in Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 76-91.

¹⁵ Uri Eisenzweig has argued that the concept emerged out of a sense of the failure of language to communicate, and thus of its inability to translate into revolution. He also highlighted the close relationship between the discourse on propaganda by the deed and the consolidation of anarcho-communism as a distinct movement. Uri Eisenzweig, *Fictions de l’anarchisme* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois Éditeur, 2001). 74-75 and 80-82.

¹⁶ For the idea that “propaganda by the deed” was more transparent than words, see this passage in a letter from Carlo Cafiero to Enrico Malatesta, reproduced in the *Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne* (December 3, 1876): “le moyen de propagande le plus efficace, et le seul qui, sans tromper et corrompre les masses, puisse pénétrer dans les couches sociales les plus profondes.” Cafiero and Malatesta were Italian anarchists, members of what is considered the first group to put into practice the passage from “ideas” to “deeds.” In this letter Cafiero used the term “fait insurrectionnel” rather than “propagande par le fait.” This portion of the text is reproduced and discussed in Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, 1: 75-77.

¹⁷ “L’idée sera jetée, non sur le papier, non sur un journal, non sur un tableau, elle ne sera pas sculptée en marbre, ni taillée en pierre, ni coulée en bronze: elle marchera, en chair et en os, vivante, devant le peuple.” Anonymous [Paul Brousse], *Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne* (August 5, 1877). I have adapted the translation from Lay, “*Beau Geste!*,” 85.

of representation, including art, by putting theory into practice. The deed's potential to transform into outright revolt blurred the boundary between propaganda and revolution. Even if this transformation failed to materialize, anarchists could console themselves with the deed's value as propaganda: its "living" presence, no matter how short-lived, furnished the desired anarchist examples; its extinction at the hands of authority highlighted capitalist oppression; both drew attention to the anarchist cause.¹⁸

In the period following its inception, the concept of "propaganda by the deed" was subject to two main developments. First, the term became indissoluble from violent terrorist acts, namely bombings, thefts and assassinations.¹⁹ Second, anarcho-communist enthusiasm for such action waned.²⁰ While exhortations to violence could still be found, well into the nineties, in publications like Émile Pouget's *Le Père Peinard*, figures like Kropotkin, Reclus, and Grave had reversed their position on the matter. As indicated in *La Révolte*, they had concluded that man's insufficiently advanced state of consciousness necessitated a "time of propaganda."²¹ Inflammatory rhetoric and action should be deferred to a period of imminent revolution:

¹⁸ According to Cahm, it was the deed's direct revolutionary potential that attracted a militant like Kropotkin, who hoped that insurrectional acts might transform into a larger revolt. Cahm contrasted this attitude with that of Brousse, who she argued was almost entirely preoccupied with deeds as propaganda (i.e. for the attention they brought to the anarchist cause). Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism*: 99-105.

¹⁹ The progressive alignment of the concept of propaganda by the deed with individual terrorist acts is discussed in Vivien Bouhey, *Les Anarchistes contre la République, 1880 à 1914: Contribution à l'histoire des réseaux sous la Troisième République* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008). 139-42.

²⁰ As described in Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, 1: 260-61. Scholars have provided different reasons for this ambivalence. While Maitron identified it with the increasing interest in syndicalist action, Eisenzweig has argued that once the consolidation of anarcho-communism was accomplished, the inherent contradiction of the concept—a form of communication that would transcend representation—was its undoing. Cahm identified an early distaste for the results and implications of violent acts, such as assassinations, originating in individual impulse. Eisenzweig, *Fictions de l'anarchisme*: 85-86; Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism*: 109-15.

²¹ "Lutte et théorie," 2.

It is not a matter of taking action, but of spreading ideas that create men of action [...] [A]narchists [...] must seek to lead individuals to reason for themselves, [...] to become capable of directing their own acts [...] They must not act solely on the impulse of whatever cerebral exacerbation leads an individual to commit acts, possibly violent, the significance of which he is unaware, and which leave him without force or energy once the paroxysm has passed, allowing himself be enslaved again.²²

The journal's articles regularly insisted on the importance of logic and reason for both the creation and reception of anarchist propaganda. In contrast, the actions associated with "propaganda by the deed" were mistrusted as unreflective, unconscious manifestations of excessive emotion and feeling.²³ Without the preparation of reasoned propaganda, insurrectional action subjugated rather than enfranchised, thereby delaying an enduring, *collective* revolution. So, while Fénéon emphasized the *logic* of the *attentats* when arguing for their superiority as propaganda, the contributors to *La Révolte* saw logic as antithetical to such deeds.²⁴ Before the terrorism of the early nineties, Jean Grave's circle had already repudiated the notion that individual terrorist acts could synthesize

²² "Il ne s'agit pas de passer à l'action, il faut répandre des idées qui créent les hommes d'action [...] [L]es anarchistes [...] doivent chercher à amener les individus à se raisonner eux-mêmes, [...] à se faire capables de diriger leurs propres actes [...] Ils ne doivent pas agir seulement sous le coup d'une exacerbation cérébrale quelconque qui entraîne l'individu à commettre des actes, violents peut-être, dont il ignore la portée, [...] et le laissent sans force ni énergie, une fois la surexcitation passée, en sorte qu'il [...] se laisse enchaîner de nouveau." Ibid.

²³ Reason and logic were privileged over emotion and feeling because "au lieu d'en faire des *croissants* nous voulons en faire des *convaincus*." "La vérité sans phrase," 1, no. 38 (June 23-28, 1888): 2.

²⁴ Note that Fénéon highlighted the *attentat* of Émile Henry, the most articulate of the terrorists. In his deposition (as reported in *L'Écho de Paris*), Henry explained that he had targeted a café because all members of the bourgeoisie were guilty participants in the capitalist oppression of the people, whose own "innocents" were never spared. Edgard Troimaux, "Émile Henry: Les explosions du café Terminus et de la rue des Bons-Enfants," *L'Écho de Paris: Journal littéraire et politique du matin*, no. 3626 (April 30, 1894). The version from *La Gazette des Tribunaux* is reproduced in Badier, *Émile Henry*: 193-99. Henry's capture, trial, and execution had provided him with a forum, just as Fénéon's own trial gave the critic an opportunity to mock the court and its proceedings.

A distrust of "propaganda by the deed" had already begun to manifest itself in the pages of *Le Révolté*, *La Révolte*'s predecessor. I have nevertheless associated this framework with *La Révolte*, in which it was more firmly established. *La Révolte* (published from 1887 to 1894) is also more relevant to the period I am examining.

propaganda and deed. They portrayed such acts as individual manifestations without collective results, and deferred revolution to a time when the masses would be ready.

Art and Propaganda

The discussions of propaganda by the deed in *La Révolte* had a number of affinities with Grave's conception of art, perhaps explaining his initial disinterest in the latter. While Pouget had already initiated a visual campaign in keeping with his inflammatory rhetoric, in 1891 Grave largely deferred the "question of art," implying that it was the kind of individualist endeavor best reserved for a future anarchist society.²⁵ When Grave later enlisted the work of artists for *La Révolte*'s successor, *Les Temps Nouveaux*, he framed it as a means to sell propaganda rather than as a form of propaganda itself.²⁶ Nevertheless, he urged engaged artists to deploy their work in the service of the people, making them

²⁵ In response to the question of what role art would have in a socialist or anarchist society, it was argued (no doubt by Grave) in *La Révolte* that, though art was not one of the paper's primary concerns, it would flourish in a future society in which machines and science would leave more room for intellectual and artistic endeavors. The article pointed to Oscar Wilde's description of art as the supreme manifestation of individualism (in an essay reproduced in *La Révolte*'s literary supplement). "Question d'art," *La Révolte: organe communiste-anarchiste* 4, no. 43 (July 10-17, 1891); Oscar Wilde, "Individualisme," *La Révolte (supplément littéraire)* 3, no. 43 (July 12-18, 1890). Grave repeated Wilde's characterization in Jean Grave, *La société future*, Bibliothèque sociologique (Paris: P.V. Stock, 1895). 368.

Pouget used images as another tool to reach his less educated audience, which he thought should portray social inequities and revolt as clearly as possible. The emotion and sensation that Grave associated with art was well suited to Pouget's visceral language, as was the purposefully rough style of images provided by artists like Maximilien Luce. See Howard G. Lay, "Réflex d'un gniaff. On Emile Pouget and *Le Père Peinard*," in *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 110-20. The Herberts argued that Pouget's use of imagery inspired Grave's later efforts with *Les Temps Nouveaux*. They also indicated, based on correspondence in the Signac archives, that Signac knew Pouget. Herbert and Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism I," 477.

²⁶ "J'aurais l'intention de demander—à l'œil—aux artistes que nous connaissons, un dessin ou deux, de façon à former un album d'une trentaine de planches que l'on mettrait en vente *au profit du journal*." Letter from Jean Grave to Camille Pissarro, March 25, 1896, reproduced in Dardel, "*Les Temps Nouveaux*," 1895-1914: 18 (emphasis added). Grave did not integrate images into the body of *Les Temps Nouveaux* until 1905, an addition that he later felt had not brought much to the journal. Jean Grave, *Quarante ans de propagande anarchiste*, ed. Mireille Delfau (Paris: Flammarion, 1973). 438.

aware—through explicit anarchist iconography—of their oppression, as well as the benefits of an anarchist future.²⁷ In 1899, Grave expressed his disappointment with the results, by criticizing the inability of contemporary art to “unite the cold reason of the work of propaganda with art’s emotional fervor.”²⁸ Since art, according to Grave, was associated with emotions, the senses, and the unconscious, it was vulnerable to the same critiques as “propaganda by the deed.” “[E]motional fervor” was not so far from “cerebral exacerbation,” and Grave spoke of the viewer’s subjection to, rather than emancipation by, art’s “charm.”²⁹

This evaluation would have been encouraged by the prevalence in avant-garde literary and artistic circles—the very milieus promoting the association of art with emotion over representation—of a certain anarchist dilettantism, one that highlighted individualism rather than communal solidarity. The first public representation of Ibsen’s *Enemy of the People*, performed at Lugné-Poe’s *Théâtre de L’Œuvre* on November 10, 1893, in the midst of the terrorist attacks, provides an extreme example.³⁰ Depicting a village’s repudiation of an inconvenient truth brought to light by the educated Dr. Stockmann, the play was interpreted in decidedly individualist terms that entwined

²⁷ See, for example, the opening editorial of *Les Temps nouveaux*. “Temps nouveaux,” *Les Temps nouveaux* 1, no. 1 (May 4-10, 1895): 1.

²⁸ “allier la froide raison de l’œuvre de propagande avec la fougue émotionnelle artistique.” “La Thèse dans l’art,” *Les Temps nouveaux* 5, no. 30 (November 18-24, 1899): 1.

²⁹ “L’œuvre d’art est une œuvre qui parle à nos sens, exalte nos sentiments, souvent inconsciemment, et de la part de celui qui l’a créée et de la part de celui qui subit son charme.” Ibid.

³⁰ Performances began on the 10th, shortly after the November 8th bombing of the rue des Bons-Enfants, the first *attentat* attributed to Henry. Signac’s journal indicates that Fénéon’s remarks praising the logic of Henry’s attacks may have been made while attending a revival of the same play the following year. Signac, “Extraits du Journal I,” 113. Lugné-Poe (Aurelien Lugné, 1869-1939) reported that *L’Œuvre* presented *Enemy of the People* again the following season. Lugné-Poe, *Acrobaties: souvenirs et impressions de théâtre (1894-1902)*, 4 vols., vol. 2, *La Parade* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1931). 119. It seems likely that the 1894 iteration of the play, as well as the memory of its 1893 precedent, provided the inspiration for Fénéon’s reflections on anarchist efficacy.

anarchism and elitism. The poet Laurent Tailhade introduced it with an “apology of the solitary man, free of all social constraints, stronger in his elevated consciousness than any organized hierarchies” and there were cries of “Long live anarchy! Long live socialism! Long live the elite!”³¹ Tailhade would later respond to the terrorist attack on the Palais-Bourbon by saying that beauty and individuality, in and of themselves, were worth the deaths of lesser, “vague” persons.³² When he subsequently lost an eye in the Foyot explosion (to the righteous glee of reporters), the poet refuted any ties to anarchism but reaffirmed the primacy of the individual and the aesthetic, as well as his disgust for the people.³³ This episode (or rather, series of episodes) indicates the ties forged between propaganda by the deed and individual and aesthetic freedom.

The question for Signac, then, was how to distance himself from such fickle, impulsive anarchism, by rationalizing his art for the purpose of revolutionary awareness. This is a question that Signac was already attempting to answer during the late 1880s. Anarchist discourse on art and propaganda encouraged him to think about the role of his art as a form of rational propaganda. But it might also have encouraged him, like other members of the avant-garde, to see his art in terms of the qualities associated with

³¹ “Apologie de l’homme seul, libre de toute contrainte sociale, plus fort en sa conscience haute que toutes les hiérarchies organisées”; “Vive l’anarchie! Vive le socialisme! Vive l’élite!” This description of Tailhade’s conference—which was also presented as the encapsulation of the play itself—comes from the journal *L’Ermitage*, whose contributors were generally critical of democracy, universal suffrage, and the masses. Jean Carrère, “Conférence de Laurent Tailhade, à propos de l’*Ennemi du Peuple* d’Ibsen,” *L’Ermitage: Revue artistique et littéraire* 7, no. 12 (December 1893).

³² “Qu’importe l’acte, si le geste est beau! Qu’importe la mort de vagues humanités, si par elles l’individualité s’affirme!” Paul Roche, “Encore une bombe,” *Le Gaulois* 5136 (April 5, 1894): 1. Tailhade’s connection to the Foyot *attentat* is analyzed in Lay, “*Beau Geste!*,” particularly 83-84 and 92-93. It is placed in relation to Mallarmé’s reception of anarchist terrorism in Patrick McGuinness, “Mallarmé and the Poetics of Explosion,” *MLN* 124, no. 4 (September 2009).

³³ As reported by André Picard, “M. Laurent Tailhade et l’Anarchie: Interview de M. Laurent Tailhade,” *Le Gaulois* April 6, 1894.

“propaganda by the deed”: art as an impassioned, intuitive act. For Signac, the association of art with action lay not so much in the realm of iconography as in that of form. He indicated as much in an anonymous editorial published in *La Révolte*, in which he equated “Impressionists” and “revolutionaries.”³⁴ In the text, Signac associated the Neo-Impressionist technique with both scientific logic and the emotion of art, ultimately disassociating art’s revolutionary import from its subject matter. Opening with an evocation of the recent exhibition of Impressionist (i.e. Neo-Impressionist) painting at the *Salon des Indépendants*, Signac contrasted jeering bourgeois attendees with an “intrigued” proletarian viewership.³⁵ He saw the former’s dismissal and the latter’s interest as indicative of the Neo-Impressionists’ “revolutionary tendency,” embodied in their technical innovation: “with a more *logical* and *scientific* placement of tones and colors, they replace outdated methods.”³⁶ Though he did link Neo-Impressionism’s revolutionary character with its subject matter, Signac placed more emphasis on the painter’s communication of the “purely aesthetic emotion” felt before his subject: in other words, the emotion generated by purely formal means such as line, color and composition. It was this aesthetic emotion that revealed the subject’s “unconscious, social

³⁴ The letter, signed “Un camarade impressionniste,” was published in *La Révolte* on June 13, 1891, with the disclaimer that its opinions diverged from those of the editorial staff on certain points “d’appréciation littéraire.” The attribution of the letter to Signac is undisputed, and it has been reproduced as Paul Signac, “Variétés: Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires,” 48 /14 *La Revue du musée d’Orsay*, no. 12 (Spring 2001).

³⁵ “Il y a quelques semaines, à l’Exposition des artistes Indépendants, [...] devant les toiles des peintres Impressionnistes, on vit s’exclamer les types dont le grand ironiste Forain a si bien saisi l’incurable vulgarité; en revanche, le dimanche, quelques prolétaires intrigués s’intéressèrent.” Signac, “Variétés: Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires,” 98. Though Signac dismissed Courbet in favor of Millet in this article, his attribution of proletarian spectators to Neo-Impressionism was similar to the public imagined for Courbet’s early painting. See T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, Third ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). 145-54.

³⁶ “Techniquement ils innovent: par une disposition plus logique et plus scientifique des tons et des couleurs, ils remplacent les procédés surannés.” Signac, “Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires,” 98 (emphasis added).

character,” and its participation in the “great social trial that begins between workers and Capital.”³⁷ It was counterproductive, Signac argued, to demand an explicitly social art, since art’s social character “will appear more strongly and eloquently in the pure aesthetes, revolutionaries by temperament, who leave the beaten path to paint what they see, as they feel it, and who very often unconsciously deal a solid blow of the pick to the old social edifice.”³⁸

With his emphasis on both the logic and science of the Neo-Impressionist technique, and the social character of aesthetic emotion, Signac implied that Neo-Impressionist painting had taken art’s revolutionary role even further. By uniting the logic of propaganda with the emotional power associated with art and deed, Neo-Impressionism constituted an aesthetic act that was a *conscious* “blow of the pick.” According to Signac, workers responded with a “sympathetic reserve,” a description that evoked both emotion and awareness, and was a far cry from the subjugated viewer later portrayed by Grave.³⁹

“Un Félix décoratif”

As the exposition of his artistic and revolutionary convictions, Signac’s letter to *La Révolte* implicitly aligned the paintings exhibited at the Independants with revolutionary

³⁷ “[L]eurs œuvres, résultant d’une émotion purement esthétique produite par le pittoresque des choses et des restes, ont ce caractère social, inconscient, dont est marquée déjà la littérature contemporaine”; “grand procès social qui s’engage entre les travailleurs et le Capital.” Ibid., 99 and 101.

³⁸ “[C]ette tendance [socialiste] se retrouvera beaucoup plus forte et éloquente chez les purs esthètes révolutionnaires par tempérament, qui s’éloignant des sentiers battus, peignent ce qu’ils veulent, comme ils le sentent et donnent inconsciemment, très souvent, un solide coup de pioche au vieil édifice social.” Ibid., 101. The translation is from Hutton, *Neo-impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground*: 251.

³⁹ Signac, “Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires,” 98.

acts. Signac's own contributions to the show contained none of the suburban, bourgeois or labor imagery of previous years—motifs that could be read in explicitly social terms. Instead, Signac exhibited some landscapes and his astonishing *Opus 127: Sur l'émail d'un fond rythmique de mesures et d'angles, de tons et de teintes, portrait de M. Félix Fénéon en 1890* (*Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones and Tints, Portrait of Félix Fénéon in 1890, 1890-91*) (Figure 3.4).⁴⁰ Decked out with a bright yellow coat, top hat, gloves and cane, Fénéon stares to the left, set in profile against a wheel of decorative, abstract motifs spinning in the opposite direction. In his right hand the critic holds a cyclamen, offering it to someone beyond the frame, or perhaps in homage to the colorful backdrop itself.⁴¹

Indeed, as the painting's subtitle indicates, this "rhythmic" backdrop is as much the star of the painting as Fénéon (as several critics deplored). Through the abstract motifs, Signac asserted its status as a vector of a "purely aesthetic emotion." Not content with merely bypassing traditional conceptions of painting as representation—as a window—Signac simultaneously referenced and denied the conventions commonly used to establish representational illusion: the white "petals" and stars above Fénéon's right arm obey the rules of perspectival recession, but are unmoored from any fuller indication of illusionary space; the green orb punches a "hole" in the swirling, decorative pattern to the right of Fénéon's head.⁴² This duality of visual effect is echoed in the "wheel," whose

⁴⁰ Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: 202 and 211.

⁴¹ Anne Dymond has identified the flower (a motif that is repeated in *Au temps d'Harmonie*) with "aesthetic contemplation." Anne Dymond, "A Politicized Pastoral: Signac and the Cultural Geography of Mediterranean France," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 2 (June 2003): 361.

⁴² These observations are from Howard G. Lay, "The Aesthetics of Terror: On Signac's Portrait of Fénéon," (unpublished manuscript).

curved sections, with their clock-wise orientation, give the impression that the backdrop is endlessly spinning. As these sections taper to a vanishing point they seem to both recede into, and flow out from, their fulcrum.⁴³ All of this serves to emphasize Signac's painting as perpetual aesthetic action rather than fixed representation.⁴⁴

If this action could be said to go beyond the formal, it was thanks in part to the "scientific aesthetic" of Charles Henry, whose influence Signac made clear with the use of the terms "rhythmic," "measures" and "angles."⁴⁵ Henry argued that abstract visual elements (notably colors, lines and forms) created pleasurable or painful sensations in the viewing subject. Since he tied this pleasure and pain to form's capacity to energize (when "dynamogenous") or inhibit the viewing subject, painting could be conceived of as both an *act* and a stimulus *to act*.⁴⁶ This conception of form was well suited to Signac's artistic

⁴³ The smoke-like yellow arabesques in the upper left corner, for example, enhance the impression of an outwardly flowing movement.

⁴⁴ Martha Ward distinguished the specific "moment," motion and action of the portrait from the calm immobility and containment of Signac's contemporaneous landscapes in Martha Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). 139-43.

⁴⁵ My account of Henry's own work is based primarily on Charles Henry, *Introduction à une esthétique scientifique* (Paris: La Revue contemporaine, 1885); *Cercle chromatique: Présentant tous les compléments et toutes les harmonies de couleurs, avec une introduction sur la théorie générale du contraste, du rythme et de la mesure* (Paris: Charles Verdin, 1888); *Rapporteur esthétique de M. Charles Henry. Notice sur les applications à l'art industriel, à l'histoire de l'art, à l'interprétation de la méthode graphique, en général à l'étude et à la rectification esthétiques de toutes formes* (Paris: G. Séguin, 1888); *Harmonies de formes et de couleurs: Démonstrations pratiques avec le rapporteur esthétique et le cercle chromatique (Conférence faite à la bibliothèque municipale professionnelle d'art et d'industrie Forney le 27 mars 1890)* (Paris: Libraire Scientifique A. Hermann, 1891); José Argüelles, *Charles Henry and the Formation of a Psychophysical Aesthetic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Michael F. Zimmermann, *Les Mondes de Seurat: Son œuvre et le débat artistique de son temps* (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1991); Robert L. Herbert, "Parade de cirque and the Scientific Aesthetic of Charles Henry," in *Seurat, Drawings and Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Henri Dorra, "Charles Henry's "Scientific" Aesthetic," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 74, no. 1121 (December 1969); William Innes Homer, *Seurat and the Science of Painting* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1964).

⁴⁶ Henry identified pleasurable and painful colors and directions—for example, the color red or lines moving upward and to the right as pleasurable—as well as the means to determine pleasurable and painful forms. The increase or decrease in energy caused by form could manifest itself in a variety of ways, ranging from greater or lesser muscular force to stimulated or dampened, even positive or negative, thought. Henry, *Harmonies de formes et de couleurs*: 23-26. The origins and the implications of the concept of dynamogeny are examined in relation to Seurat's 1887-88 *Parade de Cirque* in Jonathan Crary,

and revolutionary ambitions. In the portrait he took care to arrange the wheel for dynamogenous effects highlighted by inhibitory accents, in accordance with the idea that “the unpleasant hyperesthetizes [i.e. hypersensitizes]; the pleasant anesthetizes.”⁴⁷ In its attempt to render, through painful sensation, the viewer more sensitive to the painting’s energizing dynamogeny, Fénéon’s portrait is arguably the most deed-like of Signac’s paintings. Just as anarchist bombs attempted to attack the social structure and inspire revolution, Signac tried to awaken consciousness through a decorative explosion that would deal “a solid blow of the pick to the old social edifice.”⁴⁸ One cannot help but see the portrait as the antithesis of the stuffy bourgeois apartment depicted in *Un Dimanche, Paris, 1889 (A Sunday, Paris, 1889, 1888-90)* (Figure 3.5), as if the latter’s profusion of decorative motifs had exploded from their moorings in rugs and bibelots, coalescing into an enamel wall that is itself perpetually imploding and exploding.⁴⁹

“1888: Illuminations of Disenchantment,” in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 163-76, in particular.

⁴⁷ The portrait’s combination of the dynamogenous and the inhibitory has been discussed in Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist*: 143-49; Argüelles, *Charles Henry*: 131-42; Zimmermann, *Les Mondes de Seurat*: 297. The clock-wise orientation of the wheel (of which the segments were arranged to create pleasantly rhythmic angles) would have been considered dynamogenous, which contrasted with Fénéon’s orientation and the largely inhibitory angles associated with his figure. The colors were also arranged so as to juxtapose dynamogenous reds and yellows and oranges with inhibitory blues, greens and purples. The juxtaposition of dynamogenous and inhibitory colors was considered by Henry to have a dynamogenous result if they were at “rhythmic” intervals on the chromatic circle. See Henry, *Cercle chromatique*: 36; Homer, *Seurat and the Science of Painting*: 195-96.

“Le désagréable hyperesthésie; l’agréable anesthésie.” The phrase was used by Fénéon in a discussion of the practical implications of Henry’s ideas, in particular the enhancement of perception through the “ugly”. “Signac,” *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui*, n. 373 (May 1890), reproduced in Félix Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes: Chroniques d’art*, ed. Joan U. Halperin, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1970). 178.

⁴⁸ Howard Lay has discussed the way the painting’s background, like the explosions of anarchist bombs, attempted to suspend traditional means of signification. Lay, “The Aesthetics of Terror.”

Fénéon would later make the analogy between posters’ “couleurs flamboyantes” and dynamite; around the time of the portrait’s creation he wrote of paintings by Signac “qui annulent mes murs.” “Chez les barbouilleurs: Les affiches en couleur,” *Le Père peignard*, April 30, 1893, reproduced in Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 230. Undated [1890] letter from Fénéon to Signac, Signac Archives, Paris, France.

⁴⁹ That was the title it was exhibited under at the 1890 Independants. Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: 197. For an analysis of *Un Dimanche*, as well as *La Salle à manger (1886-1887)*, in terms of frivolous

But if the “scientific aesthetic” provided the justification of form-as-act, it also provided the logic, science, and didactic awareness associated with theoretical propaganda. After all, Henry held that form’s effects could be predicted and measured, allowing him to deduce, through psychophysics, the universal “laws” of formal expression.⁵⁰ Synthesizing earlier aesthetic theories, Henry endowed the orchestration of aesthetic emotion and sensation with a (supposedly) mathematical, scientific rigor. The search for a science of art had motivated Signac’s original adoption, along with Georges Seurat (1859-1891), of the Neo-Impressionist technique, and when writing on the movement in 1886, Fénéon faithfully described the scientific knowledge—of the behavior of light, pigment, and their effect on the eye—underpinning their division of color.⁵¹ Alongside the novelty of this scientific and technical discussion, Fénéon’s account of Neo-Impressionism also bore the rather traditional marks of a rationalist discourse: an abstract, depersonalized eye (“*the eye*,” “*the retina*”)—associated with the intellect rather than the senses through terms like “perspicacious,” “conscious” and

consumption and stultifying commodification, see Robyn Roslak, “Artisans, Consumers and Corporeality in Signac’s Parisian Interiors,” *Art History* 29, no. 5 (November 2006): 860-86.

⁵⁰ Henry presented some caveats to these assertions. For example, he constantly reiterated that his designations only applied to the “normal,” healthy subject; hence Henry’s assertion that his scientific aesthetic could be used to diagnose pathology. See, for example, Henry, *Harmonies de formes et de couleurs*: 27. For an analysis of how this conception of pathology infiltrated art critical discourse, see Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde*: 127-31.

Psychophysics (or psychophysiology, as it has also been called), emerged in France as early as 1870 as a subset of experimental psychology, which focused on observable psychological phenomena and activities. Psychophysics attempted to access subjective sensorial impressions through knowledge of the physiology of the nervous system. Though Henry’s aesthetic also delved into realms beyond psychophysics (such as philosophy and mathematics), it contained this discipline’s focus on the body. On the origins and evolution of psychophysics in France, see Henriette Bloch, *La psychologie scientifique en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2006). Ch. 1.

⁵¹ See, in particular, “Les Impressionnistes en 1886,” *La Vogue*, October 1886, reproduced in Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 27-45. The notion of “optical mixture,” in which separated pigments recomposed themselves as a more luminous color/light in the viewer’s eye, was already well-suited to psychophysics’ emphasis on subjective effects (see page 36).

“learned”—replaced the painter and viewer (as well as the author himself) as subjects. When combined with the admonitions to back up from the paintings (the optical mixture that lay at the heart of Neo-Impressionism’s scientific claims required “recul”), this abstracted vision suggested a distance that was both literal and metaphorical.⁵² It indicated a certain detachment, a rational perspective on the “emotional fervor” associated with art. Fénéon’s meticulous explanations suggested the same thing.

Henry’s aesthetic was different because it shifted the emphasis from an empiricist justification of Neo-Impressionist *facture* to one that originated in the artwork itself: formal elements, independent of what they might represent, became a sure, effective and universal means of determining aesthetic emotion, via their action on the senses. In other words, Henry highlighted rather than sublimated the qualities that made figures like Grave wary. In his 1899 *D’Eugène Delacroix au néo-impersonnisme*, Signac emphasized the term “divisionism” over that of “pointillism,” distinguishing the formal purity, contrast, and harmony of the former from the latter’s slavish imitation of nature.⁵³

⁵² “[U]n recul de deux pas, et toutes ces versicolores gouttes se fondent en ondulantes masses lumineuses; la facture, on peut dire, s’évanouit: l’œil n’est plus sollicité que par ce qui est essentiellement la peinture.” Ibid., 74.

⁵³ “*Diviser*, c’est rechercher la puissance et l’harmonie de la couleur, en représentant la lumière colorée par ses éléments purs, et en employant le mélange optique de ces éléments purs séparés et doses selon les lois essentielles du contraste et de la dégradation [...] *Pointiller* [...] [c]’est couvrir une surface de petites touches multicolores rapprochées, pures ou ternes, en s’efforçant d’imiter, par le mélange optique de ces éléments multiplies, les teintes variées de la nature, sans aucune volonté d’équilibre, sans aucun souci de contraste.” Paul Signac, *D’Eugène Delacroix au néo-impersonnisme*, ed. Françoise Cachin (Paris: Hermann, 1978). 119-20. The text amounted to a manifesto for, and a defense of, Neo-Impressionism. Signac portrayed pointillists as artists who misunderstood the purposes of divisionism. He distanced the Neo-Impressionists from a pointillist focus on nature, though Fénéon’s early writing on the movement indicates that a more accurate representation of nature was at least one of its initial goals.

This distinction confirmed Signac's preoccupation with the psychophysical impact, rather than the representational empiricism, of his technique.⁵⁴

But like Fénéon's earlier presentation of Neo-Impressionism's optical science, Henry's "scientific aesthetic" was also an attempt to make art—in this case, form's unconscious effects—more accessible to consciousness. Henry wrote treatises explaining his theories and their practical application, which he accompanied with instruments—among them a "chromatic circle" and an "aesthetic protractor"—designed to help determine the psychophysical valence of colors and forms.⁵⁵ When Signac used these instruments in the creation of illustrations, calculations and promotional works for Henry's lectures and publications, he was hoping to increase aesthetic awareness, enabling viewers to apply logic and reason to aesthetic emotion.⁵⁶

Signac's promotional print for Henry's chromatic circle (Figure 3.6)—which appeared on the back of programs for the Théâtre Libre's 1888-89 season—was no doubt

⁵⁴ Signac's emphasis on the "logical and scientific *placement* [...] of tones and colors" identified the technique entirely with the arrangement of color on canvas, as opposed to its initial justification as the reproduction of empirical light effects. "Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires," 98 (emphasis added).

⁵⁵ On Henry's version of the chromatic circle the colors were arranged so that pleasurable colors corresponded to pleasurable directions, and vice versa (for example, red, as the most agreeable color, was on top); the aesthetic protractor was for measuring angles, thereby determining whether a form was rhythmic (and thus harmonious) or not. These instruments, produced as plates or inserts within the relevant treatises, were meant to aid figures ranging from doctors and engineers to artists, critics and artisans in the analysis and/or creation of form. Henry's instruments are discussed in Homer, *Seurat and the Science of Painting*: 190-98; Zimmermann, *Les Mondes de Seurat*: 265-75.

⁵⁶ In an 1890 conference before furniture makers from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, Henry used figures created by Signac (of sword guards and vases, for example). Henry, *Harmonies de formes et de couleurs*. Signac wrote to Vincent Van Gogh, "Cela aura une grande portée sociale au point de vue surtout de l'art industriel. Nous apprenons à voir juste et beau aux ouvriers apprentis, etc. dont jusqu'ici on n'a fait l'éducation esthétique qu'au moyen de formules empiriques et de conseils malhonnêtes ou niais." Paul Signac, "Letter to Vincent Van Gogh. Cassis, Friday, April 12, 1889 (Letter 757)," *Vincent Van Gogh, The Letters*, <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let757/letter.html>. Signac's calculations and figures were later published in Charles Henry, *Quelques aperçus sur l'Esthétique des formes* (Paris: Librairie Nony & C^{ie}, 1895).

the most stunning manifestation of these pedagogical efforts.⁵⁷ In its use of color and figure, it was also the most relevant to Signac's painting. Explicitly labeled as an "Application du cercle chromatique de M^r. Ch. Henry" ("Application of Mr. Ch. Henry's chromatic circle") it showcased some of the expressive effects outlined in the publication of the same name: the turning of chromatic circles within the letters was meant to capture the viewer's attention, while the scene within the medallion juxtaposed inhibiting and dynamogenous colors—the kind of contrast Signac would develop to such striking effect in Fénéon's portrait. Appropriately enough, the stocky figure is a viewer (perhaps a theater-goer, as the chair-like arch at his back implies).⁵⁸ Signac's use of mainly inhibitory colors like blue and green to depict both the viewer and the viewed scene seems to illustrate Henry's belief in the direct correspondence between aesthetic properties and the experience of the viewer, though this begs the question of why there is not a similar echo of the energizing, dynamogenous red—visible in the upper portion of the medallion above and beyond the viewer's head—on the figure. But it seems likely that—in addition to the necessity, in Henry's aesthetic, of inhibitory accents/contrasts to an overall harmony—Signac was seeking to emphasize the public's general inhibition, showing the viewer in a moment prior to the dynamogeny promised by the red horizon.⁵⁹ In doing so, he highlighted the public's dire need for "applications" of Henry's theories.

⁵⁷ This print was based on a no longer extant poster that Signac painted to advertise Henry's chromatic circle in the publisher's shop. Two articles by Fénéon on the poster thus provide insight into the print, particularly "L'affiche de M. Paul Signac. Octobre (14, boulevard Saint-Michel)" in *La Revue indépendante's* 1888 "Calendrier de Septembre." Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 117.

⁵⁸ As Robyn Roslak has suggested to me, this could also be a depiction of a viewer looking at a Neo-Impressionist landscape, particularly given the fact that Seurat and Signac exhibited their work in the lobby of the Théâtre-Libre.

⁵⁹ Michael Zimmermann has given a different explanation, arguing that the contrast signifies a viewer anaesthetized by the hyperstimulus of the largely dynamogenous scene he views. Zimmermann, *Les Mondes de Seurat*: 297. Given the context, I find this interpretation less convincing.

The predominance of the inhibitory blue was perhaps also meant to suggest a proletarian viewer in a blue smock, anticipating the artist's emphasis on just such an audience in "Impressionists and Revolutionaries."

Given the associations between popular and didactic imagery, this possible proletarian identity would have reinforced the pedagogical message. The basic, rather geometrical shapes that describe the viewer also seem a lesson in simple and/or popular forms.⁶⁰ These forms in turn serve as the ground for Signac's divisionist application of color, which was more "divided" than ever before: color lithography reproduced the various colors as separate flecks and dashes quite different from the layers of small, overlapping pointillist brushstrokes found in Neo-Impressionist painting of this period; printed on a theater program, no "recul" offered the supposed blending associated with optical mixture. Despite the many occlusions and ambiguities of the medallion (including the viewer's face), the mechanics of divisionism and of Henry's chromatic circle were laid out starkly as possible, clearly visible as "decorative" (i.e. distanced from representation) patterns of color and forms, independent of what they might represent.⁶¹ In Fénéon's portrait (Figure 3.4), where the citation of Henry's terminology and the use of abstract forms indicated a similarly didactic impulse, Signac fully exploited the

⁶⁰ These qualities are no doubt attributable in part to Signac's desire to stick to simple (he used the terms "bête" and "barbare") forms in order to facilitate his task and to better display the color arrangements. Fénéon also wrote in his description of the poster that "[l]'affiche de M. Paul Signac est un premier essai: sa polychromie est parfaitement ordonnée, mais on ne voit pas que les proportions des lettres aient été l'objet de calculs." Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 117. In a note thanking the critic for his article, Signac acknowledged that he and Henry had agreed to put off "recherches typographiques," using simple and large forms in order to make their construction easier and to better display the color. "Ceci explique le côté barbare de cette affiche qui ne vous a pas échappé." Visiting card from Signac to Fénéon, undated [1888], Signac Archives.

⁶¹ For conceptions of the Neo-Impressionist brushstroke as (frivolously) decorative, or soullessly mechanistic, see Roslak, "Artisans, Consumers and Corporeality," 882.

decorative tendencies only nascent in the print, adding another “system” to that of divisionism: “decorative” patterns and motifs, manifesting as explicitly as possible the “laws” of linear expression.⁶²

Decorative Harmony

The “decorative” character of Fénéon’s portrait, to which I have alluded thus far only in passing, was therefore about more than its abstracted, non-representational background, or its affinities with patterns and shapes found in the decorative arts. The terms with which Signac proposed the portrait to Fénéon (in reciprocation for the latter’s flattering profile in *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui*, which included a discussion of Signac’s collaboration with Henry) implicitly aligned “decorative” aesthetics with psychophysical aesthetics: “It will in no way be a banal portrait, but rather a very composed picture, very arranged in lines and tints [...] A decorative Félix.”⁶³ Explicitly decorative form, I argue, was Signac’s attempt to produce, logically and transparently, harmonious sensation. It was well-suited to this task due to the adjectival polysemy of the term “decorative,” which simultaneously invoked: 1) the self-sufficiency of pure form, denuded of any representational function; 2) the “purely aesthetic emotion“ produced by these abstracted

⁶² Signac did not necessarily appreciate the term “system.” In an April 14, 1897 journal entry he wrote that “[l]a division est plutôt une philosophie qu’un système,” though he also used the term when describing divisionism in his *D’Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionisme*: “La division, c’est un système complexe d’harmonie, une esthétique plutôt qu’une technique.” Paul Signac, “Extraits du Journal inédit de Paul Signac II, 1897-1898,” *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 39(1952): 267; *D’Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*: 119. My use of the term is meant to highlight the explicit application of divisionism and Henry’s aesthetic.

⁶³ “Signac,” *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui*, n. 373 (1890), reproduced in Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 174-79. “Ce ne serait point un banal portrait mais un tableau très composé, très agencé en lignes et teintes [...] Un Félix décoratif.” Letter from Signac to Fénéon, Saint-Briac, July 21, 1890, Signac Archives.

elements; and 3) the unconscious, universal principles that governed harmonious formal expression.⁶⁴ Henry's aesthetic—which represented an attempt at the conscious recuperation of these instinctive principles—had a huge role in reinforcing these associations.

The association of the decorative and decorative painting with formal harmony was particularly appropriate to Henry's ideas on psychophysical and social harmony, which echoed anarchist visions of free individuals living in collective harmony.⁶⁵ Robyn Roslak has demonstrated the way the Neo-Impressionist application of paint, and its underlying theories of color and light, had affinities with contemporary scientific discourses on the natural world and anarcho-communist theories of social harmony. As a result, "the Neo-Impressionists believed that the conditions of aesthetic harmony and equilibrium [...] held an abstract, evocative value that made it possible to transform the human intellect or psyche in a positive direction and perhaps promote noncompetitive, harmonious social behavior."⁶⁶ Roslak mentions Henry's role in this conception only briefly, yet it was largely thanks to his aesthetic that formal and/or decorative harmony

⁶⁴ For the association of these qualities with decorative painting, see Nicholas Watkins, "The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic," in *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930*, ed. Gloria Groom (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 1-6; Roger Benjamin, "The Decorative Landscape, Fauvism and the Arabesque of Observation," *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 2 (June 1993); Joyce Henri Robinson, "'Hi Honey, I'm Home': Weary (Neurasthenic) Businessmen and the Formulation of a Serenely Modern Aesthetic," in *What is Architecture?*, ed. Andrew Ballantyne (New York: Routledge, 2002), 114-19. See my earlier discussion of aesthetic emotion.

⁶⁵ Critics such as Alphonse Germain and Georges Lecomte tied the expressive "harmonie des lignes et des couleurs" to decorative painting. See, for example, Georges Lecomte, "Société des artistes indépendants," *L'Art moderne* 10 (March 30, 1890). This connection was based, in part, on Henry's own association of his aesthetic with the abstract motifs and forms of the decorative arts, as well as the formal qualities associated with a prior discourse on mural painting. *Liste des travaux de M. Charles Henry*, (Rome: Imprimerie des Sciences mathématiques et physiques, October 1880). 6; Marie Jeannine Aquilino, "Painted Promises: The Politics of Public Art in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 4 (December 1993); Watkins, "The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic," 1-6. Germain's conception of decorative painting has been analyzed by both Benjamin and Robinson (see preceding footnote).

⁶⁶ Roslak, "The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony," 388.

was endowed with connotations of a psychophysical and, ultimately, social harmony.

According to Henry, “to help the normal development of art is also to further the realization of our still far-off destiny—the creation of universal harmony.”⁶⁷

In a profile of Signac for *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui*—which had generated the idea for the portrait—Fénéon highlighted a similar concept in relation to decoration, that of synthesis.⁶⁸ In the passage cited above, Henry distanced harmony from the present by projecting it into a far-off future; in a passage that Robyn Roslak has argued is critical to an understanding of Signac’s artistic ambitions, Fénéon associated decorative synthesis with material and temporal transcendence.⁶⁹ The critic wrote that once the Neo-Impressionist technique of optical mixture had provided a vehicle for the artist’s latent qualities:

M. Paul Signac was able to create exemplary specimens of an art of great decorative development, which sacrifices anecdote to arabesque, nomenclature to synthesis, the fleeting to the permanent, and [...] confers on Nature, which at last grew weary of its precarious reality, an authentic Reality.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ “[A]ider le développement normal de l’art, c’est favoriser d’autant la réalisation encore lointaine de notre destinée—la création de l’harmonie universelle.” Henry, *Rapporteur esthétique*: 15. Zimmermann has argued that Henry’s rhetoric, particularly given that the psychophysicist’s stance on anarchism was unclear, bears just as strong a resemblance to bourgeois hopes for a harmony between classes that would nevertheless maintain the prevailing class structure. Zimmermann, *Les Mondes de Seurat*: 282. Nevertheless, Henry’s notion of humanity’s progress toward greater and greater harmony closely echoes ideas expressed in *La Révolte* in the same period: “après une révolution qui nous aura débarrassé de nos entraves, l’humanité pourra continuer plus rapidement son évolution vers la bienveillance mutuelle. La Révolution ne transformera pas les individus, mais en modifiant la nature de leurs relations, un changement important se fera dans les caractères, un grand pas dans la marche vers la solidarité.” “Communisme et individualisme,” *La Révolte: Organe communiste-anarchiste* 1, no. 22 (February 18-24, 1888): 2.

⁶⁸ For the entwined concepts of harmony, analysis and synthesis, see Roslak, “The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony,” particularly 388-89. Synthesis was the greater unity formed out of disparate elements determined by analysis.

⁶⁹ For Roslak, this is a key passage, indicative of Neo-Impressionism’s idealizing impulse. *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism*: 1-5; “Symphonic Seas, Oceans of Liberty: Paul Signac’s *La Mer: Les Barques (Concarneau)*,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2005), <http://19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/component/content/article/64-spring05article/302-symphonic-seas-oceans-of-liberty-paul-signacs-la-mer-les-barques-concarneau>.

⁷⁰ “M. Paul Signac put créer les exemplaires spécimens d’un art à grand développement décoratif, qui sacrifie l’anecdote à l’arabesque, la nomenclature à la synthèse, le fugace au permanent, et [...] confère à la

The use of the term “synthesis” here implies the transcendence of disparate elements (the enumeration of nomenclature), including antitheses.⁷¹ Dialectic was in fact central to Seurat’s notion of harmony: “Art is harmony, Harmony is the analogy of Opposites, the analogy of Similarities—of tone, tint and line.”⁷² Yet, unless they wished to criticize Neo-Impressionist painting, critics largely emphasized an overall decorative unity, which they associated with a harmony of repose; in the words of Fénéon, “a harmonious and nostalgic dream in light.”⁷³ With its profusion of contrasts, the Fénéon portrait seems designed for anything but. In addition to the imploding/exploding backdrop, and the contrast of dynamogenous and inhibitory angles, directions, and colors, Signac juxtaposed the figure of Fénéon and the abstract, “rhythmic background.” The juxtaposition resulted in the pairing of an esoteric, private joke—indicated by Fénéon’s bright yellow coat, bizarre pose and obscurely symbolic flower—and an explicit

Nature, que lassait à la fin sa réalité précaire, une authentique Réalité.” “Signac,” *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui*, n. 373 (1890), reproduced in Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 177. The translation is Roslak’s (see preceding note).

⁷¹ From the beginning the Neo-Impressionist technique highlighted the dual process of analysis and synthesis. This process was fused with Henry’s theories of formal expression, in which harmony was determined by the combined processes of addition and subtraction. Roslak has highlighted the concept of analysis rather than antithesis or dialectic. Roslak, “The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony.” Fénéon’s text was in fact sensitive to the importance of contrast, but he subordinated it to the narrative of synthesis.

⁷² “L’Art c’est l’harmonie, l’Harmonie c’est l’analogie des Contraires, l’analogie des Semblables—de ton, de teinte, de ligne.” As reported by Jules Christophe, “Georges Seurat,” *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui* 9, no. 368 (April 1890). A similar formulation can be found in Seurat’s “Esthétique,” which consists of a series of four drafts of a letter (that was never sent) to the critic Maurice Beaubourg. They are reproduced or summarized in Robert L. Herbert et al., *Georges Seurat, 1859-1891* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991). 381-84. My translation is based on that found in Robert L. Herbert, *Seurat, Drawings and Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). 170-71. Herbert explains that “‘Ton’ and ‘teinte’ have been translated by their nineteenth-century equivalents ‘tone’ and ‘tint,’ although today many would say ‘value’ and ‘hue’ (the latter, however, is not the same as ‘tint,’ which incorporates the idea of a degree of saturation as distinct from pure chroma).”

⁷³ “[U]n harmonieux et nostalgique rêve dans de la lumière.” “Paul Signac,” *La Plume* (1 September 1891), reproduced in Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 199.

exposition of theory.⁷⁴ Signac also opposed small, isolated motifs in the lower-right corner (around Fénéon's body) with curved and flowing lines in the upper-left corner, where the patterns seem to roil in response to Fénéon's proffered cyclamen. In this light, the background becomes a decorative balancing act, a dialectical harmony conjured up and controlled by Fénéon.

This balancing act reflected Signac's own juggling of a complex dialectic. On the one hand, there were the individualized freedoms of pure aesthetics, of color and emotion, and of artistic "deed." Anarchist theorists like Grave associated these elements with an art of the ideal future rather than of an engaged present, arguing that current efforts needed to be directed at collective awareness.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Signac attempted to make individual artistic freedom relevant to the present by endowing it with the qualities of propaganda. His aesthetic theories were given concrete form as explicit formal systems, namely divisionism and abstract linearity. With his decorative "enamel"—particularly its decorative patterns, which most explicitly combined the aesthetic and the didactic—Signac attempted to bridge the gap between individual and collective emancipation, present struggle and future anarchist harmony. The portrait's decorative backdrop both explodes and suspends the explosion; when Fénéon wrote that Signac's paintings erased his walls, Signac responded with a constructive metaphor, asking if there were another painting "that would fill a hole in the gallery of my friend

⁷⁴ Such elements have led Marina Feretti-Bocquillon to propose the portrait as a gentle mockery of Henry's scientific aesthetic, one verging on parody. Anne Distel et al., eds., *Signac, 1863-1935* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001), 202-5.

⁷⁵ Grave criticized exclusively aesthetic concerns as resulting in an art for art's sake, which he believed negated art's potential for social engagement. Grave, *La société future*: 357-68.

Fénéon.”⁷⁶ With his art, Signac strove for a harmonious alternative to terrorist bombs.

Which raises the following questions: is Fénéon in control of the backdrop’s decorative im/explosion, or is he just an observer to a process set in motion? Does the portrait synthesize into an overall harmony, containing the various forces it brings to bear?

For the most part, the response of commentators was an emphatic no. Georges Lecomte had already remarked in 1890 that “[t]his search for the harmony of lines and colors, for the clear expression, even exaggeration, of the painting’s dominant idea, will result in powerful effects of decorative painting, provided that one manages to dissimulate the too apparent procedure.”⁷⁷ Aside from the disjunction between the figure and background, the most criticized aspect of the painting was the emphatic concretization of divisionism and Henry’s theories. For viewers ranging from Adolphe Retté to Camille Pissarro (both anarchists, but of a very different stamp) these systems impeded formal synthesis and its corollary, aesthetic emotion. Retté compared Neo-Impression negatively with the “decorative composition” and “synthesis” of symbolist painters like Pierre Bonnard and Maurice Denis, arguing that Signac’s work provided a merely visual pleasure (*sensation*) absent of ideas and emotions.⁷⁸ Pissarro condemned the portrait for the absence of both sensation and decorative, aesthetic emotion.⁷⁹ Signac

⁷⁶ Fénéon wrote admiringly of paintings by Signac “qui annulent mes murs”; Signac responded by asking if there were another painting “qui boucherait un trou dans la galerie de mon ami Fénéon.” Undated [1890] letter from Fénéon to Signac, and April 29, 1890 response from Signac, Signac Archives.

⁷⁷ “Cette recherche de l’harmonie des lignes et des couleurs, pour l’expression nette jusqu’à l’exagération de l’idée dominante du tableau, aboutira à des effets puissants de peinture décorative, pour peu qu’on arrive à dissimuler le trop apparent procédé.” Lecomte, “Société des artistes indépendants,” 100-101.

⁷⁸ Adolphe Retté, “Septième exposition des artistes indépendants,” *L’Ermitage* (May 1891): 293 and 295. Retté would later become a monarchist, perhaps not surprising given the elitist tone of his and others’ contributions to *l’Ermitage*.

⁷⁹ “Un portrait bizarre de Fénéon debout, tendant un lys, et comme fond, des entrelacs de couleurs qui ne sont pas décoratifs, qui ne s’expliquent pas au point de vue de la sensation et qui ne donnent pas non plus une sensation de beauté décorative à l’œuvre.” Letter to Lucien Pissarro, March 30, 1891 (n. 647) in

had viewed explicit decorative pattern as his surest means for achieving both aesthetic and didactic ends, but those same patterns stretched the dialectic to breaking point.

Viewers like Lecomte, Retté and Pissarro required of decorative painting a more uniform, synthetic harmony—the kind designated by Fénéon’s “authentic Reality.”⁸⁰

Fénéon kept the portrait, but apparently dismissed it late in life.⁸¹ And around the time of its creation, he provided subtle dissuasions from theoretical excess. While editing the profile of Signac in which the passage on decorative, authentic Reality appeared, Fénéon railed against Henry’s theoretical precisions, complaining to Signac that “We are in a studio, not in a laboratory.”⁸² Then, in the published article, the critic implied that Henry’s aesthetic was too crude a tool for the execution or analysis of Signac’s paintings.⁸³ The following year, Fénéon wrote that “[Signac] has not enslaved himself to this graceful mathematics; he knows well that a work of art is inextricable.”⁸⁴ Fénéon acknowledged that Signac’s study of Henry’s aesthetic seemed to have given him more

Camille Pissarro, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, ed. Janine Bailly-Herzberg, 5 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions du Valhermeil, 1988). 50.

⁸⁰ See footnote 70.

⁸¹ For Fénéon’s negative view of the portrait, see Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist*: 147. Halperin also argued that Fénéon had an ambivalent attitude to the application of Henry’s aesthetic in painting (pp. 125-31). Based on the fact that Fénéon kept the portrait all his life, Marina Feretti-Bocquillon has implied, in contrast, that Fénéon prized this painting. Distel et al., *Signac, 1863-1935*, 204.

⁸² “Nous sommes dans un atelier, pas dans un laboratoire.” Undated letter [April 1890] from Fénéon to Signac, Signac Archives. Quoted in *Signac, 1863-1935*, 51. A collection of letters from Henry to Fénéon, including one with the suggested corrections that irritated Fénéon, is conserved at the Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, Paris, France.

⁸³ “Cette méthode permettrait peut-être l’étude mathématique de chromoxylographies japonaises aux teintes autonomes dans leurs confins nettement délinées. Mais il serait illusoire que M. Signac cherchât à l’utiliser pour l’exécution d’un tableau ou M. X. pour l’analyse ultérieure de ce tableau.” “Signac,” *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui*, n. 373 (1890), reproduced in Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 178. Interestingly, the backdrop for the portrait was adapted from just the type of Japanese print Fénéon described. For the identification of a Japanese wood-block print (possibly a kimono pattern) as the iconographical source, see Françoise Cachin, “Le Portrait de Fénéon par Signac: Une Source inédite,” *La Revue de l’art*, no. 6 (1969).

⁸⁴ “[Signac] ne s’est pas asservi à cette mathématique gracieuse; il sait bien qu’une œuvre d’art est inextricable.” “Paul Signac,” *La Plume* (1 September 1891), reproduced in Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, 1: 198.

control over “his intuitions of polychromic and linear harmonies,” allowing him to reach “the threshold of consciousness.”⁸⁵ But note the terms “inextricable,” “intuition,” and “threshold”: the critic accepts Henry’s aesthetic insofar as it helps clarify and communicate the intuitions of artistic genius; if given too central a role, it might evacuate aesthetic instinct and emotion. This balance of instinctive aesthetics and theoretical awareness would certainly have appealed to Signac, and his reaction to Fénéon’s 1890 article was unreservedly enthusiastic.⁸⁶ Yet I do not think that Signac—who at this time included a date in all his paintings’ titles and wrote of “the vanity of inalterable processes”—would have fully embraced the transcendence of the “fleeting,” “precarious” present entailed by Fénéon’s “authentic Reality.”⁸⁷ As I have already indicated, Signac’s portrait of Fénéon resisted synthesis even as it proposed it. It resisted synthesis too much for most viewers, resulting in rupture rather than harmony, and incomprehension rather than awareness and understanding.

This reaction, combined with the shock of Seurat’s death, must have shaken Signac’s confidence in his ability to join reason and aesthetic emotion.⁸⁸ Henry’s aesthetic had also been challenged, and three years later a rather dismissive journal entry suggests that Signac had washed his hands of the psychophysicist.⁸⁹ Yet, rather than

⁸⁵ “ses intuitions d’harmonies polychromes et linéaires”; “le seuil de la conscience.” Ibid., 178 and 198.

⁸⁶ Letter from Signac to Fénéon, April 29, 1890, quoted in Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist*: 134; Distel et al., *Signac, 1863-1935*, 51.

⁸⁷ “la vanité des procédés immuables.” Signac, “Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires,” 101.

⁸⁸ Seurat died suddenly and unexpectedly on March 29, 1891, shortly after the opening of the Independants.

⁸⁹ “Visite de Charles Henry, de plus en plus poétique. D’une donnée exacte et scientifique, il tire des conclusions d’une fantaisie charmante qu’il s’efforce de démontrer mathématiquement.” December 14, 1894, Signac, “Extraits du Journal I,” 112. Zimmermann has attributed Signac’s eventual estrangement from Henry to the discrediting, in the 1890s, of his psychophysical aesthetic on scientific and philosophical grounds (accomplished largely by the philosophers Georges Sorel and Henri Bergson, though only the former attacked Henry directly). Zimmermann, *Les Mondes de Seurat*: 243-48.

abandoning Henry's ideas, Signac was convinced by critics that his theoretical frameworks (articulated through divisionism and decorative pattern) had to be further sublimated in favor of decorative unity, and that intuition, rather than calculations, needed to dominate.⁹⁰ The abstract background of the Fénéon portrait had proved to be a problem. Critics read it as the oppressive yoke of an all "too apparent procedure," while anarchists outside of avant-garde circles would have read it as an esoteric exercise devoid of revolutionary import.⁹¹ Signac could address both complaints by grounding his work in nature and, to a lesser extent, anarchist iconography, subject matter that would serve as alibis for the deployment of his aesthetic systems.

Decorative Painting in the *Ère des attentats*

In March 1892 a series of bombings struck Paris, ushering in the *ère des attentats*. In that same period, Signac began an extended voyage along the French coast, beginning in Brittany and culminating in May with his arrival at Saint-Tropez. This idyllic setting provided Signac with both an outsider's view on Parisian turmoil and a concrete example of the individual liberty and mutual aid promised by anarcho-communism.⁹² This

⁹⁰ For an indication of Signac's continued adherence to Henry's ideas, see "Le sujet en peinture et la signification du tableau, 1935," reproduced in annex in Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*: 185. See the epilogue to this dissertation for a more in-depth discussion of this text.

⁹¹ See footnote 77.

⁹² Anne Dymond, Robyn Roslak, and Tania Woloshyn have pointed to the special connection between anarchist theory, geography and the idealization of Southern France as a site of traditional communities approximating anarchist social structures. Dymond, "A Politicized Pastoral.," Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism*: particularly ch. 6; Tania Woloshyn, "*Vers la lumière*: Painters and Patients on the Côte d'Azur, c.1887-1910" (University of Nottingham, 2008); "Colonizing the Côte d'Azur: Neo-Impressionism, Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical Terre Libre of the Maures, c.1892-1908," *RIHA Journal* 0045 (Special Issue 'New Directions in Neo-Impressionism')(July 14, 2012), <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2012/2012-jul-sep/special-issue-neo-impressionism/woloshyn-colonizing-the-cote-dazur>.

combination inspired two large-scale decorative works, *Femmes au puits* (*Women at the Well*, 1892) (Figure 3.7) and *Au temps d'Harmonie* (Figure 3.1), both of which were harmonious alternatives to anarchist bombs.

If Signac decided to reaffirm his anarchist engagement in the realm of paint, it was because the “great social trial that begins between workers and Capital” seemed to be coming to a head. The following year he wrote to Grave of “the hope of this near future when, finally, for the first time, all individuality will be free.”⁹³ Grave’s *La Révolte* had separated rational propaganda and emotional deed, arguing that the latter would have to wait for a “time of revolution.”⁹⁴ But violent terrorism could be interpreted as the stirrings of a future cataclysm. Propaganda seemed on the verge of achieving its own desired transcendence as revolutionary act. As Reclus wrote in *La Plume*:

Each day could bring catastrophe, and the situation is so tense that in each country we are waiting for a burst, who knows, maybe the first flare of the explosion! [...] It’s that the feeling of solidarity grows to such an extent that each local shock tends to shake all of Humanity. Thus great days are on the horizon. The evolution is complete, and the revolution will not be long in coming. Is it not accomplishing itself in multiple shocks right before our eyes? [...] *The day will come when Evolution and Revolution follow immediately upon one another, from desire to reality, idea to realization, merging as one, single phenomenon.*⁹⁵

⁹³ “Quelle logique et quelle clarté dans ce beau livre qui [...] nous donne l’espérance de cet avenir proche où, enfin, pour la première fois, toute individualité sera libre.” Undated letter [1893] from Signac to Jean Grave (thanking him for and praising his *La Société mourante et l’anarchie*, published in Paris that year), reproduced in Herbert and Herbert, “Artists and Anarchism II,” 519.

⁹⁴ “Lutte et théorie,” 2.

⁹⁵ “Chaque jour peut amener une catastrophe et la situation est tellement tendue que dans chaque pays on s’attend à un éclat, qui sait ? peut-être la première fusée de l’explosion ! [...] C’est que le sentiment de solidarité gagne de plus en plus et que toute secousse locale tend à ébranler l’Humanité. [...] Ainsi les grands jours s’annoncent. L’évolution s’est faite, la révolution ne saurait tarder. D’ailleurs ne s’accomplit-elle pas constamment sous nos yeux par multiples secousses? [...] Le jour viendra où l’Evolution et la Révolution se succédant immédiatement du désir au fait, de l’idée à la réalisation, se confondront en un seul et même phénomène.” Élisée Reclus, “La Révolution,” *La Plume: Littéraire, artistique, et sociale*, no. 97 (May 1, 1893): 207 (emphasis added).

At such a time, as he was fleshing out the idea for *Au temps d'Harmonie*, Signac was able to see aesthetic and anarchist engagement as the same project.⁹⁶ The moment when “purely aesthetic emotion” would be accessible to all seemed imminent, and a reasoned artistic propaganda could help bring it closer.⁹⁷

Signac envisioned artistic interventions that would engender none of the reservations directed at “propaganda by the deed.” While Fénéon considered Émile Henry’s bombing of the Café Terminus to be the most logical of the *attentats*, fellow anarchist and *littérateur* Octave Mirbeau expressed the opinion of many when he charged that it was “inexplicable.”⁹⁸ With the killing of innocent café patrons, Mirbeau feared that Henry had muddied the anarchist “idea” with the gratuitous violence of an “isolated criminal.”⁹⁹ And, echoing Grave’s own doubts, the poet Stéphane Mallarmé emphasized the deed’s ephemerality as propaganda:

Explosive devices—the detonation of which illuminates parliaments with a *summary* glow, but that maims, just as regrettably, the curious onlooker—would interest me for the glow they produce, were it not for the *brevity of its lesson*, which permits the legislator to claim a definitive lack of understanding; but I question the addition of bullets and nails to these devices.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ For details of the elaboration of both *Femmes au puits* and *Au temps d'Harmonie*, see Distel et al., *Signac, 1863-1935*, 226-28 and 241-45; Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, ed. *Signac & Saint-Tropez, 1892-1913* (Saint-Tropez: Musée de l'Annonciade, 1992), 32-36 and 50-51.

⁹⁷ See footnote 37.

⁹⁸ Octave Mirbeau, “Pour Jean Grave,” in *Combats politiques*, ed. Pierre Michel and Jean-François Nivet (Paris: Librairie Séguier, 1990), 141. The essay originally appeared in *Le Journal* on February 19, 1894.

⁹⁹ “Tout est à craindre, car se trouvent confondues dans une même haine, et la bombe du criminel isolé, et l'idée qui marche, impassible et lente, à travers les siècles.” *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ “Les engins, dont le bris illumine les parlements d'une lueur sommaire, mais estropient, aussi à faire grand pitié, des badauds, je m'y intéresserais, en raison de la lueur—sans la brièveté de son enseignement qui permet au législateur d'alléguer une définitive incompréhension; mais j'y récuse l'adjonction de balles à tir et de clous.” Stéphane Mallarmé, “La musique et les lettres: lecture d'Oxford et de Cambridge,” *La Revue Blanche* 30 (April 1894): 307 (emphasis added). Discussed and translated in Lay, “*Beau Geste!*,” 94-95. This passage is placed in relation to Mallarmé’s reception of anarchist terrorism in McGuinness, “Mallarmé.” McGuinness argues that Mallarmé’s poetry recuperated the violent explosions of the *attentats* as a positive, constructive force by transmuting them into aesthetic explosions, “poésie éclatée.” As I have indicated, this view of Mallarmé is equally appropriate for Signac.

Signac turned to decorative painting to render, with the force of psychophysical harmony, the collective justice, beauty and happiness that Mirbeau associated with Grave's anarcho-communism.¹⁰¹

Femme se coiffant

Signac also wanted to make *enduring* anarchist lessons. Seurat's death inspired in Signac an ongoing reflection on the posterity of his work and Neo-Impressionism's legacy, concerns that would also inform his political engagement. Early in 1892, before the wave of *attentats* and his departure for Brittany and the south, Signac painted *Femme se coiffant*, *Opus 227* (*Woman Arranging Her Hair*, *Opus 227*, Figure 3.8) using a technique that Henry had "resurrected" in 1884.¹⁰² The critic Charles Saunier reported that Signac experimented with encaustic's "inalterable procedure" in the hopes of avoiding the color degradation that had diminished some of Seurat's *oeuvre*.¹⁰³ As with Fénéon's portrait, the painting's subtitle, "Arabesques pour une salle de toilette (Peinture à l'encaustique)" ("Arabesques for a Dressing Room, Encaustic Painting") proclaimed its decorative character—as both a decoration for a dressing room and a support for decorative forms—

¹⁰¹ "Ce qui éclate dans ce livre [*La société mourante et l'anarchie*], c'est l'amour de la vie, c'est-à-dire la justice et la pitié. Même si, de-ci, de-là, il contient des parties de pur rêve, ce rêve est beau, puisqu'il poursuit le bonheur." Mirbeau, "Pour Jean Grave," 146.

¹⁰² Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: 206 (n.221). Signac exhibited this painting twice in 1892 and then twice more in 1893. Henry had co-authored a treatise on encaustic painting in 1884 with Henry Cros, a sculptor affiliated with official decorative arts institutions. Henry Cros and Charles Henry, *L'Encaustique et les autres procédés de peinture chez les anciens: Histoire et technique* (Paris: J. Rouam, 1884). Signac's concern for posterity (and related interest in the encaustic technique) nevertheless predated Seurat's death, as witnessed by a December 1890 letter to Henri-Edmond Cross. "Dégoûté des couleurs à l'huile trop changeantes, je vais essayer de peindre à l'encaustique à chaud—Lefranc va préparer des couleurs immuables!" Cited by Ferretti-Bocquillon in Distel et al., *Signac, 1863-1935*, 211.

¹⁰³ Charles Saunier, "L'Art nouveau, II: Les Indépendants," *La Revue indépendante* 23, no. 66 (April 1892): 43.

and Henry's influence. But unlike the patterns set behind Fénéon, the decorative patterns of *Femme se coiffant* are anchored in the figuration, as Saunier noted in his description of the work: "The lively and harmonious hues, the special yellows add their brilliance to the radiant lines of the décor: supple arabesques formed [nées] by the furniture's curves, various Japanese screens, intimate objects with aesthetic contours."¹⁰⁴ In Saunier's text, the decorative patterns are "born" from, and thus dependent on, the objects. And unlike the decorative motifs and objects displayed in Seurat's own boudoir scene, *Jeune femme se poudrant* (*Young Woman Powdering Herself*, Figure 3.9), Signac's forms and patterns are less stiff and upright; their irregular roundness evokes the "natural" as opposed to the artificial, an association reinforced by the vegetal motifs on the ceramic washbasin and jug.¹⁰⁵ It was also with this painting that Signac seems to have ended his practice of including dates in the exhibition titles of his works. All of these elements indicate that, in the wake of the poor reception of the Fénéon portrait, and in adapting psychophysical decorative pattern to the private realm of the boudoir, Signac was moving in the direction of a decorative synthesis that transcended the perception of divisionism as a procedure: atemporal, natural/intuitive, and emphasizing unity over rupture.

¹⁰⁴ "Les tons pimpants et harmonieux, les jaunes spéciaux juxtaposent leur éclat aux radieuses lignes du décor: sveltes arabesques nées de la courbe des meubles, écrans japonais disséminés, intimes objets au contour esthétique." Ibid. This portion of the text is reproduced in Distel et al., *Signac, 1863-1935*, 211. The translation is modified from the English version of the catalogue.

¹⁰⁵ Two small details indicate that Signac's *Femme se coiffant* was (at least inadvertently) a commentary on Seurat's painting: the woman's coiffure—of which the chignon is unaccountably visible in the mirror—along with her yellow ribbons. The raised lumps of the reflected hair echo the bizarre formation atop the head of Seurat's figure, while the yellow bows are citations of Seurat's citations of Jules Chéret's *Chérette*. Marina Feretti-Bocquillon has noted the disjunction in the reflection, though she does not make this connection with Seurat. See her discussions in *Signac, 1863-1935*, 213; Françoise Cachin, "1893, l'Europe des peintres," (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1993), 148.

This painting ended up being something of an anomaly in Signac's *oeuvre*. When the *attentats* struck Paris, placing anarchism at the center of public debate, the artist looked to large-scale decorative painting to represent and enact a harmonious, anarchist alternative to terrorism. Public, as opposed to private, decorations were more appropriate to anarchism's new visibility, and to the future collectivity it seemed poised to bring about. *Femme se coiffant* is nevertheless important for the glimpses it provides into Signac's softening of his decorative propaganda/deed. Future decorative works similarly integrated abstraction and figuration. Large-scale decorations, like encaustic painting, indicated a desire for permanence. Such changes oriented Signac's painting more fully toward Fénéon's "authentic Reality." Nevertheless, the artist did not neglect his work's capacity to serve as a timely—as opposed to merely timeless—lesson.¹⁰⁶ Rather, he attempted to give future harmony a foothold in the present.

Femmes au puits

Signac's first Saint-Tropez-inspired decoration was painted at the end of 1892 and exhibited in 1893. Its (undated) title proclaimed Signac's decorative ambitions: *Jeunes Provençales au puits (décoration pour un panneau dans la pénombre)* (*Young Provençals at the Well, decoration for a panel in half-light*, 1892) (Figure 3.7).¹⁰⁷ The emphasis on a unified surface—a "panel" rather than an accumulation, as in the Fénéon portrait, of individualized "tints" or "angles"—indicated Signac's increased focus on an overall harmony. Similarly to *Femme se coiffant*, in this painting he integrated decorative

¹⁰⁶ See my earlier discussion in this chapter.

¹⁰⁷ Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: 210-11 (cat. n. 234).

patterns with the landscape and figures: the most emphatic curves and patterns double as the foreground shadow, the ascending path, the folds of a skirt or the women's arms. In a May 1893 letter to Henri-Edmond Cross (1856-1910), Signac made it clear that he was trying to create an ensemble in which the subject and patterns ("contours") were ultimately transcended by light.¹⁰⁸ Luminous intensity was the other preoccupation highlighted by the subtitle, for *Femmes au puits* was meant to create its own light in a darkened space. Having revisited paintings by Seurat in the "gentle light" of his mother's apartment, Signac would later confirm that Neo-Impressionist "painting [...] does not need a great deal of light since it creates its own."¹⁰⁹ As Georges Roque has highlighted, Henry's identification of red, orange and yellow with pleasure and/or joy and green, blue and violet with pain and/or sadness arose from their association with light or dark: many scientists believed that light gave pleasure in proportion to its intensity.¹¹⁰ An orange-yellow dominates the hill where the women draw water; as with Fénéon's portrait, it is accompanied by inhibitory colors—notably the blue Mediterranean and the green foreground shadow—intended to set off and enhance its dynamogeny. Moreover, these inhibitory colors are much more visibly permeated by dynamogenous flecks than the

¹⁰⁸ Referring to Charles Angrand's critique that the painting possibly suffered because the figures and the landscape were of equal importance, neither subordinated to the other, Signac wrote that this had been his goal: "ni figures, ni paysages! Un ensemble de lumière, un tout de soleil. J'ai même évité le plus possible les contours." Undated letter from Signac to Henri-Edmond Cross [May 1893], Signac Archives. Reproduced in Ferretti-Bocquillon, *Signac & Saint-Tropez*, 32, n.3. The relevant April 1893 letter from Angrand is reproduced in Charles Angrand, *Correspondances, 1883-1926*, ed. François Lespinasse (Rouen: F. Lespinasse, 1988). 57.

¹⁰⁹ "C'est de la lumière douce et harmonieuse qui est accrochée sur ces murs [in Mme Seurat's apartment]. On ne sent pas du tout la facture. Tout le côté gênant du métier disparaît—et reste seul le bénéfice de lumière et d'harmonie. Je crois qu'une lumière douce d'appartement est très favorable à cette peinture qui n'a pas besoin de grande lumière puisqu'elle-même en crée." December 29, 1894 journal entry, Signac, "Extraits du Journal I," 114. See also Ferretti-Bocquillon, *Signac & Saint-Tropez*, 36.

¹¹⁰ George Roque, "Seurat and color theory," in *Seurat re-viewed*, ed. Paul Smith (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 53.

yellow hill and path are by inhibitory accents. Signac intended his painting as a luminous intervention, a vehicle for harmony (the term which came to subsume Henry's aesthetic) independent of its surroundings.

Light, of course, was also a firmly established metaphor for revolutionary enlightenment or awakening.¹¹¹ With *Femmes au puits*, Signac's didactic intentions manifested themselves not only in color and line, but also in the beginnings of an (obliquely) anarchist iconography. As Anne Dymond has shown, the Provençal women at the communal well were both an illustration and a symbol of mutual aid and collective resources.¹¹² She has argued that, in addition to identifying these women with the region, Signac anchored them in the modern present by avoiding the stereotypical costumes and body types associated with Provence.¹¹³ I would further relate the contemporaneity and subtle didacticism of the imagery with the painting's intent to join propaganda and "purely aesthetic emotion."¹¹⁴ As in Fénéon's portrait, this attempt was signaled and epitomized by abstract decorative pattern, particularly the curling arabesques that refuse to meld with the foreground. Roslak has associated these forms with Fénéon's "authentic Reality," and thus with a timeless synthesis. My point is rather that these explicit patterns were intended just as much as an intervention into the "precarious" present. Their relatively stark contours echo the stiff, geometrical character of the women's bodies,

¹¹¹ See Woloshyn, "Colonizing the Côte d'Azur: Neo-Impressionism, Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical Terre Libre of the Maures, c.1892-1908".

¹¹² Dymond, "A Politicized Pastoral," 358-61.

¹¹³ While Dymond identified this choice with Signac's direct experience of the region and its inhabitants, Roslak has emphasized Signac's idealized decorations as the product of a "tourist" perspective, arguing that Signac never fully understood or integrated with the communities he purported to depict. Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism*: 159-62.

¹¹⁴ See footnote 37.

which conjured up Henry's system.¹¹⁵ Signac hoped to connect with the viewer through an accessible mode of representation; such a connection would allow the harmonious action of the painting's line and color, even as the "too apparent procedure[s]" allowed the viewer to become aware of this aesthetic process.¹¹⁶

Though tied to the landscape and figures, these distinct forms and patterns were too much for Charles Saunier. He advised that Signac:

renounce the unqualified application of scientific theories that seem more and more to annihilate his personality. He must return to nature. Art is made of life and emotions, not theories. The foliage of a tree is, in and of itself, in rhythm with its surrounding decor; the grace of a gesture will always be superior to the linear directions prescribed by mathematical laws.¹¹⁷

Once again Signac was urged to surrender theory (the "mathematical" lines of his explicit decorative patterns) in favor of his own personality, emotion and intuition (to be mirrored by a graceful, organic nature).¹¹⁸ Once again he faced critical incomprehension, indicating that Signac's combination of propaganda and art—his attempt to address and create a larger collective—had failed to coalesce into an overall harmony. The aesthetic

¹¹⁵ These qualities also evoke the naïveté of popular imagery, another aspect of Signac's attempt to imagine a proletarian audience. Margaret Werth has discussed the stiff flatness of these figures, which she reads as a failure in Signac's search for "a figurative language that was affirmative and modern, animated and systematic," in Margaret Werth, "The Golden Age is not in the Past, It is in the Future," in *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 100.

¹¹⁶ See footnote 77.

¹¹⁷ "M. Signac est un artiste consciencieux, servi par une vision délicate, de qui l'on peut exiger de belles œuvres. Mais je crois qu'il doit pour cela renoncer à l'application absolue des théories scientifiques qui semblent de plus en plus annihiler sa personnalité. Il doit revenir à la nature. L'art est fait de vie et d'émotions, non de théories. La frondaison d'un arbre est en elle-même rythmique au décor environnant; la grâce d'un geste sera toujours supérieure à toutes les directions de lignes voulues par des lois mathématique [sic]." Charles Saunier, "Salon des Indépendants," *La Plume*, no. 92 (April 15, 1893): 172.

¹¹⁸ For the reading of nature and landscape in terms of the artist's personality, or temperament, see Nicholas Green, "Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformations of the Artistic Field in France During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Art History* 10, no. 1 (March 1987).

awareness provoked by Signac's systems interfered with the synthetic harmony, unified by an individualized "personality," that critics prized.

Au temps d'Harmonie

Signac was discouraged, but persistent. An early watercolor study for *Femmes au puits* shows its central motif as part of a larger ensemble. In the summer of 1893, this ensemble reemerged as the idea for a large decorative project whose scale presupposed a wide public.¹¹⁹ *Au temps d'Harmonie (l'âge d'or n'est pas dans le passé, il est dans l'avenir)* (Figure 3.1)—initially referred to as "In Time of Anarchy"—would give fuller expression to the anarchist ambitions embedded in *Femmes au puits*.¹²⁰ The choice of size was also an attempt to preemptively create the collective works of the future, when art would be understood by all.¹²¹ In other words, the proposed work would speak both to the precarious present and a fully realized anarchist future, serving both as propaganda and as

¹¹⁹ In the wake of *Femmes au puits*'s 1893 exhibition at the Independants, Signac missed the decorative panel's large dimensions, expressing his ongoing frustration with small formats. Undated [April 1893] letter to Cross, Signac Archives. His critique of such formats as "un peu 'commerce'" echoed anarchist condemnations of artistic enslavement under capitalism. See, for example, Walter Crane, "L'Art et les artistes," *La Plume: Littéraire, artistique, et sociale*, no. 97 (May 1, 1893). This article had appeared earlier in *La Révolte* as "Le Socialisme et les artistes," *La Révolte (supplément littéraire)* 4, no. 26 (March 7-13, 1891). The critique of the commercialized *tableau* was central to the preoccupation with decorative painting in this period, which extended beyond anarchist circles. See Watkins, "The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic," 35.

The 1892 watercolor study is reproduced in Ferretti-Bocquillon, *Signac & Saint-Tropez*, 33.

¹²⁰ "...grande nouvelle! Sur vos conseils je vais tâter d'une grande toile! Le joueur de boules devient un personnage épisodique de: au temps d'anarchie (titre à chercher). Au premier plan un groupe au repos... homme, femme, enfant...sous un gros pin un vieillard conte des histoires à de jeunes mômes... sur un coteau... la moisson: les machines fument, travaillent, abattent la besogne: et autour des meules... une farandole de moissonneurs... au centre un jeune couple: l'amour libre!" Undated letter [1893] from Signac to Cross, quoted in *Signac & Saint-Tropez*, 52.

¹²¹ For discussions of the collective (and, in the case of Albert, explicitly "decorative") nature of the anarchist art of the future, see Crane, "L'Art et les artistes," 213; Charles Albert, "La 21^e Exposition des Artistes Indépendants," *Les Temps nouveaux* 10(April 8-14, 1905): 7. See also Émile Verhaeren, "Le Salon de la Libre Esthétique," *L'Art moderne* (March 8, 1896).

a concrete actualization of anarchist harmony. Cross responded to the project by distinguishing it from standard categories of anarchist visual propaganda:

Your idea for a large canvas is perfect [...] Until today, drawings related to the expression of anarchy have always shown either revolt, or a scene whose poignant suffering suggests revolt. Let us imagine the dreamed-of age of Happiness and well-being, showing the actions of men, their games, their work in this era of general harmony.¹²²

This subject was particularly suited to Signac's desire to fuse the present need for propaganda and the pure aesthetics of the future because, as the painting's subtitle emphasized, this temporal dialectic was inherent to the depiction of a harmonious anarchist future. He also married his radical aesthetic program to more explicitly radical subject matter, and further sublimated his arabesques in natural forms or arrangements of figures that had a vaguely contemporary allure. Signac was trying to give "utopia" a concrete form for a public that, in its pre-anarchist disharmony, was not quite ready for either the harmonious society of the future or painting as "purely aesthetic emotion."¹²³ The goal was to reach this contemporary public through something that they could understand in the present, while simultaneously initiating them to the aesthetic future.

Au temps d'Harmonie was exhibited at the Independants in 1895, and the following year in Brussels at the Salon de la Libre Esthétique. Reactions were mixed.

After the Independants' opening, Signac reported in his journal that his fellow painters

¹²² "Votre idée pour une grande toile est parfait. [...] Jusqu'à aujourd'hui les dessins relatifs à l'expression de l'anarchie montrent toujours soit la révolte, soit une scène suggérant par sa poignante misère la révolte. Imaginons l'époque rêvée du Bonheur et du bien-être et montrons les actions des hommes, leurs jeux, leurs travaux en cette ère d'harmonie générale." Undated letter [1893] from Cross to Signac, Signac Archives. This passage is reproduced by Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon in Distel et al., *Signac, 1863-1935*, 241.

¹²³ See footnote 37. Woloshyn has questioned the use of the term "utopia" to characterize this and analogous works, based in part on their desire to locate the anarchist future with such geographical specificity. Woloshyn, "Colonizing the Côte d'Azur: Neo-Impressionism, Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical Terre Libre of the Maures, c.1892-1908".

were complimentary, but that the critics were harsh.¹²⁴ Upon returning from Brussels in 1896, he wrote that Émile Verhaeren (whose poetry was one of Signac's inspirations) and Henry van de Velde were the only favorable reviewers, and then proceeded to note their caveats.¹²⁵ In spite of Signac's attempts to soften his systems, Verhaeren found Signac's theoretical foundations oppressive.¹²⁶ Signac identified this objection with the arms of the woman and child in the foreground, though it could just as easily have been provoked by the stylized path or the wave-like pattern created by the edge of the foreground shadow. In contrast, Signac's former Neo-Impressionist colleague van de Velde praised this "evocation of Happiness, perhaps without equal because it is due solely to the ordering of lines and colors," while criticizing the clothed figures as proof of a "puritanical anarchism."¹²⁷ Verhaeren and van de Velde seemed to provide opposite critiques, but in fact they had both identified elements that, in their explicit, didactic nature, were tied to the painting's role as propaganda. These elements expressed *Au temps d'Harmonie's* resistance to absolute synthesis and temporal transcendence.

Signac continued his journal entry by recounting Constantin Meunier's reaction to the painting. Like Pissarro the previous year, the sculptor singled out the background—framed and mediated by the shadowed foreground—for praise.¹²⁸ Signac concluded that "my painting would have had much more success if I had done it entirely in the light.

¹²⁴ April 26, 1895. Signac, "Extraits du Journal I," 117.

¹²⁵ The relevant passage is reproduced in Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: 216. It is identified as a February 23, 1896 journal entry, but, since both of the articles Signac cited were published in March, it is more likely to be from that month.

¹²⁶ Verhaeren, "Le Salon de la Libre Esthétique."

¹²⁷ Henry van de Velde, "Les expositions d'art: À Bruxelles, la peinture au 3^e Salon de la Libre Esthétique," *La Revue Blanche* 10(1896): 286.

¹²⁸ Pissarro's opinion was noted by Signac in a May 17, 1895 journal entry. Signac, "Extraits du Journal I," 122.

And yet this shadowed foreground gives more opposition[,] more radiance, more of the painter, more art... But the problem originates in the terrible difficulty of harmonizing these blues and oranges.”¹²⁹ The painter presented the background-foreground disjunction as a formal problem, but it can surely be read in social terms. I contend that Signac’s preoccupation with opposition was tied to his dialectical conception of harmony: the attempted syntheses of propaganda and “purely aesthetic emotion,” of capitalist present and anarchist future.¹³⁰ This is not to say that these dialectical contrasts map neatly onto the distinction between the foreground and background. As I have already indicated, the relationship in Signac’s painting between the aesthetic, the didactic, and the temporal is complex. Both the foreground and background display entwined propagandistic and pictorial concerns, and the entire painting was clearly intended as a manifestation of the golden age. Nevertheless, artists and critics tended to isolate the luminous background as a satisfactory depiction of future harmony, from which the shadowed foreground was a distraction. This reaction suggests that the light-filled landscape provided the desired synthesis and transcendence of “authentic Reality,” while the foreground, in which

¹²⁹ “[M]on tableau aurait eu beaucoup plus de succès si je l’avais fait entièrement dans la lumière. Et cependant ce premier plan à l’ombre donne plus d’opposition plus d’éclat, plus peintre, plus art... Mais le mal vient de la terrible difficulté d’accorder ces bleus et ces orangés.” Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: 216.

¹³⁰ This reading is indebted to Werth, who has pointed to the complex temporalities invoked by Signac’s depiction of himself as the man reaching for a fig: “Signac’s idyll [...] mov[es] from the external, all-seeing perspective of the artist/viewer to the figure of the protagonist/narrator of the idyll, with the artist both pointing to his own participation in the fictional future and thus propelling a complex exchange between utopian and historical time, and presenting himself as if an ‘other.’” Roslak has identified this position as “other,” and the distinction between foreground and background, with Signac’s touristic gaze: his ambiguous relationship to the “authentic” life of the region. Finally, Dymond has also discussed the painting in terms of contrasts, pointing out its indebtedness to the pastoral tradition’s “juxtaposition of dichotomies such as real and idyllic, urban and rural—or, as [she] suggest[s], north and south.” The juxtaposition of the “real and idyllic” is the most relevant to my argument. Werth, “The Golden Age is not in the Past, It is in the Future,” 137; Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism*: 157-62; Dymond, “A Politicized Pastoral,” 353.

Signac's didactic intent was most pronounced, impeding this synthesis.¹³¹ The distinction is apparent even in van de Velde's review, despite its praise of both foreground and background and of Signac's rational, scientific method:

The foreground, the figures occupying the part in shadow, is unified, of a sustained and even atmosphere, in true equilibrium with the sunlit passage rising up to the top. Two flaws, however: the irises and the cock plunked in there as filler—out of place!

But the aspect of life there in the sun, the appearance of serene life, is a sound and rare pleasure of art, an evocation of Happiness, perhaps without equal because it is due solely to the ordering of lines and colors. If others have faulted the scenic treatment, here it disappears, caught up in an overall symphony that moves us solely by its pictorial qualities.

But the figuration is questionable; it is off-putting, like the ridiculously decked-out choruses of popular theaters. Such a get-up has nothing to do with the future exalted by the painter and is a matter of a puritanical anarchism manifestly careless of aesthetics. These women in bouffant sleeves and these men dressed like soldiers on orders for bathing exercises offend too violently my vision of the future for me not to protest [...] [I]f these figures had been nude, the joy of painting them would have been doubled and our satisfaction complete.¹³²

¹³¹ See footnote 70.

¹³² “Le premier plan, les personnes agissants dans la partie d’ombre, est d’une pièce, d’une enveloppe soutenue et égale, en juste équilibre avec la phrase ensoleillée, montant jusqu’au sommet. Deux tares cependant, les iris et le coq venu là en bouche-trou—hors cadre! Mais, l’aspect de la vie, là, au soleil, l’apparence de la vie sereine est bonne et rare jouissance d’art ; une évocation du Bonheur, sans égale peut-être, parce qu’elle est due à la seule ordonnance des lignes et des couleurs. D’autres eussent accusé les moyens scéniques; ici, ils disparaissent, sont entraînés dans la symphonie générale qui nous émeut dans ses seules vertus picturales. Mais la figuration est contestable, elle est rebutante à la façon des chœurs nippés ridiculement des théâtres titrés. L’accoutrement n’aura que faire avec l’avenir exalté par le peintre et relève d’un anarchisme puritain, manifestement insoucieux d’esthétique. Ces femmes en manches bouffantes et ces hommes en tenue de soldats commandés pour l’exercice du bain heurtent trop violemment ma vision d’avenir pour que je ne proteste [...] que ne sont-ils nus, ces personnages, la joie de les peindre eût été double et notre satisfaction entière.” van de Velde, “Les expositions d’art,” 286 (emphasis added). The translation is adapted from Werth, “The Golden Age is not in the Past, It is in the Future,” 118. Van de Velde’s “théâtres titrés” seems to refer to the secondary theaters, sometimes referred to as “théâtres de boulevards,” as opposed to elite or avant-garde theaters or productions. The translation of this phrase as “popular theaters” is not meant to indicate their working-class status, but rather their wider audiences. I would like to thank Bill Weber for his clarification of this context.

Werth largely agreed with van de Velde as to the inadequacy of Signac’s figuration to the depiction of anarchist utopia. “Signac relies on the vibrations of divisionist color, the decorative arabesques, the

Van de Velde here commends the unity of the foreground, and its balance with the sun-lit landscape, yet his text consistently set the latter apart as the site of a purely aesthetic harmony that dissolved any jarring, theatrical elements—elements antithetical to aesthetic transcendence. And though van de Velde’s critique of the figures applied to the entire painting, their contemporary garb was more easily ignored when its stark contours were softened and erased, rather than backlit, by the diffuse, uniform light of the sun. Van de Velde implicitly equated sunlight, future happiness, and purely formal expression. As Tania Woloshyn has shown, sunlight was firmly entwined with anarchist conceptions of the future golden age.¹³³ Imagery more tightly associated with the realization of this anarchist golden age was reserved for the luminous landscape; the amalgamation of machines, collective dancing and storytelling, free love and free art, could only happen in a simultaneously free and collective society.¹³⁴

circulatory structure of the composition, and the rhythmic play of color, line, and interval to animate his painting, but they do not compensate fully for the static poses, stilted gestural rhetoric, and stiffening of the figures (not to mention their costume) that in the end lean too heavily on the examples of Puvis’s impassive ‘calm and noble gestures,’ the frieze-like moderns of Seurat’s *Grande Jatte*, the tableau-vivant figures of Cross’s *Air du soir*, the simplified forms of popular illustration, and the expressive linear reductions of Charles Henry.” Ibid., 134.

¹³³ Tania Woloshyn, “Vers la lumière: Painters and Patients on the Côte d’Azur, c.1887-1910” (University of Nottingham, 2008), 241-45; “Colonizing the Côte d’Azur: Neo-Impressionism, Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical Terre Libre of the Maures, c.1892-1908”.

¹³⁴ This imagery is discussed at length in Werth, “The Golden Age is not in the Past, It is in the Future,” 109-13. The sexual and aesthetic freedom of the couple and the painter is indicated by the flowers held by the former and by the latter’s muse. For the most part, the figures and objects in the shadowed space could have been encountered in contemporary Saint-Tropez, even down to the iconography (such as the sickle and cock) with anarchist overtones. Signac placed himself and his wife, residents of Saint-Tropez, there; even the cock had a more concrete connection to the present than its generic symbolism implied, since the artist associated it in his journal with the beginning of the Procès des Trente. Again, this distinction should not be pushed too far, since the foreground is clearly incorporated as part of the depiction of future harmony. For a discussion of the significance of the flowers and the cock, see Dymond, “A Politicized Pastoral,” 361 and 363.

But with the shallow space demarcated by shadow, Signac insisted on mediating the viewer's experience of the golden panorama. The dark frieze of figures serves as both a repoussoir—distancing the viewer from the luminous landscape—and an entry point into the painting. Reading from left (a depiction of Signac himself) to right, the eye can follow the *boules* player (and the line of the shadow's edge) outside the painting, or follow the impetus of the path that starts at Signac's feet and leads to the sea. Reinforcing this sense of the foreground as a mediating space between the viewer and full-fledged harmony is a series of gestures suspended in paint (and time): Signac's alter-ego picking a fig, the woman (his wife Berthe) extending a fig to the reaching child, the *boules* player about to throw.¹³⁵ There are also a number of references to knowledge and education, including the evocation at the left of the tree of knowledge, the man reading, and the interaction between mother and child.¹³⁶ When combined with the interstitial space of the foreground, this imagery suggests that Signac wanted to provide the viewer with a rational perspective on harmony, and on aesthetic emotion—an “Apollonian” vision, as Werth has described it.¹³⁷ The “puritanical,” moralizing imagery is most visually prominent in the foreground, as is the dual system of divided color and linear pattern. The theatricality that disturbed van de Velde signaled Signac's didactic, propagandistic impulses. Van de Velde and others wanted pure aesthetic synthesis to be fully realized in

¹³⁵ The gestures involving the figs have been analyzed by Werth, who saw the “gap” between the viewer and the child/utopian space echoed in that between the hands of the mother and child. Werth, “The Golden Age is not in the Past, It is in the Future,” 139.

¹³⁶ For the child as a reference to education, see Woloshyn, “*Vers la lumière: Painters and Patients on the Côte d’Azur, c.1887-1910*,” 242. Both Werth and Roslak discuss the picking of the fig in relation to the tree of knowledge. Werth, “The Golden Age is not in the Past, It is in the Future,” 136-39. For the identification of the reading figure as another self-portrait of Signac, see Ferretti-Bocquillon, *Signac & Saint-Tropez*, 56-57.

¹³⁷ Werth, “The Golden Age is not in the Past, It is in the Future,” 106.

the present. Instead, Signac projected it in the simultaneously near and distant future, where the painter paints his canvas and his muse contemplates the pure flower of Beauty.¹³⁸ Seemingly at the cusp of an age of propaganda and one of imminent revolution, the golden age is both present and deferred. The shadowed foreground and sun-lit landscape are both divided and joined by the small, crested waves of the shadow's edge, an explicit pattern that embodies the conjunction of rational system and aesthetic emotion. In other words, Signac's dialectic both strives for and resists synthesis.

Thwarted Ambitions

Signac had attempted to fuse reason and aesthetic emotion through decorative propaganda. Critics like Verhaeren and van de Velde endorsed the aesthetic effort, while reacting to the propaganda with more reserve. But the didactic character of *Au temps d'Harmonie* indicates the extent to which Signac must have been thinking of another audience: the interested, sympathetic proletarians evoked in his 1891 "Impressionists and Revolutionaries." This desired audience, as well as the generally positive reactions of Belgian friends and critics like Théo van Rysselberghe (182-1926), van de Velde, and Verhaeren, is no doubt what prompted Signac to offer *Au temps d'Harmonie* for the new socialist *Maison du Peuple* in Brussels while it was still under construction.¹³⁹ Earlier that

¹³⁸ Dymond, "A Politicized Pastoral," 361. The painter and muse are identified as another representation of Signac and Berthe in Ferretti-Bocquillon, *Signac & Saint-Tropez*, 57.

¹³⁹ He made the offer during a trip to Brussels, where he stayed from November 15th to December 17th. Philippe Thiébaud identifies his host as Verhaeren; Ferretti-Bocquillon reports it was van Rysselberghe. Philippe Thiébaud, "Art Nouveau et néo-impressionnisme: Une rencontre éphémère," *Péristyles*, no. 11 (January 1998): 30; Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: 368. For more information on the Maisons du Peuple, see Annick Brauman et al., eds., *Architecture pour le peuple. Maisons du peuple: Belgique, Allemagne, Autriche, France, Grand-Bretagne, Italie, Pays-Bas, Suisse* (Bruxelles: Archives d'architecture moderne, 1984), 7-9 and 159-62.

year, Signac began work on *Le démolisseur* (*The Wrecker*, 1897-1899) (Figure 3.10), which he imagined as part of a series of decorative celebrations of labor in the spirit of *Au temps d'Harmonie*.¹⁴⁰ The projected subjects, “the haulers, the wreckers, the builders,” had a social resonance beyond anarchism, perhaps with the intention of retaining a wider range of potential settings.¹⁴¹

Nevertheless, Signac’s central *démolisseur*, poised to strike as parts of a vast city burn behind him was decidedly anarchist in tenor, a visual transcription of the “solid blow of the pick to the old social edifice.” In an earlier lithograph (Figure 3.11) of the same subject, published by *Les Temps Nouveaux*, Signac had included an anarchist rising sun.¹⁴² In the painting, an unseen light source illuminates the central figure’s face, torso and upper right thigh.¹⁴³ The association of light with enlightenment and education, as well as the didactic nature of the imagery, point to a propagandistic purpose in keeping

¹⁴⁰ Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: 241-42 (cat. n. 336). Signac, journal entry of June 9, 1896: “J’ai aussi commencé une esquisse de souvenir d’après ma grande toile [*Au temps d’Harmonie*] pour me préparer aux esquisses de mes prochaines toiles: les haleurs, les démolisseurs, les constructeurs.” Reproduced in Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, “Paul Signac au temps d’harmonie, 1892-1913,” in *Signac et la libération de la couleur*, ed. Erich Franz (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1997), 59n28. The first and third projected installments of the series were never executed.

¹⁴¹ See previous note. Signac’s choice of theme may also have reflected the increasing focus on syndicalism in anarchist circles, including that of *Les Temps Nouveaux*, as discussed in Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, 1: 265-313. Hutton also discussed the move toward syndicalism, arguing that the instrumentalization of art in the syndicalist context alienated a number of the Neo-Impressionists, including Signac. See “The Turn to Activist Art” in Hutton, *Neo-impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground*: 209-36. This narrative of gradual Neo-Impressionist disengagement is challenged in Woloshyn, “Vers la lumière,” 246-52; “Colonizing the Côte d’Azur: Neo-Impressionism, Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical Terre Libre of the Maures, c.1892-1908”.

¹⁴² The lithograph was published September 29, 1896. For this date, and for a discussion of the association of the rising sun with the beginning of an anarchist golden age, see Dardel, “*Les Temps Nouveaux*,” 1895-1914: 18 and 34. Hutton has indicated the extent to which this imagery was associated with revolution, anarchist or otherwise, though he explained Signac’s intent in anarchist terms. Hutton, *Neo-impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground*: 59-63. Ferretti-Bocquillon has associated the painting, which was begun on January 4, 1897, with the work of Verhaeren, particularly *Les Aubes*. Verhaeren worked on the latter while staying in Signac’s studio, in the presence of *Au temps d’harmonie*. Ferretti-Bocquillon, “Paul Signac au temps d’harmonie,” 59-60; Woloshyn, “Vers la lumière,” 243-44.

¹⁴³ The unseen light source was perhaps intended as a (repositioned) rising sun, given the indications of a dawn sky.

with that of *Au temps d'Harmonie*.¹⁴⁴ At this point in time, decorative propaganda was an artistic vein that Signac had every intention of mining.

But to Signac's dismay, the plan to install *Au temps d'Harmonie* in the Brussels *Maison du Peuple* fell apart in November 1900; the artist withdrew his offer in the face of the apparent indifference of the building's art nouveau architect, Victor Horta.¹⁴⁵ The imposition of the architect's authority was particularly bitter for an anarchist like Signac. Then, a little over a month later, his contest submission for the decoration of the Mairie d'Asnières (the Asnières city hall) was rejected.¹⁴⁶ Seemingly undaunted, at the 1901 Independants Signac exhibited both *Le démolisseur*—subtitled “*panneau pour une Maison du Peuple*” (panel for a Maison du Peuple)—and the self-described *Projet non retenu pour la décoration de la mairie d'Asnières* (*Project not retained for the decoration of the Asnières city hall*, 1900) (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Hutton, *Neo-impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground*: 62. It should be noted, however, that the linear patterns that were still visible as distinct entities in *Au temps d'Harmonie* have all but disappeared in this painting (an erasure akin to that of the anarchist rising sun).

¹⁴⁵ Signac reported the withdrawal of his offer in a November 11, 1900 journal entry. Philippe Thiébaud, “Art nouveau et néo-impressionnisme: Les ateliers de Signac,” *Revue de l'art* 92, no. 1 (1991): 72-73; “Art Nouveau et néo-impressionnisme: Une rencontre,” 30-31; Ferretti-Bocquillon, “Paul Signac au temps d'harmonie,” 59-60. Ferretti-Bocquillon, “Paul Signac au temps d'harmonie, 1892-1913,” 59-60. The work remained in Signac's studio until after his death, when it was given to the Mairie de Montreuil by the artist's daughter, Ginette Signac (though whether it was a gift or a loan was recently contested by the artist's inheritors). Hung above a landing of the Mairie's grand staircase since 1938, it was briefly taken down for restoration when some damage to the work was discovered early January 2012, as noted in Julie Subtil, “On va retrouver l'harmonie!,” *Tous Montreuil: Le journal de la ville et de ses habitant-e-s*, no. 74 (April 3-16, 2012), http://www.montreuil.fr/uploads/tx_estiondoc/TM74_optim_01.pdf.

¹⁴⁶ Signac wrote that he had begun the sketch for the Mairie d'Asnières contest in the same journal entry in which he reported his retraction of *Au temps d'Harmonie*. Though he had little hope for the former, the new decorative opportunity was perhaps part of his motivation in giving up on the *Maison du peuple*. These two sections of the entry are not reproduced together: the discussion of Horta and the *Maison du peuple* can be found in Thiébaud (see previous footnote); the portions of Signac's journal discussing the Asnières project can be found in Paul Signac, “Fragments du Journal de Paul Signac,” *Arts de France* 11, no. 11-12 (1947): 98-101. See also the discussion of the Asnières competition in Anne Dymond, “Valiant, Independent, and Harmonious: Paul Signac and Neo-Impressionism after 1900,” *RIHA Journal* 0046 (Special Issue ‘New Directions in Neo-Impressionism’)(July 14, 2012), <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2012/2012-jul-sep/special-issue-neo-impressionism/dymond-valiant-independent-and-harmonious>.

¹⁴⁷ Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné*: cat. nos. 355-58.

The pairing of these works asserted the continuity between Signac's decorative ambitions of the nineties and his latest project, yet they also indicate something of a rupture. *Le démolisseur*'s large central figure, with its suspended, didactic gesture and dramatic lighting, is more reminiscent of the shadowed foreground in *Au temps d'Harmonie*.¹⁴⁸ In the Asnières project, the smaller scale of the motifs, their distance from the picture plane, the relatively uniform facture, and the diffuse (albeit far more subdued) light recall the bright panorama of Signac's "golden age." The critical acclaim for this work, which is analyzed in this issue by Dymond, confirms the connection.¹⁴⁹ The legacy of painted propaganda that I have traced from Fénéon's portrait through *Le démolisseur* ended; the artist subsequently focused his production on synthetic, relatively

¹⁴⁸ The connection is further reinforced if one views the central *démolisseur* as another self-portrait of Signac, as argued in Richard Thompson, "Ruines, rhétoriques et révolution: Paul Signac et l'anarchisme dans les années 1890," *Arts & Sociétés: Lettre du séminaire 44*(December 9, 2010), <http://www.artsetsocietes.org/f/f-thomson2.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Anne Dymond has also brought to my attention the contrasting lack of critical attention for Signac's *Démolisseur*.

timeless landscapes.¹⁵⁰ Signac's efforts toward anarchist awareness continued outside the realm of painting.¹⁵¹ Propaganda and "purely aesthetic emotion" parted company.¹⁵²

Conclusion

Shut off from public commissions, in this period Neo-Impressionism was gaining ground in the private market. Though Signac never gave up the dream of aesthetic collectivity (when he re-exhibited *Au temps d'Harmonie* in 1926 he subtitled it "*décoration pour une maison du peuple*"), he had to be satisfied with the smaller ambitions of the private realm, whose implications were already embedded in the 1892 *Femme se coiffant*.

Anarchist harmony would be spread on a smaller scale, beginning with the individual

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas Green observed that, "[u]nlike many ideological domains in which we can point to materially-located institutions as the sites from which power is exercised, nature, it seems, hangs in a vacuum. Because it is to do with leisure time, because it is to do with personalized perceptions, it appears to lie outside or in the interstices of more obviously institutionalized power relations." Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Manchester University Press and St Martin's Press, 1990). 128. In one of the sketches for the Asnières project (Figure 3.2), the landscape is marked both by the signs of industry (on the right) and those of leisure (on the left). Though leisure was no less modern than industry, its temporal markers were less explicit (as indicated by Green). Later landscapes included some depictions of industry (see in particular Signac's 1906-1907 views of Rotterdam, catalogue raisonné nos. 434-436, 440 and 448), but were largely focused on temporally ambiguous (in its evocation of both leisure and traditional forms of labor) boating imagery. Signac wrote in 1935 that "[d]ans un tableau, le sujet devrait passer inaperçu, comme le style dans un roman. Un sujet pittoresque se démode; seul le pictural ne se démode pas." Paul Signac, "Le sujet en peinture," reproduced in Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impersonnisme*: 176. For a more in-depth discussion of this text, see the epilogue to this dissertation.

¹⁵¹ As discussed earlier in this chapter, Grave's mobilization of artwork for *Les Temps nouveaux* involved Signac in the production of prints and illustrations for the journal and its related publications. Woloshyn has highlighted the difference between paintings and drawings for Neo-Impressionists like Signac and Cross, suggesting that they found painting a *more* direct means of political expression than the work they did for Grave. Woloshyn, "Vers la lumière," 251-52.

¹⁵² In 1935 Signac wrote of propaganda and the pictorial (i.e. the formal) as very distinct elements of art; over time, he argued, the former would fade, leaving only the pictorial. "C'est faute d'éducation et de loisir que les masses restent insensibles au pictural et s'en tiennent au pittoresque. Une société nouvelle fournira de nouveaux sujets, mais qui seront à leur tour, lorsqu'ils auront joué leur rôle nécessaire de propagande et de triomphe, dominés par la vraie peinture." Paul Signac, "Le sujet en peinture," reproduced in Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impersonnisme*: 190.

viewer. In *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionisme*, Signac cited Fénéon's "authentic reality" in support of the argument that all Neo-Impressionist paintings were decorative:

excluded from official commissions, having no walls to decorate, [the Neo-Impressionists] wait for a time when they will be able to realize the great endeavors of which they dream [...] Even small-scale Neo-Impressionist canvases can be presented as decorative. They are neither studies nor easel paintings, but "exemplary specimens of an art of great decorative development, which sacrifices anecdote to arabesque, nomenclature to synthesis, the fleeting to the permanent, and [...] confers on Nature, which at last grew weary of its precarious reality, an authentic reality," wrote M. Félix Fénéon.¹⁵³

This combination of private, individualized setting and atemporal synthesis came to be associated with landscapes, like those of the Asnières project, whose unity and balance could be attributed to the individual genius and personality of the artist. Signac's landscapes of the late 80s had a stiffer, geometric quality (Figure 3.13)—created by starkly demarcated planes of color—and then, in the early to mid-90s, a more curvilinear quality (Figure 3.14)—punctuated by emphatic variations of the arabesque. Both of these effects were symptomatic of Signac's greater preoccupation with theoretical systems and with painting as propaganda. In the later landscapes (Figure 3.12), the action of divisionism and explicit pattern were subordinated to the subject, as well as the artist's "freer" facture and color.¹⁵⁴ The emancipation that Neo-Impressionism now offered was

¹⁵³ "[E]xclus des commandes officielles, n'ayant pas de murailles à décorer, ils [the Neo-Impressionists] attendent des temps où il sera permis de réaliser les grandes entreprises dont ils rêvent [...] Même les toiles de petites dimensions des néo-impressionnistes peuvent être présentées comme décoratives. Ce ne sont ni des études ni des tableaux de chevalet, mais d'exemplaires spécimens d'un art à grand développement décoratif, qui sacrifie l'anecdote à l'arabesque, la nomenclature à la synthèse, le fugace au permanent, et [...] confère à la nature, que lassait à la fin sa réalité précaire, une authentique réalité," écrit M. Félix Fénéon." Ibid., 124 and 126.

¹⁵⁴ When emphatic patterns and lines appear in these landscapes, they are less stylized than in *Au temps d'Harmonie*. They are thus more tightly aligned with the subject matter (waves, curving branches, wind-filled sails, or, as in Figure 3.12, vertical masts). The explicit action of divisionism and line were subdued in favor of the bustling activity of harbors and waterways (the emptiness and stillness of early Neo-Impressionist landscapes, as in Figure 3.13, foregrounded the technique). Note, however, Signac's continued interest in contrast, as demonstrated in Figure 3.12.

that of the individual artist, as Signac indicated in a 1902 letter to his friend and fellow Neo-Impressionist, Théo van Rysselberghe: “If we paint thus it is because we have—not the intention of imitating, but the desire to create beauty [...] Let us create, let us create harmonies! And the more we free ourselves from the concern of imitation, the more beautiful these harmonies will be.”¹⁵⁵ In other words, Signac wanted their art to be freed from the world (nature) as it was; he was looking for utopia. By that time he had focused his own production on sea and landscapes, along with a handful of cityscapes, where he had found the liberty he sought. In this domain, he no longer had to contend with his difficulties drawing and painting figures, allowing him to rely more and more on his memory and imagination, and to strive for a (non-linear) form of drawing in keeping with his chromatic harmonies.¹⁵⁶

In the early 20th Century, critics read more freedom into Signac’s application of paint because his divisionist technique became regular and uniform enough to be ignored or interpreted as a product of the artist’s unified self. See the analysis of this criticism in Dymond, “Valiant, Independent, and Harmonious: Paul Signac and Neo-Impressionism after 1900 “. More recently, Signac’s increasing aesthetic freedom was the premise of Erich Franz, “Signac et la libération de la couleur,” (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1997). See in particular Feretti-Bocquillon’s contribution.

¹⁵⁵ “Si nous peignons ainsi c’est que nous avons—non l’idée d’imiter, mais la volonté de créer du beau. [...] Créons, créons des harmonies! Et plus nous serons libérés du souci d’imiter, plus belles elles seront, ces harmonies.” Signac to van Rysselberghe, Letters received from Paul Signac, c. 1892-1909, Théo van Rysselberghe correspondence, c. 1889-1926 (hereafter van Rysselberghe correspondence), The Getty Research Library, Special Collections, Los Angeles, California (the letter is undated but from Fall/Winter 1902, based on a follow-up letter located in the same archive and dated December 31, 1902). In the same letter Signac (half jokingly) said that he was offering van Rysselberghe this “affranchissement” for Christmas. He expressed very similar sentiments in an April 1898 journal entry written after a visit to London to view works by Turner. Having concluded that Turner and Italian masters were all searching for more intense color, Signac wrote “Les oeuvres de Turner me prouvent qu’il faut être libre de toute idée d’imitation ou de copie, et qu’il faut créer des teintes. Le plus fort coloriste sera celui qui créera le plus. [...] Comme c’est restreint ce que l’on pourrait copier—comme c’est illimité ce que l’on peut créer !” Signac, “Extraits du Journal II,” 279.

¹⁵⁶ In his 1902 exchange with van Rysselberghe, Signac placed a great deal of emphasis on a form of drawing adapted to their coloristic goals, describing the “dessin au trait” as unproductive. Signac to van Rysselberghe, July [1902], Letters received from Paul Signac, c. 1892-1909, Théo van Rysselberghe correspondence. See also the Fall/Winter 1902 letter cited in the previous note, as well as a letter dated December 31, 1902.

This position differs not only from Signac’s earlier attempts to balance the concerns of freedom and propaganda, but also from Seurat’s practice, which Cray has argued was “a *repudiation* of the modernist

But as I have indicated, this freedom came with its own constraints.¹⁵⁷ Signac admired the imaginative freedom of a lion hunt by Rubens or of Delacroix's *Boissy d'Anglas à la Convention* (*Boissy d'Anglas at the Convention*, 1831)—pure products, he argued, of the mind—but explained that, lacking “their creative force,” his own imagination was limited to much more prosaic subject matter, whether boats or bridges.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Signac evidently embraced such subjects as a kind of anodyne, neutral ground for a radical decorative freedom.

Fénéon's “authentic Reality”; small decorative landscapes; Signac's 1899 treatise on Delacroix and Neo-Impressionism: each of these points to the related concerns of decorative synthesis, timelessness, and posterity that came to dominate the artist's

myth of the ‘liberation’ of pure color” that foregrounded both the freedom and domination of the viewer. Crary, “1888: Illuminations of Disenchantment,” 159.

¹⁵⁷ The passage quoted in footnote 152, in which Signac argued that the picturesque (subject matter) would ultimately cede to the pictorial, was followed with this line: “De nouvelles matières, de nouveaux modes d'expression viendront à l'aide de valeurs nouvelles, libérées de la contrainte et de la servitude de la nature extérieure.” Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*. Given the equation in this period of nature with artistic individuality, it is possible that Signac's troubled relationship with nature and the natural was in some sense an unconscious resistance to the more limited (i.e. individualized, even bourgeois) freedom of his life and artistic practice in the absence of an anarcho-communist revolution. Green has examined the importance of nature and landscape in the construction of bourgeois identity (particularly in the way they enabled the social and the hegemonic to appear as the private and personal), as well as its reading in terms of artistic authenticity and personality. Green, *The Spectacle of Nature*: particularly 127-52; “Dealing in Temperaments.” Yet harmony in nature and landscape was also interpreted in anarchist and socialist terms. See Roslak, “The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony.”; *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism*: particularly 97-112; Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley University of California Press, 2002). 60-63. For a discussion of the ways in which Signac's life and artistic activities enacted anarcho-communist ideals on a local level, see the analysis of the Côte d'Azur as a kind of “anarcho-communist colony” for Neo-Impressionist painters in Woloshyn, “Colonizing the Côte d'Azur: Neo-Impressionism, Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical Terre Libre of the Maures, c.1892-1908”. The freedom associated with the Independants (as discussed in Dymond's article from the same special issue of *RIHA*) can be read in both individualist or anarcho-communist terms.

¹⁵⁸ “Ils ont été libres, eux, complètement, va! Pas de renseignements qui seraient venues à l'encontre de leur fougue pour la gêner—et la refroidir. Ils ont peint ces arabes la tête en bas, cette mêlée de chevaux et de cavaliers, cette foule se ruant sur la tribune, avec leur cerveau et non après des petits bouts de papier. Ils ont fait cela comme moi je dessinerai de souvenir une pauvre petite tartane ou une misérable arche de pont. Et puisque je n'ai pas leur puissance de création, je vais m'en tenir à ma pauvre petite tartane et à ma misérable arche.” Letter to van Rysselberghe [Fall/Winter 1902]. See footnote 155.

practice by the end of the nineties.¹⁵⁹ When anarchist revolution seemed imminent, Signac attempted to bridge the present and future with an aesthetic propaganda directed in part at proletarian viewers. But by 1900, these works were finding little traction, the anarchist golden age appeared distant, and syndicalist anarchism had even less use for the action of “purely aesthetic emotion.”¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, Signac stripped his painting of explicit propaganda, focusing on a timeless decorative synthesis. His famous dictum, “Justice in sociology, harmony in art” had a caveat: “When the eye is educated [...] When the society that we dream of exists.”¹⁶¹ Ready to be activated in the viewer’s

¹⁵⁹ Note that in his 1899 text, Signac placed Neo-Impression in a narrative of art historical continuity rather than rupture.

¹⁶⁰ In the late nineties, the scandal and conflict of the Dreyfus Affair could be seen as the kind of “secousse” celebrated by Reclus (see footnote 95). But, as analyzed by Maitron, anarchist reactions to the Affair were ambivalent (even more so than the response to terrorism earlier in the decade). Though Jean Jaurès and, eventually, Pouget saw the Affair as an opportunity to further justice and the anarchist cause, Grave continued to see it as a dangerous distraction: Dreyfusard activity, he believed, smacked of organized politics, implicitly condoning the State all for the sake of a bourgeois officer. Maitron’s discussion of the Dreyfus Affair is followed by a section on the fragmentation of the anarchist movement, in which he argued that “[l]a révolution, que l’on croyait toute proche, s’estompe à l’horizon.” Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, 1: 331-43. For the marginalization of anarcho-communism in the face of a rising syndicalism, and the consequent decrease in the politicization of Neo-Impressionist painting, see “The Turn to Activist Art” in Hutton, *Neo-impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground*: 209-36. Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 209-236. Woloshyn explicitly differs from Hutton, arguing that the Neo-Impressionists’ personal and artistic choices of this period were connected to their anarcho-communist beliefs (see footnote 141). See my discussion of the Dreyfus Affair in relation to Maurice Denis in the subsequent chapter.

¹⁶¹ “Justice en sociologie, harmonie en art: même chose [...] Quand l’œil sera éduqué, le peuple verra autre chose que le sujet dans les tableaux.

Quand la société que nous rêvons existera [...] le travailleur aura le temps de penser et de s’instruire.” Commentators tend to gloss over the exclusive use of the future tense in this text (at least as reproduced by the Herberts and elsewhere). Unpublished and undated manuscript in the Signac Archives, which the Herberts cited and dated to c. 1902. Herbert and Herbert, “Artists and Anarchism I,” 479. Alistair Wright has contrasted Maximilien Luce’s early 20th-century artistic practice with Signac’s increasing (though somewhat exaggerated, in his account) ivory tower aestheticism. For Wright, the latter is exemplified by Signac’s de-emphasis of subject matter, present in his 1891 letter to *La Révolte* and culminating with this 1902 text. Alistair Wright, “Maximilien Luce and the Specter of Neo-Impressionism,” in *Twenty-First-Century Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008).

consciousness, Signac's paintings anticipated the revolutionary harmony, free from propaganda, of this far-off future.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Though Signac still felt bound by the "propaganda" of the subject, which he also referred to as "la nature extérieure." See footnote 157.

CHAPTER 4

Maurice Denis, Decorative Painting, and the Politics of Feeling

As the Nineteenth Century gave way to the Twentieth, Signac gradually set aside his ambitions for large-scale works that would, by bringing together explicitly anarchist themes and the dialectical play of pure aesthetic emotion, bridge the gap between the unjust present and a utopian future. He had to be satisfied with the thought, put forward in his *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, that “[e]ven small-scale Neo-Impressionist canvases can be presented as decorative.”¹ What mattered was not the size of an artwork but its ability to produce “the greatest light, color and harmony,” effects that Signac had come to see as indistinguishable from the political.² Withdrawing from more explicit messages and patterns (the elements I associated, in the previous chapter, with anarchist propaganda) in his painting practice, he equated decorative aesthetics with justice due to its utopian transcendence of unjust reality, as well as its harmonious, emancipating action on the viewer.

Even as Signac relinquished the task of transforming aesthetic emotion into an accessible, collective idiom in the present, another artist was taking up that challenge for very different ends. Maurice Denis is best known for the Symbolist works of his 1890s Nabi period: intimate “icons” whose formal distortions and flattened patterns—more

¹ “Même les toiles de petites dimensions des néo-impressionnistes peuvent être présentées comme décoratives.” Paul Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, ed. Françoise Cachin (Paris: Hermann, 1978). 124.

² “un maximum de lumière, de coloration et d’harmonie.” *Ibid.*, 126.

evocative of decorative objects than monumental civic decorations—were meant to relay the artist’s sensations and emotions, and ultimately the experience of the sacred.³ Yet by the end of the century he had come to view these works as excessively subjective. Like Signac before him, politics—in this case, the successive cataclysms of the Dreyfus Affair and the separation of Church and State—led Denis to search for a more collective idiom, turning from decorative distortions to large-scale decorations. In particular, he looked to a Renaissance-inspired classicism as a means of giving the power of symbolist form (i.e. expressive, decorative aesthetics) a broader address.

The classicism promoted by Denis and his contemporaries was formulated in subtly gendered terms: in promoting the restraint of sensation and emotion through the artist’s will and reason, it reiterated old hierarchies that had long elevated “masculine” intellect and control over “feminine” corporeality and all its attributes, whether instinct, the senses or the emotions. Denis read in the scale and clarity of Renaissance works the salutary results of an implicitly masculine reason and effort. For, again like his contemporaries, the artist envisioned the public sphere as a realm of masculine action, and attempted to fashion an artistic identity appropriate to his new, collective ambitions. This masculine refashioning would have appeared all the more urgent due to the artist’s association with the “intimate” decorations of his Nabi period and his fervent Catholicism, which the Republican anticlericalism of the previous decades had cast in a

³ Denis first used the term “distortion [déformation]” in a March 1, 1895 review of an exhibition of Armand Séguin’s work at Le Barc de Boutteville’s gallery, which was later reproduced in in a 1912 anthology of his critical writings entitled *Théories, 1890-1910, du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique*.

feminine light.⁴ It would soon find its explicitly political counterpart in the *Action Française*'s royalist nationalism, and in 1905 Camille Mauclair identified the vogue for an Italianate classicism, and Denis in particular, with a "nationalist reaction in art."⁵

Nevertheless, Denis's classicism was marked by an ambiguous, contested masculinity analogous to those highlighted by Christopher Forth in the context of the Dreyfus Affair.⁶ While the artist glimpsed in the Renaissance and, later, in the *Action Française*, the possibility of a triumphant, synthetic classicism that would affirm the nation's, and his art's, religious, political and temporal coherence, he also suspected that this monolithic classicism was extra-human: that it was perhaps indifferent to the specificity of human emotion and religious practice that Denis associated with the presence of, as well as the longing for, the divine.⁷ As I will demonstrate, Denis's search

⁴ For an introduction to, as well as problematization of, scholarship focusing on the feminization of religion in this period, see Patrick Pasture and Jan Art, eds., *Beyond the Feminization Thesis: Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 7-34.

⁵ Camille Mauclair, "La réaction nationaliste en art et l'ignorance de l'homme des lettres," *La revue mondiale* (January 15, 1905): 157. The artist's response can be found in the context of an exhibition review: Maurice Denis, "La peinture," *L'Ermitage* (May 15, 1905). The text was reprinted with slight modifications as "La réaction nationaliste," in *Théories, 1890-1910, du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* (Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1920). Though Denis disputed the role of nationalism in what he saw as artists' desire for greater order and discipline, he was indeed affiliated with the integral nationalism of the royalist, and deeply anti-semitic, Action Française. His increasing involvement with conservative politics in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair has been discussed in Michael Marlais, "Conservative Style/Conservative Politics: Maurice Denis in Le Vésinet," *Art History* 16, no. 1 (1993); Jean-Paul Bouillon, "The Politics of Maurice Denis," in *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943* (Lyon: Musée des Beaux Arts, Lyon, in association with Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994); "Vuillard et Denis: le tournant classique de 1898," *48/14 La Revue du musée d'Orsay*, no. 17 (Autumn 2003); Katherine Marie Kuenzli, "Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus: Maurice Denis's *Homage to Cézanne*," *Art History* 30, no. 5 (November 2007). See also brief discussions in Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁶ Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

⁷ While on an April 1904 trip to Italy, Denis wrote to his friend and fellow promoter of the classical, André Gide, that "peut-être que tout ce grand effort classique était au dessus des forces humaines." André Gide and Maurice Denis, *Correspondance: 1892-1945*, ed. Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer, Cahiers de la NRF (Paris: Gallimard, 2006). 221. As the editors note, this was probably an allusion to a play by B. Björnson, *Au-delà des forces humaines*, for which Denis designed the program when it was presented by the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. See a similar statement in Maurice Denis, *Journal*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: La Colombe, 1957). 216.

for a public, collective art was ultimately about finding a public role for intimate, and above all, religious, feeling, despite its rejection by the militant nationalism of the Action Française. Katherine Kuenzli has recently highlighted the Nabis' belief in the intimate as a source of regeneration for public life, and, in particular, the "tension [in Denis's work] between a desire for public art and the belief that intimate expressions are the most authentic."⁸ But while Kuenzli implies that this tension resolved itself after 1900 due to the artist's sacrifice—in pursuit of public commissions—of individual sensation and modernist form, I will highlight its continued relevance for the Denis's oeuvre prior to World War I. Rather than completely sacrificing individual sensation and emotion in the interest of a "masculine" public realm and artistic identity, Denis attempted—albeit with much ambivalence—to render it an acceptable part of that identity. By his own account, this effort was only partially successful. Though the artist received more and more decorative commissions, these met with mixed reviews, particularly as he introduced more specific, and complex, subject matter into his work. This failure led Denis, again like Signac, to view decorative form as a language rendered impenetrable by the fragmentation of contemporary society.

Emotion, Sentiment and the Decorative

Beginning in 1907 and culminating in 1909, Signac engaged in an increasingly bitter epistolary debate with the Belgian painter Théo van Rysselberghe.⁹ At the heart of the

⁸ Katherine Marie Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010). 140.

⁹ The general context and tenor of this debate is described in Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, "Signac and Van Rysselberghe: The Story of a Friendship 1887-1907," *Apollo* (June 1998): 16-18.

debate was van Rysselberghe's break with Neo-Impressionism, and his characterization of the divisionist technique—and by extension, Signac's divisionist works—as mechanical, monotonous, and inexpressive. As Signac pointed out, these were arguments that had long been used by the Neo-Impressionists' "worst enemies."¹⁰ But one of the observations that drew the most heat, cementing the friends' aesthetic (and ultimately personal) rupture, was Signac's identification of van Rysselberghe's new artistic preoccupations with the "influence—conscious or not—of Maurice Denis."¹¹

Signac's disapproval of Denis no doubt had something to do with the latter's politics, which were antithetical to his own. Already in 1899 Signac had associated Denis's reticence about his artistic methods with the latter's anti-Dreyfusard stance, and by the time of the Neo-Impressionist's exchange of letters with van Rysselberghe, Denis had associated himself with a reactionary nationalism.¹² Yet—perhaps unsurprisingly given his equation of politics and aesthetics—Signac framed his disapproval entirely in aesthetic terms, as a dispute over the nature of the decorative. He argued that Denis's overly faithful emulation of Renaissance decorations—their ordered arrangements of

¹⁰ Signac to van Rysselberghe, October 30, 1908, Letters received from Paul Signac, c. 1892-1909, Théo van Rysselberghe correspondence, c. 1889-1926 (hereafter van Rysselberghe correspondence), The Getty Research Library, Special Collections, Los Angeles, California.

¹¹ "Au fait je m'explique sur Denis. Si je l'attaque c'est que je pense que son influence sur toi a été déplorable. C'est uniquement par amitié pour toi et non par hostilité pour lui que je te dis ce que je pense, et ce qui doit rester entre nous." Signac to van Rysselberghe, November 18 [1908], Letters received from Paul Signac, c. 1892-1909, van Rysselberghe correspondence.

¹² "Maurice Denis vient me voir. Comme il est fin et diplomate; il sait plaire, complimenter et vous interroger sur ce qu'il désire savoir. Je lui fournis tous les renseignements techniques qu'il me demande sur ma peinture et lorsque je lui demande de quelle manière il se documente d'après nature, il me répond par cette phrase énorme: 'Mon art comporte de grands travaux préparatoires d'après une méthode qui m'est personnelle.' En somme, je crois qu'il a été pris au dépourvu par ma question. Tout autre a été le bon Vuillard auquel j'ai fait un jour la même question et qui m'a tout dit, tout montré, jusqu'au moindre croquis. Il est logique que Denis ait signé la liste de la 'Libre Parole' et Vuillard celle de 'l'Aurore.'" February 7, 1899 entry in Paul Signac, "Extraits du Journal inédit de Paul Signac III, 1898-1899," *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July-August 1953): 42-43.

sculptural figures in large-scale compositions—had missed the real decorative lesson to be found in Italian painting (the same lesson he had “found” in Delacroix): dialectical color harmonies.¹³ In the same letter lamenting Denis’s influence, Signac compared Fra Angelico (a longtime favorite of Denis) and Pinturricchio in order to clarify his conception of the decorative:

Yes, I admired the Angelicos in the Chapel of Nicholas V [...] But I didn’t feel there the great pictorial pleasure experienced in the Borgia apartments, which gave me gooseflesh; it was an almost physical, animal pleasure. It’s a torrent of painting; [...] and whatever you say, there is repose in that magnificence [...] There aren’t any works more balanced, poised, reposed than those Pinturicchios, for those who see them properly.

That, on the contrary, is genuine decoration... much more “decorative” than the charming illuminations of Angelico. The first is a joy for the eyes; the second charms mostly through sentiment. Same difference between Puvis and Delacroix. Delacroix and Pinturricchio intensify and oppose. Angelico (and Puvis and Denis who copied him wholesale [...]) spread out and dilute.¹⁴

This passage is instructive for two reasons: first, in it Signac identifies the decorative with the combination of intense visual sensations and overall harmony/repose; second, he opposes the intense visual pleasure of the decorative to that obtained through sentiment.

Ironically, this latter distinction had also preoccupied Denis since at least 1890, when he first made his mark on the Parisian art scene with symbolist theories of art

¹³ In his October 30, 1908 letter to van Rysselberghe, Signac wrote “Quelle bonheur j’ai eu à les retrouver sur les murs d’Italie ces contrastes prévus !”

¹⁴ “Oui, j’ai admiré les Angelico de la Chapelle Nicolas V [...] Mais je n’ai pas éprouvé là, le grand plaisir pictural ressenti aux appartements Borgia, où mes cheveux se dressaient sur ma tête; c’était presque un plaisir physique, animal. C’est un torrent de peinture; [...] et quoique tu en dis, il y a des repos dans cette magnificence [...] Pas d’œuvres plus pondérées, plus balancées, plus reposées que ces Pinturicchio, pour qui veut les bien voir. C’est un art au contraire tout de réflexion et d’équilibre. [...] C’est là au contraire la véritable décoration... beaucoup plus “décorative” que les suaves enlumineurs de l’Angelico. La première est la joie des yeux ; la 2^e séduit surtout par le sentiment. Même différence entre Puvis et Delacroix. Delacroix et Pinturricchio, concentrent et opposent. Angelico (et Puvis et Denis qui l’ont déménagé [...]) étale, et dilue.” Signac to van Rysselberghe, November 18 [1908], Letters received from Paul Signac, c. 1892-1909, van Rysselberghe correspondence.

remarkably similar to Signac's own. As a member and unofficial spokesman for the Gauguin-inspired artistic brotherhood privately known as the Nabis ("prophets"), Denis had hoped to retrieve the artist's role as the "prophet" of deeper, sacred truths, now obscured by empiricism and the superficial, slavish imitation of academicism and naturalism.¹⁵ Laying out these goals in the 1890 "Definition of Neo-Traditionism," he consistently identified art's more profound meaning with an emotion that emerged directly from the artwork's formal properties, independent of any associations invoked by its subject matter.¹⁶ The text is most famous for its opening line, often cited as a precursor to twentieth-century formalism's preoccupation with abstraction and media specificity: "Remember that a painting—before being a warhorse, a nude woman or some anecdote—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."¹⁷ Yet the statement functioned primarily as a set-up for observations like the following, which emphasized form as a means of expression: "From the canvas itself, flat surface coated [enduite] in colors, the emotion pours forth, [...] without the need to interpose the memory of another, prior, sensation (like that of the selected natural motif)."¹⁸ Elsewhere

¹⁵ A discussion of the origin and complex meanings of the label "Nabi"—a French rendering of a Hebrew (as well as Arabic) term loosely understood to mean "prophets"—can be found in Claire Frèches-Thory and Ursula Perucchi-Petri, eds., *Nabis, 1888-1900* (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais in association with Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), 17 and 253.

¹⁶ Written under the pseudonym Pierre Louis, the text appeared in the August 23 and 30 (n.65 and 66) issues of the small avant-garde revue *Art et critique*. A later, anthologized, version of 1912, with all its modifications noted, is reprinted in Maurice Denis, *Le ciel et l'arcadie*, ed. Jean-Paul Bouillon (Paris: Hermann, 2003). 5-21.

¹⁷ "Se rappeler qu'un tableau—avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote—est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées." *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ Denis would later regret the attention lavished on the text's opening observation—which had a number of precedents in art criticism and discourse, from Charles Baudelaire to Hippolyte Taine—at the expense of its later, more significant arguments, as well as the way it had been used to justify abstract art. Jean-Paul Bouillon, "Denis: du bon usage des théories," in *Nabis, 1888-1900*, ed. Claire Frèches-Thory and Ursula Perucchi-Petri (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais in association with Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), 61-62.

Denis reinforced the distinction between the emotion inscribed in the painting's form and a weaker sentimentality derived from its subject matter: "Neo-Traditionism must not dwell on learned and febrile psychologies, on literary sentimentalities, calling up legends, all things that are not of its emotional domain [...] Everything is contained in the beauty of the work."¹⁹

Denis's contention that the artwork's impact and meaning lay in "the emotion of beauty" rather than sentimentality had a great deal of affinity not just with the ideas Signac expressed in 1908, but also with the terms the Neo-Impressionist would soon use in his anonymous 1891 letter to *La Révolte*, published June 13th as "Impressionists and revolutionaries."²⁰ There, Signac had argued that revolutionary artworks originated in "a purely aesthetic emotion" felt before the subject: in other words, an emotion provoked entirely by the subject's formal characteristics, independent of any evaluation of its political or social implications.²¹ Impressionists (i.e. Neo-Impressionists) were particularly worthy of praise because they retained and perhaps intensified the expressed emotion through their "more logical and scientific placement of tones and colors."²²

"De la toile elle-même, surface plane enduite de couleurs, jaillit l'émotion, 'littéraire,' comme disent les peintres, sans qu'il soit besoin d'interposer le souvenir d'une autre sensation ancienne (comme celle du motif de nature utilisé)." Shortly before this passage, Denis made a similar observation about Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes's decoration at the Sorbonne: "Et la profondeur de notre émotion vient de la suffisance de ces lignes et de ces couleurs à s'expliquer elles-mêmes, comme seulement belles et divines de beauté." Denis, *Le ciel et l'arcadie*: 16-17.

¹⁹ "Le néo-traditionnisme ne peut s'attarder aux psychologies savantes et fébriles, aux sentimentalités littéraires, appelant la légende, toutes choses qui ne sont point de son domaine émotionnel [...] En la beauté de l'œuvre, tout est contenu." *Le ciel et l'arcadie*: 19.

²⁰ "triomphe de l'émotion du beau sur le mensonge naturaliste." *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹ Paul Signac, "Variétés: Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires," 48 /14 *La Revue du musée d'Orsay*, no. 12 (Spring 2001): 99. For more on this text, see the discussion in chapter 3.

²² "Techniquement ils innovent: par une disposition plus logique et plus scientifique des tons et des couleurs, ils remplacent les procédés surannés." Signac, "Variétés: Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires," 98.

Signac and Denis's works at the 1891 Salon des Independants (the exhibition discussed in Signac's letter to *La Révolte*) included the former's portrait of Fénéon and the latter's pointillist version of his *Mystère catholique* (Figure 4.1). Both displayed a "decorative" rather than empirical—i.e. replicating the action of light upon the eye—use of Neo-Impressionist facture, pointing to their emphasis on aesthetic emotion over subject matter. Yet their results were quite different. Signac juxtaposed pure pigments in order to heighten the intensity, dialectical contrast and emotional impact of his color, even as he experimented with line and shape for the same reason. Denis, who also distorted line and shape with expressive intent, nevertheless used a veil of "points" to produce a unified, vibrating surface composed of "subtle harmonies of green, white and pink" distinct from both Gauguin's intense primaries and Neo-Impressionist contrast.²³

These differences pointed to divergent understandings of aesthetic emotion. Although Signac criticized artworks constructed around a preconceived, explicit message, he did believe that "pure aesthetes, revolutionary in temperament," imbued their work with "an unconscious, social character": in their desire to break through artistic convention and communicate aesthetic emotion as sincerely as possible, the artists and their work became inadvertent witnesses to the "great social trial that begins between workers and Capital."²⁴ As I discussed in the previous chapter, he also believed that Neo-

²³ Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis* (Geneva: Skira, 1993). 30-31.

The distinction between *Catholic Mystery* and both Neo-Impressionism and Gauguin was made all the more clear by the fact that it was accompanied by works that more closely resembled those of Gauguin and the Pont-Aven school. The list of works exhibited by Denis can be found on page twenty-two of the Salon's catalogue, reproduced in *Salons of the "Indépendants" 1884-1891*, ed. Theodore Reff (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981).

²⁴ "leurs œuvres, résultant d'une émotion purement esthétique produite par le pittoresque des choses et des restes, ont ce caractère social, inconscient, dont est marquée déjà la littérature contemporaine"; "[une tendance socialiste] se retrouvera beaucoup plus forte et éloquente chez les purs esthètes révolutionnaires par tempérament, qui s'éloignant des sentiers battus, peignent ce qu'ils veulent, comme ils le sentent et

Impressionism's dialectical harmonies served, in part, to promote this latent conflict and its desired resolution. In closing "Impressionists and revolutionaries," Signac drew a sharp line between the (Neo-)Impressionists' revolutionary outlook and technique and the Symbolists "who, in devoting themselves to retrograde subjects, return to old misguided ways and forget that art is much more about searching in the future [...] than in exhuming the legends of the past."²⁵

He certainly intended Denis as one of his Symbolist targets.²⁶ Though set in a contemporary setting, *Catholic Mystery* was nevertheless a painting of the Annunciation, surely one of the "retrograde subjects" denounced by Signac. Where the Neo-

donnent inconsciemment, très souvent, un solide coup de pioche au vieil édifice social"; "grand procès social qui s'engage entre les travailleurs et le Capital." Signac, "Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires," 99 and 101.

²⁵ "les seuls artistes hantés par l'art pur et particulièrement les peintres impressionnistes, dont la technique est la négation des vieilles routines artistiques méritent toute la sympathie de ceux qui applaudissent à l'écroulement des préjugés surannés.—J'excepte les impressionnistes-symbolistes qui, en se confiant dans des sujets rétrogrades, retombent dans les vieux errements et oublient que l'art consiste beaucoup plus à chercher dans l'avenir, si large, qu'à exhumer les légendes du passé." Signac, "Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires," 101. The Nabis were particularly well-received by Symbolist critics like Adolphe Retté and Alphonse Germain, detractors of Neo-Impressionism. For Retté and Germain's favorable reception of Denis's *Mystère catholique*, see *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*, (Lyon: Musée des Beaux Arts, Lyon, in association with Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994). 128.

²⁶ As Marnin Young has highlighted, Signac's efforts to distance his artistic practice from that of the Symbolists must have been motivated, at least in part, by Denis's cooptation of aesthetic emotion (what Young labels, following Todd Cronan, "affective formalism") for Symbolism. Marnin Young, "The Death of Georges Seurat: Neo-Impressionism and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in 1891," *RIHA Journal* 0043 (Special Issue 'New Directions in Neo-Impressionism')(July 14, 2012), <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2012/2012-jul-sep/special-issue-neo-impressionism/young-death-of-seurat/>. Denis's text had indeed ignored the expressionist evolution in Neo-Impressionist aesthetic reflection and practice, and which had been given significant attention in profiles of Seurat and Signac published in *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui*: Jules Christophe, "Georges Seurat," *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui* 9, no. 368 (April 1890); Félix Fénéon, "Signac," *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui*, no. 373 (May 1890). Lamenting modern art's reductive focus on "optical sensations," Denis had effectively lumped Neo-Impressionism with naturalism by noting, dismissively, that "M. Signac vous prouvera par l'impeccable science que ses perceptions chromatiques sont de toute nécessité." Denis, *Le ciel et l'arcadie*: 6-7. "Impressionists and Revolutionaries" can thus be viewed as a means for Signac to assert his artistic prerogative to aesthetic emotion, which had been effaced in Denis's text. See Signac's reaction, in a May 20, 1895 journal entry, to a later iteration of Denis's ideas on painting: "Tout ce qu'il dit est intelligent, mais son erreur est de croire qu'on avait besoin des Symbolistes pour combattre la plate imitation de la nature. Jamais un 'peintre' n'a fait cette imbécillité. [...] Vraiment, il n'y avait pas besoin des misérables déformations des Symbolistes pour combattre la platitude des stupides copieurs des Salons officiels..." Paul Signac, "Extraits du Journal inédit de Paul Signac I, 1894-1895," *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 36 (1949): 122.

Impressionist emphasized the “revolutionary” temperament of artists preoccupied with aesthetic emotion, Denis emphasized the religious: having stated that “[a]ll, or nearly all, of the artwork’s Sentiment springs unconsciously from the artist’s state of mind [état d’âme],” he followed with this observation from Fra Angelico: “He who would paint the things of Christ must live with Christ.”²⁷ His intention was to create decorative icons that would express an emotion derived not entirely from the natural world, but rather from the presence of the spiritual within it:

Art is the sanctification of nature, of that mundane nature which is content merely to live! The grand art, which we call decorative, of the Hindus, Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks, the art of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, and the best works of Modern Art, what are they if not the deformation [travestissement] of vulgar sensations, of natural objects, into sacred, hermetic, imposing icons?²⁸

As with Signac’s portrait of Fénéon, Denis’s invocation of the decorative was meant to focus attention on formal expression (form’s action on the spectator), independent of representation, but with a very different end. Denis highlighted the iconic, and thus spiritual, character of his works through an emphasis on flatness and surface. Covered in a veil of points or areas of unmodeled color and/or stylized pattern, and displaying sharply delineated, “distorted” forms, Denis’s paintings refused to serve as windows onto a “mundane nature.” Yet their meaning was at the same time immanent and integral to their formal, material presence: the intent was to make, via these icons, the spiritual as

²⁷ “De l’état d’âme de l’artiste, vient inconsciemment, ou presque, tout le Sentiment de l’œuvre d’art: ‘Celui qui veut peindre les choses du Christ doit vivre avec le Christ,’ disait Fra Angelico.” Denis, *Le ciel et l’arcadie*: 16.

²⁸ “L’Art est la sanctification de la nature, de cette nature de tout le monde, qui se contente de vivre! Le grand art, qu’on appelle décoratif, des Indous, des Assyriens, des Égyptiens, des Grecs, l’art du Moyen-Âge et de la Renaissance, et les œuvres décidément supérieures de l’Art moderne, qu’est-ce? Sinon le travestissement des sensations vulgaires—des objets naturels—en icônes sacrées, hermétiques, imposantes.” *Ibid.*, 20.

solidly present as any object.²⁹ Denis's repeated use of decorative arts like tapestry and embroidery as analogies for Neo-Traditionist painting highlighted the way he and the Nabis conceived their works as objects. It also suggested that they were to be associated with the same kind of intimate and/or domestic space foregrounded in *Catholic Mystery*. There they would help the viewer live, as the painter had, with Christ.

Denis followed up *Catholic Mystery* with paintings in which flattened, outlined silhouettes and stylized patterns signaled their status as decorative, iconic objects. These effects were particularly foregrounded in an 1891-2 series exhibited as "panels for a young girl's bedroom" (see Figure 4.2 for an example), the 1892 *L'Échelle dans le feuillage* or *Arabesques poétiques pour la décoration d'un plafond* (*Ladder in foliage* or *Poetic arabesques for a ceiling decoration*) commissioned for the painter Henri Lerolle, and his 1893 *Muses* (Figures 4.3 and 4.4), where they served to conflate both the scenes represented and the works themselves with decorative objects and thus with the surrounding interiors, real or imagined. The frame of the second painting was stenciled (by Marthe Meurier, Denis's future wife) with a repeated leaf motif that echoed the patterns of foliage within the painting; the rich burgundy and golden hues of the forest floor depicted in *Muses*, as well as its flatness and the stylized character of its leafy

²⁹ Fénéon pointed to these qualities in his review of the artist's work: "[Denis's] plus séduisants tableaux sont de tonalité claire; d'autres semblent tendus de caligineux velours damassés, sur lesquels voici, bien insolites, des colorations en printanier bouquet. Comme moyen d'exécution: un pointillis, qu'il broche sur des fonds à plat, pour douer le tableau de quelque vie épidermique.—Par la glace qui les protège, par l'émaillé de leur facture, par leurs cadres d'un choix jaloux, les œuvres de M. Denis se confèrent un aspect d'objets d'art." Félix Fénéon, "Quelques peintres idéistes," *Le Chat noir* (September 19, 1891), passage reproduced in Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis: Le spirituel dans l'art* (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2006). 105. The full review, written about the Nabis' 1891 Saint-Germain-en-Laye exhibition, can be found in Félix Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes: Chroniques d'art*, ed. Joan U. Halperin, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1970). 200-202.

“shadows,” suggests carpet. In other works, the artist explicitly imitated tapestry.³⁰ Denis was also creating designs for fans, lampshades, stained glass windows and wallpaper, and in 1895 he designed a set of bedroom furniture and painted a series of decorative panels, once again intended for a young girl’s room, for Siegfried Bing’s *Maison de l’Art Nouveau*.³¹

A Feminized Decorative

In these paintings and objects, the sense of a sacred space—one that is as extraordinary as it is ordinary and domestic—is activated not only by the formal distortions and rhythmic patterns, but also by the predominance of women and sometimes children. As Jean-Paul Bouillon has highlighted, Denis established a personal, entwined trinity of art, religion and love in adolescence, and thereafter identified the sacred with aesthetically charged female figures, for which his fiancée and then wife served as the principal muse.³² Women functioned in his work as mediators for the sacred, guiding the viewer as they did the artist: “The angels are women who hold me by the hand.”³³

Kuenzli has argued against accounts of Nabi practice that characterized its focus on female figures in intimate spaces as either masculine or feminine, claiming that the artists sought instead to transcend subject, gender and spatial boundaries.³⁴ She points to

³⁰ See, for example, *Le Printemps* and *L’Automne*, commissioned by Arthur Huc (the director of the newspaper *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, for which Denis designed a poster), reproduced and discussed in Jean-Paul Bouillon, ed. *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2006), 166-67.

³¹ For examples of his designs for decorative arts in this period, see *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*: 326-334.

³² *Maurice Denis*: 25-38.

³³ “Les anges sont femmes qui me tiennent par la main.” Oct 23, 1890, journal entry in Denis, *Journal*, 1: 82.

³⁴ Kuenzli cites Patricia Mathews and Susan Sidlauskas as identifying a masculine, even misogynistic, perspective in the work of the Nabis, and John Russell as associating it with an entirely feminine realm. Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*: 13-14.

the continuity between the works the Nabis exhibited and those they created for private spaces, whether of their family or friends. In the case of Denis, she also highlights the gender ambiguity introduced by his symbolist distortions, arguing that it undermined the nineteenth-century association of religious devotion with the feminine.³⁵ I agree with Kuenzli that Nabis like Denis and Édouard Vuillard celebrated domestic space as a regenerative, worthy model for the public sphere, and that Denis's work often indicated a desire to fuse, if not transcend, the masculine and the feminine. Nevertheless, I find that the Nabis, Denis in particular, still reinforced the association of the domestic, the private, and the feminine.³⁶ It was precisely because women were associated with materiality, emotion, and—in Denis's case—religion, that they could serve as a regenerative model. His female figures are so often pictorially bound by (albeit permeable) interiors, gardens, balustrades or trellises: enclosed or delineated spaces that he associated with virginity and family life (as in his frieze for Bing, which highlighted the traditional feminine milestones of communion, marriage and maternity). Denis's work thus reinforced the image, fostered by Republican liberalism, of a separate feminine sphere as the site of entwined domestic and religious activities: the site, as Paul Seeley has described it, of a “ritual intimacy that welded knowing and doing, symbolism and feeling, the faith and its physical embodiment.”³⁷ As I will argue in this chapter, Denis's increasing preoccupation

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133-4.

³⁶ On several occasions Denis posited marriage as the antithesis to grand ambitions, even to painting itself, viewing it as a withdrawal analogous (in his mind) to religious vows. This was an opposition that Meurier, however, rejected. Denis, *Journal*, 1: 87 and 93.

³⁷ Paul Seeley, “O Sainte Mère: Liberalism and the Socialization of Catholic Men in Nineteenth-Century France,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (December 1998): 873-74. Seeley describes how, having left their sons' early education to the care of their wives as part of the private, domestic domain assigned to women by liberal ideology, Republican men nevertheless saw this education—particularly the Catholic ritual associated with it—as emasculating, and expected their sons to leave it behind as they progressed toward adulthood. For some sons raised in this manner, however, this transition came as a shock, leading

with the ideal of a public, collective art was often in tension with his early fascination for a feminized interiority that was all at once material and psychological.

Denis himself indicated some awareness of the negative, potentially emasculating, perceptions that might result from the association of the Nabis' work with the intimate, the decorative and the feminine. In a review of the 1892 *Exposition des Indépendants*, written again under the pseudonym Pierre Louis, Denis noted that the context was ill-suited to the aspects (such as the frame for *Poetic arabesques*) with which the Nabis aligned their paintings with the decorative arts:

White frames are in their proper place here, and you know how irritating they are in a soft light [...] But the ornamentation of borders? And this idea of echoing the painting's tonality in the arabesques that circumscribe it? Flowered frames, dappled frames, frames embroidered by the hands of friends—those of Misters Ranson, Bonnard, Denis—here vigorous contrasts are needed, and these pretty things appear saccharine [mièvres].³⁸

Denis's evaluation suggested that, when presented in the public context of a large-scale, heterogeneous exhibition like the *Indépendants* rather than domestic interiors or smaller gallery spaces like that of *Le Barc de Boutteville*, Nabi work struck a note of prettiness rather than beauty, risking sentimentality rather than the transcendent emotion to which he aspired.

them to reject rather than to identify with the masculine liberal values providing access to the public sphere. Denis's early biography follows, on a number of points, the trajectory laid out by Seeley. For a synopsis of this biographical information, see Fabienne Stahl, "L'enfant dans la vie et l'oeuvre de Maurice Denis," in *Maurice Denis: Le matin de la vie* (Kyoto, Japan: Nissha Printing Company, 2011), 190.

³⁸ "Les cadres blancs sont à leur place ici: et vous savez comme ils sont gênants dans un jour discret [...] Mais l'ornementation des bordures? Et cette idée d'un rappel de la tonalité du tableau dans les arabesques qui le circonscrivent? Cadres fleuris, cadres tachés, cadres brodés par des mains amies—MM. Ranson, Bonnard, Denis—il faut ici de vigoureux contrastes, et ces jolies choses paraissent mièvres." Pierre Louis [Maurice Denis], "Notes sur l'exposition des Indépendants," *La Revue Blanche*, no. 7 (April 25, 1892): 233.

Denis made the gender implications of these distinctions clearer in an 1896 article entitled “Notes on religious painting,” in which he sought to further disassociate Symbolist form—which he described as a “positivist,” “scientific” awareness of the “close correspondence between form and emotion”—from the sentimental.³⁹ He identified the latter with a “feminine” affinity for the emotions elicited by subject matter rather than form itself, laying out the difference in terms of two categories of religious painting:

One, sentimental, [...] reproduces the beauty of prayerful attitudes, heads inclined for ecstasy, genuflections; the purity, naivety of veiled girls, the nine o’clock hour of the first communion. It is the feminine manifestation of Catholicism, the art of fashioning scenes, of endowing Saints and Spirits, with the memory of pious emotions; of molding God in the image of our sorrows, our melancholies, our desires.

The other draws less on life and, in order to realize the absolute, recaptures the intimate secret of nature, the number. From the mathematical relationship between lines and colors emerges a supernatural Beauty barely distorted by a little human suffering, which appears as if to add a discreet accent of life and prayer to the expression of divine harmony [...] Rather than evoking prior emotions felt before the subject represented, it is the work itself that wants to move us. [...] there is an equivalence between the harmony of form and the logic of Dogma.⁴⁰

³⁹ “Résultat immédiate des philosophies positives, alors en vogue, et des méthodes d’induction que nous eûmes en si grand respect, [l’idée symboliste] fut bien la tentative d’art la plus strictement scientifique. [...] Il y avait donc étroite correspondance entre des formes et des émotions ! Les phénomènes signifient des états d’âme, et c’est le Symbolisme. La matière est devenue expressive, et la chair s’est faite le verbe.” Reproduced in Denis, *Le ciel et l’arcadie*: 36-37. The article first appeared in the October 1896 issue of Maurice Pujo and Gabriel Trarieux’s *L’Art et la vie*, and sprang from Denis’s desire to distance his own conception of Symbolism from the idealism promoted by that review. Pujo was a member of Edouard Desjardins’s Union de l’action morale (see Chapter 2) and later co-founded the Action Française.

⁴⁰ “L’une sentimentale, [...] qui restitue la beauté des attitudes de prières, des têtes inclinées pour l’extase, des agenouillements; la pureté, la naïveté des fillettes voiles, le neuf heures du matin de la première communion. C’est la manifestation féminine du catholicisme, l’art de façonner des scènes avec le souvenir de pieuses émotions, d’en revêtir les Saints, les Esprits; de figurer Dieu à l’image de nos tristesses, de nos mélancolies, de nos désirs.

L’autre s’inspire moins de la vie et, pour réaliser l’absolu, reprend l’intime secret de la nature, le nombre. Des rapports mathématiques entre lignes et couleurs surgit une surnaturelle Beauté que déforme à peine un peu de souffrance humaine transparue là comme pour ajouter un discret accent de vie et de prière à l’expression de l’harmonie divine. [...] Au lieu d’évoquer nos émotions anciennes devant le sujet représenté, c’est l’œuvre elle-même qui veut nous émouvoir. [...] il y a équivalence entre l’harmonie des formes et la logique du Dogme.” Ibid., 35.

This dichotomy is important for several reasons. It placed Denis's oeuvre, which contained many of the elements associated with the feminine and sentimental, in an ambiguous position. In the text Denis identified in Fra Angelico, his idol, "a combination of sentimental, idealist art [...] and symbolist art."⁴¹ The essay as a whole is devoted to the decline of a sacred tradition of Christian art caused, in the wake of the Byzantine, by the gradual shift from a symbolist to an idealist art. Denis nevertheless exempts Fra Angelico from this decline by depicting him as an exceptional genius who managed to synthesize sentiment and an abstract, sacred language. Within a framework that denied the sentimental, Denis celebrated the attractions of Fra Angelico's tender, compassionate art, a dynamic that would characterize his art for at least another two decades.⁴²

The distinctions laid out in the sentimental/symbolist dichotomy also indicated Denis's desire to portray contemporary Symbolism in a universal light, as the vehicle of a sacred, "immutable"—i.e. divine, inhuman—beauty. While in an earlier text Denis had placed equal weight on "subjective" and "objective" distortions, identifying the former with the artist's sincere transcription of their own experience and the latter with "eternal decorative laws," here he prioritized the universal and atemporal over a particular, individual experience.⁴³ These decorative laws were associated with a sacred, eternal

⁴¹ "un mélange d'art sentimental idéaliste [...] et d'art symboliste." Ibid., 43.

⁴² "Il [Fra Angelico] est l'interprète de la Pitié, de la pureté chrétienne, le poète de nos tristesses consolées par le Christ, le peintre de Marie. Comme Cimabuë évoque la mâle beauté du dogme, la logique d'un saint Paul, l'Angelico exprime la dévotion tendre des saints du Moyen-Âge, la compassion d'un François d'Assise." Ibid., 44.

⁴³ "éternelles lois du décor." March 1, 1895 review of an exhibition of Armand Séguin's work at Le Barc de Boutteville's gallery, reproduced in *Théories, 1890-1910, du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* (Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1920). 23.

beauty that found its fullest expression in Christian painting.⁴⁴ Denis argued that the Renaissance, like classical Antiquity, had denied this tradition by setting man rather than the divine as its ideal. Ironically, Denis's preoccupation with the universal pointed to his subsequent shift from Symbolism to classicism.

The Turn to Classicism and Decorative Painting

The Legend of Saint Hubert: Decorative painting as an Antidote to Modern

Sensibility

This shift was prepared, in part, by Denis's completion of an ambitious decoration. Bouillon has argued that this work, *La Légende de saint Hubert (The Legend of Saint Hubert)*, marked the beginning of Denis's greater preoccupation with collective, public life, which he would subsequently associate with the "classical."⁴⁵

The patron was Baron Denys Cochin, a Catholic deputy associated with the reconciliatory politics of the Ralliement and "l'Esprit nouveau," which had managed to soothe tensions between Catholics and Republicans. Having commissioned a stained glass window, *Le Chemin de la Vie (The Path of Life)*, Figure 4.5, from Denis for his study, Cochin solicited a painted decoration from the artist for the same room.⁴⁶ It was Denis's first commissioned decoration requiring a site-specific ensemble of paintings.

⁴⁴ "Mais si telle fut la puissance de cette tradition, et telle la certitude de ces mesures, c'est qu'en elles se manifestent les lois éternelles de l'émotion esthétique, les règles du Beau, qu'on démêle à des degrés divers dans la conscience humaine, mais dont les artistes de génie ont seuls la connaissance complète." *Le ciel et l'arcadie*: 48.

⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Bouillon, "L'expérience de *La Légende*," in *Maurice Denis: La Légende de saint Hubert, 1896-1897*, ed. Agnès Delannoy and et al. (Paris: Somogy éditions d'art, 1999), 27-31.

⁴⁶ Cochin had been impressed by stained glass windows realized by Louis Comfort Tiffany for Bing, which were exhibited at the Salon des Beaux-Arts of 1895 (including a design by Denis entitled *Paysage*). The artist adapted one of the designs he had produced for Bing (without the more opaque Tiffany glass) and included portraits of Cochin's daughters.

Unlike previous decorative panels like *L'Échelle dans le feuillage*, the subject was an established, specific narrative, supplied by his patron: St. Hubert, a dissipated young nobleman obsessed with hunting, is in frantic pursuit of a deer when the crucified Christ appears between the animal's antlers. Cochin saw in this tale a means of celebrating both focused action (embodied in the hunt's mixture of patient searching and frantic pursuit, all aimed at one goal), and the need to be open to the divine.⁴⁷ Otherwise one risked the fate of Victor Hugo's Fair Pécopin, who used up his life in an infernal hunt led by the devil.

Denis depicted both these alternatives in his panels, which lined the upper walls and ceiling of the study. On one wall the Cochin family was shown on horseback (Figure 4.6), about to leave on a hunt that continued in two more paintings/panels (Figures 4.7 and 4.8) and culminated in a panel depicting St. Hubert's encounter with the deer (Figure 4.9). The latter occupied its own wall across from *Le Chemin de la vie*. In this panel, *Le Miracle (The Miracle)*, the intervention of the divine is represented by the halos demarcating the heads of St. Hubert and three wingless angels in hunting garb, the luminous Christ and Cross between the deer's antlers, and the yellow-green crepuscular light found in the sky and reflected in the lake. This color would reappear many times in Denis's work, typically as a means of signaling and highlighting the meeting of the earthly and the divine. The decoration then continued on the next wall: *Le Défaut (Losing the Scent*, Figure 4.10); a dark, wild-eyed *La Chasse infernale (The Devil's Hunt*, Figure

⁴⁷ For Cochin "[c]ette tension [of the hunt] vers un objet, cet absolu des circonstances environnantes, et des obstacles, sont des sentiments qu'on éprouve à la poursuite d'une idée, comme à la poursuite d'une bête." Letter to Maurice Denis [Winter 1895-96], reproduced in Agnès Delannoy and et al., *Maurice Denis: La Légende de saint Hubert, 1896-1897* (Paris: Somogy éditions d'art, 1999). 122.

4.11); and finally *L'Arrivée à l'ermitage* (*The Arrival at the Hermitage*, Figure 4.12), located across from the departure for the hunt and figuring the Cochin family once again, this time praying with St. Hubert (a portrait of Cochin's deceased father, also a politician) in front of the shining entrance to his hermitage.⁴⁸

This ensemble, along with *Le Chemin de la vie*, is notable in combining the Symbolist, decorative aesthetic described in "Notes on Religious Painting" with a greater specificity and naturalism—a quality that Denis would come to associate with ambitious, "classical" decorative painting. Naturalistic, though simplified, depictions of the Cochin family were attended by stylized, expressive elements: notably the shadows and silhouettes of the trees or the dramatic color associated with the sunset and the miracle. Ultimately, these "distortions" built and culminated in *Le Miracle*, pointing to the sacred character of the event: the miraculous revelation is framed and punctuated by highly stylized trees and the supernatural green of lake and sky. Similarly, *Le Chemin de la vie* transitions from portraits of Cochin's daughters, their features drawn on the glass in delicate detail, to an increasingly stylized, and sacred upper register: a group of women, little more than a series of white curved forms, approach the equally abstracted rays of a spiritual sun, their dress suggesting that they are entering into a final communion with God. This movement from more naturalistic to more stylized forms points to a desire on the part of the artist to enact, within the work itself, the movement from the earthly and mundane to the spiritual. It suggests a way of synthesizing, as Denis argued Fra Angelico

⁴⁸ The decoration was also crowned by a panel that allowed the sky of *The Miracle* to continue onto the ceiling, its supernatural green gradually shifting to a blue upon which *The Miracle*'s three angels, now winged, reappear on a cloud.

had done, the dichotomy the artist had laid out in “Notes on Religious Painting.” This was all the more true given that, in the case of the St. Hubert panels, this was religion not entirely in feminine guise: Cochin, like St. Hubert before him, provided a concrete example of Catholic action in the very public realm of politics.

Yet despite the relatively seamless melding of the earthly/naturalistic and the sacred/Symbolist in these works, Denis’s journal highlighted the difficulty of transforming the décor’s various elements into a coherent whole, a task for which the artist found himself inadequately prepared both in terms of temperament and skill.⁴⁹ Bouillon has identified in the preparations and frustrations of this work a prelude to the impact that the Dreyfus Affair and Rome would have on Denis, which I will discuss shortly.⁵⁰ In the meantime, I want to foreground the way in which Denis began to see his problems with the St. Hubert decoration as symptomatic of a modern sensibility. Having begun painting the panels on May 28, 1897, Denis noted in August that:

There is only one quality, that of courage. The courage of one’s faith, of one’s right, of one’s personality, the courage of one’s strength. In other times, with a less acute—and above all, less abnormal—sensibility, we would have been energetic fighters, in love with life, and, in art, entranced with every plenitude, with every harmony.⁵¹

⁴⁹ The décor’s subject matter, revolving around the hunt, was unfamiliar to Denis, necessitating extensive documentation. For example, the artist attended some of the hunts, studied the family likenesses, sought out previous depictions of St. Hubert and of the hunt, and traveled to view paintings and tapestries at Fontainebleau.

⁵⁰ Bertrand Tillier has even asserted a more direct association between the two pursuits/paths depicted in the décor—one leading to salvation, the other damned—and the schism opened up by the Affair, indicating that Denis may have already been aware of the controversy thanks to Cochin. Though the latter seems unlikely, it corresponds well with Bouillon’s vision of the artist poised at a kind of crossroads. Bertrand Tillier, *Les artistes et l’affaire Dreyfus, 1898-1908* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2009). 104-105.

⁵¹ “Il n’y a qu’une qualité, c’est le courage. Le courage de sa foi, de son droit, de sa personnalité, le courage de sa force. En d’autres temps, avec une sensibilité moins aiguë et surtout moins anormale, nous aurions été d’énergiques lutteurs, amoureux de la vie, et dans l’art épris de toutes les plénitudes, de toutes les harmonies.” Denis, *Journal*, 1: 119-20.

This reflection was followed up by an analogous one in September:

The multitude of motifs that nature provides us, we who are so caught up in daily spectacles, prevents us from focusing our attention in reflective artistic practice [métier]. We are also limited in time. With this habit of situating a state of mind in a spectacle, everything eventually [...] becomes expressive, that is, the subject of a painting. [...] Don't seek out rapid execution, it's the intellectual work that must be slowed down. [...] In order to focus on a work, one must have as a goal something besides self-expression.⁵²

As this passage indicates, Denis felt that his previous methods provided no reflective distance on, and thus no protection from, the flow of time and experience. According to the artist, modernity (though he did not use that term) manifested itself as an altered, abnormal sensibility, one that set the subject on an endless pursuit of new stimulation. He attempted to rupture this cycle by providing various kinds of reflective distance between himself and the artwork. First, he saw a possible solution in the kind of careful métier that had been largely lost in painting but retained in certain decorative arts, and which he saw as particularly necessary for decorations (i.e. decorative painting).⁵³ Métier provided, Denis hoped, material knowledge and the stability of a method to which he could return with each new work. Second, decorative painting (large-scale, ambitious projects like the St. Hubert panels) offered an antidote to excessive sensibility by providing a set of constraints and demanding sustained focus and the synthesis of

⁵² “La multitude des motifs que la nature nous fournit, à nous qui participons si complètement aux spectacles quotidiens, nous empêche d’attacher notre attention au métier réfléchi. Le temps aussi nous manque. Avec cette habitude de situer un état d’âme dans un spectacle, tout, à la longue [...] devient expressif, c’est-à-dire sujet de tableau. [...] Ne pas chercher l’exécution rapide, c’est le travail intellectuel qu’il faut ralentir. [...] Pour s’attacher à une œuvre, il faut avoir en vue autre chose que l’expression de soi.” Ibid., 120.

⁵³ At one point he raised the possibility of taking the preparations for his stained glass projects as a possible model for decorative painting. Ibid., 122. As Kuenzli has noted, this was not dissimilar to Vuillard, who in this period “want[ed] to ground Symbolist painting in a set of material procedures that could provide constraints and direction to the individual mind without becoming formulaic.” Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*: 170.

sensation. Finally, he sought out geographical distance. In an October 10, 1897 letter to his friend and frequent patron Madame Ernest Chausson, Denis wrote that:

I am very tired of my hunt panels, and more and more focused on educating myself, on better knowing my métier. If I don't find the means to spend several months in Italy, I'll allow myself to get caught up by new and sterile projects, due to the insatiable need to produce that the fever of Paris inspires.⁵⁴

In this passage, Italy appears as a calming alternative to the heightened sensibility Denis associates with Paris, and with an endless, feverish cycle of stunted works. It is interesting to note how Denis's self-portrait, placed in the lower left foreground of *Le Défaut*, seems to visualize this dynamic. Bouillon has suggested that Denis placed portraits of himself and his wife (he stands with a portfolio of sketches in hand, perched somewhat above and in front of Meurier, on horseback like the other figures) in this panel as a humble acknowledgment of his struggles and doubts. Yet note as well that, rather than immersing themselves in the search, Denis and Meurier remain somewhat aloof, waiting the unfolding of events. Rather than depicting himself in the midst of sketching, Denis's portfolio is closed, as if to illustrate the necessity of reflection rather than "rapid execution." In addition, he and Meurier are grouped to the left-hand edge of the panel, closest to the neighboring *Le Miracle* (though admittedly with their backs to it). They are also close to the glowing stream (which seems to light up Meurier's face), in which a glimmer of *Le Miracle*'s supernatural green light is barely visible, half hidden by the belly of one of the dogs.⁵⁵ So when Denis and Meurier look out at the viewer, it seems

⁵⁴ "Je suis très fatigué de mes panneaux de chasse, et de plus en plus préoccupé de m'instruire, de connaître mieux mon métier. Si je ne trouve le moyen d'aller flâner plusieurs mois en Italie, je me laisserai prendre par de nouveaux et stériles travaux, par l'insatiable besoin de produire que donne la fièvre de Paris." Reproduced in Denis, *Journal*, 1: 122-3.

⁵⁵ In his journal, Denis reminded himself to "[l]aisser de l'importance au ruisseau." *Ibid.*, 119.

more as a reminder to be calmly receptive to such signs than to call attention to the lesson of the riders' confusion.⁵⁶ When he left for Italy that winter, Denis was on the lookout for just such a revelation.

The Dreyfus Affair and Rome

For Denis, the Dreyfus Affair appeared as a symptom of the modern sensibility that he viewed as inimical to ambitious decorative painting.⁵⁷ His trip to Italy came just as this crisis intensified in 1898, consuming all of French society in the wake of Emile Zola's *J'accuse*, and the political furor confirmed the artist's association of Paris with a feverish sensibility.

While previous visits to Italy had revolved around Tuscany and a love for the Italian Primitives (as in an 1897 stay with the Chaussons in a villa near Fra Angelico's monastery), this time Denis followed up a trip through Tuscany and Umbria with a visit to Rome. Despite his initial negative reaction to the city and its art, Denis came to appreciate Renaissance painting, and the monumental works of Raphael in particular, as the manifestation of just the kind of sensibility and method he was seeking. Under the influence of his friend and one-time collaborator, the writer André Gide, he labeled this desired sensibility "classicism."

⁵⁶ Unlike Meurier and Denis, the other figures seem about to depart in what could be read as the wrong direction: the master of the hunt appears on the verge of sounding his horn as a nearby rider points toward the right-hand side of the painting. Though the glimpse of water in the upper right-hand corner has been read as the lake behind St. Hubert (Delannoy and al., *Maurice Denis: La Légende de saint Hubert*: 93.), the placement of the panels meant that the rider was actually pointing in the direction of *The Devil's Hunt*.

⁵⁷ For previous scholarship associating Denis's turn to classicism with the Affair, see Bouillon, "Vuillard et Denis: le tournant classique."; Kuenzli, "Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus."

Kuenzli has highlighted the way the Affair exacerbated nascent tensions among the Nabis—tensions that Denis later found himself incapable of resolving, even in the context of the 1900 group portrait *Hommage à Cézanne* (*Homage to Cézanne*, Figure 4.13).⁵⁸ These conflicts became clear in an exchange of letters with Vuillard, who wrote to Denis of the difficulties of producing anything in Paris’s tense political atmosphere.⁵⁹ Denis pronounced himself well out of “the nervous and runaway contagion that wracks Paris,” as well as the kind of conflicts his anti-Dreyfusard sympathies might have led to with friends, Vuillard among them.⁶⁰ But while Vuillard attributed his distracted state and the general agitation to the specific circumstances of the Affair, Denis saw them as the symptoms of the deeper, underlying condition he had begun to highlight in his journal.

So although he acknowledged in passing their opposing positions on the Affair, rather than fully engaging with that debate Denis transposed it onto another, explicitly implicating Impressionism (and ultimately Symbolism) in the nervous sensibility he associated with Paris and contrasting it with his own mental state:

The importance of an artwork lies in the plenitude of the artist’s effort, the strength of his will. [...] I don’t know of any other milieu that seems more antithetical to Impressionism [than Rome]. One barely thinks of noting day to day one’s small, though delightful, impressions, and feels strong enough to undertake paintings that would take two years.⁶¹

⁵⁸ “Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus.”

⁵⁹ In a February 13, 1898 letter Vuillard reported that “La peinture a sombrée dans l’affaire et, le temps que je reste à la maison je suis tout désorienté et ne sais par où me prendre. [...] Les têtes des gens sont admirables dans les réunions et si l’on avait du génie et qu’on puisse rendre une image de ce que l’on conçoit à certaines secondes, on ferait peut-être quelque chose de très beau. Mais il faudrait être très fort physiquement pour résister à cette vie. Pour moi je profite de toutes les occasions pour passer une journée loin de Paris sans quoi je perds la tête.” Then, in a letter of February 19th, he wrote “Nous sommes dans la fièvre et l’inquiétude.” Part of this exchange was published in Denis, *Journal*, 1: 133-41. Bouillon has reproduced the initial letter, in which Vuillard spoke of his difficulties, as well as passages that were not included in the initial publication of Denis’s journal, in Bouillon, “Vuillard et Denis: le tournant classique,” 82-84.

⁶⁰ “la contagion de nervosité et d’emballement qui agite Paris.” Denis, *Journal*, 1: 137.

⁶¹ “Ce qui fait l’importance d’une œuvre d’art, c’est la plénitude de l’effort de l’artiste, c’est la puissance de sa volonté. Et c’est pourquoi on comprend qu’à Rome tous les peintres de la grande époque, et leurs

He thus opposed an Impressionist/Symbolist preoccupation with immediate, and ultimately superficial, aesthetic gratification to the mindset that resulted in monumental (both in terms of scale and effort) works like those decorating Rome.⁶² Vuillard, taking the criticism personally, protested that Denis was extrapolating a principle from what was in fact a prop, relied on in a difficult period until Vuillard should “find [himself] sufficiently altered to be able to abandon the dead formulas and relive (?) another naturally.”⁶³

Denis was in fact looking for the opposite: the conscious sacrifice of the artist’s natural, instinctive impulses in pursuit of an “absolute,” collective ideal.

The effort of science and reason toward style, which is, as Gide suggests to me, a system of subordination. I am reminded also of the expression *style châtié* [polished/punished style], a half-pun that conveys the idea of a perpetual penance, and thus I come to the conclusion that classical art is one of sacrifice, at the expense, if you like, of natural gifts, of instinctive work, in favor of reasoning and the ideal.

In [our own] case, there is an exaggeration of the individual, of his originality; work that is as capricious, irregular, and spasmodic as life itself.

admirables élèves, comme Poussin ou Ingres, n’aient eu en vue que des œuvres achevées. Je ne connais pas de milieu qui me semble plus l’antipode de l’impressionnisme. On y songe à peine à noter au jour le jour les petites impressions qu’on a (pourtant délicieuses), on s’y sent la force d’entreprendre des tableaux qui dureraient deux ans.” Denis to Vuillard, February 15, 1898. *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶² By implicating himself and Vuillard in his critique, Denis made it clear that he included Symbolism in his condemnation of Impressionism.

⁶³ “Une œuvre d’art qui durerait deux ans! Mais je sais bien que ce serait délicieux et je sais bien qu’il y en a eu et qu’elles comportent un plaisir délicieux et presque inconnu maintenant pour qui les contemple. Et je m’entête personnellement à vouloir trouver à ce plaisir un caractère connu, que dans les moments de faiblesse et d’impuissance, jusqu’à ce qu’un certain excès de tristesse atteint, je me trouve assez modifié pour abandonner les formules mortes et en revivre (?) une autre naturellement.” Denis, *Journal*, 1: 137-38. Bouillon, following on Dario Gamboni, has suggested that Vuillard was to some extent dissembling, and that uncertainty did serve him as a methodological principle, one that left the viewer more interpretive freedom (in keeping with the contemporaneous emphasis on suggestion). Bouillon, “Vuillard et Denis: le tournant classique,” 85-87; Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (London: Reaktion, 2002). 100-104; “Vuillard and Ambiguity,” in *Édouard Vuillard*, ed. Guy Cogeval (New Haven and London: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Yale University Press, 2003).

In the case of Raphael, the man completely disappears in the artwork [...] [I]nstead of providing a kind of summary of daily existence, the work involves lengthy endeavors.⁶⁴

According to Denis, art should not directly mirror the individual artist (nor, through him, the haphazardness of life), but instead aim at subordinating both to a (*the*) universal and collective ideal. In doing so, it would be less vulnerable to the vagaries of time, producing more enduring works. While Vuillard speculated that the dramatic confrontations inspired by the Affair might provide great artistic material, if only he could figure out how to work in the midst of such drama, Denis thought that such events should not inform art in a direct, “journalistic” manner.⁶⁵ According to Denis, Symbolism, which had emerged as a corrective to Impressionism, had only aggravated this tendency by replacing nature or the model—which introduced an element of *durée* through the necessity of observation—with any subjective emotion/sensation, no matter how fleeting.⁶⁶ He thought that a stable mind and method (“classicism”) would maintain a more oblique, and fruitful relationship between art and life.

⁶⁴ “Effort pour la raison et la science vers le style, qui est comme me souffle Gide, un système de subordinations. Je songe aussi à l’expression *style châtié*, un demi-calembour qui donne bien l’idée d’une pénitence perpétuelle, et j’arrive ainsi à comprendre que l’art classique est fait de sacrifice, aux dépens, si vous voulez, des dons naturels, du travail instinctif, et en faveur du raisonnement et de l’idéal. Dans le premier cas, le nôtre, il y a exagération de l’individu, de son originalité, le travail capricieux, irrégulier, et saccadé, selon la vie elle-même.

Dans le cas de Raphaël, l’homme disparaît tout à fait dans l’œuvre [...] et le travail, au lieu d’être une sorte de compte rendu de l’existence journalière, comporte des entreprises de longue durée.” Denis to Vuillard, February 22, 1898, reproduced in Denis, *Journal*, 1: 139-140.

⁶⁵ Kuenzli has pointed to Denis’s condemnation of artistic journalism, identifying this attitude with the artist’s exclusion of Vallotton and Ibels from his *Homage to Cézanne*. Kuenzli, “Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus,” 689 and 697.

⁶⁶ “Depuis le symbolisme, le travail de l’artiste est devenue plus subjectif que jamais. Toute émotion peut devenir un sujet de tableau. Dès lors les vingt-quatre heures de chaque jour ne suffisent pas à les noter toutes, ces émotions: on arrivera à en conserver pas mal, sur des bouts de toile ou de carton, à coup de simplifications rapides. La vie se passe à tenir une sorte de sténographie des sensations quotidiennes. [...] Les impressionnistes eux-mêmes sont encore tenus par le travail d’après le modèle, d’après nature, qui nécessite des *lenteurs* dans l’analyse ; tandis que nous...” Ibid. (I, 140).

Denis's emphasis on science, reason and the ideal over instinct and sensation implicitly gendered his vision of classicism as masculine. Feminist histories of philosophy have traced the association of masculinity with reason and objectivity back to Antiquity, and Denis's recourse to this masculinizing rhetoric was in keeping with the warring, contested masculinities that Christopher Forth has highlighted in the Dreyfus Affair.⁶⁷ Charles Maurras, in particular, would associate a masculine classicism with nationalism in the context of the *École Romane* and, later, in the *Action Française*.⁶⁸ Denis thus participated in the fin-de-siècle beginnings of a gendered "call" or "return to order" that is more often associated with World War I and the interwar period.⁶⁹ It is,

⁶⁷ For the feminist critique of a "masculine" reason and philosophy, see, for example, Genevieve Lloyd, *Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*, Second ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt, *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); Charlotte Witt, "Feminist History of Philosophy," ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2012 ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/feminism-femhist/>. For attempts to historicize and/or reveal the instabilities of these gendered divisions, see Phyllis Rooney, "Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conceptions of Reason," *Hypatia* 6, no. 2 (1991); Kerry Sanders, "Michèle Le Doeuff: Reconsidering Rationality," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71, no. 4 (December 1, 1993); Penelope Deutscher, *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Michael Shalom Kochin, *Gender and Rhetoric in Plato's Political Thought* (Cambridge (U.K.) and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*. Competing views of masculinity are also examined in the context of the Dreyfus Affair (above all in regards to the category of the intellectual) in Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). Ch. 5.

⁶⁸ The *École Romane* was a literary movement initiated by Jean Moréas in the early 1890s that sought to distinguish itself from what it perceived to be the decadent, anarchic character of the wider Symbolist movement. The *École Romane*'s preoccupations with the harmony, measure and order of a "Latin" tradition, as opposed to the supposedly anarchic influence of foreigners and Jews, are discussed in Richard Shyrock, "Reaction within Symbolism: The *École Romane*," *The French Review* 71, no. 4 (March 1998). For an analysis of Maurras's opposition to a "feminine" Romanticism in the context of the *École Romane* and then the nationalist movement, see Neil McWilliam, "Qui a peur de George Sand?: Antirromantisme et antiféminisme chez les maurrassiens," in *Le maurrassisme et la culture*, ed. Olivier Dard, Michel Leymarie, and Neil McWilliam (Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2010).

⁶⁹ *Le retour à l'ordre dans les arts plastiques et l'architecture, 1919-1925*, (Saint-Étienne: Centre interdisciplinaire d'étude et de recherche sur l'expression contemporaine, 1975); Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989). For studies that evoke or analyze this impulse pre-WWI, see Dominique Jarrassé, "'Retour à l'ordre' ou 'Retour de Rome'? Le maniérisme des Prix de Rome dans l'entre-deux-guerres," in *Du Romantisme à l'Art Déco: Lectures croisées*, ed. Rossella Froissart, Laurent Houssais, and Jean-François Luneau (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011); Christopher Green, *Cubism and its*

however, important to note the ambiguities of the masculine subject inscribed in these passages: on the one hand, it is a subject in full command, characterized by strength and will; on the other, it is subordinated to, and even erased by, the force of larger structures, whether the collectivity or (in Denis's case) the divine. As I will demonstrate, this kind of ambiguity would continue to characterize Denis's artistic persona and oeuvre.

The Politics of Classicism

Bertrand Tillier has read Denis's initial reaction to the Affair as an attempt to maintain the separation between art and politics previously vaunted by many of his Symbolist contemporaries: an attempt that failed once Denis returned to Paris and was caught up in the same maelstrom as Vuillard. Tillier sees this failure as proof of the ultimate impossibility of such a stance in the context of the Affair: the doctrine of "art for art's sake" suddenly appeared completely bankrupt, as artists sought a public, participatory role worthy of the magnitude of the social upheaval.⁷⁰ Yet Denis's promotion of classicism was already embedded with the politics surrounding the Affair, as the scholarship of Bouillon and Kuenzli attests. His emphasis on the artist's disciplining of his own instinct was analogous to, and a participant in, what anti-Dreyfusards were calling for in French society as a whole: the sacrifice, when necessary, of the individual in the interest of a greater, collective good. In the realm of art, Denis imagined style as

Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French art, 1916-1928 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); *Art in France: 1900-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: the Avant-garde and Politics in Paris 1905-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); *Cubism and its Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). Of these scholars, Cottington is the only one to pay much attention to issues of gender and masculinity in the pre-war period, largely in relation to Cubism.

⁷⁰ Tillier, *Les artistes et l'affaire Dreyfus*: 78-83 and 103-6.

the index of this sacrifice: an artist's (or school's) effort toward *the* ideal rather than an ideal. Even before his return to Paris, Denis's reinvigorated interest in ambitious decorative cycles was entwined with contemporaneous debates—explored already in the previous chapters—on the role of the individuals and institutions (notably religion and the State) in promoting social solidarity.⁷¹

His return to the city, and to the many friends and acquaintances that had been in direct contact with the “fever” of the Affair, nevertheless concretized this relationship. The Parisian context highlighted the larger, social implications embedded in the contrasting sensibilities—the nervous Impressionist/Symbolist and the balanced classical—that Denis had begun to elaborate in Rome. By Christmas 1898 he noted in his journal that:

In regards to the Affair, I rejoice in the skepticism and diplomacy [des adresses] that it has taught me, in which I find resources for public life [la vie active] (as with the organization for the exhibition at [Durand-Ruel's]). Mithouard argues that it is the struggle of the individual against solidarity, and of impressionism against collective ideas! J. Lerolle—between anarchists of all stripes and those who respect the idea of authority. Along with Mellerio, I also see in it the opposition between nervous types, dreamers, and on the other side those with very balanced, practical, minds.⁷²

⁷¹ Bouillon, “Vuillard et Denis: le tournant classique,” 84-85; “L’expérience de *La Légende*.”

⁷² The passage followed on a reported Dreyfusard remark made by Signac, whom Denis had begun to cultivate in this period: “A propos de l’Affaire, je me réjouis des méfiances et des adresses qu’elle m’a enseignées. J’y trouve des ressources de vie active (comme pour l’organisation de l’Exposition chez D.-R.). Mithouard prétend que c’est la lutte de l’individuel contre la solidarité ; et de l’impressionnisme contre les idées générales! J. Lerolle—entre les anarchistes de toute opinion et ceux qui ont le respect de l’idée de l’autorité. Avec Mellerio, j’y vois aussi opposition entre les nerveux, les rêveurs, et d’autre part les esprits très équilibrés, et pratiques.” Elements of this translation are adapted from Kuenzli, “Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus,” 684. This passage from Denis’s journal was first reproduced in its entirety in Bouillon, “Vuillard et Denis: le tournant classique,” 84.

This passage suggests that Denis's earlier reticence over the Affair was not a retreat from the political so much as an attempt to project a state of clear-sighted objectivity.⁷³ He clearly believed he had retained this balanced state of mind—echoed in the psychological remove implied by terms like “skepticism”—and that it allowed him to channel the force of his reactions for more “practical,” productive ends: public, “active” life. As Bouillon has highlighted, a chain of associations was established between, on the one hand, a Dreyfusard, expressive, subjective and Symbolist point of view, and, on the other, an anti-Dreyfusard, harmonious, classical point of view, the latter which was associated with decorative painting.⁷⁴

These oppositions were on display in an 1898/9 article, entitled “The Arts in Rome, or the Classical Method,” in which Denis repeated many of the formulas elaborated in his journal and his letters to Vuillard.⁷⁵ Classical methods put the artist's “consciousness and will” on display, while dissimulating their “personal taste and emotivity, [as well as their] originality.”⁷⁶ In subjecting the artist to the exigencies of a collective style, classicism rendered him master of his own passions, freeing him from the sensual submersion Denis associated with Impressionism, and, in this text, the

⁷³ Again recalling Denis's self-portrait among the searchers in *The Legend of St. Hubert*, where he is set apart as an observer (both of the hunt and of the viewer).

⁷⁴ Bouillon, “Vuillard et Denis: le tournant classique,” 84-5.

⁷⁵ Maurice Denis, “Les Arts à Rome, ou la method classique,” *Le Spectateur Catholique* IV (Juillet-Décembre 1898). The issue in which the article appeared was intended (and labeled) as an 1898 publication, but seems to have been actually published late in 1899, as Bouillon has noted, and which seems confirmed by the Denis-Gide correspondence. *Le ciel et l'arcadie*: 55; Gide and Denis, *Correspondance*: 146-149.

⁷⁶ “Ainsi les méthodes classiques qui font le mieux paraître, en les exaltant, la conscience et la volonté de l'artiste, ont encore ce résultat de dissimuler et son émotivité et son goût personnel. Son originalité s'efface, disparaît dans l'ampleur et la perfection de la formule: épreuve semblable à celle que propose à l'âme la Sagesse Chrétienne en vue de la vie éternelle par le renoncement de soi.” Denis, “Les Arts à Rome, ou la method classique,” 200.

Semitic and the oriental. Denis compared the sacrifices of classicism to those demanded by the Church, but his discourse was analogous to those of anti-Dreyfusards and even Solidarists on the sacrifices demanded by society and the state. “The classical aesthetic offers us both a method of thinking and a method of willing; a code of conduct as well as a mentality [psychologie].”⁷⁷ It was thus the aesthetic, psychology, and morality necessary to a fully realized (i.e. conscious, active) life, lived not in spite of but rather as a result of its extreme rigor. Denis’s rhetoric of restriction and hardship—subordination, sacrifice, penitence, trial [épreuve]—was balanced by, or rather found its fulfillment in, a vocabulary of strength and vitality: an artwork took on meaning as a result of the artist’s “will,” as a register of his/her “conscious, energetic, serious life.”⁷⁸ Denis’s classicism, like his 1896 formulation of Symbolism, was framed in masculine terms.

Denis also placed his impressionist/classical opposition in racist, xenophobic terms: in closing the article he contrasted the classical mentality with the Semitic and oriental, associating latter with “an excessive love of brilliance, of rich materials, of color, at the expense of form, architecture and classical sobriety.”⁷⁹ In the context of the exhibition at the Durand-Ruel gallery, he would divide the Nabis themselves according to these categories: a “Semitic” group (Vuillard, Bonnard and Valloton) characterized by small, somber paintings more suited to a small, dimly lit apartments (as opposed to a studio or an exhibition), and neglecting figures and drawing in favor of nature filtered by memory; a classical (“Latin”) group (Séusier, Ranson, and Denis) characterized by large

⁷⁷ “L’esthétique classique nous offre à la fois une méthode de penser et une méthode de vouloir ; une morale en même temps qu’une psychologie.” Ibid., 208.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 198-99.

⁷⁹ “L’amour exagéré de l’éclat, de la riche matière, de la couleur, au dépens de la forme, de l’architecture et de la sobriété classique.” Ibid., 208.

paintings, executed in the studio, that foregrounded the figure and supplemented memory with documents, geometrical measurements or models. Denis further distinguished the two groups by the materiality of their works: his own group's "simple and uniform" facture (and color) versus the "complicated" facture of Vuillard's group.⁸⁰ The classical/Latin was thus associated with the same characteristics as decorative painting, particularly as practiced by Puvis de Chavannes (see Chapter 2).

Classicism and Nationalism

In his desire to transform his new obsession with "effort" and "style" into concrete projects—thereby proving classicism's salutary effect on public life—Denis renewed his endeavors to gain more exposure for his work and that of his fellow Nabis, whom he portrayed as a rather sober artistic brotherhood in his 1900 *Homage to Cézanne* (Fig X).⁸¹ All of this activity seems to have had one central goal: obtaining ambitious decorative commissions.⁸²

Denis turned to classicism and monumental decorative painting in his search for a generalizing language appropriate to collective expression. He believed that the formal simplifications and harmony associated with an architectural conception of decorative painting—the mural aesthetic analyzed by Jeannine Marie Aquilino, discussed in the

⁸⁰ March 1899 entry, *Journal*, 1: 150.

⁸¹ Some of the fruits of these labors were the exhibition at Durand-Ruel's gallery, which placed the group in the context of a larger, modern movement (as opposed to the more insular displays at St. Germain-en-Laye or Le Barc de Boutteville's gallery). Despite the fractures that these efforts revealed, they did succeed in giving the Nabis a more public, if not entirely coherent, identity. And despite the divisions of the Dreyfus affair, Denis assiduously cultivated a wider segment of the art world (including, as noted earlier, the ambivalent Signac).

⁸² Even Signac was aware of the intensity of this desire, to the extent that he briefly wondered if it was behind Denis's public anti-Dreyfusism. Signac, "Extraits du Journal III," 38.

introduction—would further this universalizing impulse. Denis’s early work had displayed emphatic distortions and patterns that were aligned with textiles and the decorative arts: elements that he had come to identify with an excessively individual, private expression. In his classical phase, Denis downplayed these elements and placed much more emphasis on order, structure, and overall harmony: a shift, I argue, from a more Baudelairean modernity to the more stable forms of an implicitly masculine modernism. But I will also show how this effort was ultimately about integrating the “masculine” strength and clarity of classicism with the more personal, subjective, “feminine” orientation of his early work, as a means of giving the latter (and in particular, religion) a more public role. Because Denis’s initial presentation of classicism was so focused on qualities associated with masculinity (vigor, strength), scholars like Katherine Kuenzli, Michael Marlais, and Mark Antliff have presented the artist’s classicism as a reactionary break with his Nabi past and the intimate emotion and decorations with which it is associated. Indeed, the artist’s greater participation in the “active life” that he associated with decorative painting included nationalist politics: by 1901 Denis was affiliated with the anti-Dreyfusard *Ligue de la Patrie française*, set up as an intellectual and political counterweight to the Dreyfusard *Ligue des Droits de l’Homme*. Yet Denis’s earlier distortions, which were associated with the expression of subjective emotion through form, reemerged in his work as excesses that critics described using terms like “awkwardness [gaucherie]” and “immaturity [puerilité].” The artist alternately desired to eradicate and embrace these irruptions into his classicizing framework. Regardless, his work inadvertently revealed an impure, fractured classicism of a kind more typically associated with Matisse. As I will argue, this impurity communicated his desire to retain

a role for individual and Christian feeling within the universalizing, masculine impulse that was classicism in this period.

Adrien Mithouard and *The Torment of Unity*: Decorative Simplification and the Reintegration of Emotion

Another of Denis's "public" activities, the journal *L'Occident (The West)*, played an important role in legitimizing feeling alongside reason.⁸³ Directed by his friend Mithouard, the journal began publication (decorated with the artist's drawings) in 1901 on the premise that France constituted a racial, territorial and religious unity, the fruit of the combined glories of Western civilization. Its articles paired a Barrèsian emphasis on instinct and feeling with an equal concern for reason, discipline and structure.⁸⁴ An animating force in the larger nationalist movement and within the *Ligue de la Patrie française* in particular (though it never fully endorsed his anti-Semitic populism), Maurice Barrès had moved beyond early fame as a champion of the "cult of the self" to a new, and equally influential, role as proselytizer of the cult of "the earth and the dead [la terre et les morts]." Instinct and emotion, which the writer and politician had long identified as the only efficacious sources of action, were reassigned from the individual to race and nation.⁸⁵

⁸³ Denis's important role in the journal was indicated in a December 10, 1901 letter from Eugène Rouart to André Gide, which labeled it "la revue Denis-Mithouard." André Gide and Eugène Rouart, *Correspondance*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2006). 626.

⁸⁴ Barrès's work was often discussed or featured in the journal itself.

⁸⁵ Much of the tenor of the nationalism that emerged with the Affair, at least in intellectual circles, could be attributed to Maurice Barrès. In his writings, reason and intellectualism figured as enemies rather than central features of French culture, for they interfered with an individual's (and ultimately, society's) emotional, instinctive connection to race and nation. For Barrès's increasingly physiological conception of race, and his emphasis on instinct and emotion over reason (he had a particular genius for synthesizing this fin-de-siècle trend, whose manifestations included Gustave Le Bon's crowd theory and Henri Bergson's

L'Occident's combination of feeling and reason was directed at the imbalance Mithouard had identified in the Affair, and which he had recently described in his *Le Tourment de l'Unité (The Torment of Unity)*. Mithouard believed that art, along with any human effort, was characterized by two competing impulses: on the one hand, by an individualistic, emotive rebelliousness (an “expressive” tendency, as he labeled it) that led to innovation and renewal but also to dispersed, incoherent efforts; on the other hand, by a stabilizing, “harmonious” tendency that built on, consolidated and purified prior attainments, providing them with a more collective, enduring character. This “dualism,” as Mithouard called it, had a great deal of affinity with Denis’s reflections on classicism (though Mithouard would never share Denis’s enthusiasm for the Renaissance, preferring instead the gothic and “primitives” like Fra Angelico).⁸⁶

In contrast to Denis’s discussions of the classical, Mithouard presented expression and harmony as two necessary tendencies in the search for a greater—but never quite obtained—synthesis.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, he thought, like Denis, that the Affair proved that individualizing, expressive tendencies had gone too far, particularly given what Mithouard viewed as the naturally harmonious character of the French race and culture, visible even in its language: “The beautiful individualist chimera is therefore in

promotion of instinct), see Zeev Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme française*, New ed. (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2000). Ch. 6. See also Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: the Avant-garde and Politics in Paris 1905-1914*: 54-63. Denis must have been attracted to Barrès’s emphasis on energetic, enthusiastic action in the service of the collective rather than the individual, though the artist may have had some qualms about Barrès’s pure equation of race, nation, and action with morality.

⁸⁶ Mithouard was most likely citing Denis when he wrote, in a chapter explicitly identifying Dreyfusards with individual expression and anti-Dreyfusards with harmonious solidarity, that “un artiste de mes amis reconnaît la sympathie de certains peintres pour l’accusé à une certaine composition diffuse et à un sentiment particulier de la couleur.” Adrien Mithouard, *Le Tourment de l’unité* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1901). 291.

⁸⁷ Mithouard’s dualism in some ways echoed the dynamic between the modern and the eternal introduced by Baudelaire in “The Painter of Modern Life.”

contradiction with our tradition of classical thought, virtually unbroken in popular use of the language”⁸⁸ An endless thirst for novelty, whether through science or cosmopolitanism, had allowed many to lose touch with this underlying harmonious stratum.⁸⁹ According to Mithouard, all the greatest, most enduring works were distinguished by this underlying harmony—even those dominated by expression.⁹⁰ Like Denis, Mithouard viewed the Affair as a salutary call to order: it had simultaneously restored clarity to the expressive/harmonious dialectic and revealed the harmonious tendency of those most in touch, whether by instinct or education, with French race and culture.⁹¹

The Torment of Unity provided a framework within which Denis could recuperate the emotional tenor of his earlier work, integrating it with his desire for classical discipline and synthesis. In a chapter entitled “...Towards Simplicity,” Mithouard pointed to simplification as the sign of a reaction against expressive excess, and the harbinger of a new, harmonious unity. Artists, he thought, were moving away from formal and expressive complexity, striving to reach the “essence” of their art. He identified this trend in the very movements, Impressionism and Symbolism, that Denis had once castigated for their unreflective egotism and sensuality. Mithouard’s framework therefore allowed

⁸⁸ “La belle chimère individualiste est donc en contradiction chez nous avec la tradition de la pensée classique, virtuellement continuée par l’usage populaire de la langue.” Mithouard, *Le Tourment de l’unité*: 289.

⁸⁹ See Mithouard’s description of the French context in the opening of the chapter relating his aesthetic dualism to the Dreyfus Affair. *Ibid.*, 281-83.

⁹⁰ “[L]a Beauté expressive ne se révèle que par un grand coup d’archet initial, et quand la nouveauté s’en éteint, elle ne garde de splendeur qu’autant que sa composition perpétue des alternatives harmonieuses.” *Ibid.*, 362.

⁹¹ In the “harmonious” group, Mithouard cited the presence of François Coppée, Henri Rochefort and Barrès (“d’instinct national”), as well as that of Brunetière, Jules Lemaître, René Doumic and Maurras (“nourris de nos lettres françaises”). *Ibid.*, 290.

Denis to reclaim these traditions as acceptable models. Similarly, in *The Torment of Unity* these simplifying efforts were seen as paving the way for emotion to reemerge in a purified form: “Following the abuses of an affected romanticism, the sentimental and the picturesque will have little by little been eliminated from artworks only to reemerge one day in a burst of purifying [simplifiant] passion.”⁹²

Elsewhere in the same chapter Mithouard made a similar statement about the role of emotion, one that correlated more closely to Denis’s writing on the classical: “Simplification involves removing from the artwork all that is not the result of a dominant idea, and no longer tolerating any emotions other than those of the mind.”⁹³ In other words, the artist would no longer rely on the immediate emotions associated with sensation, but instead filter and channel them so that the result was an emotion entirely directed, mastered, and purified by the mind. Appropriately, this statement followed a discussion of Denis’s work, in which the artist figured not only as the inheritor of the Impressionist and Symbolist traditions but also as a “decorator.”⁹⁴ Mithouard identified the many constraints and difficulties of site-specific decoration as an additional force for simplification. Its subordination to architecture demanded planning and preparation as well as a slower, more methodical execution, all of which favored emotional mastery and purification. Decorative subordination also required a formal, material simplicity: “[the decorator] must express himself by moderating the exuberance of his language [...] This

⁹² “[L]e sentimental et le pittoresque n’auraient été peu à peu éliminés des œuvres d’art à la suite des abus qu’en avait faits un romantisme affecté, que pour rejaillir un jour en un jet de passion simplifiante.” Ibid., 162-3.

⁹³ “C’est simplifier [...] de retirer de l’œuvre d’art tout ce qui n’y est pas le développement d’une pensée maîtresse et de n’y plus tolérer d’émotions que celle de l’esprit.” Ibid., 167.

⁹⁴ Denis was the only visual artist discussed at any length in the chapter. Mithouard remarked, for example, that Impressionism had liberated Denis’s vision, opening his eyes to the “brightness” of the universe. Ibid., 160 and 166.

difficult task lends sobriety and simplicity to painting.”⁹⁵ As examples, Mithouard evoked Denis’s early decorative work, including the St. Hubert panels, as well as two newer decorations in Le Vésinet. The first, *Exaltation de la Sainte Croix* (*Exaltation of the Holy Cross*) (Figures 4.14, 4.15, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18 and 4.19), was an altarpiece completed in 1899 for the chapel of the Collège de Sainte Croix; the second was a 1901 ceiling decoration for a chapel dedicated to the Virgin in the Église de Sainte Marguerite (Figure 4.20). The latter commission also included a second chapel (dedicated to the Sacred Heart) in the same church (Figure 4.21), which was financed separately and completed in 1903 (after the publication of *The Torment of Unity*).⁹⁶

Scholars have identified these works with Denis’s turn to conservative politics and a consequent sacrifice of modernist sensation and ambiguity in the interest of a classical “style.”⁹⁷ Certainly the “classical,” “harmonious” and “decorative” disciplining of emotion and material highlighted by Mithouard was on display in these works. Yet I will also indicate how “expressive” distortions, associated with the individual or “intimate” emotion of Denis’s Nabi period, continued to manifest itself in the artist’s work.

⁹⁵ “[I]l lui faut s’exprimer en modérant l’exubérance de son langage; son cas ressemble un peu à celui du poète aux prises avec une métrique. La peinture acquiert à ce jeu difficile des aspects de sobriété et de simplicité.” Ibid., 166.

⁹⁶ Denis received both commissions through Father Bergonier, then a parish priest at Le Vésinet and the former vicar of the artist’s parish in Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

⁹⁷ Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*: 139-40; Marlais, “Conservative Style/Conservative Politics.”

The Sainte-Croix Chapel in Le Vésinet

In the monumental decoration for the Sainte-Croix chapel, Denis's first commission for a religious institution, he depicted angels (their wings discreetly in shadow) and altar boys gathered to either side of an expanse of tiled marble that ended before a local landscape (Figure 4.18). In *Exaltation de la Sainte Croix's* (*Exaltation of the Holy Cross*) upper register, more angels surround and support a large, blood-stained cross, held up against a mass of clouds and a blue, star-filled sky (Figure 4.19). Denis's determination to instill a classical order and restraint was epitomized by the explicit signs of structure—notably the frame provided by two exemplary perspectival devices, the columned arbor and floor of marble tiles—as well as the importance, monumentality and clarity accorded to the figures. In this decoration, even more than in the St. Hubert panels, Denis restrained and focused his expressive “distortions” so as to intensify the spiritual center of his painting: the upper register, with its depiction of the holy cross. Instead of the curving and claw-like branches of the St. Hubert décor, the trees' greenery forms solid masses that frame and echo the clouds in this register, which contains the décor's most stylized, flattened forms. As a result, these “distortions” are not in fact distortions so much as Mithouard's “simplifications.” The entire décor is marked by a certain material asceticism: above all, the dry, flat application of paint, which resulted in unmodulated color, abrupt shadows and distinct forms.

This restraint won over the critics, including André Michel of the *Journal des débats*, who was willing to overlook “the inadequacies of [Denis's] drawing, the

puerilities that remain here and there in the excessive simplifications.”⁹⁸ He suggested that viewers instead sympathize with the artist’s “delicately persuasive” message: “virtuosity is, in truth, sterile; be humble [simple] and place on the walls gentle and harmonious decors.”⁹⁹ It was in this vein that Roger Marx, who had always been supportive of the Nabis’ efforts, praised *Exaltation de la Sainte Croix* in his 1899 salon review.¹⁰⁰ Drawing a parallel between the figures’ devoted absorption in their liturgical tasks and that of the painter in his own artistic labors, the critic recognized a sincere faith and a disdain for worldly concerns in Denis’s large, unmodeled expanses of color. According to Marx, the artist’s work was denuded of “the tricks of the trade,” an observation that echoed one of the meanings Denis had associated with “style châtié” (punished, disciplined) while denying the other (polished).¹⁰¹ Unlike the critics that attributed these qualities to an “insufficiency” of drawing and modeling, Marx argued that they gave the painting a persuasive, pedagogical edge, in keeping with its scholastic setting: “the emotion of his simple and frank language will have a greater hold upon the masses than the cold, learned artifices of empty rhetoric.”¹⁰²

Denis’s own writings in this period, many of which nuance the arguments laid out in “The Arts in Rome,” indicate that he was not averse to this pairing of pedagogical simplicity and persuasive emotion.

⁹⁸ “ce que son dessin a d’insuffisant, sur ce qu’il reste encore çà et là de puérité dans les simplifications excessives du parti pris qu’il a adopté.” Andre Michel, “Promenade au Salon,” *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (May 9, 1899).

⁹⁹ “[L]a virtuosité est, au fond, stérile; soyons simples et posons sur les murailles des décors harmonieux et doux.” Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Roger Marx features prominently in chapter two of this dissertation.

¹⁰¹ “les roueries du métier.” Roger Marx, “Les Salons de 1899,” *Revue encyclopédique* 9, no. 306 (July 15, 1899): 547. See footnote 64.

¹⁰² “[L]’émotion de son simple et franc langage aura plus de prise sur la foule que les artifices savants et froids des rhétoriques vaines.” Ibid.

The importance of Antiquity for us lies entirely in the following: that, in contrast to the modern (and Christian) tendency for the exactitude of *individual resemblance* and the expression of *sentiment*, Antiquity prefers the representation of a general type of humanity, in the most normal state of mind. Yet for me, the most exciting work lies in situating, in the simplest, clearest, and noblest form possible, a contingent, personal, lived emotion. That has been the traditional effort of the artist ever since individual consciousness became the center of everything. Arrive at a general expression of a particular emotion. Synthesis, generalization: render commonplace (The great man only aspires to make himself commonplace, Gide says).¹⁰³

Denis reported to Gide that his *Exaltation of the Cross* was successful despite some initial resistance from the “clerics,” presumably the patrons themselves. He hoped that it was because the work was “*general* enough to move [émouvoir] everyone.”¹⁰⁴ The artist once again presented the impulse to generalize and the impulse to incite emotion as a conjoined effort: the former would expand the scope of the latter, allowing an emotion that originated with the individual artist to resonate with the collective. Denis was seeking to bridge the perceived gap between what he now framed as a modern, Christian emphasis on feeling and individuality and the more generalized, universal mode of address he associated with Antiquity. In keeping with Mithouard’s emphasis on the reemergence of a purified feeling, Denis’s desire to synthesize the individual and the general appears to have been as much about preserving a role for modern—and

¹⁰³ “L’importance de l’antique pour nous est tout entière en ceci: qu’à l’opposé des tendances modernes (et chrétiennes) vers l’exactitude de la *resemblance individuelle* et l’expression du *sentiment*, l’antique préfère la représentation d’un type général d’humanité, dans l’état d’âme le plus normal. Or pour moi, le travail de situer dans une forme aussi simple, aussi claire, et aussi noble que possible une émotion contingente, personnelle, vécue, ce travail est le plus passionnant qui soit. C’est l’effort traditionnel de l’artiste, depuis que la conscience de l’individu s’est faite le centre de tout. Arriver à une expression générale d’une émotion particulière. Synthèse, généralisation: banaliser. (Le grand homme n’aspire qu’à se faire banal, dit Gide.)” January 1900 entry, Denis, *Journal*, 1: 159-60.

¹⁰⁴ “Est-ce que à cause de la bonne presse que j’ai eue pour les fragments exposés au Salon? Ou est-ce que c’est assez *général* pour émouvoir tout le monde? Ce qui est sûr c’est que tout le monde est content. J’ai l’espoir d’avoir d’autres ouvrages analogues à faire. Et me voilà devenu sinon le Fra Angelico, au moins le Flandrin ou l’Overbeck de mon temps.” July 11, 1899, Gide and Denis, *Correspondance*: 147.

Christian—individuality and sentiment (by making it an integral part of a collective language) as it was about rendering that modernity more general and timeless. Fra Angelico, whose communication of a “touching [...] human emotion” Denis had discussed in his 1896 “Notes on Religious Painting,” reemerged as the primary model. The artist perceived an excess of subjectivity (individuality and sentiment) to be a barrier to an implicitly masculine collectivity. But he also thought that, when properly regulated (i.e. generalized), that same subjectivity, due to its *modern* character and appeal, became an important means of addressing a wide audience. The individual/modern was no less instrumental than the general/classical in constructing a collective language.

The Sainte Marguerite Chapels

Denis’s next decorations were in many ways more obviously indebted to his Nabi past than his altarpiece for Sainte Croix. Though of recent construction (1896), both the Virgin and Sacred Heart chapels in the Église de Sainte Marguerite had gothic ribbed vaults and pointed arches, more appropriate to Mithouard and Denis’s admiration for the Middle Ages and “Primitives” like Fra Angelico than Denis’s more recent enthusiasm for the Renaissance. The artist chose to accentuate these architectural features by doubling and complementing them with non-figural, largely floral motifs, creating framing elements analogous—particularly in their use of stenciling—to those that had decorated many Nabi works.¹⁰⁵ Above all, the chapels are examples of the coordinated

¹⁰⁵ Although Denis’s evocation of a naturalistic ground and sky in the painted ceilings, particularly that of the Virgin chapel, invoked a Renaissance pictorial space transcending the wall and its gothic/Nabi frame, the Sacred-Heart chapel ceiling, completed second, also does much to deny that illusionism: the figures are larger, crowd (and thus reinforce) the picture plane, and are set against the unnatural green present in the St. Hubert décor.

Gesamtkunstwerks of which the Nabis had dreamed: within each chapel, Denis created not only the ceiling paintings but also stained glass windows and smaller *tableaux* that reflected and expanded upon each chapel's dedication: *Noces de Cana* (*Wedding at Cana*) for the Virgin chapel and *Coup de lance* (*Pierce of the Spear*) for the Sacred Heart chapel.¹⁰⁶ He also painted or stenciled small figural compositions in both the chapels and the intervening ambulatory. The conjunction of these elements serves to visually envelop the viewer, an effect that is enhanced by the small size of the chapels.

The gendered associations of these Vésinet décors (including that at Sainte Croix) were also more ambiguous than Denis's late 1890s turn to classicism would have seemed to allow. Vigor, strength, and plenitude—the qualities the artist had associated with classicism—were not what critics noted when discussing Denis's first opportunities to put his ideas into practice in ambitious decorative ensembles. The decorations were instead praised for their charming sentiment and tender faith. While acknowledging Denis's efforts to discipline his work, critics nevertheless associated these decorations with the primitivism of Fra Angelico rather than the formal sophistication of the Renaissance. In other words, they used the same, vaguely feminizing framework used to discuss Denis's Nabi works.¹⁰⁷ As if to counter—or rather, balance—this feminizing framework, the critic Gabriel Mourey emphasized the feminine/masculine

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of the Nabis, Art Nouveau, and the Wagnerian ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, see Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*: Ch. 4.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Octave Maus's response to the *Exaltation de la Sainte-Croix* at the Salon: "Les fragments d'exécution exposés simultanément par l'artiste font présager une décoration à la fois savoureuse aux regards et d'un sentiment délicat. [...] Ce qui séduit, dès à présent, c'est, en même temps que l'ordonnance des groupes, la candeur des visages et la simplicité des attitudes, le charme d'une vision douce et claire qui évoque, avec un sentiment personnel, foncièrement religieux, le souvenir des maîtres angéliques de l'Italie de jadis." Madeleine Octave Maus, "Le Salon de Paris," *L'Art Moderne: Revue critique des arts et de la littérature*, no. 22 (May 28, 1899): 181.

complementarity of the two chapels in the St. Marguerite church, in terms that recalled (but revised) Denis's "Notes on Religious Painting." Mourey, who corresponded with the artist while writing the article, associated the Virgin chapel with the decorations and rituals of "past months of Mary" such that "one relives the delicious troubles of a healthy, naive faith, [...] all those delights of the senses and the heart that leave an indelible mark on the sensibility of those who experience them."¹⁰⁸ He contrasted this atmosphere with that of the Sacred Heart chapel:

"The Virgin Chapel is an act of human tenderness; the Sacred Heart chapel is an act of faith with a male authority, with a tyrannical vigor. Here one must believe or not believe, but anything lukewarm is impossible. I have seen few religious paintings that impose themselves more victoriously or more frankly promote their convictions and belief. The chapel does not draw on feeling [sentiment], it wants to vanquish and convince the mind [...] one senses here an elevated, voluntary, reasoned affirmation [...] of belief."¹⁰⁹

Mourey identified this same kind of balance with the artist himself, arguing that Denis sought to temper seductive charm (still identified, even by Mourey, as the main characteristic of his work) with his "strong will for style."¹¹⁰ "[W]ere they not," he wrote, "so ordered and executed with such harmony, with such a unity of characterization, and with such a care to their expression, some of [Denis's] inspirations would risk seeming

¹⁰⁸ "les mois de Marie d'autrefois"; "on revit les troubles délicieux de la foi naïve et saine, [...] toutes ces voluptés des sens et du Cœur qui laissent dans la sensibilité de ceux qui les goûtèrent une empreinte ineffaçable." Gabriel Mourey, "Revue artistique: M. Maurice Denis, décorateur," *La Revue universelle*, no. 97 (November 1, 1903): 561. Letters between Mourey and Denis can be found in: Maurice Denis letters, 1896-1920 and Gabriel Mourey letters received, 1887-1913, The Getty Research Library, Special Collections.

¹⁰⁹ "La chapelle de la Vierge est un acte de tendresse humaine, la chapelle du Sacré-Cœur est un acte de foi d'une autorité mâle, d'une vigueur tyrannique. Il faut croire ici ou ne pas croire: mais toute tiédeur est impossible. Je vois peu de peinture religieuse au monde qui s'impose plus victorieusement et promulgue avec plus de franchise ses convictions et sa croyance. Elle ne fait point appel au sentiment, elle veut vaincre et convaincre l'esprit; cela est redoutable et l'on hésite avant de franchir le seuil de cette fournaise d'amour. [...] on sent ici une affirmation hautaine, volontaire, raisonnée [...] d'une croyance." *Ibid.*, 562.

¹¹⁰ "forte volonté de style." *Ibid.*, 564.

mannered, pretentious, excessively subtle, puerile.” But because it was sincere, Mourey argued, “this naïveté that some take for affectation is simply the normal, natural form of a human sensibility.”¹¹¹

This framing of sensibility and emotion as a normative means of apprehending the world, one that incorporated both the feminine and the masculine, became a central tenet in Denis’s drive to legitimize his art. Yet it is important to note the way that the artist, through Mourey, reasserted the role of masculine reason and authority in his work. If the Virgin chapel was seen as addressing the senses and the emotions in a way akin to the “months of Mary” (*mois de Marie*), a series of feast days focused on introducing children to the cult of the Virgin, the later Sacred Heart chapel was presented as a conscious, reasoned adoption of faith, mediated more by the intellect than the senses.¹¹² This presentation seems to have been motivated, at least in part, by politics. Marlais has pointed to the militant character of this décor and of the contemporaneous *La Vierge à l’École* (*Our Lady of the Schools*, Figure 4.22), a painting exhibited at the Salon de la Société Nationale in 1903. Denis reported in his journal that his anger and worry over the Combes laws had inspired the second work (which he referred to, tellingly, as *Our Lady of the Free School*).¹¹³ In the period between the completion of the Virgin chapel and that

¹¹¹ “telles de ses inspirations, si elles n’étaient ordonnées, mises en œuvre avec autant d’harmonie, avec une telle unité de caractérisation, avec un tel souci de l’expression, ne manqueraient pas de paraître maniérées, prétentieuses, subtiles à l’excès, puériles”; “cette naïveté que certains prennent pour une manière est simplement la forme normale, naturelle d’une sensibilité humaine.” Ibid.

¹¹² The *mois de Marie* and wider promotion of the cult of the Virgin were linked to the “matrifocal” religious practice many church officials saw as a means to rechristianize France. Seeley, “O Sainte Mère,” 873-74.

¹¹³ “Les lois Combes, le souci de l’action politique [...]—la fermeture imminente du collège du Vésinet et mes inquiétudes au sujet de la peinture qui en orne la chapelle—tout cela et le désir de réaliser une grande toile avec un motif de nature, de préciser avec d’amples formules les imprécisions de la vie—et je m’explique que la Sainte-Catherine, fêtée chez les Sœurs, m’ait donné l’idée, subitement, de Notre-Dame de l’École libre.” November 1902, Denis, *Journal*, 1: 182.

of the Sacred Heart, Prime Minister Émile Combes had moved to close the many unauthorized schools run by religious orders, including the one containing Denis's *Exaltation de la Sainte Croix*. It was the first of several decisions that would culminate in the 1905 separation of the Church and State. In *La Vierge à l'École* the children's piety before the concrete, luminous presence of the Virgin and Child—an encounter enabled by the self-sacrificing ministrations of the *Filles de Charité*—was an open rebuke to this policy, particularly given the evocation (in the map of France) of the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, which many had identified with France's diminished spirituality.¹¹⁴

Even before this new stage in the conflict between Catholicism and secular Republicanism, the subject matter of the Sacred Heart chapel presented a more obvious challenge to secularism than the Virgin chapel. In contrast to the latter's focus on an interiorized, ecstatic encounter with the divine, modeled by the ascending Virgin and the equally absorbed accompanying figures (similar to those in the lower register of the Holy Cross chapel), the Sacred Heart chapel displayed the public, evangelizing face of Catholicism. Above the altar, Christ stands upon a throne with open, outstretched hands, his "sulfurous" burning heart on display, and his gaze directed at the viewer. Across from him, above one of the chapel entrances, Denis represented a Parisian landscape focused on the still incomplete, and controversial, Sacré-Cœur Basilica in Montmartre, which had been dedicated to the Sacred Heart in repentance for the spiritual ills that had supposedly led to French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (Figure 4.23). Many viewed its construction as an affront to the working-class neighborhood and, more specifically, to

¹¹⁴ Specific information about the iconography of this painting and those of the Sainte Marguerite chapels is indebted to Marlais, "Conservative Style/Conservative Politics."

the defeated Commune. Seven saints and members of various religious orders were associated with this landscape, placed close to the picture plane and facing the viewer with explicit gestures of prayer or exhortation. Many of them were associated with the cult of the Sacred Heart. The décor also depicted other sites that were central to this cult or to French Catholicism in general, particularly in its most public manifestations: sites like Paray-le-Monial, the basilica of Saint Denis or Notre Dame in Paris.

These inclusions highlighted the centrality of Catholicism to French culture and history. Denis implicitly and explicitly proposed Christian values as the solution to France's social tensions: Christ's self-sacrifice (highlighted, notably, in *Coup de lance*, Figure 4.24) was the central reference in Catholic, anti-Dreyfusard critiques of individualism, but Denis also included a more direct, specific call for Christian solidarity in a tympanum vignette located beneath the representation of the Sacré-Cœur Basilica.¹¹⁵ Explicitly identified by the phrase "Love one another [as I have loved you]," the vignette showed bourgeois men and workers joined in harmony under Christ's auspices.¹¹⁶ What might appear a rather anodyne admonition took on a more aggressive cast in the context of alternative visions of solidarity, notably Republican Solidarism and the emerging labor movement.¹¹⁷ The vignette suggested that Christianity, rather than trade-unionism or the institutionalized politics of parliamentarism, was the panacea to social turmoil.¹¹⁸ Given

¹¹⁵ Anti-Dreyfusard invocations of Christ even provoked Dreyfusards to recast Dreyfus himself as a Christ figure. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*: Ch. 2.

¹¹⁶ "Aimez-vous les uns les autres."

¹¹⁷ See chapters two and the end of chapter three in this dissertation.

¹¹⁸ Though Marlais has emphasized the royalist character of this décor, this imagery of social reconciliation has as much or more affinity with the Catholic socialism of Comte Albert de Mun or even Marc Sangnier. For the state of this movement in the 1890s and de Mun's role in it, see Francesco Saverio Nitti, *Le socialisme catholique*, Collection d'Auteurs étrangers (Paris: Guillaumin, 1894). Ch. 10. On Sangnier's later opposition of "Social Christianity" with the Action Française's "Monarchal Positivism," see Michael Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism: the Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics*,

the didacticism and political implications of the Sacred-Heart décor, it is unsurprising that Mourey detected in it a “male authority” and “tyrannical vigor” that presaged the artist’s involvement in royalist nationalism.

Gaucherie and the Fracturing of Decorative Harmony

Denis had brought to bear two different approaches in St. Marguerite’s chapels, one more strongly identified with a private, feminized realm of religious experience, but whose latent political implications appeared fully realized in the other, more masculine authority projected in the Sacred-Heart chapel. But while Marlais was right to see in the Sacred Heart chapel the signs of a more militant, explicitly politicized turn in Denis’s art, this trend should not be read as entirely superseding the “feminine” aspects of his art. Rather like Mithouard or Mourey, Denis seems to have viewed these approaches as complementary, each serving the larger goal of national(ist) evangelization. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the continuing pressure on the artist to masculinize his art, which meant that his relationship to these impulses was characterized by defensiveness and ambivalence. Mithouard had portrayed the ascetic simplicity of decorative painting (Denis’s in particular) in subtly masculine terms, but as some of Mourey’s remarks indicated, it could also be read as an excessive, affected emulation of Primitives like Fra Angelico. In the latter case, Denis’s simplifications were dogged by charges of a feminized inadequacy and sentimentality.

1890-1914 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982). 76-100. See also my discussion, later in this chapter, of the Catholic critique of the Action Française.

This risk was made particularly apparent by the reception of *La Vierge à l'École* (Figure 4.22), which prompted accusations “of awkwardness [gaucherie], of naiveté, of bad drawing.”¹¹⁹ The clear, clean lines of the adult profiles and the simple, cherubic roundness of the little girls’ faces are similar to those found in the celebrated Sainte-Croix decoration, but the abbreviations of facture are even more pronounced. Elements such as the highlights or accessories in the children’s hair sit, barely blended, atop the painting’s surface, which is at times rough and scumbled. It was as if Denis wished, perhaps in spite of himself, to register the immediacy and urgency of the work’s inspiration (and rapidly executed sketch) even when he translated it into the more enduring medium of oil paint.¹²⁰ Denis wrote that his goal had been to “clarify in broad strokes the confusion of life”—suggesting that classical, decorative synthesis might alleviate the uncertainty and turmoil of the Combes laws—but the confusion resurfaced in an unconscious awkwardness that undermined Denis’s synthesizing efforts.¹²¹ The correlation between art and politics became too apparent. *Gaucherie* was thus aligned with the temporal immediacy of modernity and individuality rather than the *durée* and universality of classicism. It threatened to rupture the harmony of Denis’s decorations as well, even if contemporaries were more willing to read the (milder) formal abbreviations of works like the Vésinet decorations in terms of the conventions of a mural aesthetic.

“Yet,” Denis wrote, “I have never put so much effort into representing what I believe I saw. I immerse myself in the idea that study of Antiquity will reveal the

¹¹⁹ “Tous les critiques parlent de gaucherie, de naiveté, de mauvais dessin,” April 15, 1903, Denis, *Journal*, 1: 195.

¹²⁰ Denis wrote that the idea for the painting came upon him suddenly and was immediately realized in a rapidly-executed study (dated to the day in his journal) “à la colle.” November 1902, *ibid.*, 182. Part of the passage is reproduced in footnote 113.

¹²¹ “préciser avec d’amples formules les imprécisions de la vie.” *Ibid.* See footnote 113.

formula through which I can reconcile my natural expression (my awkwardness [gaucherie]) with a more general beauty.”¹²²

In other words, he was finding that conscious effort, one of the pillars of his “classical” method, was not enough to dissolve his own expression into a more generalized beauty appropriate to decorations: i.e. a beauty that would be more recognizable and acceptable to the general public, and which could thus contribute to a renewed, collective style. He thus looked for a means to reconcile *gaucherie* with an abstract, timeless—and for Denis, divine—beauty, seeking it in museums, monuments and churches throughout Europe, as well as in the aesthetic theories of Sérusier or the archaizing École de Beuron.¹²³ But he ultimately found that it was the very abstraction of the proposed models and solutions that was unsatisfying.¹²⁴ Many critics held that a more mature, accomplished execution would allow Denis to eradicate the awkwardness still visible in his circa 1900 decorations, giving fuller expression to his sincerity and feeling. Yet the passage quoted above also suggests that the artist believed this sincerity and feeling was itself inextricable from his *gaucherie*. *Gaucherie* thus had both a negative and positive connotation, both of them subtly feminized: an association with weakness and

¹²² “Pourtant je n’ai jamais apporté tant de conscience à représenter ce que je crois avoir vu. Je m’enfonce dans la pensée que l’étude de l’Antique me découvrira la formule par quoi je puis concilier mon expression naturelle (ma gaucherie) avec une beauté plus générale.” April 15, 1903, *ibid.*, 195.

¹²³ Denis’s friend and fellow Nabi Jan Verkade had entered into religious orders at the Beuron monastery (located in Germany) and affiliated himself with its search, driven by Peter Lenz (Father Desiderius), to recuperate the divine proportions lost after the Fall of Adam and Eve. Some of the school’s ideas were apparent in Denis’s association of Symbolism, in “Notes on Religious Painting,” with a divine mathematics. Denis visited Beuron in 1903, and later wrote a preface to the French publication of the school’s ideas: Pierre Lenz, *L’Esthétique de Beuron*, trans. Paul Sérusier (Paris: Bibliothèque de l’Occident, 1905). For more on the school and its influence on the Nabis, see Claire Barbillon, “Un canon d’art sacré: l’école de Beuron, entre la géométrie et le nombre,” in *Les Canons du corps humain au XIX^e siècle: L’Art et la Règle* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004). Sérusier would later incorporate the ideas of the Beuron school in his 1921 *ABC de la peinture*.

¹²⁴ See, already in February 1904, an ambivalent discussion of Sérusier and the Beuron school’s emphasis on rigid linearity and flat silhouettes: Denis, *Journal*, 1: 207-8.

inadequacy and an association with personal, sincere emotion. Though Denis wanted to escape the former, he still valued the latter even after his turn to classicism, and even though it posed a threat to the harmony necessary to decorative painting.

Primitive *Gaucherie*

In the ensuing years, he accordingly reformulated his discourse on classicism so that it focused less on will, effort and sacrifice, and more on a natural, instinctive synthesis of nature that could encompass *gaucherie*. Part of this shift had to do with his increasing appreciation for Paul Cézanne, whom he would briefly visit in Aix-en-Provence in 1906.¹²⁵ But this emphasis was clearest in Denis's renewed championing of Primitivism as a sign of the artist's passionate, sincere encounter with the world around him.¹²⁶ In an article inspired by the polemic surrounding the recent exhibition of "French Primitives" at the Louvre, published in Mourey's *L'Art et la vie*, Denis distinguished a "hieratic" approach to art from that of the Primitive.¹²⁷ The symmetrical, conventional syntheses of the former, based as they were on abstract theorizations, easily degraded into formulae. The Primitive, he claimed, "prefers reality to the appearance of reality," and thus conscientiously, and sometimes clumsily, adapted that appearance to his knowledge and

¹²⁵ See the account of this visit, and of Denis's identification of a natural, spontaneous classicism in Cézanne, in Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). 132-40. Shiff also discusses Denis's ambiguous, and shifting, use of the term *gaucherie* in relation to Cézanne.

¹²⁶ He identified this childlike appreciation in work ranging from the 15th century frescoes in the Kersnascleden church in Brittany to the school of Ingres. See the 1902 "Les élèves d'Ingres" and the 1904 "Un chef-d'œuvre inconnu de la peinture française au XV^e siècle," reproduced in Denis, *Théories, 1890-1910*.

¹²⁷ "De la gaucherie des Primitifs," *Les Arts de la vie*, no. 7 (July 1904). Reproduced in *Théories, 1890-1910*: 172-78. Denis had outlined many of the article's ideas in Fall 1903: *Journal*, 1: 196-98.

experience of the world.¹²⁸ Denis presented classicism as something of a middle ground: its syntheses/stylizations were indistinguishable from its naturalism. As a result,

[Classical Antiquity] seems not to have experienced the puerile doubts of our Primitives. It always subordinates its descriptive efforts to its technical means; it reveals no weakness, no impotence. It is not at all awkward [gauche]: it has no Primitives. [...] Classical superiority is born from the equilibrium between the sense of Beauty and the love of Reality.¹²⁹

Yet this perfection had a price: Denis argued that “Greco-Latin art is for the most part cold and bland” because it expressed a limited, easily mastered, range of emotion.¹³⁰ The Primitives, on the other hand, were inspired by their “Christian” passion for the “spectacle of Creation” to explore beyond their own artistic capacities—hence their “gaucherie.”¹³¹ The result, according to Denis, was “spontaneous,” “sincere” works that “exude Life.”¹³² His refashioning of classicism and Primitivism enabled him not only to assimilate these approaches as equally grounded in a “Western” taste for concrete, practical realities, but also to assert the value of the sensuality, materiality, sentimentality, and overall excessive (gauche) character attributed to the Primitive.¹³³ It prepared the way

¹²⁸ “Il préfère la réalité à l’apparence de la réalité. [...] il conforme l’image des choses à la notion qu’il en a.” “De la gaucherie des Primitifs,” 15.

¹²⁹ “L’Antiquité classique n’a guère connu ces cas de conscience. Il semble bien qu’elle ignora devant la nature les puérides inquiétudes de nos Primitifs. Toujours elle subordonna son effort descriptif à ses moyens techniques; elle ne trahit ni faiblesse, ni impuissance. Elle n’est point gauche: elle n’a pas de Primitifs. [...] C’est d’un équilibre entre le sens du Beau et l’amour de la Réalité que naît la supériorité classique.” Ibid., 15-16.

¹³⁰ “[L]’art gréco-latine est le plus souvent froid et sans saveur.” Ibid., 17.

¹³¹ “Le christianisme tout au contraire éveilla la passion de la Nature, les hommes d’Occident s’extasièrent au spectacle de la création. [...] Au lieu de se contenter, comme l’Antiquité, d’un nombre restreint d’émotions qu’ils surent traduire, les Primitifs s’efforcèrent de tout embrasser, de tout exprimer, —depuis les sentiments les plus délicats de l’âme humaine jusqu’aux jeux les plus subtils de la lumière. [...] Leur inexpérience vient de ce qu’ils ont multiplié les expériences; leur ignorance de ce qu’ils ont indéfiniment appris; leur gaucherie de ce que le monde était vaste et leur métier restreint. Ils ont voulu faire entrer dans le domaine de l’art le plus possible d’éléments: ils ont doté d’une valeur d’art tous les objets.” Ibid., 17-18.

¹³² “Si maladroitesses soient-elles, le charme de leurs formules, c’est d’être spontanées, variées, sincères, de sentir bon la Vie.” Ibid., 18.

¹³³ Denis emphasized “l’amour avide de l’Occident pour la réalité.” Ibid.

for a vision of classical principles enlivened by these qualities, one that paralleled Mithouard's notion of an underlying harmony renewed by the strivings of expression.

The Action Française

As much as this new value system reflected those of Mithouard and Barrès, it also pointed to concerns that would lead to the artist's increasing involvement with the nationalist politics of the Action Française (or the AF, as Denis so often referred to it)—an affiliation that would, despite their many shared ideals and multiple collaborations, lead to something of an estrangement between Denis and Mithouard.¹³⁴ Under the direction of Charles Maurras, the Action Française had gone beyond the Ligue de la Patrie française's anti-parliamentary stance to advocate a virulently anti-Republican monarchism. Even as Denis's desire for political action had intensified in the increasing polarization of Catholic and Republican politics and the removal of Catholicism from the public sphere, the Ligue had proved ineffectual: having consistently rejected an openly anti-Semitic, populist, or anti-Republican stance as too inflammatory, it had floundered politically. As for Mithouard, Denis may have concluded that there was not enough conviction or force behind the ideas espoused in *The Torment of Unity*. Writing to Madame de la Laurencie, whose friendship and conservative politics (like those of her husband and her father, the Catholic composer Vincent d'Indy) encouraged Denis's

¹³⁴ Denis reported to his friend Madame de la Laurencie that differing views over the Action Française were a source of tension between *L'Occident's* collaborators (June 24, 1908, M4642 and August 2, 1908 M4643), noting in a December 1, 1908 letter (M4647) that he had not heard from the Mithouards since writing them a letter praising the Action Française. Maurice Denis Correspondence, Musée Maurice Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France. Denis later referred to Mithouard's increasing hostility toward the Action Française in a journal entry marked "Fin d'année 1909," *Journal*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: La Colombe, 1957). 113.

support of the Action Française, the artist reported that Mithouard had no appreciation for the harmonious, Italianate beauty on display in Rome.¹³⁵ He concluded that Mithouard “defends the West against his own inclinations.”¹³⁶

Denis was therefore looking elsewhere for the concrete, practical action he had identified with the classical method, at the very moment that the Action Française was becoming known for just such a program.¹³⁷ Building on key components of anti-Dreyfusardism, and especially its critique of individualism, the AF argued that reason must be the principal guide of the action enshrined in its name. As its Maurrassian program subtly implied, reason was proposed as a corrective to an emotive anti-Dreyfusard patriotism:

The Action Française speaks to patriotism, when it is conscious, thoughtful and rational.

Founded in 1899, in the midst of political, military and religious crisis, the Action Française was inspired by nationalist feeling; it was its particular task to subject this feeling to a serious discipline.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Denis wrote that his own admiration for the city and its creations had been dampened by “l’indifférence de Mithouard pour la Beauté ‘harmonieuse,’ son horreur de l’italianisme.” January 28, 1904, published in *ibid.*, 1: 201.

¹³⁶ Mithouard “défend l’Occident contre son propre plaisir.” *Ibid.* Far from becoming a monarchist, Mithouard, like Barrès, became an elected member of parliament.

¹³⁷ Responding to an “enquête” on avant-garde reviews, Denis would write that the AF “donnait une forme concrète et une morale pratique aux velléités de l’Occident.” *Belles-Lettres*, n.62-66 (December 1924), 135-6.

¹³⁸ “L’Action Française s’adresse au patriotisme, quand il est conscient, réfléchi et rationnel. Fondée en 1899, en pleine crise politique, militaire et religieuse, l’Action Française s’inspirait du sentiment nationaliste; son œuvre propre fut de soumettre ce sentiment à une discipline sérieuse.” This text was printed on the back of the front page of the Action Française’s monthly review (in this particular case, the back of the review’s January 1, 1905 cover) once it shifted to monarchism under Maurras’s influence. See Albert Marty, *L’Action française racontée par elle-même* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1986). Édouard Drumont, in particular, was a model of impassioned, polemical patriotism (and writing) that Maurras sought to emulate but also to discipline. See Grégoire Kauffmann, “De Drumont à Maurras, une veine pamphlétaire,” in *Le maurrassisme et la culture*, ed. Olivier Dard, Michel Leymarie, and Neil McWilliam (Villeneuve d’Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2010).

In texts that became the basis of his political theory, Maurras identified excessive, individualistic sentimentality as the central element in Protestant Christianity and “feminine” Romanticism.¹³⁹ He implicated this sentimentality in a Judeo-Christian-Germanic anarchy that had been imported to France, leading to revolution and decline. For the French who were religiously inclined, Maurras advocated Catholicism, which he believed had given a Hellenic/Roman discipline to Christian feeling. For those, like himself, who were not Catholic, he proposed Comtian (or rather, Maurrassian) positivism. Both, Maurras believed, should ally themselves in the royalist cause: his reasoned, empirical analysis of history demonstrated that France was best served by authoritarian monarchy, the political regime that had allowed it to flourish.¹⁴⁰ This political orientation was associated with the promotion of classicism, whether that of Greco-Roman Antiquity or seventeenth-century Absolutism.

Denis’s continued, if often ambivalent, advocacy of the naiveté and emotion of the Primitives (and through them, that of Christianity) might have set him at odds with the Action Française. After all, the artist harbored doubts about classicism, and a number of commentators questioned the AF’s compatibility with Catholicism.¹⁴¹ Like Denis, they associated Christianity with sincere, divinely-inspired feeling, to which Maurras’s rather cold logic seemed anathema.¹⁴² Indeed, Neil McWilliam has associated the artist with

¹³⁹ McWilliam, “Qui a peur de George Sand?”

¹⁴⁰ Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism*: Ch. 2; McWilliam, “Qui a peur de George Sand?”

¹⁴¹ Marc Sangnier, the founder of a Christian labor movement (Le Sillon) aimed at reconciling Catholicism and Republican democracy through an emphasis on the equality and solidarity fostered by Christian love, was one of the first to criticize Maurras’s “Monarchal Positivism” in these terms. Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism*: Ch. 3, particularly 77-78.

¹⁴² Despite his admiration for Maurras, Barrès had a central role in the former’s association with a cold, unfeeling reason. Stéphane Giocanti, *Charles Maurras: Le chaos et l’ordre* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006). 211-12.

Mithouard's camp in the ideological conflicts between the AF and Mithouard's journal, *l'Occident*, highlighting the contempt Louis Dimier, an art historian and the AF's principal art critic, held for Denis's aesthetic models, Ingres in particular.¹⁴³

Yet Maurras vigorously refuted claims that his thought was anti-Catholic, while McWilliams's analysis of the AF's "empiricist" classicism points to its potential compatibility with Denis's conception of Primitivism. The AF championed classicism not only as a means of fostering clarity, order and discipline, but also because it held that classicism married concrete, practical experience with tradition.¹⁴⁴ As I noted earlier, Denis had begun to align Primitivism and classicism through their shared grasp of reality. And even Denis's emphasis on instinct was not as removed from this point of view as it might first appear, once instinct was framed as emerging out of the accumulated experience of a race and nation. Both the instinctive heritage emphasized by figures like Mithouard and Barrès and the rational, practical mastery promoted by the AF provided an outlook seemingly more grounded in reality. Denis thus saw these viewpoints on a continuum, in which the AF nevertheless transcended what he termed "our earlier nationalism" by transforming its instinct and sentiment into the concrete, empowering action the artist desired.¹⁴⁵ He would thus increasingly associate the AF with a joyous

¹⁴³ For the alignment of Denis with Mithouard, and Dimier's general disgust for archaizing, primitivizing tendencies, see Neil McWilliam, "Action Française, Classicism, and the Dilemmas of Traditionalism in France, 1900-1914," in *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870-1914*, ed. June Hargrove and Neil McWilliam (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), particularly 282-84; "Érudition et engagement politique: La double vie de Louis Dimier," in *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art en France au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Roland Recht, et al. (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2008), 410-17.

¹⁴⁴ As McWilliam explains, for the AF classicism "represented the aesthetic expression of an intelligence whose mastery of nature was rooted in experience through a discriminating appreciation of tradition." "Action Française, Classicism, and the Dilemmas of Traditionalism," 270.

¹⁴⁵ "C'est la guerre entre les deux fractions de l'Occident. Cela me navre; j'en viens à craindre à l'irréparable rupture. Mais enfin c'est une preuve de la grande vitalité de l'A.F. Pauvre Occident ! Je voudrais qu'il survive le mouvement jeune, qui, sorti des idées de Barrès et de Mithouard, dépasse de

optimism, later describing Maurras's *Investigations on Monarchy* as "a conquering book, an excellent alcohol that invigorates and makes one optimistic," and arguing that "the order we need consists as much of health, joie de vivre, the acceptance of life, as social hierarchy and the King."¹⁴⁶ His letters to Mme de la Laurencie—whose robust, stoicism he often contrasted with his own propensity to nervousness and dreams—were punctuated with admonitions to avoid the dangers of Romanticism (and by inference, effeminacy), no matter how "delicious."¹⁴⁷

Such observations placed the Action Française's influence in sharp contrast to Denis's sense of "our modern faith that brings forth nothing but fairly mediocre works, that relies on our sadness, and that turns its back on beauty."¹⁴⁸ He hoped that, through the AF, the melancholy of this rather severe, bleak faith would give way to a new, joyous outlook, oriented toward the future as much, if not more, than the past. By presenting royalism, classicism and Catholicism as the entwined, necessary foundations of a

beaucoup notre nationalisme d'antan!" Denis to Mme de la Laurencie, August 2, 1908 (M4643), Correspondence, Musée Maurice Denis.

¹⁴⁶ "un livre conquérant, un alcool de bonne qualité qui tonifie et rend optimiste," Denis to Madame de la Laurencie, July 15, 1909 (M6468), Correspondence, Musée Maurice Denis. Maurras's *L'Enquête sur la monarchie* (in which he invited intellectuals to reflect on monarchy and presented his own ideas on the matter) was initially published June through December 1900 in the *Gazette de France*, and then as a book in 1909.

The second remark was inspired both by a fortifying trip to Brittany (which Denis described as his "pays natal") and his admiration for Pierre Laserre's 1907 *Le Romantisme française: Essai sur la révolution dans les sentiments et dans les idées au XIX^e siècle*. "Le voilà le remède à toutes les neurasthénies: l'ordre dont nous avons besoin comporte aussi bien la santé, la joie de vivre, l'acceptation de la vie, que la hiérarchie sociale et le Roi." Denis to Madame de la Laurencie, June 24, 1908 (M4642), Correspondence, Musée Maurice Denis.

¹⁴⁷ "Il faut avoir horreur du romantisme, qui est une forme de l'esprit révolutionnaire, c'est-à-dire de l'esprit d'orgueil. J'ai été très romantique, je l'avoue, Racine m'ennuyait. [...] Maurras a écrit de belles pages sur l'esprit classique. Il est remarquable que les néo-monarchistes sont le plus souvent des néo-classiques. Aimons donc l'ordre pour sa beauté, et ne cherchons point de beautés dans le désordre, fut-il délicieux." Denis to Madame de la Laurencie, October 16, 1906 (M4637), Correspondence, Musée Maurice Denis.

¹⁴⁸ "notre foi moderne qui n'enfante que des œuvres assez médiocres, qui s'appuie sur notre tristesse et qui tourne le dos à la beauté." Undated [1906] letter from Denis to Mithouard after a visit to the rather austere pilgrimage site of La Salette, reproduced in Denis, *Journal*, 2: 45.

coherent French nation, the AF allowed him to imagine a future in which Catholicism would once again be an integral part of collective life, instead of being marginalized in the private, domestic realm of women and children. Indeed, much of the AF's rise was attributable to the 1905 separation of church and state, which replaced the Dreyfus Affair (Dreyfus was exonerated in 1906) as the movement's central, galvanizing grievance.¹⁴⁹ One of the most pertinent attractions of the AF's program was, I believe, the way it suggested that nationalism and religion were synonymous or at least analogous, the former serving as a manifestation of the latter in the political realm.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, classicism served as an acceptable public form of both royalist and/or religious expression, one eminently adapted to the present circumstances of secularization (which Denis sometimes likened to the persecution of early Christians). Classicism thus provided both royalism and religion with an aesthetic alibi, even if figures like Mauclair still detected the conservative nationalism underneath.¹⁵¹ So although scholars have rightly attributed Denis's increasingly reactionary politics to the 1905 separation of church and state, it is important to note the way the AF's preoccupations conformed to the logic of secularization: both separated a masculine public and political realm from the private and spiritual, perceived as feminine.¹⁵² In accepting classicism as the appropriate face of a

¹⁴⁹ Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism*: 91-100.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, Denis's framing of his Catholicism in a 1911 letter to Georges Desvallières discussing the possibility of a school of Christian art (a project that would become, after WWI, the Ateliers d'Art Sacré): "moi qui suis un réaliste d'action française, un positiviste endurci, et qui ne suis catholique que par besoin de Réalité absolue—j'aime, en ces occasions, m'inspirer des faits, et je cherche autour de moi, des exemples." Reproduced in Fabienne Stahl, "Les décorations religieuses de Maurice Denis (1870-1943) entre les deux guerres" (Doctorate, Université Blaise-Pascal de Clermont-Ferrand, 2009), 46.

¹⁵¹ See footnote 5.

¹⁵² Initially, the implications of this secular orientation remained largely unremarked. Sutton has examined Maurras's effort to demonstrate the compatibility of Catholicism and his integral nationalism via the separation of the political and spiritual realm, an idea that gained legitimacy from its (superficial) affinity with the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Despite the misgivings expressed mid-decade by Sangnier and, later,

collective, public art, Denis also accepted the grounds of secularization, including its gender norms, tacitly acknowledging the public realm as secular and masculine.

Terre Latine, Aristide Maillol, and the Legitimization of Gaucherie

The first of Denis's decorations to display a secularized classicism à la Action Française was his 1907 *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie* (*Latin Soil, Muse of Art and Poetry*, Figures 4.25, 4.26, 4.27, 4.28, 4.29, 4.30 and 4.31), an ensemble of canvases for the “modern style” (i.e. Art Nouveau) Parisian *hôtel* of Jacques Rouché, a successful industrialist increasingly involved in the arts.¹⁵³ Denis's canvases—*Les arts plastiques* (*The Fine Arts*, Figure 4.27), *La poésie* (*Poetry*, Figure 4.28), *Le paysage* (*Landscape*, Figure 4.29) and *La musique* (*Music*, Figure 4.30)—decorated the vestibule (Figures 4.25 and 4.26); the artist also designed a small stained glass window for the stairwell.¹⁵⁴ Since a steady stream of the cultural and industrial elite attended events organized in Rouché's home, it was an ideal, quasi-public venue for Denis to display his skills as a painter of secularized, classical scenes, and thus as a decorative painter *tout court*. With the patron's

in the pages of *Le Correspondant*, a wide-spread Catholic critique of Maurras and the AF did not appear until the end of the decade. Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism*: Ch. 3.

¹⁵³ Rouché had married into the perfume industry, making the business a commercial success. This financed his cultural activities, including *La Grande Revue*, which he acquired in 1907 and transformed into an influential literary and artistic review. Matisse's “Notes d'un peintre” appeared in its December 25, 1908 issue. Rouché would later become the director of the *Théâtre des arts* and then of the *Opéra de Paris*. For more on Rouché, see Dominique Garban, *Jacques Rouché: L'homme qui sauva l'Opéra de Paris* (Paris: Somogy éditions d'art, 2007).

¹⁵⁴ The Art Nouveau architects Tony and Pierre Selmersheim were responsible for *hôtel*'s interior architecture. Denis's decorations were among a number of works Rouché solicited for his new *hôtel privé*: paintings, objects, and other decorative elements by artists such as Albert Besnard, Georges Desvallières, René Lalique, and Théo van Rysselberghe proclaimed Rouché's status as an enlightened, modern patron of the arts. “Les décors de l'hôtel Rouché à Paris par Albert Besnard, George Desvallières, Maurice Denis et René Lalique,” *L'Atelier: Bulletin de l'association “Le Temps d'Albert Besnard”*, no. 5 (2009).

permission, the artist even organized a particular, invited showing of the décor, working to time it with a 1907 exhibition of his work at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery.¹⁵⁵

In place of the religiously charged sites of the Sacred Heart chapel, *Terre latine* displayed a generalized, Mediterranean landscape dotted with signs of its classical heritage.¹⁵⁶ A figure similar to the Virgin from the St. Marguerite chapel floats in the sky of *La Poésie*, reconfigured as a classical muse. Mythological scenes and a Greek temple coexist seamlessly in the décor with figures in medieval, vaguely contemporary, or traditional Provençal costume. The emphasis is on the continuity and renewal of tradition, ensured by the synthetic force of *la terre latine*. This unifying landscape, and the various arts it engenders, produce a joyous color and movement epitomized in the smiling dancers and soaring allegories. It was thus a vivid illustration of Denis's belief that classicism provided a vibrant, modern outlook.

As I indicated earlier, Denis came to associate the classical mastery of nature with instinct as much as effort, a spontaneous classicism he saw exemplified in Cézanne but also in the artist Aristide Maillol. At the bottom left-hand side of *Les arts plastiques* (Figure 4.27) Maillol can be seen sculpting a figure modeled by Denis's wife, but with another source of inspiration ready at hand: in the distance, a tiny Paris chooses between the beauty of Athena, Hera and Aphrodite. In 1905 Denis wrote that:

[Maillol's] art is fundamentally an art of synthesis. [...] But this simplicity, this grand style that we [the Symbolists, in which Denis included himself] sought amongst paradoxes, and found only by way of systems, Maillol discovered almost without effort, in himself.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Denis to Rouché [undated], Bibliothèque de l'Opéra, L.A.S. Denis, Maurice n. 6.

¹⁵⁶ Denis had recently gone on an artistic pilgrimage to southern France, where he visited Cézanne and other artists.

¹⁵⁷ "Son art est essentiellement un art de synthèse. [...] Mais cette simplicité, ce grand style que nous cherchions parmi les paradoxes, et que nous ne trouvions qu'à force de systèmes, Maillol les découvrit

In keeping with the *Action Française*'s conception of classicism, the masculine force of this synthesis was indicated through Maillol's grasp and mastery of reality, exemplified by the ample plenitude and earthy sensuality of his (female) forms. Denis associated this physicality with the sculptor's southern, Mediterranean heritage, which functioned as a guarantee of masculinity. He described the sensuality of Maillol's figures as more "Greek"—that is, more animal, more sexual—than Christian.¹⁵⁸

Denis's own works were often associated with a chaste innocence. Yet in this decoration he explicitly invited comparison between Maillol's sculpted, sensual nudes and his own female figures, particularly that of his wife and the swooping allegory in the sky. The rounded contours of the latter's breasts, stomach, and buttocks are sharply accentuated despite the décor's overall flatness.¹⁵⁹ In assimilating the sexualized plenitude

presque sans effort, en lui-même." From "Aristide Maillol," *L'Occident* n.48 (November 1905), 241-49, reproduced in Denis, *Le ciel et l'arcadie*: 101. This description of the sculptor's "don classique" was in marked contrast to Denis's own incessant, laborious searching; the painter had filled numerous articles with his theoretical ruminations, and combed museums all over Europe for artistic models.

¹⁵⁸ "Les chefs-d'œuvre de notre statuaire du XIII^{ème} siècle sont en tout comparables aux chefs-d'œuvre du V^{ème} siècle grec. Plus variés, plus vivants, plus expressifs, j'admets qu'on leur refuse le caractère d'humanité générale, et cette sorte de bestialité supérieure par quoi les statues de Maillol s'apparentent aux belles antiques. Mais du point de vue où nous sommes, à savoir le point de vue classique, convenons que les statues de Chartres par exemple sont d'un art aussi sobre, d'un style aussi châtié, d'un goût de proportion aussi pur que les plus belles figures grecques. Et il y a peu de représentations de la femme dans l'art du V^{ème} siècle qui soient aussi savoureuses que nos Vierges gothiques, grasses et souriantes." Ibid., 104-5. Note that Christian art was portrayed as equally sensual in its own right.

¹⁵⁹ In his correspondence with Rouché, Denis highlighted the importance of the human figure in the creation of a "distinguished" result, arguing that the stained glass windows for the stairwell should also include figures rather than merely foliage and landscape. "J'ai absolument besoin de votre avis pour le petit vitrail car j'ai reconnu l'impossibilité de faire quelque chose de distingué avec des feuilles et un paysage. Il faut du dessin dans un vitrail; j'ai dessiné deux figures, et serais heureux que vous m'approuviez." Denis to Rouché, December 2 [1906], Bibliothèque de l'Opéra, L.A.S. Denis, Maurice n. 5. Reproduced in Véronique David and Fabienne Stahl, "Les vitraux de l'hôtel Rouché," *L'Atelier: Bulletin de l'association "Le Temps d'Albert Besnard"*, no. 5 (December 2009): 70. The design for the windows is dominated by two female nudes, one an oft-repeated reprise of an Ingresque female figure from his 1897 *Figures dans un paysage de printemps (Bois sacré)*, and the other partially modeled on Maillol's *Femme accroupie*, exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1905 and specifically praised in Denis's article. At one point this work was titled *Pensée latine*, before being rebaptized *Méditerranée* in the twenties.

of Maillol's rounded, full-bodied nudes, Denis asserted his own masculinity and that of his art.

The painter stood to benefit from this alignment because, in his own portrayal of Maillol, the assured masculinity of the sculptor's classicism was combined with the same kind of primitivism and *gaucherie* identified as Denis's own greatest weakness: "this type of maladroit affirmation that communicates, ignoring accepted conventions, an artist's personal emotion."¹⁶⁰ Following up on his earlier writing on Primitivism, the painter argued that *gaucherie* enhanced rather than undermined Maillol's art. According to Denis, *gaucherie* infused an otherwise cold classicism with life, because its very awkwardness was a symptom of a new, personal—and thus modern—way of apprehending the world.¹⁶¹ This portrayal helped to inure primitivism and *gaucherie* from their emasculating connotations. Denis thus felt at liberty to align Maillol's primitivism with his female creations:

With what naïveté he sees his subject, and with what artlessness he sculpts it! He uses no tricks to conceal the audacity he permits himself with nature, the distortions with which he emphasizes a gesture, an attitude, the rhythm of a beautiful body. [...] Like his women, his art is naked and ingenuous. He has the same peasant roughness, the coarse health, and the habitual frankness that complicated civilizations find embarrassing. Admirable character! He brings together the virtue of a classicist and the innocence of a Primitive.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ "cette sorte de maladroit affirmation par quoi se traduit, en-dehors des formules admises, l'émotion personnelle d'un artiste." Denis, *Le ciel et l'arcadie*: 108.

¹⁶¹ In emphasizing this aspect of Maillol's art—in which the artist's vision was paradoxically modern due to its "primitive" naïveté—Denis's text followed in the footsteps of writing by Stéphane Mallarmé and others on Impressionism, though he differed in comparing it to the art of the middle ages or of Ingres.

¹⁶² "Avec quelle naïveté il voit son sujet, avec quelle ingénuité il le sculpte! Les audaces qu'il se permet avec la nature, les déformations dont il souligne un geste, une attitude, le rythme d'un beau corps, aucun tour de main ne les dissimule: on les voit bien, il n'entend rien nous cacher. Comme ses femmes, son art est nu est ingénu. Et comme elles aussi il a la rudesse paysanne, la fruste santé, et cette gêne que donne vis-à-vis d'une civilisation compliquée l'habitude de la franchise. Admirable nature! Il joint à la vertu d'un classique l'innocence d'un Primitif." Denis, *Le ciel et l'arcadie*: 109.

The figure of Maillol that Denis constructed was able to absorb even the awkward, the naïve, and the primitive in such a way as to strengthen rather than weaken his art. Denis imagined a new kind of plenitude that encompassed and synthesized the rather austere, yet practical classicism promoted by the Action Française with the naïve, even tender, emotion Mithouard and Denis admired in the Primitives—the same kind of sentiment abhorred by the AF as part of a degenerate, feminized romanticism. This reconstituted plenitude, which Denis imagined as greater than the sum of its sometimes awkward parts, can be read as a new kind of masculinity that absorbed and contained, instead of merely acting upon, the feminine.¹⁶³ Perhaps it was even an attempt to represent the human as opposed to the merely masculine. For while Denis glimpsed in the Action Française’s triumphant, synthetic classicism the possibility of a transcendent French unity, he also suspected that this monolithic classicism bordered on the inhuman: as he wrote to André Gide in 1904, “perhaps all this great classical effort *was beyond human strength [au dessus des forces humaines]*.”¹⁶⁴

This attempt at melding classicism’s masculine, generalizing impulse with a primitive naïveté was not entirely successful. In an August 1908 article praising Rouché’s *hôtel* as a concrete demonstration of the opinions espoused in his review, the designer Eugène Belville nevertheless critiqued Denis’s décor in explicitly emasculating terms:

I am irritated by the vulgarity of these chubby, short-limbed figures, by this skilfully maintained, childish naïveté, of which the puerility seems to increase with age and success.

¹⁶³ Denis in fact held that both Fifth-Century Greek art and Thirteenth-Century Christian art “ont réalisé des types idéaux d’humanité, par la plénitude de la forme.” *Ibid.*, 105. He believed that Maillol had managed to bring both to bear in his sculptures.

¹⁶⁴ See footnote 7.

Maurice Denis's niceties remind me of the awkwardness [gaucherie] of those big boys on whom their mothers' lingering tenderness has imposed for too long the sailor collar and bare calves.¹⁶⁵

In his journal, Denis reported an analogous judgment, received second-hand from Degas:

At the inauguration of the paintings for Rouché, Poujaud passes on a remark Degas made about me: "That boy only makes asses that have never farted." My exhibition and the paintings for Rouché do not perhaps have very grand qualities; but I can only hope that the sensibility contained therein is nonetheless something exceptional for our time.¹⁶⁶

The Gentle Harmony of an *Éternel Printemps*

As if to fulfill this notion that the value of his work lay in feeling rather than grandeur,

Denis's next decoration played as much, if not more, on sensibility as classicism.

Commissioned by Gabriel Thomas, Denis's friend, patron, and a fervent Catholic,

Éternel Printemps (*Eternal Springtime*) was inspired, like so many of Denis's earlier

works, by local Ile-de-France landscapes. It was meant to bring the springtime that Denis

had seen through Thomas's dining room windows into the dining room itself, giving it an

¹⁶⁵ "[J]e m'irrite de la vulgarité de ses figures poupines aux membres courts, de cette naïveté enfantine savamment entretenue dont la puérilité semble s'exaspérer avec l'âge et les triomphes. Les gentillesses de Maurice Denis me font songer à la gaucherie de ces grands garçons auxquels la tendresse attardée des mères impose trop longtemps le col marin et les mollets nus." Eugène Belville, "Un Hôtel particulier à Paris," *L'Art décoratif* (August 1909): 49-50. This passage is partially reproduced in Violaine Béraud-Sudreau, "Maurice Denis à l'hôtel Rouché: Terre latine, inspiratrice des arts," *L'Atelier: Bulletin de l'association "Le Temps d'Albert Besnard"*, no. 5 (December 2009): 36.

¹⁶⁶ "Poujaud, à l'inauguration des peintures de Rouché, me conte le mot de Degas sur moi : 'Ce garçon-là, il ne fait que des culs qui n'ont jamais pété.'

Mon exposition et les peintures de Rouché n'ont sans doute pas de bien grandes qualités; mais je ne puis croire que la sensibilité qui y est contenue ne soit tout de même en notre temps quelque chose d'exceptionnel." Denis, *Journal*, 2: 62. Paul Poujaud was a lawyer and friends with many of the same musicians and artists in Denis's circles, including Degas.

Denis had made an analogous observation to Madame de la Laurencie in 1906, in which he both lamented and seemed to revel in his desire for an art of feeling and sensation: "elles [his paintings] sont fort entachées de debussysme et c'est au moment où je suis le plus attiré par la beauté classique que je me livre le plus complètement aux fantaisies de l'impressionnisme et du chromatisme le plus exaspéré. Je viens d'écrire un article [...] où je condamne sévèrement tout ce que je pratique habituellement dans ma peinture." Denis to Mme de la Laurencie, November 25, 1906 (M4638), Correspondence, Musée Maurice Denis.

“eternal” character with evident religious implications. The ten panels—which entirely covered walls interspersed with doors, windows and a mirror (Figures 4.32, 4.33, 4.34 and 4.35)—depicted a springtime landscape dominated by whites, blues and greens and featuring scenes of women and children more indebted to Nabi Symbolism than classicism. The décor’s palette and many of its motifs can be traced back to Denis’s earlier spring-themed decorations for the Chausson family: above all the 1896 *Temps des lilas* (also known as *Le Printemps*) (*Time of Lilacs* or *Springtime*, Figure 4.36), but also the 1894 *Avril* (*April*, Figure 4.37), with its flower-bearing women.

Also like earlier Nabi works (such as his frieze for Bing), this decoration’s four largest panels evoked key components of traditional womanhood, but tied them even more directly to Catholic ritual.¹⁶⁷ *Le Bain* (*The Bath*, Figure 4.32) alluded to communion, *La Couronne de fleurs* (*The Wreath of Flowers*, Figure 4.33) featured Denis’s favorite symbol of engagement and marriage, and *La Madone* (*The Madonna*, Figure 4.35) doubled as an homage to both the Virgin and motherhood in general. This latter panel was a reformulation of the artist’s 1907 *Le Mois de Marie* (*The Month of Mary*, Figure 4.38), thus invoking the feminized ritual Mourey had associated with Denis’s Virgin chapel. *Le Mois de Marie*’s flowering almond trees also permeated *Éternel Printemps*, their blossoms echoed and amplified by the painting’s dappled surface. This inevitably drew comparisons with Impressionist facture.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ The brightly patterned dresses of the central figure in *Les Musiciennes* (*The Musicians*) and *La Madone* also recalled similar motifs from his Nabi period, and which had continued to characterize many of his depictions of domestic life.

¹⁶⁸ Mauclair, who in 1905 had accused Denis of forsaking a national, Impressionist tradition for a foreign, Italianate classicism, wrote that “ce Primitif [Denis] n’ignore rien des plus louables trouvailles de l’impressionnisme, que le bienheureux Fra Angelico, l’un de ses patrons, soupçonnait déjà.” Camille Mauclair, “Le Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts,” *Revue bleue* 9, no. 17 (April 25, 1908).

As if to counterbalance both the décor's Impressionist tendencies and its risk of being labeled a religious work, in eight of the panels (the two others were placed above doors) Denis incorporated simulated bas-reliefs in which his chosen theme(s) appeared in a more classical and/or secular light. For example, in *La Couronne de fleurs*'s bas-relief a nude youth venerates the barely draped female figure (also crowned with flowers), while beneath the Madonna a mother offers her breast, its roundness aligned with the nearby apples, to an approaching child. If Denis associated the Christianity, Catholic ritual, and Symbolist "Impressionism" of the central scenes with chaste, virginal youth, in the bas-reliefs he associated the harvest, carnality, fertility, and maternity with a classical plenitude.¹⁶⁹ Yet once again the artist proposed a kind of melding of the primitive/impressionist and the classical, with the latter as the eventual fruit of the former's innocence. As one critic pointed out, the white-robed figures were "sometimes like chaste nymphs and sometimes like girls taking their first communion."¹⁷⁰ This combination may have been what led a Swiss critic to describe Denis as a product of France's "secular Catholicism."¹⁷¹

The décor's blending of feminine, innocent religiosity and classical fecundity was generally well-received. Though many critics continued to censure Denis for "puerility," "gaucherie" and a precious artificiality (one going so far as to argue that Thomas would

¹⁶⁹ Roger Marx also noted how the bas-reliefs provided an underlying structure to the decoration: "Cette œuvre d'un poète ému, sensible, décèle un décorateur admirablement versé dans les lois de son art. M. Denis a su atteindre l'unité par la localisation opportune des tons, par la répartition heureuse des volumes et des masses, par le balancement des lignes verticales et horizontales, enfin par le lien d'un soubassement en camaïeu, fertile, lui aussi, en inventions ingénieuses et exquises." Roger Marx, "Le Vernissage de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, no. 16 (April 18, 1908): 143.

¹⁷⁰ "tantôt pareilles à de chastes nymphes et tantôt à des premières communiantes." R.-M. Berry, *L'Éclair* (April 14, 1908). Press clipping in *L'Éternel Printemps*'s object file at the Musée Maurice Denis.

¹⁷¹ Georges Gaulis, "Les Salons de Peinture: La Société nationale," *Journal de Genève: National, politique et littéraire*, no. 105 (April 15, 1908).

soon cover up the décor with commercial posters), enough of them were struck by the overall “charm,” “grace,” and “freshness [fraîcheur]” of *Éternel Printemps* to render its exhibition a success.¹⁷² A number of them commended Denis for his ability to establish a soothing harmony. The critic André Beaunier congratulated Denis as among the few, in salons bursting with “decorative” paintings, to have understood this harmonious quality as the essence of the genre. Denis, he wrote, “had avoided turbulent subjects; the scenes he painted can last without becoming absurd: they have a character of youthful eternity. [...] Mr. Maurice Denis has painted repose, calm life, serene gaiety.”¹⁷³ Yet there were also a certain number of caveats to this praise: if, according to Beaunier, decorative painting was a sign of “exterior and collective life,” it was a collective life more aligned with mass culture than the richer, more intellectual pleasures that the critic associated with books and easel paintings.¹⁷⁴ As for Denis, Beaunier described his harmonies as

¹⁷² The review in *l’Hippogriffe* (April 30, 1908) was particularly caustic, while the critic in *l’Univers* (April 23, 1908) made the dismissive remark about covering up the décor with posters. In Gide’s *La Nouvelle Revue* (May 15, 1908), Chervet criticized Denis for thinking that the Primitives’ “défauts, ou plutôt leur manque d’expérience, leur mauvaise technique, encore balbutiante et informe” could produce the same emotion now that it did in their own time, when in fact (ironically, echoing Denis) it was their “effort,” their “ferveur et sincérité” that should be emulated. But he saw enough positive qualities in Denis’s oeuvre to indicate a great future, while Berry (with some reservations, in *L’Éclair*, April 14, 1908), Roger Marx (see footnote 169), Henry Ghéon (*Le Siècle*, April 14, 1908), and Édouard Sarrazin (*Journal des Débats*, April 15 1908) seemed to think that that future had arrived. Press clippings in *Éternel Printemps*’ object file at the Musée Maurice Denis.

¹⁷³ “Enfin, louons M. Maurice Denis d’avoir choisi, pour décorer une demeure privée, d’aimables et plaisants motifs. Il a évité les sujets turbulents; les scènes qu’il a peintes peuvent durer sans devenir absurdes: elles ont un caractère de jeune éternité. [...] M. Maurice Denis a peint le repos, la calme vie, la sereine gaieté.” André Beaunier, “Les Salons de 1908,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 1 (June 1908): 383-84. Maclair made a similar observation, arguing that the painting had no subject beyond its formal harmony: “La seule raison, le seul sujet, sont le désir d’assembler des lignes et des tonalités dans le but de réaliser des harmonies ornementales capables d’inspirer une joie calme, de baigner l’âme d’une atmosphère lyrique, tendre, suave.” Maclair, “Le Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts,” 527-28.

¹⁷⁴ “C’est le plaisir des yeux; c’en est l’amusement. [...] Il convient cependant de noter que cette peinture ne semble pas solide. Elle paraît fragile comme l’improvisation [...] Louons ces peintres qui, modestes, après tout, ne songent pas à la postérité. [...] Ils font, en somme, de la peinture décorative. [...] Le tableau passera de mode, comme le livre. Le temps où nous vivons, temps de vie extérieure et de vie collective, préfère au livre le théâtre et au tableau de chevalet un ensemble décoratif. [...] Le lecteur solitaire a plus de loisir attentif que n’en a une turbulente foule; aussi le livre peut-il être plus chargé de pensée, plus délicat

particularly appropriate to *private* spaces, and feared that his “delicate art” was rather limited.¹⁷⁵ In *Le Petit Temps* Thiebault-Soisson, who mistakenly supposed the work to be another décor for a young girl’s room, made an analogous observation. Denis, he held, had succeeded in making his “ideal of chastity, whiteness and purity” “intelligible to everyone,” but perhaps not to everyone’s taste.¹⁷⁶ In other words, Denis was achieving his desire for a more classical (i.e. generalized) address, but still falling short of classicism’s masculine, universalizing plenitude.

Psyché: Impure Classicism, Ruptured Harmony

In his next decoration, Denis seemed determined to transcend the gentle, Impressionist harmony and feminine, domestic orientation of *Éternel Printemps*. Count Harry Kessler reported that when he remarked of the latter work (during a visit to Denis’s studio in February 1908) that “[i]t is a symphony in white, but it’s not dull,” the artist disagreed:

“I am tired of this overly gentle tonality of our climate [...] When drawing inspiration from it one unavoidably recreates the same harmonies [the Impressionists] already created. Something else must be found now. I would like to return to the more solid tones of the Midi. I am persuaded that Cézanne owed much of his solidity to the fact that he was from the Midi and used its tones.” He pulled down a sketch of men bathing at the Lido. “When I saw that, I was blown away. It was the first time I had seen naked men. Until then I had only seen

de forme et plus fin qu’une pièce de théâtre. Je ferais entre le tableau et l’œuvre décorative une pareille comparaison.” Beaunier, “Les Salons de 1908,” 361-62.

¹⁷⁵ “Quelles sont les ressources de cet art délicat? Je les crois un peu limitées, à vrai dire.” Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Thiebault-Soisson described the work as “la manifestation souriante et aisée du rêve d’art qu’il a porté en lui si longtemps sans arriver, malgré tous ses efforts, à lui donner une forme accomplie. Maître aujourd’hui de sa main et sûr de sa pensée, il s’exprime librement, en une langue conventionnelle à coup sûr, mais intelligible pour tous. A l’idéal de chasteté, de blancheur et de pureté qu’il nous offre, on a le droit d’en préférer d’autres, mais on ne peut lui nier sa conquête et l’on devra bon gré mal gré reconnaître qu’il a ouvert des horizons nouveaux à notre art.” *Le Petit Temps*, April 14, 1908, press clipping from the object file.

models in a studio. This one here (pointing to one of the figures) was of an entirely brown, almost green tone. The Germans, the Americans were pink.”¹⁷⁷

Though Denis made no mention of Matisse and the Fauves, this passage indicates the extent to which their example had made Impressionist/Symbolist tendencies seem weak and passé. Delving into the sketch that Denis showed to Kessler helps draw out the aesthetic conclusions that the artist drew from the Fauve example. He evoked what must have been the same sketch (Figure 4.39) in a December 12, 1907 letter written to Gide from Fiesole.¹⁷⁸ Despite his general disappointment with his recent stay in Venice, Denis reported with pleasure his family’s visits to the Lido,

where there were [...] the most beautiful naked bodies that I’ve ever seen: in the sun, a people of every sort of bronze, of every sort of copper. I did a large sketch of it that I’m going to call *Haiatalnefous* or *The Captives*. You would have loved the golden flesh, and the tired attitudes of all these people that were simply, and unhurriedly, sunbathing.¹⁷⁹

In his journal, the striking color of these bodies was also associated with that of the sea:

¹⁷⁷ February 27, 1908 entry in Harry Kessler, *Journey to the Abyss: The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler, 1880-1918*, trans. Laird McLeod Easton (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011). 444. I have modified and supplemented Easton’s translation, which truncated part of the passage. The parts of Kessler’s journal related to Denis are reproduced (Kessler wrote in German but reported French speech in the original language) in annex in Carina Schäfer, *Maurice Denis et le comte Kessler (1902-1913)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997). The original French (Schäfer, 217-18) is: “C’est une symphonie en blanc, cependant ce n’est pas fade”; “Je suis fatigué de cette tonalité trop douce de notre climat; les Impressionistes ont tiré de là tout ce qu’on en peut tirer. Quand on s’en inspire, on refait fatalement les mêmes harmonies qu’ils ont déjà faites. Il faut trouver autre chose, maintenant. Je voudrais revenir aux tons plus solides du Midi. Je suis persuadé, que Cézanne a dû beaucoup de sa solidité à ce qu’il était du Midi et se servait des tons du Midi. [...] Quand j’ai vu ça [the bathers at the Lido], j’ai été ébloui. C’est la première fois que j’ai vu des hommes nus; jusqu’alors, je n’avais vu que des modèles dans un atelier. Celui-là était d’un ton tout uni brun, presque vert. Les Allemands, les Américains étaient roses.” The German count was the former director (1903-6) of the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Weimar, where he had had Henry van de Velde incorporate works by Denis and other artists into his apartment. See Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*: 110.

¹⁷⁸ As concluded in a recent exhibition of Denis’s work: Brigitte Richart, *Maurice Denis au fil de l’eau (exposition 21 avril-22 septembre 2013)* (Granville: Musée d’art moderne Richard Anacréon, 2013).

¹⁷⁹ “Les enfants s’ennuyaient, sauf au Lido, où il y avait [...] les plus beaux corps nus que j’eusse jamais vus: au soleil, un peuple de tous les bronzes, et de tous les cuivres. J’ai fait de cela une grande esquisse que j’appellerai: *Haiatalnefous* ou *Les Captifs*. Vous auriez aimé ces chairs dorées, et les attitudes fatiguées de ces gens qui tout simplement prenaient lentement des bains de soleil.” Gide and Denis, *Correspondance*: 269.

Coming back from the Lido (a little sad at the end when we saw nothing but pale Germans in black swimsuits rather than bronze men in pink trunks), there were evenings where it was truly a sea of color spread upon the water's surface. No transparency: vibrant, opaque, heavy colors, like draperies by Veronese.¹⁸⁰

These passages clarify what Denis meant by solidity. He had long been preoccupied with color as the painterly equivalent of light: a means of *representing* rather than reproducing the world. The artist had already laid out this distinction in relation to the Fauves in 1906: while the latter attempted to reproduce the “painful, blinding sensation” of harsh sunlight, an artist like Cézanne achieved a greater harmony of *color* as opposed to light.¹⁸¹ Denis was still seeking to transcend raw nature through an aesthetic harmony that spoke to both man and the Divine:

Our error was to look for light above everything. We needed to look first for the kingdom of God—that is, the expression of our soul in Beauty—and the rest would have been given with it. [...] What is important, is that a painting constitute a harmony of color [...] there is something more powerful than the sun: that paramount faculty [of the imagination] that chooses, decides and elucidates, transforming a confused sensation into a work of art, reconstructing the world in the image of man.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ “En revenant du Lido (un peu triste à la fin quand on ne voyait plus que de pâles Allemands vêtus de costumes noirs au lieu des hommes de bronze en caleçons roses), il y eut des soirs où c’était réellement une mer de couleur étalée à la surface de l’eau. Pas de transparences: couleurs vives, opaques, lourdes, comme des draperies de Véronèse.” Denis, *Journal*, 2: 75.

¹⁸¹ “Ce qu’ils [Matisse and the Fauves] nous restituent du Soleil, c’est le trouble rétinien, le frisson optique, la pénible sensation d’éblouissement, le vertige que donne en plein midi d’été un mur blanc ou une esplanade.” “Chronique de peinture,” *L’Ermitage* n. 12 (December 15, 1906), 321-26, reproduced in *Le ciel et l’arcadie*: 119.

¹⁸² “L’erreur des uns et des autres, notre erreur à tous, ç’a été de chercher avant tout la lumière. Il fallait chercher d’abord le royaume de Dieu et sa justice, c’est-à-dire l’expression de notre âme en Beauté, et le reste nous eût été donné par surcroît. Il n’est pas important de rendre ou de ne pas rendre l’éclat véritable du soleil, de lutter avec lui de luminosité: les pigments que nous employons et qu’on eut le grand tort d’assimiler aux couleurs du spectre, ne sont que des boues colorées, qui ne restitueront jamais la grande lumière du soleil. Ce qui importe, c’est qu’un tableau constitue une harmonie de couleurs. [...] il y a quelque chose de plus puissant que le soleil: c’est cette faculté maîtresse [l’imagination] celle qui choisit, qui décide et qui élucide, qui fait d’une sensation confuse une œuvre d’art, et qui reconstruit le monde à l’image de l’homme.” *Ibid.*, 120-21.

This process was a means of attaining the eternal truth behind nature's apparent ephemerality. Denis described its success or failure in terms of a masculine sexual potency or impotence:

We linger [...] in the *innocent* games of a capricious sensibility. [Nature] is still only the somewhat vague and ghostly substratum of our subjectivities; it [elle] escapes our embrace, perhaps because we only know how to *seize* its shimmering, subtle exterior, to *tickle* and *tease* it. Completely different, and *fertile*, was the relationship of an artist like Titian with nature. Ah, how *male* and generous was classical art!¹⁸³

In other words, modern artists were stuck at first base; classical artists went all the way.

Denis's visits to the Lido allowed the artist to ground this virile plenitude in his own experience of a transient nature (the lagoon) and flesh (rather paradoxically, the naked male body) transformed into opaque, enduring color. Recall that Denis, like the Action Française, feared the classical might become too abstract and academic if disconnected from reality. In the Lido sketch a frieze of nudes, most of them male, are set against the stone of the architecture and the bright aquamarine blue of the Venetian lagoon. These nudes are arranged so that their varied flesh tones—the coppers, bronzes and pinks described by Denis—heighten and play off of one another. The contrasts between the bodies encourage the viewer to see them as surfaces of pure color, but glistening highlights serve to recall slick, humid skin. Denis would nevertheless restrain this latter effect in his follow-up to *Éternel Printemps*: the monumental decoration *Histoire de Psyché* (*History of Psyche*, Figures 4.40, 4.41, 4.42, 4.43 and 4.44).

¹⁸³ “Nous nous attardons au trop facile exercice des annotations, aux jeux innocents d’une sensibilité capricieuse. Elle [la nature] n’est encore que le substratum un peu vague et fantomatique de nos subjectivités, elle échappe à notre étreinte, et c’est peut-être que nous ne savons la saisir que dans le chatolement et la subtilité de ses apparences, que la lutiner et la chatouiller. Tout autres et autrement féconds étaient les rapports qu’un Titien, par exemple, entretenait avec la nature. Ah! Que l’art classique était donc mâle et généreux.” Ibid., 123 (emphasis added).

This decorative ensemble was created for a large music room in the home of the Russian businessman, and avid art collector, Ivan Morozov.¹⁸⁴ The tale of Psyche, based on the account in Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, was an ideal subject for Denis's preoccupations: it had long been seen as an allegory of the immortality of the soul, obtained through love. The nature of that love, equally carnal and sacred, mirrored the duality that the artist hoped to achieve: giving his religious sentiment a classical lineage that might legitimize it in the secular eyes of the Republic and the Action Française, even while sanctifying the classical for a Catholic audience.¹⁸⁵

Denis exhibited the decoration at the Salon d'Automne in Fall 1908, but he was already showing sketches and a full-scale preparatory study for the work to Kessler in February, right after pulling out the Lido sketch. The décor was meant to build upon the new direction visible in that earlier sketch, while radically simplifying it. As Denis said of the work to Kessler, "I would like it to be like large drawings. I would like to fill the contours with nearly flat tones. While [in the *Éternel Printemps*'s nudes] there is a multitude of small, juxtaposed touches of color, green, rose, yellow, white, I am planning to do this nude [from *Psyché*] with only 2 tones."¹⁸⁶

Of the five panels, the first, *L'Amour s'éprend de la beauté de Psyché, objet innocent du culte des mortels et de la jalousie de Vénus* (*Love Falls for the Beauty of*

¹⁸⁴ Morozov was the primary Russian collector of modern French art, alongside Sergei Schukin.

¹⁸⁵ Despite the success of his decorations in Le Vésinet, Denis would not receive any significant religious commissions until his decoration of the apse of the *église Saint-Paul* in Geneva, completed in 1916. For the possible reasons behind this gap, see Stahl, "Les décorations religieuses de Maurice Denis," 24-51.

¹⁸⁶ "Je voudrais que ce soit comme de grands dessins. Je voudrais remplir des contours avec des tons presque plats. Tandisqu'ici [sic] [referring to *Éternel Printemps*], dans un nu il y a une multitude de petits tons juxtaposés, du vert, du rose, du jaune, du blanc, je compte faire ce nu ci par exemple [...] avec deux tons seulement." February 27, 1908 entry in Kessler's diary, reproduced in Schäfer, *Maurice Denis et le comte Kessler*: 218.

Psyche, Innocent Object of Mortal Worship and of Venus's Jealousy, Figure 4.40), most resembled the Lido sketch.¹⁸⁷ On the shore of Lake Maggiore, Psyche, naked, accepts the offerings of a multicolored group of admirers. Pale, slightly glistening highlights, similar to those of the Lido bathers, are reserved for the male figures. Their more muscular modeling and generally darker skin serves to accentuate the pallor, flat smoothness, and linearity of the female figures—especially Psyche, framed in this scene by two “copper” men. This frieze of alternating flesh tones, on a spectrum from white to bronze, continued throughout the panels and reflected Denis’s desire to synthesize, or at least place on a continuum, rather disparate sources and models. In the Fall and Winter of 1907, prior to the decoration’s completion, the artist’s journal was taken up with references to artworks viewed on a voyage in Italy, including works by Denis’s most obvious influences, Raphael and Giulio Romano.¹⁸⁸ Critics also noted an affinity with Davidian or Ingresque Neo-classicism, as well as with, in particular, Puvis de Chavannes.¹⁸⁹ Denis’s decoration

¹⁸⁷ Denis would add six more panels to the ensemble the following year, four of them bordering elements.

¹⁸⁸ Before completing his own *Psyché* decoration, Denis had visited important Renaissance precedents: for example, the decorative cycle at the Farnese Palace designed by Raphael but executed by pupils such as Giulio Romano, as well as another depiction of the Psyche tale by Romano at the Palazzo Te in Mantua. Denis also referenced Raphael’s *Galatea* at the Farnese Palace in the first panel, while his choice to include a panel of the gods celebrating the marriage of Cupid and Psyche was a nod to both Raphael and Romano.

¹⁸⁹ See the press clippings in the object file, Musée Maurice Denis. A number of critics compared Denis to Puvis de Chavannes, while a few evoked the schools of David and Ingres (see, for example, Camille Mauclair’s references to Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson and Hippolyte Flandrin, in the passage reproduced in footnote 192). Psyche’s gesture of supplication in the decoration’s final panel reminded one critic (in a September 30, 1908 review) of Ingres’s *Jupiter et Thétis*, though, as Susan Siegfried has pointed out to me, the gesture more closely resembles (while substituting Psyche for Cupid) that shown in Filippo Pelagio Palagi’s c.1808 *Betrothal of Cupid and Psyche* (Detroit Institute of Arts). For a reproduction of this work, and a discussion of Ingres’s reworking of the gesture, see Susan L. Siegfried, *Ingres: Painting Reimagined* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 149-70. Denis viewed Ingres, like Maillol, as a “classical primitive,” and therefore as a model for work that sought to combine the classical and the spiritual. See his 1902 “Les élèves d’Ingres,” reproduced in Denis, *Théories, 1890-1910*. Although there is little sign that Denis’s was specifically looking to Ingres in this slightly later period, Psyche’s contrapposto pose in the opening panel/scene (like her nubile body and high-pointed breasts) echoes that of the Ingresque female ideal on display in, for example, *Vénus anadyomène* (Figure 4.45). The latter’s gamboling cupids can also be found, appropriately, at Venus’s feet in the panel evoking Psyche’s trials.

combined Puvis's matte, unvarnished surfaces with the linear clarity, apparent self-containment, and smooth impenetrability of Neo-classical bodies (see Figure 4.45 for an example). This combination of effects was a means of retaining but also containing the animal sensuality and paganism Denis saw epitomized in Romano's work—the rippling, warm-toned flesh on display, for example, at the Palazzo Te (Figure 4.46)—and which his Lido sketch in some ways echoed. By exaggerating the linear, planar qualities of his work and synthesizing them with the vivid color of the “Latin” south (i.e. Italy and the Midi), Denis sought to transcend both arid academicism and pagan sensuality.¹⁹⁰

Reactions to the décor were polarized. While some praised the ensemble as the jewel of the Salon d'Automne, many of the critics lamented the contrast between *Psyché* and the harmonious unity of *Éternel Printemps*. Gustave Kahn and Camille Mauclair highlighted the “composite” nature of Denis's panels.¹⁹¹ In keeping with his 1905 association of Denis with a “nationalist reaction,” Mauclair argued that Denis's obsession with the Renaissance had led him to a rather a bland, Italianizing Academicism. Though he lauded Denis's attempt to create a work of “style” in a period that privileged

¹⁹⁰ This balancing act was apparent in letters the artist wrote during the elaboration of the work: while Denis indicated to Gide that his *Psyché* would be much more “chaste” than that of Romano, he described it as “voluptuous” in an August 15, 1908 letter to Mme de la Laurencie (M4644, Correspondence, Musée Maurice Denis). Gide and Denis, *Correspondance*: 270.

Rather like Ingres in *The Apotheosis of Homer*, Denis proposed a classical lineage characterized by continuity (most strongly visualized in the spectrum of skin tones) but also eclecticism, its various elements always available to the present. Just as Ingres's tradition originated in Antiquity (Homer), continued through the Renaissance and placed special emphasis on 17th Century France as the inheritor of that tradition (through Poussin's prominence in the foreground and his exemplary gesture), in addition to the Renaissance precedents mentioned above Denis insisted that La Fontaine's 17th Century version of the Psyche tale, written for Louis XIV, was his central inspiration (although nothing in the iconography points to it). See the August 15th letter to Mme de la Laurencie cited above.

¹⁹¹ “L'aspect composite de ces toiles de M. Maurice Denis ne les annule pas naturellement, mais il gêne un peu.” Gustave Kahn, *Le Radical* (September 30, 1908), press clipping in the object file, Musée Maurice Denis. This review appeared in multiple journals. For a more extensive excerpt of the review, see footnote 204.

fragmentary works (“le morceau”), he ultimately judged it a failure: “bringing to bear pell-mell all the influences reflected in his lively and curious intelligence, [he] is unable to fuse them.”¹⁹² Mauclair clearly attributed these formal disjunctions to his previous diagnosis: Denis was still hobbling his own search for a classical tradition by ignoring the authentic, French heritage of the Impressionist technique—a technique that would have allowed his own personality to flourish. Instead, sources foreign to his own nature and that of the nation were leading him back to a sterile, retrograde academicism. Mauclair thus refused Denis the classical synthesis he so prized.

Judging from the reviews, what most interfered with this desired synthesis were elements that suggested pastiche—the art historical citations and clearly identifiable Italian scenery and architecture—and the jarring palette.¹⁹³ Denis’s many homages to the inventive, imaginative glories of the past lessened the artist’s own claim to originality: for Mauclair and others, Denis had gathered and composed sources, but failed to transmute them into his own creation. As for the color with which the artist had hoped to endow his

¹⁹² “On y retrouve le sens très personnel de l’arrangement, le goût décoratif, le sentiment tendre et raffiné qui font de M. Denis l’un des plus remarquables décorateurs parus en France depuis Puvis de Chavannes. Mais on y trouve aussi une couleur assez désagréable, une grande froideur dans l’archaïsme trop voulu, et une influence raphaëlesque, qui, parfois, fait plus songer aux fadeurs de Girodet ou de Flandrin, hélas! qu’à la suavité toujours ferme du maître des *Loges* [Raphael]. Très ému par l’Italie, M. Denis incline trop, cette fois, vers l’académisme italianisant ; et ce n’est pas une des moindres surprises de notre époque que ce spectacle d’un ancien pointilliste, d’un disciple de Cézanne, d’un fervent des Primitifs français, d’un déformateur, apportant pêle-mêle toutes les influences reflétées dans sa vive et curieuse intelligence, n’arrivant pas à les fondre, et aboutissant presque à un idéal d’École!” Camille Mauclair, “Le Salon d’Automne,” *Revue Bleue* 10, no. 16 (October 17, 1908): 489.

¹⁹³ In addition to the emulation and sometimes citations of artists noted by critics (including Kahn and Mauclair), Denis had chosen to place the décor’s episodes in specific Italian settings. Lake Maggiore, including the Isola Bella (“Beautiful Island,” one of the Borromean islands) with its terraced gardens, served as the backdrop in the first, second and fifth panel, while Denis used Napoleon’s bed from the island’s Palazzo Borromeo in the third panel; the fourth panel featured a view from the Giusti Gardens in Verona. Though Denis modified these models somewhat for the purpose of the décor, these motifs were largely transferred, wholesale, from postcard images that Denis owned. Bouillon, *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*, 270. Photographs of these postcards can be found in the object file at the Musée Maurice Denis.

work with greater solidity, for most critics it had an opposite, destabilizing effect. One after another they highlighted its unnatural, artificial character, particularly in the juxtaposition of the pink women—their color or bodies compared to makeup and candy—with the darker men.¹⁹⁴ One critic disliked “this marshmallow pink of the flesh,” a theme taken even farther by a critic who referred to “these candies and pink-paste sweets.”¹⁹⁵ Yet another characterized Denis’s figures as “rubber toys” that had been painted “gingerbread” (the men) and “raspberry” (the women).¹⁹⁶

Such assessments were all at once far removed from, and yet very close to, the tenor of Denis’s inspirations. One of these inspirations was, as noted above, embedded in the sketch discussed with Kessler and Gide. That work would ultimately go by the name *Les Captifs (Souvenir du Lido et du Voyage d’Urien)* (*The Captives (Souvenir of the Lido and of Urien’s Voyage)*), affirming the association—evoked in Denis’s letter to Gide—between its beautiful, intensely colored bodies, and an episode from Gide’s *Voyage d’Urien*, which Denis had illustrated in 1892. On the seventh stop of the first part of their voyage, Urien and his companions—all male—are held captive by Queen Haiatalnefous in an island city of palaces, garden terraces and canals. Abandoned by the men of the island, Haiatalnefous and the women try to seduce the foreigners through a languorous

¹⁹⁴ For example, the critic in the *Depêche de Toulouse* disliked “le bleu banal du ciel et des eaux et les femmes d’un rose de fard ou les hommes d’un brun d’ocre” (October 1908, press clipping, Musée Maurice Denis).

¹⁹⁵ The first critic liked the work apart from “ce rose-guimauve des chairs” (*l’Aurore*, Oct 1908). The second critic recommended that Denis go back to religious painting, which had served him better than the mythological subject that had produced “ces bonbons et cette confiserie aux pâtes roses” (*l’Éclair*, October 4 1908). Press clippings, Musée Maurice Denis.

¹⁹⁶ “Maurice Denis peut également livrer à sa clientèle un aussi grand nombre de jouets en caoutchouc. Il a colorié les hommes en couleur pain d’épices, les femmes en framboise. [...] Ces couleurs sont inoffensives et les petits enfants pourront mettre ces jouets dans leur bouche sans danger pour leur santé” (*Le Cri de Paris*, October 18 1908). Press clipping, Musée Maurice Denis.

boredom punctuated by a seemingly endless cycle of walks and festivities. Though many succumb, Urien and eleven of his companions steadfastly refuse. They only escape when a plague, described as rising up from the sewers and basins [lavoirs] of the city, kills everyone else—including the returned native men—in an orgiastic finish: “the certainty of death imparting a grim strength, they furiously embrace one another, sucking all the joy that they can with a thirst, a rage, a sort of frenzy, that was for us truly terrifying.”¹⁹⁷ Gide’s association of sensuality and decomposition, desire and disgust must have been on Denis’s mind for its affinity with his experience of Venice. He reported to Gide that the city was “animated, colorful, splendid,” yet ultimately an unsatisfying “artificial paradise.”¹⁹⁸ The Venice of his journal bore an even stronger resemblance to Haiatalnefous’s city. “The picturesque aspect of promenades in gondola is counterbalanced by sewage floating within reach on the surface of the water. Thus Venice is a little disgusting for those not particularly disposed to voluptuousness. Those who can or who know how to loosen up [se laisser vivre] don’t pay any attention to this underlying rot.”¹⁹⁹

Denis noted a similarly heterogeneous set of associations in relation to the Palazzo Borromeo, which had provided scenery for *Psyché* and was set (like Haiatalnefous’s city) amongst terraces and exotic vegetation: “One sees there luxurious

¹⁹⁷ “[L]’assurance de la mort leur redonnant comme une sinistre vaillance, ils s’embrassèrent furieusement, ils sucèrent toute la joie qu’ils purent avec une soif, une rage, une espèce de frénésie, pour nous vraiment terrifiante.” André Gide, *Le Voyage d’Urien, suivi de Paludes*, Second ed. (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1897). 73-74.

¹⁹⁸ Gide and Denis, *Correspondance*: 268-69.

¹⁹⁹ “Le pittoresque des promenades en gondole est compensé par les choses d’égout qui flottent sur l’eau et qu’on voit à portée de main. Ainsi, Venise est un peu écœurante pour qui n’y est pas spécialement prédisposé à la volupté. Ceux qui peuvent ou qui savent se laisser vivre ne font pas attention à ces dessous de pourriture.” 1907 entry, Denis, *Journal*, 2: 74-5.

décors obtained cheaply with glue, and almost without gilding. Contrasting tones, imitations, rockeries made out of cinder, but done with such a will for the extraordinary and gigantic that everything takes on a special note [...] Italian decoration is all at once puerile and grandiose.”²⁰⁰ In combining the saturated color and architectural/vegetal fantasies of his Italian experiences with a flat application of paint, insistent linearity and emphatic verticals and horizontals, Denis hoped to structure and discipline its suggestion of overripe sensuality and ambiguous appetites. He was attempting to synthesize what he had once explicitly opposed: *Le Voyage d’Urien* (the intense sensation, femininity and effeminacy, dream, and “delicious” disorder of Romanticism) and Louis XIV (the clarity, order, and grandeur of classicism).²⁰¹

Certainly for some of the critics, the problem of Denis’s grand décor was that this synthesis had not been realized, nor had either of its main components ultimately triumphed. Instead, the work suggested the kind of promiscuous miscegenation and hybridity that the Action Française associated with an ultimately sterile decadence (an association, it should be noted, disputed by Gide).²⁰² The movement’s daily newspaper

²⁰⁰ See footnote 193. “On y voit des décors luxueux obtenus à bon marché avec de la colle, et presque sans dorures. Des contrastes de tons, des imitations, des rocailles faites avec du mâchefer, mais une telle volonté d’extraordinaire et de gigantesque que tout prend un accent, comme, dans la bouche d’un Méridional, la moindre histoire. [...] La décoration italienne est à la fois puérile et grandiose.” Ibid., 66-67.

²⁰¹ In response to a (reportedly) depressed letter from Madame de la Laurencie, the artist wrote that it reminded him of Maeterlinck, as well as an episode in *Voyage d’Urien*, in which the character Ellis becomes more and more transparent, eventually evaporating. “Tout cela n’est pas très Louis Quatorzienne et par conséquent ne vous va pas,” he concluded, and wished her a return to the “belle santé” everyone admired. Denis to Mme de la Laurencie, November 12, 1905 (M4630), Correspondence, Musée Maurice Denis. See also footnotes 147 and 166.

²⁰² Inspired by Barrès’s *Les Déracinés*, in 1902-3 Gide and Maurras argued (in botanical terms) over the implications of uprooting/transplantation/hybridization in what came to be known as the “La Querelle du peuplier.” In 1909, Gide would take up the issue again in a series of articles on “Nationalisme et littérature,” published in Gide’s *Nouvelle Revue Française*, in which he challenged the AF’s vision of nationalism, classicism and literature. Jean-Michel Wittmann, “Gide, un ‘anti-Maurras’?,” in *Le maurrassisme et la culture*, ed. Olivier Dard, Michel Leymarie, and Neil McWilliam (Villeneuve d’Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2010), 99-103.

identified Denis's *Psyché* as one of the best works amidst the general failure of the Salon, but was dismayed by "certain disconcerting puerilities."²⁰³ Gustave Kahn made a similar observation: "Mr. Denis's composition [dessin] is infinitely interesting, it often charms, it does not always give, it seems, an impression of plenitude, of complete force, of power."²⁰⁴ The AF no doubt identified this abortive effort with a lack of pragmatic mastery and order; Mauclair, in contrast, identified it with the artist's stifling of his natural temperament.²⁰⁵ Regardless, in seeking to breathe new, modern life into classicism, Denis unconsciously corrupted its supposed purity, wholeness, and authenticity. Classicism reveals itself as never whole in the first place, but instead artificial, composite.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ "[L]'œuvre est remarquable par la grâce des attitudes, le charme des arrangements, la douceur des coloris; pourquoi faut-il qu'elle soit tachée par certaines puérités déconcertantes?" Interim, "Chronique artistique: Le sixième Salon d'Automne," *L'Action française: organe du nationalisme intégral* (October 3, 1908).

²⁰⁴ "Cette roideur et ce rappel des simplifications des primitifs communique aux paganismes de M. Maurice Denis quelque chose de quasi religieux et catholique: c'est mignard, et c'est page de missel. [...] L'aspect composite de ces toiles de M. Maurice Denis ne les annule pas naturellement, mais il gêne un peu. Le dessin de M. Denis intéresse infiniment, il charme souvent, il ne donne pas toujours, semble-t-il, une impression de plénitude, de force entière, de puissance. L'œuvre de M. Denis est tendre et claire, elle est d'une couleur savoureuse aux nuances jolies; ce n'est point une fête harmonieuse pour le regard." *Le Radical*, September 30, 1908 (object file, Musée Maurice Denis).

²⁰⁵ Mauclair described *Psyché* as an "œuvre inégale, gâtée par un excès d'intentions et surtout par les précautions d'un esprit distingué qui fait taire les fougues du tempérament et le contrarie en le voulant trop contrôler. [...] le résultat est par trop en deçà de la tentative, et on garde un malaise tout en reconnaissant la noblesse et le sérieux d'un tel effort." Mauclair, "Le Salon d'Automne," 489.

²⁰⁶ Matisse offers an interesting comparison. Margaret Werth has emphasized the way his work consistently undermined the "bonheur" and harmony that the artist appeared to seek out: for example, she writes that "*Le bonheur de vivre* [...] insistently undoes its own version of idyll and the versions on which it draws." Margaret Werth, "Le Bonheur de Vivre," in *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 188. Alastair Wright has made similar observations directly in regards to the contemporary emphasis on classicism, and Denis in particular: "It seems fair to say that the undoing of the architecture of classicism by *Le Bonheur de vivre* worked against the reconstruction of French identity with which painters such as Denis were associated in the early years of the century." Alastair Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 112.

Despite *Psyché*'s rather chilly reception, Denis continued to defend his vision of a collective art that would combine the strengths of subjective emotion and a generalizing classicism. In “De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au classicisme,” this synthesis was reconfigured as a form of “symbolism.”²⁰⁷ Denis had, in some sense, come full circle: like Signac a decade earlier, he was working to establish an art historical lineage and reconstitute a place for Symbolism (and thus himself) within it. Recuperating both subjective and objective “distortions” (“this subordination of nature to human sensibility and reason”), he presented the latter as a classical, decorative, harmonious impulse. In this light, 1890s Symbolism appeared virtually synonymous with the classicism of the early Twentieth Century: classicism had merely corrected Symbolism’s excessive emphasis on subjective deformations in favor of a fully decorative Beauty.²⁰⁸ Both were,

²⁰⁷ “Ne plus reproduire la nature et la vie par des à peu près ou par des trompe-l’œil improvisés, mais au contraire reproduire nos émotions et nos rêves en les *représentant* par des formes et des couleurs harmonieuses, c’était là, je persiste à le croire, une position nouvelle—au moins pour notre temps—du problème de l’art; et cette notion est encore féconde.

Encore une fois, elle est au fond des doctrines d’art de tous les âges, et il n’y a pas d’art qui ne soit symboliste.” Maurice Denis, “De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au Classicisme,” *L’Occident*, no. 90 (May 1909): 195-96. This text is also reprinted in *Le ciel et l’arcadie*.

²⁰⁸ “Ainsi nous libérons notre sensibilité; et l’art, au lieu d’être la copie devenait la déformation subjective de la nature.

Au point de vue objectif, la composition décorative, esthétique et rationnelle à laquelle les impressionnistes n’avaient pas pensé parce qu’elle contrariait leur goût de l’improvisation, devenait la contre-partie, le correctif nécessaire de la théorie des équivalents. Celle-ci autorisant en vue de l’expression toutes les transpositions même caricaturales, tous les excès de caractère: la déformation objective obligeait à son tour l’artiste à tout transposer en Beauté. En résumé, la synthèse expressive, le symbole d’une sensation, devait en être la transcription éloquente et en même temps un objet composé pour le plaisir des yeux. [...] Le point de vue symboliste veut que nous considérions l’œuvre d’art comme l’équivalent d’une sensation reçue: la nature peut donc n’être, pour l’artiste, qu’un état de sa propre subjectivité. Et ce que nous appelons la déformation subjective, c’est pratiquement le style.

Mais la nature n’est pas seulement le miroir où nous nous regardons nous-mêmes et où nous projetons les illusions de nos sens: c’est un objet sur lequel s’exerce comme sur l’objet d’art le jugement de notre raison. Toutes les belles œuvres comportent donc un certain équilibre entre la subjectivité et l’objectivité—entre l’idéale nature révélée par nos sens d’artiste, et la réalité que notre raison connaît. Appliquées au corps humain, par exemple, les deux déformations, subjective et objective, auxquelles je réduis la notion de l’art, se limitent par le sentiment du vraisemblable et du possible. [...] De cette subordination de la nature à la sensibilité et à la raison humaine, découlent toutes les règles.” “De Gauguin et de Van Gogh,” 193 and 199-200.

according to Denis, the harbingers of a new synthesis, in which the artwork would transcend “initiates” and “coteries” to “reach and move everyone.”²⁰⁹ The subjective nevertheless remained at the artwork’s core:

The new order that we glimpse and that the experiments and theories of 1890 brought forth [...] from anarchy itself, rests [...] on a system of the subordination of one’s faculties whose basis is still sensation: it proceeds from individual sensibility to general reason. It is not the least of our point of view’s originality to have founded a new classical art—a very objective art, a system of equivalencies between sensations and forms, a language—on the ever-changing mystery of subjectivity.²¹⁰

The artist’s persistence served him well. A more subdued 1910 décor for Charles Stern, done in Denis’s “classical” manner—matte surfaces and linear forms, flatly modeled by the juxtaposition of two tones—rivalled the success of the more impressionistic *Éternel Printemps*.²¹¹ He was subsequently awarded the Legion of Honor. In addition, Denis was finally attributed a decorative commission on par with his collective ambitions: the cupola of the new Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, which was completed in 1912 and would witness the scandal of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, performed by Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. Though the theater was a private venture it was a decidedly public venue, encouraging the artist to see in the work the possible

²⁰⁹ “Les productions de l’art moderne ne dépassent guère un petit cercle d’initiés. Ce sont de petites coteries qui en jouissent. [...] Or l’œuvre d’art doit atteindre et remuer tous les hommes.” Ibid., 201.

²¹⁰ “L’ordre nouveau que nous entrevoyons et que les expériences et les théories de 1890 ont fait naître, nous l’avons vu, de l’anarchie elle-même, s’appuie donc, en somme, sur un régime de subordination des facultés à la base duquel se trouve toujours la sensation: il procède de la sensibilité particulière à la raison générale. Et ce n’est pas la moindre originalité de notre point de vue que de fonder un nouvel art classique, un art très objectif, un système d’équivalences entre les sensations et les formes, un langage, sur le mouvant mystère de la subjectivité.” Ibid., 202.

²¹¹ The subject matter of *Soir florentin* (*Florentine Evening*)—Boccaccio’s Decameron—was specific and literary like that of *Psyché*, but was much more generalized and allusive in the depiction. The colors were also toned down at the patron’s request. Bouillon, *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*, 275-79.

confirmation of his abilities as a decorator, and thus the potential for official, government commissions and the wider audience they entailed.²¹²

Doubts about Symbolism and Classicism

As a result of his increasing success, 1911-12 was one of the busiest periods in Denis's lifetime: among his many artistic activities were the preparations for his monumental décor for the theater, as well as other, smaller, décors for the salle d'Hulst and a private apartment owned by the Prince Wagram.²¹³ He was preparing an anthology of his art criticism, his 1912 *Théories*, and organizing the *Exposition internationale de l'art chrétien*.²¹⁴ He also exhibited illustrations for an edition of St. Francis of Assisi's *Fioretti* at the Galerie Druet. At what should have been a time of triumph, Denis's personal life was punctuated by multiple tragedies, including the death of his father and a still-born child, which aggravated his wife's already-compromised physical and mental health.

²¹² Responsibility for the construction and decoration of the building had been effectively removed from its Jewish director, Gabriel Astruc, and placed in the hands of Denis's patron, Gabriel Thomas. Denis's conviction as to this commission's significance can be seen in his efforts to retain it: when the theater seemed on the verge of foundering, the artist did his utmost to keep the project alive, including bringing in Henry van de Velde to serve as architect (though the latter was eventually ousted by the classicizing Perret).

²¹³ The salle d'Hulst was located in Paris's seventh arrondissement, linked with the archdiocese of Paris and serving, among other functions, as a chapel and a conference room. Stahl, "Les décorations religieuses de Maurice Denis," 41. The décor commissioned by the wealthy art collector, the Prince Wagram, was entitled *L'Âge d'or* and located in the stairwell of the home of his mistress. Its themes were very similar to those of *Terre latine*, though more inspired by Brittany than the south of France. Marie-José Salmon, ed. *L'Âge d'or de Maurice Denis* (Beauvais: Musée départemental de l'Oise, 1982); "La peinture décorative: à la recherche d'une utopie picturale, Maurice Denis et *L'Âge d'or*," in *De Thomas Couture à Maurice Denis: Vingt ans d'acquisitions du Conseil général de l'Oise* (Beauvais: Conseil général de l'Oise and Éditions d'art Monelle Hayot, 1994).

²¹⁴ The exhibition was sponsored by the Société de Saint-Jean, a Catholic association founded in 1827 with the purpose of encouraging Christian art (which it did through conferences, exhibitions and competitions). Denis was a member and, at the time of the exhibition, the association's vice-president. The exhibition was held at the Musée des arts décoratifs's Pavillon de Marsan in November and December 1911. See Cathérine Verleysen, *Maurice Denis et la Belgique, 1890-1930* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010). 107-14.

These difficulties and an exhausting work schedule seem to have inflected his aesthetic convictions, for this was also the period in which Denis cast doubt on both Symbolist modernism and all-encompassing classicism, revealing the fragility of the synthetic equilibrium he had proposed.

Symbol and Allegory

Some of these doubts surfaced in relation to his work for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Denis's early idea for the cupola's décor had been very general, based on the same dualism of harmony and expression highlighted by Mithouard at the turn of the century, indicating the continued relevance of the aesthetic and social concerns raised by the Dreyfus Affair. But as with the Morosov décor, Denis soon sought to give more specificity to his classicism. "In my first idea, I saw two hemicycles, harmony and expression. An hour's conversation with d'Indy [...] has elucidated the project for me, and added logic, clarity, and all the necessary developments."²¹⁵ "Logic" and "clarity," were features Denis had associated with classicism since 1898, and they continued to define the classicism promoted by the Action Française. Yet the rest of the journal entry is an ever-expanding list of musical genres, instruments, and composers, so that Denis himself worried about achieving unity given the additional categories and multiple figures he had outlined.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ "Dans ma première idée, je voyais deux hémicycles, harmonie et expression. Ma conversation d'une heure avec d'Indy [...] me précise à moi-même mon projet, et y ajoute de la logique, de la clarté, et tous les développements qu'il faut." Denis, *Journal*, 2: 135.

²¹⁶ "Difficulté de transition entre les divers paysages et le sentiment particulier à chaque scène. Je m'inquiète aussi de la difficulté de faire entrer des costumes d'époques différentes, sans retirer le caractère élyséen et tomber dans l'académisme." *Ibid.*, 136.

Then, in September 1911 he noted that:

Allegory speaks to the mind, symbol speaks to the eyes. But, aside from simple impressions of joy, terror, mystery, which are felt by everyone, in order to elicit more complicated emotions a preexisting [préalable] culture is necessary. It is through this culture that symbol reaches the soul, without the intervention of conscious reason. Allegory, on the contrary, requires the action of the intellect, a reading and a translation.²¹⁷

This statement was followed by a passage that lamented the weakening of collective culture—Christian culture in particular—and the consequent “incomprehension” of the more profound or nuanced emotions/meanings (note the shift from the term “impression” to “emotion”) of artworks that depended on this absent culture.²¹⁸ As if to compensate for this lack, Denis noted the necessity for a logical arrangement of the subject “so as to reduce to a minimum the mental effort of the spectator. Be clear in every way.”²¹⁹

This discussion of symbol and allegory was a far cry from Denis’s earlier assertions that Symbolist form constituted material equivalents to the artist’s emotion. Instead, Symbolism figured as a largely conventional, if unconscious, language. Without the support of a collective culture, the fissures between the signifier and signified were revealed, and symbol’s communicative power was little greater than that of allegory.

²¹⁷ “L’allégorie parle à l’esprit, le symbole parle aux yeux. Mais, en dehors des impressions simples de joie, de terreur, de mystère, qui sont ressenties par tout le monde, il est nécessaire, pour faire naître des émotions plus compliquées, qu’il existe une culture préalable, et c’est à travers cette culture que le symbole atteint l’âme, sans que la raison consciente intervienne. L’allégorie, au contraire, nécessite une opération de l’intelligence, une lecture et une traduction.” Ibid., 140.

²¹⁸ “Dans la *Dispute du Saint-Sacrement*, il y a toute une partie théologique qui est facilement lisible pour des chrétiens, et donne pour eux un sens admirable à ce ballet sublime. Là où les gens non chrétiens, mais cependant cultivés, verront aussi l’expression d’un noble sentiment religieux, l’union des idées du Ciel et des aspirations de la terre, etc., des gens tout à fait ignorants [...] ne verront qu’un ballet bien ordonné, mais incompréhensible.” Ibid.

²¹⁹ “Nécessité d’une logique de sujet dans la mise en scène, quelle qu’elle soit, afin de réduire au minimum le travail cérébral du spectateur.” Ibid.

The Question of Christian Art

A related reflection was prompted by Louis Dimier's critique of the *Exposition internationale de l'art chrétien* in the pages of the Action Française's daily, which led to a lengthier "Survey of Christian Art" ("Enquête sur l'art chrétien") in the AF's monthly *Revue*. Dimier was skeptical about the very existence of a specifically Christian art. He summed up this resistance by citing Michelangelo's contention (as reported by Francisco de Hollanda) that "[g]ood painting is noble and devout in and of itself, for among wise men there is nothing that elevates the soul more, bringing it closer to devotion, than the difficulty of a perfection that approaches and merges with God."²²⁰ This notion of the inherently moral and religious nature of the search and struggle for aesthetic perfection was very close to Denis's own first reaction to Renaissance classicism, in which the artist had equated classical tradition's "effort" toward a collective "style" with a Cartesian, Christian aesthetic. Yet when Dimier reproduced Denis's response on the matter, the artist disagreed with Michelangelo and the AF:

I am not of your opinion. I am for sensibility: it is the profound virtue of the artist. If he wants to create a Christian work of art, he must have a Christian sensibility, i.e. religious faith and culture.

[...] I deny the importance of a certain 'difficult' and 'Italian' perfection of which Michelangelo speaks [...] I do not recognize any necessity in the artist's expression aside from those of logic and skill [*métier*], which render the image in his mind clearer, stronger and more general. Those are the only rules of art. The beauty, the sensuality of the work depend very little on these rules and very much on the artist's sensibility.

The dream of baptizing Greek art is beautiful, but utopian; one cannot superimpose at will two different sensibilities. [...]

²²⁰ "La bonne peinture est noble et dévote par elle-même, car chez les sages rien n'élève plus l'âme et ne la porte davantage à la dévotion, que la difficulté de la perfection qui s'approche de Dieu et qui s'unit à lui." Louis Dimier, "Enquête sur l'art chrétien," *L'Action française mensuelle* 38, no. 260 (May 15, 1912): 376.

There are therefore no ‘aesthetic rules particular to Christian art,’ but it is as if there were, because Christian art demands a particular sensibility of the artist, cultivated not according to Plato or the [Enlightenment’s] Honest man, but to the tradition and dogma of the Church.²²¹

Denis’s initial characterization of sensibility in this response was a bit unusual: before linking it with beauty and sensuality (appropriate to the term’s association with the senses and sense impressions), he coupled sensibility with “religious faith and culture.” Yet the final paragraph, along with Denis’s earlier notes on symbol and allegory, clarify his meaning: just as an artist relied on a shared culture for the successful expression of more “complicated emotions,” culture shaped what an artist was capable of expressing. Denis had repeatedly argued that instinctively classical artists like Cézanne and Maillol synthesized nature even as they perceived it. Similarly, the Christian artist, steeped in Christian culture, automatically transformed his experience into the material of a Christian art. In the latter example, culture took the place of instinct, reflecting the AF’s emphasis on the role of human civilization and (royal) will—as opposed to “natural,” inherent qualities like race or instinct—in shaping the nation, yet Denis’s version of culture nevertheless played a similar role to that of instinct: a collective culture, shared by

²²¹ “Je ne suis pas de votre opinion. Je tiens pour la sensibilité : c’est la vertu profonde de l’artiste. Qu’il veuille produire une œuvre d’art chrétien, il faut qu’il ait une sensibilité chrétienne, c’est-à-dire la foi et la culture religieuse.

[...] Je nie l’importance d’une certaine perfection ‘difficile’ et ‘italienne’ dont parle Michel-Ange [...]. Je ne reconnais d’autres nécessités dans les moyens d’expression de l’artiste, que les nécessités de logique et de métier, qui font plus claire, plus générale et plus forte l’image de sa pensée. Ce sont les seules règles de l’art. La beauté, la sensualité de l’œuvre dépendent très peu de ces règles et beaucoup de la sensibilité de l’artiste.

C’est un beau rêve, mais une utopie, de baptiser l’art grec ; on ne superpose pas à volonté deux sensibilités différentes. [...]

Il n’y a donc pas de ‘règles esthétiques particulières à l’art chrétien,’ mais c’est comme s’il y en avait, puisque l’art chrétien exige de l’artiste une sensibilité particulière, cultivée non pas selon Platon ou l’Honnête homme, mais selon le dogme et la tradition de l’Église.” Ibid., 378-79. Dimier had already presented Denis’s response in the AF’s daily: “Chronique artistique: Nouvelle exposition d’antiques au Louvre. M. Maurice Denis et l’art chrétien. M. Charles Morice et les amis de Carrière,” *L’Action française: organe du nationalisme intégral*, no. 35 (February 4, 1912).

society or a portion of society, was inculcated from birth and thus essentially unconscious. It allowed even complex content to function symbolically, bypassing reason to directly touch the soul. Shared culture thus served as a baseline prerequisite for Denis's identification of sensibility as the key component of Christian art (and, by implication, art in general).

Dimier seized on the potential confusion in Denis's discussion of sensibility, insisting on distinguishing moral and religious sensibility from physical sensibility (the senses), and arguing that only the latter was aesthetic in nature.²²² Thus artistic expression revolved around the faithful, masterful reproduction of appearances ("the natural language of features, attitudes and contours"), which communicated general qualities such as "majesty, gentleness, anger, duplicity, love, piety, desolation." Though this assertion echoed Denis's notion of universal "impressions" that preceded culture, Dimier reserved the term "impression" (and sometimes "sentiment") for what he felt to be entirely personal (and therefore irrelevant to the argument at hand) judgments, and he had an entirely different assessment of what Denis had described as "complex emotions." These, he argued, were a pure product of an intellectual apprehension of the artwork's subject matter, and thus external to the elements ("the natural language") proper to artistic expression itself.²²³ In Dimier's framework, Denis's "complex emotions,"

²²² "Il y a la sensibilité *morale*, il y a la sensibilité *religieuse*, il y a la sensibilité *physique* ou les sens. Les arts du dessin dépendent essentiellement de la troisième."

²²³ "[L'Expression] est de deux sortes: celle dont toute la vertu réside dans le langage naturel des traits, des attitudes et des contours: [sic] majesté, douceur, colère, duplicité, amour, piété, désolation, etc.; et celle qui se révèle à la réflexion par l'interprétation raisonnée de la scène et la confrontation de certaines connaissances. Cette expression-là, c'est le sujet [...] Or il est évident que seule la première sorte est de l'essence de la peinture, la seconde lui est extérieure, et n'en tire qu'un accompagnement, un cadre, qui lui sert de présentation. Maintenant, prenez garde que tout ce qu'il peut y avoir de spécifiquement chrétien dans un tableau, est du domaine de cette expression-là. La première ne va pas jusqu'à la détermination de

including anything of a specifically religious nature, were relegated to the intellectual domain of “reason,” the domain that Denis associated with allegory or weak, undermined symbol. He denied religion a purely artistic/symbolic expression.

Dimier maintained this division of the artistic/sensual nature of the artwork from its intellectual content (whether moral, religious or otherwise) throughout the *Enquête*, despite the many responses that insisted, even more than Denis, on the centrality of religious/Christian sensibility and/or sentiment in constituting a Christian artwork.

Dimier argued that such emotion did not exist, or if it did, it was so ineffable as to have an insignificant, or at least unactionable, impact on artistic creation and reception.²²⁴

Dimier was not precluding, like some of his contemporaries, a moral or religious role for the artwork: he was, like Denis and unlike Maurras, a devout Catholic. Yet he was, like the advocates of “art for art’s sake,” separating its moral capacity from its aesthetic character. Morality was instead a question of subject matter, and thus of reason. In this regard, his thought was entirely coherent with that of Maurras, whose insistence on the primacy of reason and logic had become the target of a Catholic critique. One respondent to the survey explicitly warned Dimier away from raising a similar debate on artistic matters, arguing that it could only be prejudicial to the AF.²²⁵

But Dimier’s division of aesthetics from subject matter, and feeling from reason, had a larger goal: the underlying, timeless unity of art. “There is no more a Greek art than

religion chrétienne ou non. Tout ce qu’elle exprime, n’est que des sentiments qui sont communs aux païens et nous.” Dimier, “*Enquête sur l’art chrétien*,” 381.

²²⁴ “Qu’une image de deux sous en dise plus pour prier qu’un chef-d’œuvre, cela ne vient pas de ce que le sujet seul compte, mais de ce que l’émotion proprement religieuse émane des choses, tient à des circonstances, trop fines pour qu’on puisse les classer, les définir, en faire une loi.” Ibid., 392.

²²⁵ See Nel Ariès’s response in “*Enquête sur l’art chrétien*,” *L’Action française mensuelle* 39, no. 262 (July 15, 1912): 30.

there is the baptism of Greek art. There is an art, a taste, a beauty, whose quality (it is a confirmed fact) is felt by men irrespective of time or geography.”²²⁶ For Dimier, an art based on the *senses* rather than *sentiment* was universal and thus eminently social.²²⁷ But to search for a Christian role for art beyond applying the persuasive weight of its beauty to Christian subjects would, according to Dimier, fracture that unity and ultimately marginalize Christianity: “to give to Christian art particular aesthetic rules is to make of Christianity a sect,” he claimed.²²⁸ The irony of this line of argument, whether or not expressly intended by Dimier, was that this was exactly the kind of fracturing division of which the Action Française stood accused by its Catholic critics. Figures such as Lucien Laberthonnière (director of *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*) and the philosopher Maurice Blondel argued that Maurras falsely separated worldly and spiritual matters, and that his rejection of Christian introspection and charity as part-and-parcel of a decadent, romantic modernism eviscerated Catholicism of all that was truly Catholic.²²⁹

It is unclear to what extent Denis was aware of or in agreement with such critiques. Much of his response to Dimier was congenial to the AF’s ideas, notably

²²⁶ “Il n’y a pas plus d’art grec que le baptême de l’art grec. Il y a un art, il y a un goût, il y a un beau, dont la vertu (c’est un fait constaté) se fait sentir des hommes par-delà les siècles et les distances.” “Enquête sur l’art chrétien,” 382.

²²⁷ In response to André Hallays (of the *Journal des Débats*), who argued that contemporary art was “l’expression du sentiment personnel de l’artiste et rien de plus,” Dimier wrote that “aux modernes revient de n’avoir considéré, dans l’art religieux, que l’expression d’un sentiment. Et, chose notable, ce point de vue nouveau a pour effet d’ôter à l’art son caractère social, le sentiment étant chose *personnelle*.” Ibid., 384.

²²⁸ “[L]’hommage de l’homme à Dieu se ramène à ce seul objet, de réaliser le beau selon les règles de l’art. L’art chrétien n’y ajoute autre chose que le choix des sujets chrétiens, source en soi d’édification, à laquelle l’excellence de l’art donnera tout son empire et toute son étendue. Chercher autre chose, donner à l’art chrétien des règles esthétiques particulières, c’est faire du Christianisme une secte.” Ibid., 378.

²²⁹ Jacques Prévotat, *Les catholiques et l’Action française: Histoire d’une condamnation 1899-1939* (Paris: Fayard, 2001). 114-16; Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism*: 155-56 and 185-91. As Prévotat’s title indicates, these critiques would eventually lead to the condemnation of the Action Française by Pope Pius XI in 1926, leading many Catholics (including Denis) to reluctantly separate themselves from the AF and its activities.

Denis's emphasis on culture and his expressed desire to render his art "clearer, stronger and more general": in other words, more collective. But his response also indicated that this collective quality was important insofar as it gave access to the deeper core of the artwork: the artist's *individual* sensibility. When imagining ignorant viewers confronted with his theater décor, Denis emphasized the need for a clear, general address; when defending the specificity of Christian art in the face of Dimier's skepticism, he emphasized instead the central role of sensibility. In doing so he was implicitly making the case for symbol, which operated principally through the senses rather than conscious thought. Despite Denis's conviction that the social and the sensible could be joined, there was clearly a tension between them, a tension created by the deterioration of collective culture.

The Théâtre des Champs-Élysées

These tensions manifested themselves in the décor for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Most critics agreed that Denis had succeeded, in this work, in communicating general, "simple impressions," and even in pushing these impressions towards more "complex emotions." The artist had organized his history of music into four distinct categories (Figure 4.47)—*L'Orchestique grecque* (Greek Song and Dance, Figure 4.48), *L'Opéra* (Figure 4.50), *La Symphonie* (Figure 4.49), and *Le Drame Lyrique* (*Lyric* [i.e. operatic] *Drama*, Figure 4.51)—represented in four large compositions (interspersed with related medallions) that circled the cupola's opaque glass dome. He also sought to make visible the continuity and ultimate unity among these distinct categories. As Henri Cochin noted in an article entitled "The Symbols of Maurice Denis," the sun rising behind Apollo and

his temple in *L'Orchestique grecque* determined the light source for the entire décor: it appeared to shine obliquely on *L'Opéra* and *La Symphonie* and directly on *Le Drame Lyrique*, located across from it.²³⁰ The Bacchanalian dance to Apollo's left (representing "rhythm") was an appropriate segue to the triumphant, semi-nudity and physicality of *La Symphonie*'s composers and allegorized works, which found an echo in the sinuous dancers—including members of the Ballets Russes—found on the right-hand side in *Le Drame Lyrique*. The more restrained, spiritualized and civilizing action of song, represented to Apollo's right by Orpheus, found its continuation in *L'Opéra*'s simultaneously elaborate and restrained costumes and décor (a Versailles park), and then in the relatively decorous figures (representations from the works of composers like Liszt, Berlioz and Chopin) of *Le Drame lyrique*. The two musical forms—song and dance (rhythm)—emanating from Apollo, coalesce and culminate, like the sunlight, with Wagner: his Parsifal, lifting the luminous Holy Grail to the sky, is placed at the center of *Le Drame Lyrique*. Parsifal's gesture, like the figures (Psyche among them) rising above into the sky, exemplifies the ascending movement that characterizes all the panels, visualized by the figures' bodies and the vertical columns of architecture and trees.

In keeping with his own ideas and those of Vincent d'Indy, this configuration was Denis's attempt to lay out a redemptive musical trajectory. He hoped to demonstrate the spiritual—and ultimately, Christian—foundations of French culture in an apparently secular setting. The joyous movement and elevated song of *L'Orchestique grecque* (in which Denis hoped to express both "a sun-drenched land" and "a religious sentiment")

²³⁰ Henri Cochin, "Les Symboles de Maurice Denis," *La Revue hebdomadaire* (March 1, 1913): 37. Cochin was the brother of Denys Cochin (of the St. Hubert decoration) and the author of a 1907 translation of Dante's *Vita Nova*, which Denis illustrated.

finds its fullest, most synthetic expression in the explicit Christianity of *Parsifal*, which Wagner designated “a Festival Play for the Consecration of the Stage” (“ein Bühnenweihfestspiel”).²³¹ It should be noted that *Parsifal*’s emphasis on compassion (“Mitleid”) as the means to redemption was in sharp contrast to the AF’s contempt for pity as a weak, Protestant sentimentalization of Roman Catholic belief. Denis’s focus on *Parsifal*, though most indebted to d’Indy’s admiration for Wagner, suggests—along with Denis’s later insistence on the importance of a Christian sensibility—some alignment with the AF’s Catholic critics.²³² But his choice to depict Parsifal as a robust, mature, triumphant figure—as opposed to the naive innocent for which he was named—renders the selection more ambiguous. It appears to be yet another example of Denis’s desire to redeem Christian qualities by clothing compassion in the terms valued by the AF: triumph and joy rather than weakness.²³³ Certainly Dimier had expressed contempt for

²³¹ “Mon panneau de la Danse devra donner: 1) l’idée de la Danse dans un pays ensoleillé; 2) l’idée que cette Danse est associée à un sentiment religieux.” Denis, *Journal*, 2: 141.

“Among the Schopenhauer ideas that find musico-dramatic expression in *Parsifal* are: that the foundation of ethics is not rationality but compassion, and that it is through compassion, not cleverness, that the deepest understanding of things can be attained; [...] that [...] redemption may be achieved by a self-transcendence [...] that [...] has nothing to do with intellectual understanding and everything to do with feeling.” Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Allen Lane Penguin Press, 2000). 273. Cochin focused on this message, quoting *Parsifal*, in his analysis of the décor: “[Denis] voit [l’art moderne] dominé par le très pur et très saint, par celui dont toute la science vient de la pitié: ‘Durch mitleid wissend/Der reine thor !...’” Cochin, “Les Symboles de Maurice Denis,” 50.

²³² Figures like Abbé Pierre identified the AF with a Nietzschean, anti-Christian outlook. Prévotat, *Les catholiques et l’Action française: Histoire d’une condamnation 1899-1939*: 112-13. Denis had at various times attempted to emulate the AF’s excision of the Christian/sentimental from the Catholic, but this went against his own inclination, as indicated in a 1909 lament for “la vieille sensibilité allemande” (of lieder, ballads, Schumann and Wagner) that had been eradicated by Nietzschean thought. Denis, *Journal*, 2: 109. For Vincent d’Indy’s admiration for Wagner, see Thérèse Barruel, “La Coupole de Maurice Denis,” in *1913: Le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1987), 84.

²³³ In a later text published during WWI, Denis would condemn the influence of German thought in elevating naiveté and instinct over intellect and tradition, giving as examples “Parsifal and Siegfried, types parfaits et, avouons-le, sympathiques, de cette aristocratie de l’*Ur-Volk* où l’on sait tout sans avoir rien appris.” “Le présent et l’avenir la peinture française,” Maurice Denis, *Nouvelles Théories: Sur l’art moderne, sur l’art sacré, 1914-1921* (Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1922). 34-35. This text was first published as “Ce que sera la peinture Française après la guerre,” *Le Correspondant* (November 25, 1916), 626-45.

those who, in responding to the survey, had suggested that Christian art lay in an awareness of human inadequacy and suffering.²³⁴

Regardless, Denis seemed as determined as usual to make his individual, personal (and joyous!) sensibility an integral part of the décor, not only through his particular vision of his subject matter (his “gaucherie”) but also through his well-known habit of inserting friends, family, and significant figures/motifs from past works. It was as if Denis hoped, via flattened, sometimes dissonant forms and color, and expressions that were somehow naive and excessive all at once, to endow otherwise conventional subjects with more “complex” aesthetic emotions. The number of figures involved in the monumental décor led Denis to engage in this practice on an even wider scale, and he also sought to expand his repertoire of sensation through the use of models. Some of the latter became favorites themselves, repeated in various parts of the décor: Natasha Trouhanova, for example, appeared both among the *Le Drame Lyrique*’s Russian dancers and as one of the figures embodying musical notations in the stage’s excedra (*Presto*) (Figure 4.52).

But the theater decoration also contains multiple indications that Denis did not entirely trust the expressive strength—the symbolism—of these efforts. As if to acknowledge that his various visual cues might not be enough to communicate the meaning of the work, Denis had provided each of his scenes with a label. The four main

²³⁴ See in particular his responses to Fagus (associated with *l’Occident*) and the art historian Marcel Raymond in the second installment of the *Enquête*. To the former’s assertion that Christian art “ne réside point dans les orgueilleux, les sensuels mensonges de la forme divinisée [...] mais dans la sincère présentation de notre humble enveloppe mortelle transfigurée par la présence de Dieu,” Dimier replied that “en art il n’y a de beau que le succès. Le sublime est dans l’effort heureux, dans la domination de l’objet, laquelle exclut vertige et mystère.” Dimier, “*Enquête sur l’art chrétien.*”17-18

scenes, for example, bore subtitles in gold lettering that emphasized literal or figurative elevation, whether “The architecture of classical opera ennobles the passions and tragic fates” (*L’Opéra*) or “In the heights, in anguish and dream, lyric drama or poem, music strives toward a pure ideal” (*Le Drame Lyrique*).²³⁵ The citation of figures from past works can also be viewed not so much as an attempt at recapturing their emotional associations, but rather as an effort to constitute a new collective culture and language: a repertoire of allegories that could, once sufficiently established, function as symbols. In his article on the décor, Cochin presented his exegesis as a complement to the aesthetic power (the harmony) of the work itself:

The paintings will be beneficial through their harmony alone.

Yet minds attracted by the secrets of art, already delighted by the assembly of so many beauties, will want to enrich themselves even more by immersing themselves in the thoughts that guided the efforts of an inspired painter. It is for them that these notes have been taken, and one would like to conclude by telling them, “Before contemplating, place yourself in the presence of these thoughts; and then forget them completely, letting yourself be carried away by this art *that rises ever upward and always lifts something with it* [Cochin used the italics to indicate a paraphrase of the artist’s own words]!”²³⁶

In this account the aesthetic, symbolic emotion of the décor invites the spectator to search out the cultural knowledge necessary to a deeper understanding of its subject: the complex collective culture mourned by Denis. Having integrated this culture, Cochin

²³⁵ “L’architecture de l’opéra classique ennoblit les passions et les destins tragiques”; “Sur les cimes dans l’angoisse et le rêve, drame lyrique ou poème, la musique s’efforce vers un pur idéale.”

²³⁶ “[Les peintures] seront bienfaisantes par leur seule harmonie.

Mais les esprits qu’attirent les secrets de l’art, ravis déjà du groupement de tant de beautés, voudront s’enrichir encore, en se pénétrant des pensées qui ont conduit l’effort d’un peintre inspiré. C’est pour eux que ces notes ont été prises, et l’on voudrait leur dire pour finir: “Mettez-vous en présence de ces pensées, avant de contempler; et puis, oubliez-les tout à fait, et laissez-vous aller à l’envolée de cet art, *qui monte toujours et qui soulève toujours quelque chose!*” Cochin, “Les Symboles de Maurice Denis,” 57.

suggests, one can then forget it (i.e. let it become an unconscious substrate) and experience the paintings symbolically.

Cochin wrote that music—and, implicitly, Denis’s decoration—“opens up for our souls limitless horizons,” but was even more appreciative of the “gentle and delicate intimacy” the artist’s work provided. He believed that the latter was even more conducive to the “communion of souls.”²³⁷ Yet when the critic Achille Ségard analyzed Denis’s oeuvre in his 1914 volume on decorative painters, he felt that the artist, in searching to address a large public, had achieved neither intimacy nor infinity. Though he too commended Denis for having executed such a vast and accomplished work, Ségard believed that the artist had mistakenly focused on precise, rigidly delineated subject matter rather than the colorful, suggestive harmonies of previous work.²³⁸ Denis’s history of music lacked, he argued, the poetic evocation of a masterpiece, or even of Denis’s own work as an illustrator.²³⁹ In other words, it remained at the level of Denis’s “simple impressions.” Echoing Denis’s distinction between allegory and symbol, Ségard wrote that in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées’s four large compositions, “the figures seem to

²³⁷ “La musique ouvre à nos âmes les horizons illimités. Mais elle nous parle aussi, et même de préférence, dans une douce et délicate intimité. Son charme se redouble de celui des rendez-vous de famille, d’amitié, de tendre camaraderie. Car elle met en communion les âmes. C’est peut-être dans les cadres modestes et discrets qu’elle répand ses plus profondes et émouvantes sensations.” Ibid., 55.

²³⁸ Ségard thought that the public and profane nature of the decoration, which contrasted with the spiritual and intimate character of most of Denis’s other decorative works, had led the artist to place too much emphasis on the subject matter. “Dans ses œuvres précédentes M. Maurice Denis s’était préoccupé de l’expression par la couleur beaucoup plus que par le sujet. [...] Tout au contraire, pour cette frise de théâtre, on sent que M. Maurice Denis a voulu être savant, il a lu des livres, feuilleté des manuels d’histoire musicale, et il s’est cru obligé de faire des efforts pour fixer l’esprit du public sur des sujets agréables et brillants. [...] Si nous ne plaçons pas au premier rang, dans l’œuvre de M. Maurice Denis cette frise décorative, c’est parce que nous estimons que ses qualités essentielles, avec le sens décoratif qui ne fait défaut à aucune de ses œuvres sont, la fraîcheur du sentiment, la sobriété des moyens d’expression, enfin le don de s’exprimer par la couleur et par la suggestion des formes mieux encore que par le sujet et par la précision des contours.” Achille Ségard, *Peintres d’aujourd’hui: Les Décorateurs*, Third ed., 2 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1914). 214-15 and 226-27.

²³⁹ Ségard enthusiastically praised Denis’s recent illustrations for *Les Fioretti*.

have been chosen and juxtaposed in an erudite effort, searching through memories or books, by mental work rather than a surge of visual sensibility. It is not a purely pictorial vision.”²⁴⁰ Even the religious sentiment that Ségard identified as the main value of Denis’s work was described in terms of the idealized rather than the material and sensual.²⁴¹ The critic concluded that Denis’s art lacked the imagination, lyricism, and mystery afforded a visual sensibility: his Théâtre des Champs-Élysées decoration was symptomatic of an oeuvre that was too easily grasped and exhausted.²⁴² This evaluation contrasted sharply with Ségard’s analysis of Vuillard’s painting in the same volume: the

²⁴⁰ “Dans les quatre grandes compositions, au contraire, les personnages semblent avoir été choisis et juxtaposés par un effort d’érudition, en cherchant dans les souvenirs sinon dans les livres, et par un travail de l’intelligence plutôt que par un élan de sensibilité visuelle. Ce n’est pas une vision purement picturale.” Ségard, *Peintres d’aujourd’hui: Les Décorateurs*, 2: 218. Note Ségard’s use of the term “juxtaposed”: it is as if Denis was painfully (re)constructing the missing collective culture, patching it together before the spectator’s very eyes; the cupola’s décor seeks to supply rather than rely on the viewer’s knowledge.

²⁴¹ “La qualité du sentiment dans l’œuvre de Maurice Denis, voilà ce qui est essentiel et entièrement original. [...] Quelques-uns, parmi les meilleurs juges, estiment qu’il ne trouve l’emploi de ses dons les plus précieux que lorsqu’il les met au service de la Religion. Même dans ses décorations profanes les plus réussies, il semble que l’idée première ait jailli d’une émotion religieuse et que l’exécution garde une dignité, une noblesse, une pudeur et une sérénité qui s’accorderaient plus intimement avec un sujet religieux qu’avec un sujet profane.

Les sentiments que M. Maurice Denis jusqu’à présent a le mieux interprétés sont aussi les plus purs, les plus dénués de matérialisme ou de sensualité. [...] Presque partout [dans les décorations d’appartements privés] se sent un je ne sais quoi de spiritualiste, de tendre, d’idéliste et, par conséquent de religieux.” Ibid., 210-11.

²⁴² Ségard opened up his discussion of Denis’s decoration by saying that the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées “nous permet de constater en même temps les qualités éminentes de ce grand décorateur et les limites au delà desquelles il ne semble pas qu’il puisse s’élever.” In concluding his text on Denis, the critic wrote that “[i]l n’y a dans ses œuvres murales ni la majesté des formes des grands Vénitiens, ni surtout leur sens du mouvement dramatique et leur lyrisme, mais ce sont tout de même de belles formes et d’un beau style. [...] On sent très bien quelles sont les limites de ce magnifique talent. M. Maurice Denis a du sentiment plutôt que du lyrisme, de la tendresse visuelle et sentimentale, de la suavité plutôt que du pathétique, plus de volonté que d’instinct, plus d’intelligence que de fougue et plus de noblesse que du sublime. [...] Tout est en lumière, jamais d’ombre et jamais de clair-obscur. C’est peut-être à sa palette plus encore qu’à sa tournure d’esprit qu’il faut attribuer le manque de mystère de ses œuvres murales et qu’elles disent presque tout de suite à peu près tout ce qu’elles ont à dire.” He nevertheless praised Denis’ ability to create synthetic arrangements of colors and lines that coalesced at a decoration’s conceptual center, and argued that he was the only contemporary French painter capable of executing a decoration so vast and accomplished. Ibid., 213-16 and 241-43.

critic argued that the latter's work provided suggestion and mystery in abundance, but its subtle, intellectual character suited it only to an educated elite.²⁴³

Conclusion

The sacrifice of mystery and suggestion was one that Denis had willingly made, even if he had hoped for somewhat different results: notably, for the retention of individual sensibility and its attendant depth of aesthetic emotion. Cochin and many others granted him that depth, even if their reviews were hedged by doubts about the complexity of the subject and composition. Denis, like Ségard, was not so sure. He would not entirely reject decorations like *Psyché* and his history of music until the 1940s, when the shadow of WWII made him feel that he had missed the path taken by Vuillard. Yet some of these doubts were present in 1914, exacerbated by the looming menace of WWI.

As France mobilized in August 1914, Denis hoped to be called up as well, regretting never having done his military service. "Perhaps then I would have corrected the various weaknesses found within myself, and even in my painting. Whatever moral force I have, outside of God, comes from the years of inner life that preceded my twentieth year; otherwise I am only a sensitive bourgeois."²⁴⁴ This regret mixing with other pressing sorrows, notably his wife's deteriorating health, Denis found that:

²⁴³ "Ses tableaux déplaient à la foule. Ils ont quelque chose de mystérieux. On ne voit guère, pour s'y intéresser, que des amateurs parvenus à une haute culture intellectuelle et visuelle, très affinés, capables de contemplation et d'un certain recueillement. [...] Le propre de l'art décoratif est-il de s'adresser à tout le monde? Ce n'est pas nécessairement son caractère. Il est hors de doute que ces tableaux ne peuvent plaire à des collectivités composées d'hommes sans éducation mais il suffit que des élites puissent se complaire dans l'atmosphère que ces peintures créent en des intérieurs ou sur les murs d'un édifice pour qu'on ne puisse pas leur dénier le caractère décoratif." Ibid., 247-48.

²⁴⁴ "J'aurais peut-être alors corrigé les diverses formes de débilité qui se voient en moi, et même dans ma peinture. Tout ce que j'ai de force morale vient, après Dieu, des années de vie intérieure qui ont précédé mes vingt ans; autrement je ne suis qu'un bourgeois sensible." Denis, *Journal*, 2: 167.

in the midst of the tumult of war, which occupies all of my outside strength, my small soul—that of a fearful, sensual child—places itself [...] in the fearsome hands of God.

Let the Germans be annihilated, let all the philosophical, social, aesthetic drugs and drivel of the Teutons perish along with Kantianism, and I believe that a great Renaissance of the French order is possible, in keeping with the Action Française's ideas. Yes, but what materialism, what pride will triumph with the new ideas! This vague religiosity, which for many served as the chrysalis of faith, will it not disappear to make way for a pitiless sense of the concrete? My art is not strong enough to accomplish what I wished, to discover the beautiful association that, in every period of French art, has linked so well nobility of spirit with the precise charm of the real.²⁴⁵

Like so many of his contemporaries, particularly the generation exhaustively profiled in surveys like Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde's *Les Jeunes Gens d'aujourd'hui* (published under the pseudonym Agathon), Denis saw in WWI a purifying force. But he viewed this prospect with a great deal of ambivalence. He feared its victims were likely to include not only German thought and theory, but also the spirituality he had encountered in the romanticism of Beethoven or Schumann: a "vague religiosity" that had nevertheless paved the way to a stronger faith. He glimpsed in the AF's promised victory the threat of materialism, pride, and "a pitiless sense of the concrete." The latter was distinct from his own search for "reality's precise charm," or the triumph born of compassion depicted at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées.

²⁴⁵ "au milieu de ce grand tumulte Guerrier qui absorbe toutes les puissances extérieures de moi-même, ma petite âme d'enfant peureux et sensuel se remet, comme si tout en ce monde était fini pour elle, entre les mains terribles de Dieu.

Que les Germains soient anéantis, que périssent, avec le kantisme, toutes les drogues et toute la camelote philosophique, sociale, esthétique, des Teutons, et je crois qu'une grande renaissance est possible dans l'ordre français et suivant les idées de l'Action française. Oui, mais quel matérialisme, quel orgueil vont triompher avec les idées nouvelles! Cette religiosité vague, qui pour beaucoup était la chrysalide de la foi, ne va-t-elle pas disparaître pour faire place à un sentiment impitoyable du concret ? Mon art n'a pas assez de souffle pour accomplir ce que j'ai voulu, pour découvrir ce beau rapport qui, à toutes les époques d'art français, a si bien lié la noblesse de l'esprit au charme précis du réel." Ibid., 167-68.

Caught between the rather cold technical mastery advocated by the AF and the suggestive possibility associated with a freer, modern sensibility, Denis failed by either measure, his work judged as either too “puerile” or too constrained. He had not been able to reconcile the social with a modern Symbolism, at least on his terms. In the wake of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and then the war, Denis’s oeuvre was marked by a more evident division between, on the one hand, the sacred, didactic subject and, on the other, the profane and the sensual. The rather theatrical gestures and coloristic excesses of decorations like *Terre latine* and *Psyché* could be found in all of Denis’s works, but the precise contours and minimal modeling (composed of only a few distinct, flatly applied tones) of *Psyché* and the Théâtre décor would dominate in the religious décors. The latter made up the bulk of Denis’s decorative practice after 1914, which treated didactic, often complex, subject matter with extreme formal simplicity. Nature, rather than Symbol, now featured as the central subject. The “reconciliation of style and reality through the psychology of the Primitive, ‘the pure fool’ [‘der reine Thor,’ quoting *Parsifal*], through the innocent, virginal and serious copy of nature, through a childlike apprehension” was all the more important, Denis believed, in the sacred spaces of a church.²⁴⁶ “Sincerity and humility” was due a place where, “It is not man that becomes God, it is God that becomes man. Do not forget it,” he continued, “Do not make a dancer of Christ, nor an Apollo.”²⁴⁷ A 1914 *Nausicaa* (Figures 4.53 and 4.54), in contrast, is full of dancing, joyous

²⁴⁶ “Si j’écris un nouveau livre ce sera, suivant l’esprit de ma conférence et l’évolution de mon art, un essai de conciliation entre le style et la réalité par la psychologie du Primitif ‘der reine Thor’ [quoting *Parsifal*], par la copie innocente, virginale et sérieuse de la nature, par le don d’enfance.” January 1914, *ibid.*, 160.

²⁴⁷ “Avec sincérité et humilité, vous parlerez le langage de vérité pour raconter les vérités de la foi. [...] Dans le temple gothique, c’est la voûte qui détermine la base, c’est le ciel qui impose son plan à la terre. Au lieu de l’homme qui devient dieu, c’est dieu qui devient homme. Ne l’oubliez pas. Ne faites pas du Christ un danseur, et non plus un Apollon. Faites le Christ de votre cœur.” August 1914, *ibid.*, 171.

movements, as well as wide, ecstatic smiles. Having renounced the “baptism of Greek art,” Denis seems to revel in its healthy, terrestrial *bonheur*, which is absent any explicit signs of transcendence. In Denis’s classicizing or familial scenes of seaside play, which continued unabated alongside his religious décors, it is as if man had indeed become God (Figure 4.55). Accordingly, in such scenes the artist allowed himself a less precise, more painterly technique. In the place of one collective culture, then, Denis’s work seems to propose two partial collectivities: Catholicism, grounded in doctrine and allegory, and a new cult of the healthy body, grounded in the senses.²⁴⁸ *Joie de vivre*, these latter works seem to say, is the only universal, symbolic language.

²⁴⁸ This foregrounding of the healthy, vigorous body is in keeping with the emergence of a turn-of-the-century “culture of force” analyzed (and tied to the preceding Dreyfus Affair) in Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*: Ch. 6.

EPILOGUE

The Subject in Art

In this dissertation I have highlighted the political implications of the harmonious aesthetic emotion associated with “the decorative.” Roger Marx’s praise of Jules Chéret suggested that the poster artist’s integration of joyous stimulus and decorative beauty modeled the reconciliation of individual interest and collectivity. It was thus an appropriate vehicle for the shared emotion that Marx saw as art’s contribution to solidarity. Paul Signac believed that his intense, dialectical harmonies materialized utopia—which the artist defined, in the realm of painting, as “pure” aesthetic emotion—in the midst of an unjust, disharmonious present, thereby furthering the revolutionary awareness necessary to an anarcho-communist future. Maurice Denis valued form’s capacity, within the structured framework of *décoration* (decorative history painting), to communicate the intense feeling of religious experience: in other words, the immediacy, vitality and contemporaneity that he hoped for Catholicism.

When seeking to intervene, however obliquely, in the politics of their own time, it is not surprising that critics and artists turned to the emotion associated with decorative form. As I have indicated in chapter two and elsewhere, emotion was believed to anticipate reason in child and human development, and to serve as a powerful motivator that could both affirm certain identities, whether of race or nation, and transcend others, particularly barriers of class and education. Privileging emotion also made sense for figures seeking a collective art: emotion was seen as a unifying force not only by

republicans like Marx and Léon Bourgeois but also by reactionary figures like Gustave Le Bon, who emphasized the sway that emotion had over the crowd.¹ The association of emotion with crowds, women and children explains the desire of the Action Française and Denis—and no doubt, to some extent, that of anarchists like Jean Grave—to circumscribe it, but figures like Maurice Barrès and Le Bon cast doubt on approaches relying on reason rather than emotion.² In emphasizing emotion, artists were in many ways seizing upon a strength associated with art, for good or for ill, since Antiquity, an association to which empirical studies in the emerging field of psychology were adding their support.³ As Jonathan Crary has highlighted, in the Nineteenth Century vision itself came to be seen as an embodied experience, enabling the conceptualization of visual form as concrete action.⁴ Why not make the most of art's capacity to move—both metaphorically and literally—the viewer?

Yet my case studies also reveal a tension between the aesthetic emotion (the action of form in and of itself on the viewer) of the decorative and the political

¹ For examinations of Le Bon's conception of the crowd as part of a larger fin-de-siècle preoccupation, see Robert Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage Publications, 1975); Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). For a more recent discussion of the implications of Le Bon's crowd psychology for visual culture under the Third Republic, see Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1890-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). 82-97.

² Note that Le Bon, when arguing that reason had little to no effect on the crowd, highlighted the necessity of communicating with it through concise, powerful images. Gustave Le Bon, *La Psychologie des foules*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1896). 48-59 and 100-104.

³ For a discussion of Plato's condemnation and Aristotle's justification of poetry (i.e. art) based, in part, on its capacity to arouse emotion, see Richard Janko's introduction to Aristotle, *Poetics (with the Tractatus Coislinianus, reconstruction of Poetics II, and the fragments of the On Poets)*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987). ix-xx.

⁴ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990). He also examined the ensuing attempts to rationalize aesthetic response, and their implications for Georges Seurat's exploration of freedom and domination in his *Parade de cirque*, in "1888: Illuminations of Disenchantment," in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).

aspirations—whether republican, anarchist, religious or nationalist—of the figures examined in my case studies. In chapter two, critics reacting to the Union pour l’action morale’s poster saw an incompatibility between its presumed moral purpose and “art.” Most of them insisted that a didactic message would undermine what Gustave Geffroy termed “the freest, the greatest, the truest of human religions,” and what Roger Marx saw as the source of “the unconscious education of taste.”⁵ Other critics, in contrast, thought that the poster’s aesthetic subtlety obscured its “message,” resulting in a work that was illegible to the very publics (the masses) it was meant to address. As I discussed in chapters three and four, Paul Signac and Maurice Denis eventually conceded a certain dissatisfaction with the communicative potential of harmonious form, concluding that the language of aesthetic emotion depended on collectivity. Signac nevertheless increasingly devoted himself to aesthetic emotion, embedding in utopian harmonies his hopes for a collective, anarcho-communist future. Denis, in contrast, began to place as much or more emphasis on subject matter as the means to sustain and increase the collective—and for him, conservative and Catholic—culture that remained. In other words, one focused on

⁵ “[C]e mot de morale qui prête à l’équivoque, qui annonce, pour les uns, un prêche contre les mauvaises mœurs, et, pour les autres, on ne sait quelle arrière-pensée d’évangélisme, de néo-christianisme. Si M. Paul Desjardins et ses adeptes travaillaient simplement pour l’émancipation humaine, en dehors de toutes les préoccupations religieuses et moralisatrices, leur œuvre serait autrement vivace et féconde. En réalité, c’est à cela qu’ils vont, puisqu’ils se réclament de l’art, qui est la plus libre, la plus grande, la plus vraie des religions humaines. Qu’ils se définissent donc une bonne fois courageusement, virilement, sans souci de la mode mystique, déjà épuisée et agonisante.” Gustave Geffroy, “L’affiche morale,” in *La vie artistique* (Paris: H. Floury, 1897), 119.

“Arracher la rue à la monotonie grise et morne des édifices alignés au cordeau; y jeter le feu d’artifice des couleurs, le rayonnement de la joie; convertir les murailles, les soubassements en surfaces décorables et, de ce musée en plein vent, tirer la révélation du caractère d’une race et en même temps l’éducation inconsciente du gout public, c’est cela la tâche de Chéret.” *Exposition Jules Chéret: Pastels, lithographies, dessins, affiches illustrées (Décembre 1889-Janvier 1890, Galeries du Théâtre d’Application, 18 rue Saint-Lazare)*, (Paris: Imprimeries Chaix (Succursale Chéret), 1889). ii.

decorative harmony and the other on a traditional conception of *décoration*, the same categories they had once hoped to merge.

To sum up, in each of my case studies I examined particular moments when the socio-political turmoil of the belle-époque prompted artists and critics to bring together the tradition of *décoration* (decorative history painting) and the power of aesthetic emotion (decorative form). They did so in the hopes of addressing—and thereby constituting—the public (or *a* public) as a collective. Yet the moments when it seemed as if these aims might converge were very ephemeral. Inspired by the desire to synthesize forms of instrumentality associated, respectively, with history painting and decorative form, I found that the emphasis on decorative painting also signaled the evacuation of both history painting's pretension to teach the viewer and the belief (outlined by figures like Charles Henry) in the direct action of line and color. This evacuation corresponded to an increasing emphasis on the eternal half of Baudelaire's modern painting, as well as to a shift, in formal terms, from the individual decorative elements (evident stylizations and emphatic forms and patterns) of a dialectical harmony to a more synthetic conception of decorative harmony. Beauty and harmony remained the province of art, but explicit subject matter and explicit forms were relegated to a strictly utilitarian and/or mass culture. Though this emphasis on a purely aesthetic harmony was itself utterly politicized (and not only in conservative ways), by many of the critics and artists' own admission the preoccupation with aesthetics had created a gap between the artist and the wider public.

This separation of art from both ideological intentions and the wider public was on display in a 1924 survey on "Art and its 'subjects,'" though, as the title of the survey indicates, it was a separation that had become much more firmly polarized as an

antithesis between aesthetics and subject matter.⁶ Inspired by remarks made by Denis at a banquet held in his honor, the survey was conducted by the *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, an artistic review published by the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune and directed by Félix Fénéon. Denis was in many ways at the height of his career. The banquet celebrated the recent retrospective of his work at the Pavillon de Marsan, in which the artist had included two sections of his monumental history of French art, a decoration that would be installed in the Petit-Palais the following year. Denis's dreams of important official and religious decorations were coming to fruition, if not synthesized in a national religious art as he had hoped. In an introduction to the *Bulletin's* survey, one of its editors, Guillaume Janneau, described Denis as a leader of the French school. In a reversal of the artist's earlier reception, analyzed in chapter four, Janneau wrote that Denis could not be "less puerile."⁷

In his banquet remarks, Denis had argued for the superiority of artworks with a spiritual subject, favoring Rembrandt's *Pilgrims at Emmaus* (1648) over *The Flayed Ox* (1655). While acknowledging Denis's own definition of a painting as a flat surface

⁶ This was an antithesis already implicit in Louis Dimier's response to Denis in his "Enquête sur l'art chrétien," discussed in chapter four. Denis made the connection between Dimier and his own reflections on the "subject" in art explicit in an earlier, December 10, 1923 lecture at the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l'Université catholique de Louvain, which was subsequently published as Maurice Denis, "L'importance du sujet dans la peinture religieuse," *Les Questions liturgiques et paroissiales* (February 1924). Denis followed Dimier in distinguishing between expression and subject matter, only to realign these elements by framing them as two complementary types of "subject" that both had a role in the constitution of a religious art. See also the discussion of this conference in Cathérine Verleysen, *Maurice Denis et la Belgique, 1890-1930* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010). 152-54.

⁷ "M. Maurice Denis est l'un des hommes en qui la jeunesse artiste reconnaît l'un de ses chefs. Il ne saurait exposer une œuvre nouvelle, publier une étude, signer une préface, que la doctrine qui s'y manifeste ne provoque des commentaires passionnés. M. Maurice Denis est, en effet, un semeur d'idées. D'autres, aimés des dieux, vivent en une perpétuelle enfance, balbutiant d'étranges paroles, jetant parfois de beaux cris. M. Maurice Denis est aussi peu puéril que possible. C'est une intelligence lucide, positive, avisée, et c'est en même temps une volonté: de là, peut-être, la singulière autorité qu'à ses opinions ses émules reconnaissent." Guillaume Janneau, "L'art et ses 'sujets'," *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 14 (July 15, 1924): 305.

covered in color, Janneau opposed the artist's more recent emphasis on subject to discourses that prioritized the emotion produced by the harmony of lines and colors. Citing Hippolyte Taine, Eugène Delacroix and Henri-Edmond Cross to illustrate the association of emotion and formal harmony, Janneau concluded that this preoccupation should not be rejected as the basis of art simply because the "subtleties" of the harmonies it described "escaped the average person."⁸

Janneau left it to respondents to answer the following question: "Does the artwork require a subject?" Signac's reply, which was listed first, celebrated the life and freedom of "pure painting" against "moral, patriotic, philosophical or religious subjects."⁹ With an implicit dig at Denis, he remarked that only a Jesuit or a merchant of religious kitsch would rate a biblical image higher than a cityscape, for example.¹⁰ When Signac developed this argument further a decade later, in a text addressing "Individual needs and painting" for Anatole de Monzie and Lucien Febvre's *Encyclopédie Française*, he distinguished between the "picturesque" and "pictorial" subject. The former was associated with "literature, history, geography, sentimentality, fashion," elements that

⁸ "Sont-ce là des subtilités d'artistes exceptionnellement sensibles? De telles perceptions, on en convient, échappent au vulgaire; elles n'en sont pas moins réelles et sincères. Il n'est pas donné à tout le monde d'avoir les sens épais et le goût bas, et ce n'est pas aux lourdauds de fixer le choix en ces matières." This statement was an appropriate preface to similar remarks made by Rodin and reported by Janneau: "L'utilité du sujet," écrivait Rodin, 'est de concentrer l'esprit, de lui épargner la dispersion. Mais l'intérêt véritable est au delà. Notre public contemporain ne soupçonne guère cet au delà. Il prétend qu'il veut comprendre. Mais le sujet ne nous renseigne pas sur l'intention de l'artiste: il faut la chercher dans l'exécution.'" Ibid., 306.

⁹ "Mais, dame! la peinture pure, c'est difficile! Et il est plus facile de remplir un ciel avec des éphèbes ailés que de réussir les passages des divers bleus qu'il comporte, plus facile de coller une auréole derrière une figure que d'accorder cette figure avec le fond. [...] Pour ma part, je préfère humblement un simple bouton de tiroir de cuisine, modulé par Cézanne, ou une pauvre petite motte de gazon, dégradée par Seurat, à tant de grandes machines à sujets moraux, patriotiques, philosophiques ou religieux." "L'œuvre d'art exige-t-il un sujet? Une enquête," *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 14 (July 15, 1924): 308-9.

¹⁰ "Il faudrait le boniment intéressé d'un fabricant d'objets de la place Saint-Sulpice ou la dialectique captieuse d'un tejj [here Signac made use of a slang term used by Stendhal for Jesuits] aux abois pour soutenir que l'image biblique est supérieure à l'image géographique." Ibid., 308.

Signac insisted were soon dated and of little importance to the painter. “[T]he prodigious drama of artistic creation” lay entirely in an artwork’s pictorial subject: “all the aesthetic and formal power of arrangement, harmony and material.”¹¹ Signac argued that the artist must move [émouvoir] the viewer through “harmonies of line and color” rather than the subject, through the senses rather than reasoning.¹² While he conceded that the wider public was currently unable to appreciate these harmonies, Signac looked to a utopian future when everyone would have the education and leisure to do so.¹³

When he referred, in the same text, to the contemporary “discredit of the subject,” Signac may have been thinking of the results of the *Bulletin*’s survey.¹⁴ Although some of those who replied agreed with Denis, most were with Signac in identifying an artwork’s value with the emotion generated by its formal properties rather than with whatever feeling might be provoked by its subject. Denis noted as much in an epilogue responding to the survey’s results, but insisted that formal questions had never in the past been divorced from questions of subject: “artists of every time period claimed to be

¹¹ “[L]ittérature, histoire, géographie, sentimentalité, mode, etc., bref, tout ce qui n’est pas plastique constitue le sujet pittoresque. [...] [Le sujet pictural] comporte toutes les forces esthétiques et plastiques d’ordonnance, d’harmonie, de matière, qui permettront de réaliser, à propos de précaires réalités ou de vaines sentimentalités suggérées par le premier [le sujet pittoresque], le drame prodigieux de la conception artistique. Pour le peintre, seul importe le sujet pictural: c’est par lui qu’il exprime sa volonté d’art.” This text, on “Les besoins individuels et la peinture,” had two main subsections, entitled “Le sujet en peinture” and “La signification du tableau.” It appeared in volume 16 of the *Encyclopédie Française* (devoted to “Arts et Littératures”), which was published after the artist’s death in 1935. The text is reproduced in Paul Signac, *D’Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, ed. Françoise Cachin (Paris: Hermann, 1978). 174.

¹² “C’est par les harmonies des lignes et des couleurs, qu’il peut manier au gré de ses besoins et de sa volonté, et non par le sujet, que le peintre doit émouvoir. Et c’est en s’adressant aux sens plus qu’au raisonnement qu’il s’exprimera le mieux.” *Ibid.*, 182.

¹³ “Un monde nouveau créera une nouvelle culture; lorsque le rude labeur des hommes sera soulagé, presque tous pourront ressentir les émotions et les joies de la peinture comme telle. [...] C’est faute d’éducation et de loisir que les masses restent insensibles au pictural et s’en tiennent au pittoresque. Une société nouvelle fournira de nouveaux sujets, mais qui seront à leur tour, lorsqu’ils auront joué leur rôle nécessaire de propagande et de triomphe, dominés par la vraie peinture. De nouvelles matières, de nouveaux modes d’expression viendront à l’aide de valeurs nouvelles, libérées de la contrainte et de la servitude de la nature extérieure.” *Ibid.*, 189-90. See also the conclusion to chapter three.

¹⁴ A section of the text was entitled “Le discredit du sujet.” *Ibid.*, 180-82.

representing or telling something.”¹⁵ He associated art’s human, spiritual, and expressive character, as well as its ability to satisfy the public, with the subject.¹⁶ Using terms that he had once employed to describe Symbolist form, Denis argued that this subject should be understood to encompass both the “external and objective subject” that the survey had implicitly opposed to aesthetic emotion and a “subjective subject.”¹⁷ He used the latter to refer to the subjectivity of the painter, a preoccupation highlighted by so many of the respondents who dismissed subject matter. In other words, Denis was still trying to

¹⁵ “Cependant c’est un fait que depuis qu’il y a des hommes, et qui peignent, les artistes de tous les temps ont eu la prétention de représenter ou de raconter quelque chose. Dans toutes les théories d’autrefois, la question de la Peinture, des limites de la Peinture, était sousentendue, hors de discussion. Les préoccupations techniques étaient toujours relatives au sujet—de nature ou d’imagination. Cela se voit dans Cennino Cennini, dans les Conférences de l’ancienne académie, dans le journal de Delacroix, chez Baudelaire et chez Duranty.

C’est ce souci de l’humain, de la spiritualité, de l’expression, et par conséquent du sujet, qui les a amenés à préférer la représentation de la figure humaine à la nature morte, et finalement à placer au sommet de l’art la peinture d’histoire, dont la peinture religieuse, plus ancienne d’ailleurs, est pour ainsi dire le point de perfection.” Maurice Denis, “Epilogue de l’enquête sur le ‘sujet’: L’opinion de M. Maurice Denis,” *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 20 (October 15, 1924): 461. A revised version of this text, which Denis included in his 1933 *Charmes et leçons d’Italie*, is reproduced in *Le ciel et l’arcadie*, ed. Jean-Paul Bouillon (Paris: Hermann, 2003). 200-204.

¹⁶ Denis even argued for a hierarchy of genres akin to the one formerly upheld by the French Academy, with, of course, religious painting as its undisputed apex.

¹⁷ “Sur quoi nous [les peintres] mettrons-nous d’accord? Sur ceci, je pense, que le peintre est à lui-même son véritable sujet. Dans les objets extérieurs comme dans les inventions de son esprit, c’est toujours lui qu’il peint.

S’il est religieux, s’il est poète, s’il est stupide, cela se voit dans sa peinture, supposée aussi dénuée que possible de ‘sujet.’ Trois pommes de Cézanne sont un Cézanne: c’est-à-dire une expression de l’homme Cézanne, du ‘sujet’ Cézanne. Le vieux Corot, chrétiennement résigné aux souffrances de la fin de sa vie, écrivait : ‘Mettons de tout cela dans la peinture!’ Ainsi, quand même il n’y aurait pas de sujet du tout, il y en aurait tout de même un: celui qui peint. Appelons cela, si vous voulez, le sujet intérieur, le sujet subjectif. J’ai fait l’hiver dernier, à l’Institut de philosophie de Louvain, une conférence là-dessus [see footnote 6]. Je distinguais deux sujets: celui que je viens de dire, et l’autre, le sujet extérieur—celui que les peintres appellent à tort le sujet littéraire...

Toute la question est de savoir s’il est possible de discerner pratiquement ces deux sujets dans le travail du peintre. Si, dans le choix du motif, dans la préférence de l’artiste pour tels paysages, pour tel modèle féminin, l’intelligence, l’imagination, la passion jouent un rôle, vous rétablissez du coup l’importance du sujet extérieur, vous lui ouvrez tout le domaine de la peinture: si vous ne séparez pas hermétiquement votre art de votre vie, si, au contraire, vous en faites un tout, et si vos sentiments intimes, votre cœur et votre intelligence débordent dans votre activité artistique, enfin si ‘vous mettez de tout cela dans votre peinture,’ il est impossible que le sujet extérieur et objectif ne vienne tout naturellement, comme une fleur, s’épanouir sur le fond de votre sensibilité et prêter une forme éclatante, et aussi plus intelligible, à la subjectivité de l’artiste.” Denis, “Epilogue de l’enquête sur le ‘sujet’: L’opinion de M. Maurice Denis,” 462-63.

synthesize elements that other artists had concluded were largely irreconcilable: aesthetic emotion and representation, the artist and the public, religion and collective life. This is no doubt why the artist was chosen to write, for the same 1935 volume of the *Encyclopédie Française*, the counterpoint to Signac's contribution on painting and individual needs.¹⁸ Addressing "Collective needs and painting," Denis reiterated his lament over the contemporary division of aesthetic emotion from a representational subject, which he believed had divorced painting from life and thus from the general public.¹⁹ In sharp contrast to Signac, he saw in a contemporary "return to the subject," as well as in the revival of religious painting, the reemergence of a collective function for painting.²⁰

The *Bulletin's* survey demonstrates the extent to which, even in the midst of a "return to order," turn-of-the-century decorative harmony had become the paradigm for artistic value.²¹ The shift that I highlighted in my case studies, from the decorative as emphatic color and pattern to the decorative as synthetic harmony, was a shift from

¹⁸ Volume 16 was divided into two parts, the first focused on the producer ("l'ouvrier") of art and literature and the second on the user ("l'usager"). This second part was divided into two sections, one on the user's "besoins collectifs et sociaux" (in which Denis's contribution appeared) and another on his/her "besoins individuels" (the context of Signac's contribution). Pierre Abraham, ed. *Arts et littératures I*, vol. 16, L'Encyclopédie Française (Paris: Comité de l'Encyclopédie Française Éditeur, 1935).

¹⁹ "Il était réservé à notre époque de dissocier les éléments complexes de l'émotion esthétique, en rejetant ou en sous-estimant la représentation de la nature, et, par une autre erreur, la valeur du sujet. [...] Ceux qui se refusent à admettre les valeurs expressives et représentatives de la peinture, jusqu'ici recherchées en même temps et au même titre que le plaisir esthétique pur, ne sont, il est vrai, qu'une faible partie du public contemporain. Mais c'est une élite d'intellectuels dont l'influence [...] a profondément modifié les données du problème esthétique. [...] Les thèses d'historiens d'art, les théories esthétiques, le goût exclusif de la nouveauté, l'analyse des formules insolites et de l'originalité psychologique, autant d'éléments qui s'interposent entre l'amateur et les expériences du peintre." "Les besoins collectifs en peinture: Les problèmes d'aujourd'hui," in *ibid.*, section 68, p. 16.

²⁰ In a subsection entitled "Le retour au sujet," Denis cited a 1933 exhibition bearing that name as an example of the renewal of interest in subject matter, explicitly contrasting this renewal with the results of the 1924 *Bulletin* survey. *Ibid.*, section 70, p. 1.

²¹ Echoing Denis's later assessment, one of the survey's responses alluded to the "return to order" when he wrote that "[I]es tendances actuelles sont de plus en plus favorables au 'sujet.'" "L'art et ses 'sujets': Notre enquête," *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 18 (September 15, 1924): 414.

aesthetic discourses that prioritized modernity (the contingent, the specific, the fashionable) to those that prioritized the eternal half (the essential, the generalized, the universal) of Baudelaire's dialectic. The synthesis laid out in "Le peintre de la vie moderne" proved difficult, if not impossible, to attain. Decades later, postmodernist art, architecture and design would target modernism for, among other things, its pretension to temporal transcendence.

In this shift from the contingent to the eternal, the decorative was largely evacuated from modernism.²² It was ultimately, I think, too specific a marker: too closely associated, for example, with the particular concerns of pre-WWI design reform and too evocative of the feminine and the domestic. While one of the respondents to the *Bulletin's* survey was still using the term "decorative" to characterize harmonious line and color, another aligned subject matter with decoration in order to identify it as an unwanted supplement to the naked truth of painting.²³ Invoking Adolf Loos's famous condemnation of ornament, the painter Jean Lurçat (well known, strangely enough, for his decorative tapestries) wrote:

Painting is made of vibrations taken from man. Is it really necessary to "decorate" it with these tattoos-subjects of which the least that can be said is that they are eye-catching?

²² See, for example, the introductions to Jenny Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Christopher Reed, *Not at Home: the Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

²³ The painter Georges Barat-Levraux wrote: "Que l'arabesque soit déterminée par une figure humaine ou par une soupière, peu importe au point de vue décoratif." Despite this apparent dismissal of subject matter, he proceeded to argue for its value, echoing Denis on several points. For example: "Le rôle du sujet est donc d'établir un point de contact entre la pensée du spectateur et celle de l'artiste; il se rattache à la part d'objectivité dans la représentation, élément indispensable à la compréhension de celui qui agit par celui qui regarde." "L'art et ses 'sujets': Notre enquête," 408 and 409.

Painting's most elevated subject, would that not be painting itself? Life is more in the blood of the painter than in the most beautiful symbols stolen from the neighbors (poets or historians).²⁴

Having succeeded in transcending subject matter, the decorative had transcended itself.

But by the painters' own accounts, it had not managed to transcend the divide, at least in painting, between the aesthetic and the social.

²⁴ "La peinture est faite de vibrations tirées de l'homme. Est-ce vraiment la peine de la 'décorer' de ces tatouages-sujets dont le moins qu'on puisse dire est qu'ils tirent l'œil[?] Le sujet le plus élevé de la peinture, ne serait-ce pas la peinture? La vie est plus dans le sang du peintre que dans les plus beaux symboles chapardés aux voisins (poètes ou historiens)." Earlier in his response Lurçat compared painting to a naked or accessorized mistress, writing that "je fais l'amour [avec la peinture] quasi quotidiennement sans perles, plumes, pickles ou manivelles." "L'art et ses 'sujets': Fin de l'enquête," *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 19 (October 1, 1924): 433.

FIGURES



Figure 1.1
Jean Auguste Ingres, *L'apothéose d'Homère (The Apotheosis of Homer)*, 1827,
oil on canvas, 386 x 512 cm,
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 1.2
Eugène Delacroix, *Le combat de Jacob avec l'Ange (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*,
1861,
fresco, 758 x 491 cm,
Église de Saint-Sulpice, Paris



Figure 2.1

Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Bois sacré cher aux arts et aux muses*, 1884,
oil on canvas, 460 x 1040 cm
Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lyon



Figure 2.2
Jules Chéret, *Exposition universelle de 1889, Le Pays des fées*, 1889,
color lithograph, 83 x 66 cm



Figure 2.3
Jules Chéret, *Musée Grévin, Pantomimes lumineuses*, 1892,
color lithograph, 124 x 87,5 cm

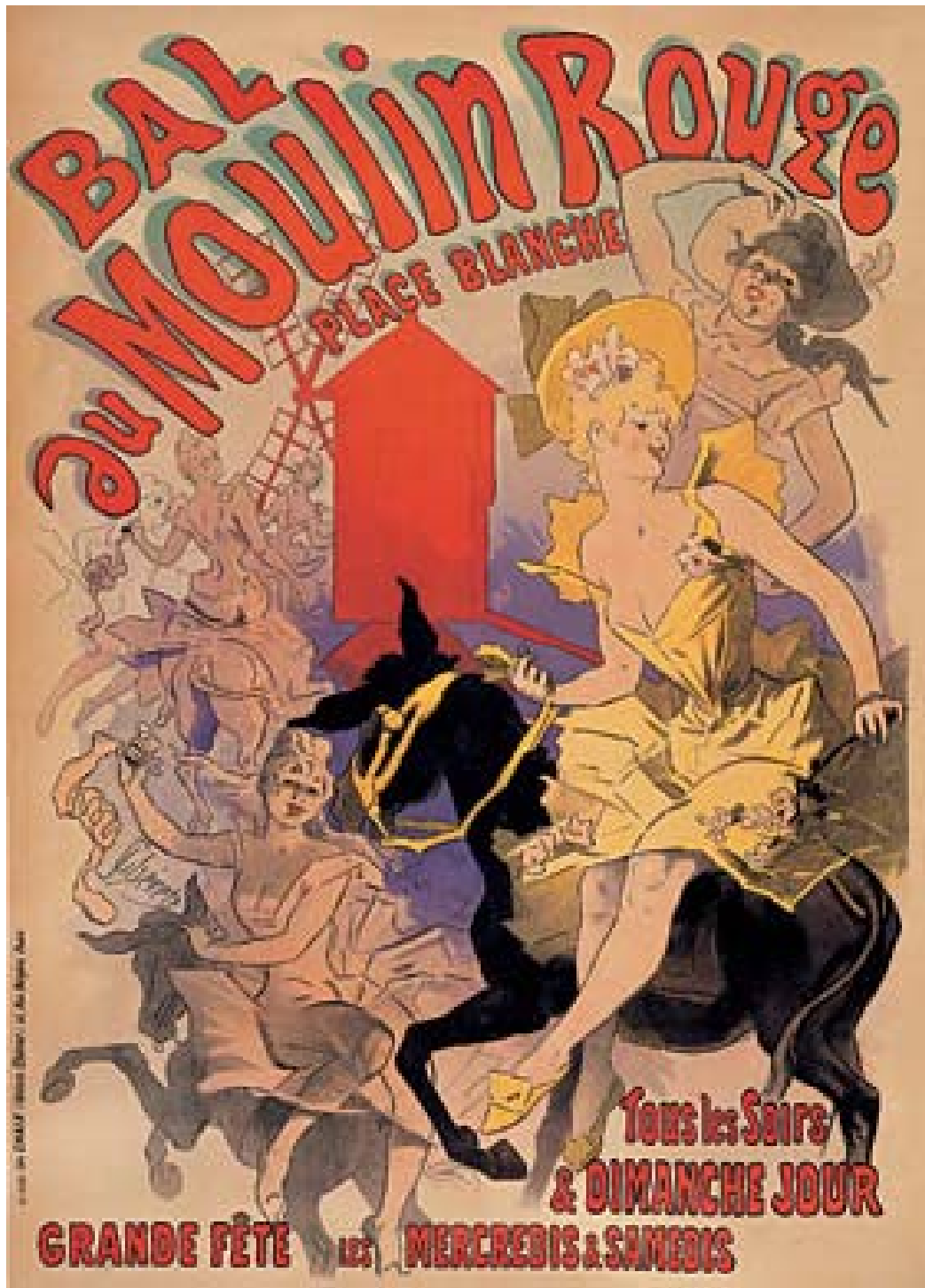


Figure 2.4
Jules Chéret, *Bal du Moulin Rouge Place Blanche*, 1889,
color lithograph, 130 x 92 cm



Figure 2.5
Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, *Le pauvre pêcheur*, 1881,
oil on e, 155 x 192 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 2.6
 Épinal image, *Bonaparte touchant les pestiférés* (*Bonaparte touching the Plague Victims*), 1835



Figure 2.7
Jules Chéret, *La Loïe Fuller*, 1893
color lithograph



Figure 2.8
Alfred Choubrac, *L'originale Loïe Mystérieuse*, 1892,
color lithograph

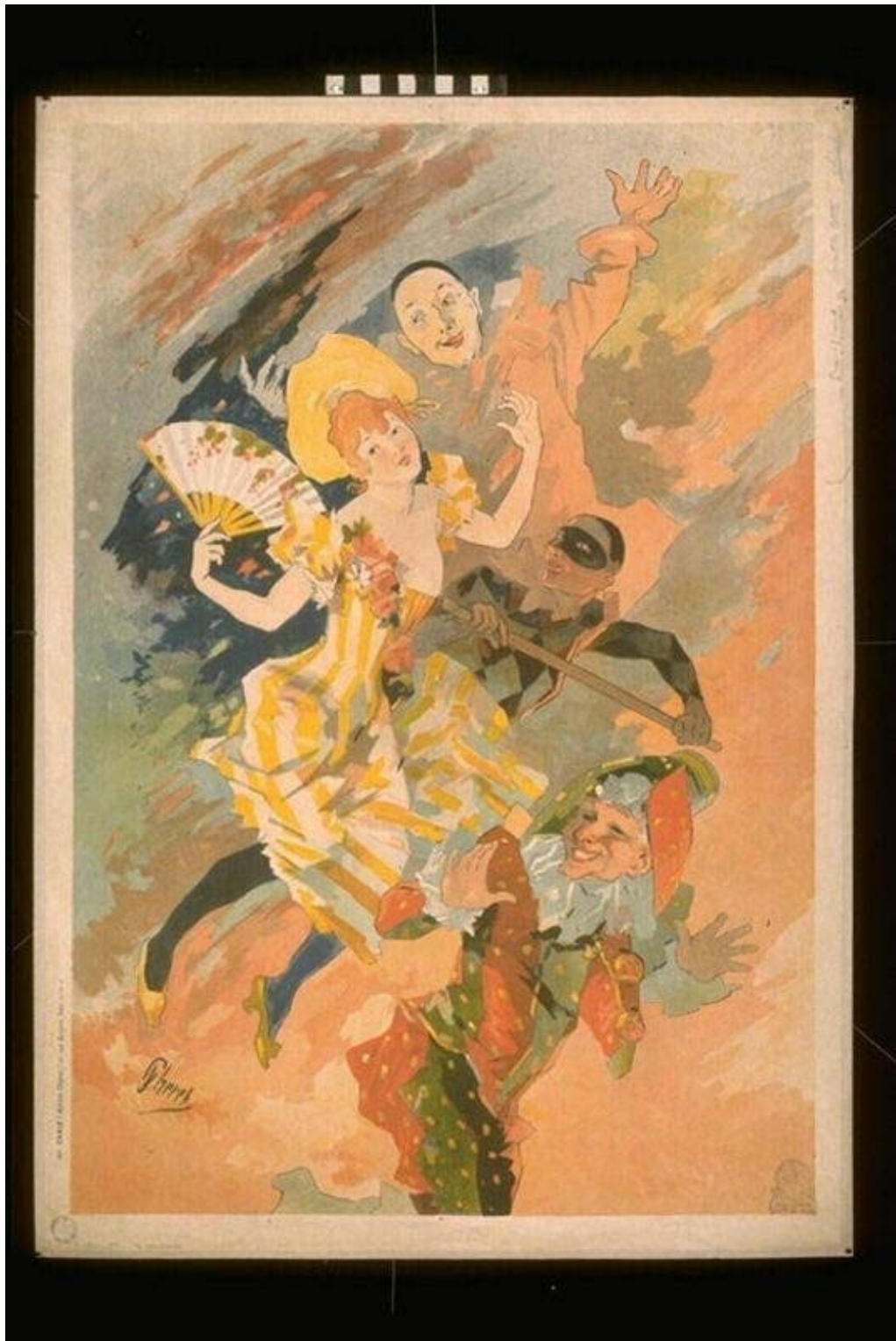


Figure 2.9
Jules Chéret, *La Pantomime*, 1891,
color lithograph, 127.5 x 90 cm

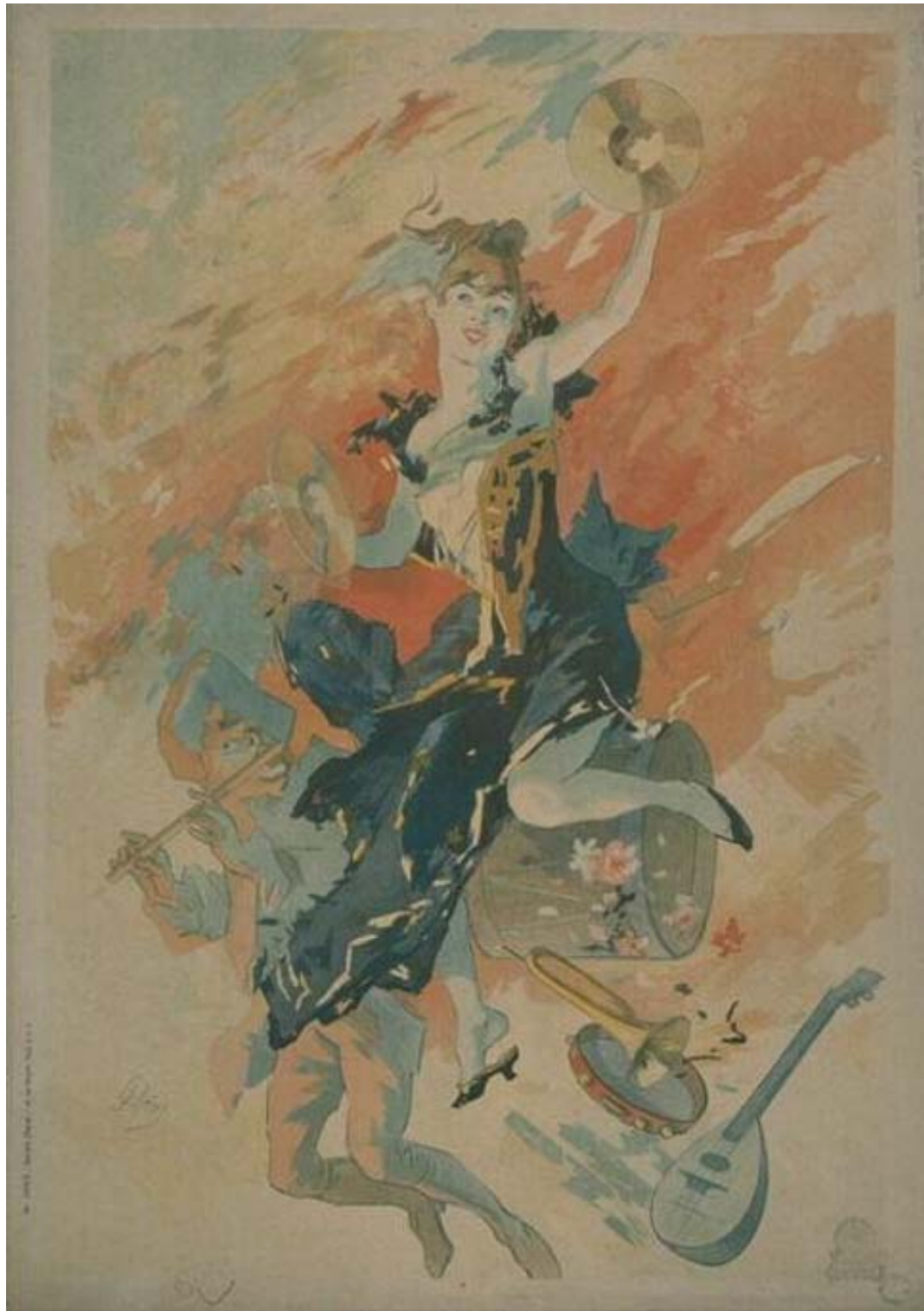


Figure 2.10
Jules Chéret, *La Musique*, 1891,
color lithograph, 128 x 90.5 cm



Figure 2.11
Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Le collin maillard (Blind Man's Bluff)*, 1769
oil on canvas, 117 x 91 cm,
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio



Figure 2.12
Jules Cheret, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, installed in Paris Hotel de Ville in 1902,
oil on canvas



Figure 2.13

L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève (Childhood of St Genevieve), 1896

Printed after a work by Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes by Alexandre Lauzet (version shown here from a reproduction that appeared in *Maîtres de l’Affiche*), 150 x 450 cm.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 2.14
Panel from *L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève* (*Childhood of St Genevieve*), 1896
Printed after a work by Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes by Alexandre Lauzet.



Figure 2.15
Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, panels from *L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève*, 1877-78,
oil on canvas,
Pantheon, Paris



Figure 2.16
Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, decorative panel from *L'Enfance de Sainte Geneviève*,
1877-78,
oil on canvas,
Pantheon, Paris

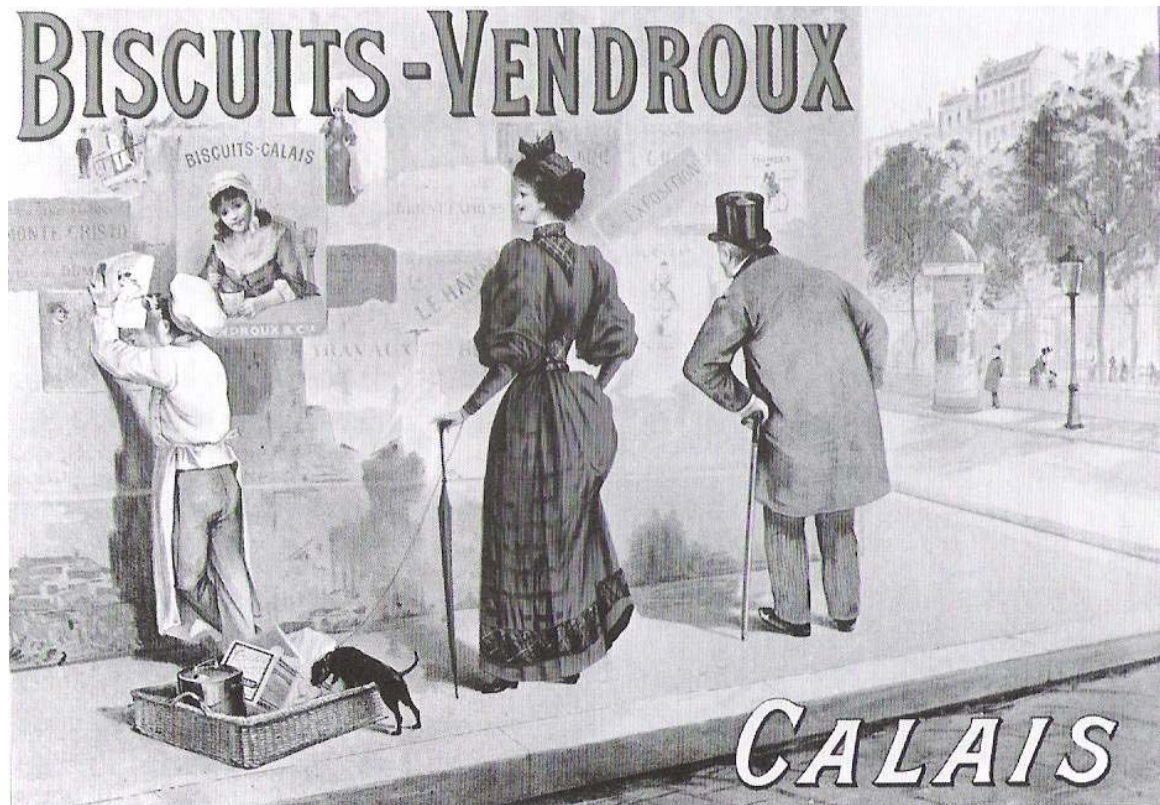


Figure 2.17
Anonymous, *Biscuits Vendroux*, 1894,
poster (reproduced in black and white)



Figure 2.18
Theophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Affiches Charles Verneau* ("La Rue"), 1896,
color lithograph, 301 x 237.5 cm



Figure 2.19
Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, *Centenaire de la Lithographie*, 1895
color lithograph, 147 x 110 cm

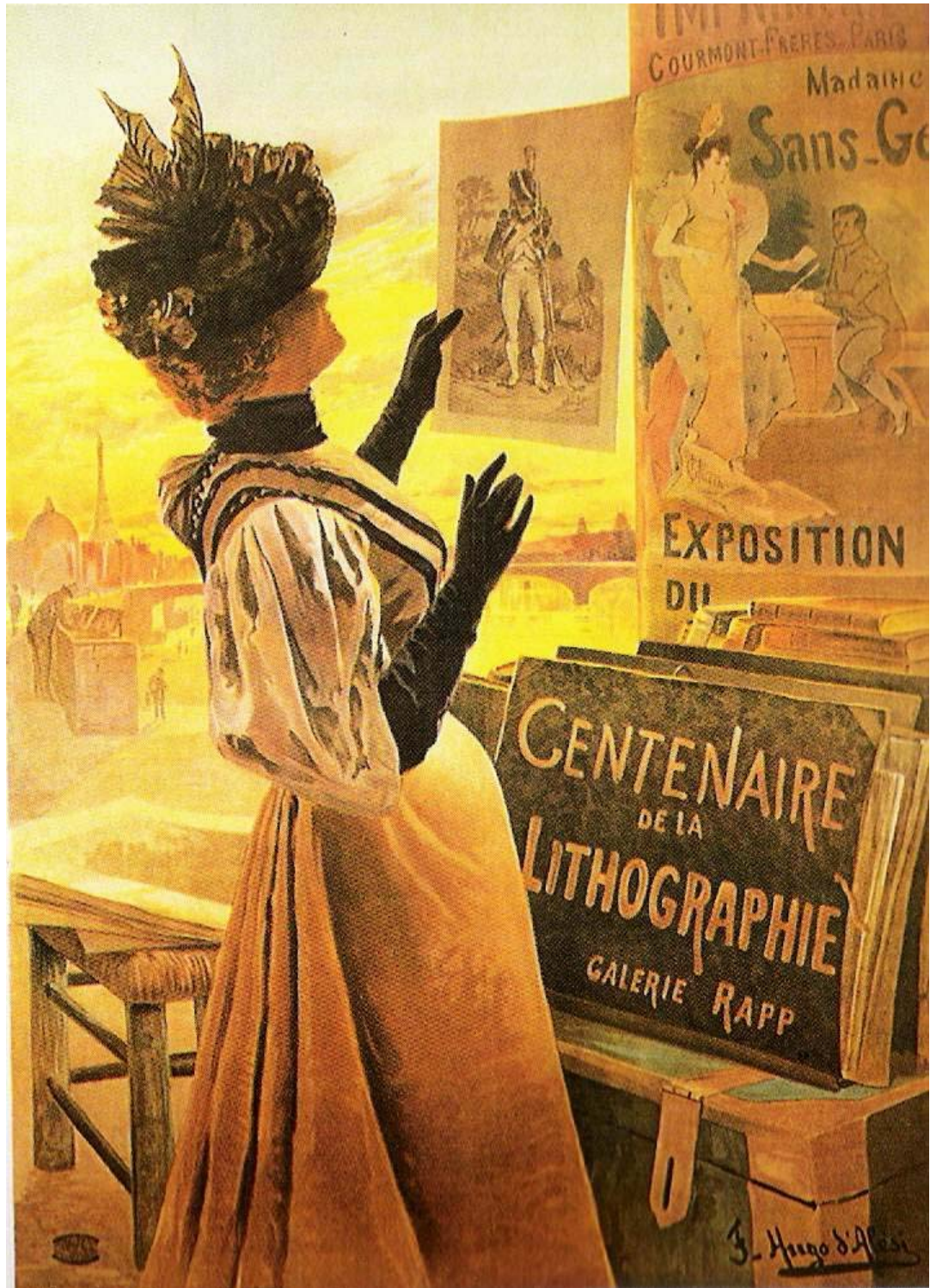


Figure 2.20
Hugo d'Alesi, *Centenaire de la Lithographie*, 1895,
color lithograph, 152 x 107 cm



Figure 2.21
Willette, *La Pieuse Erreur* (*The Pious Error*), original design for the 1899 *Les Maitres de l'affiche*, lithograph



Figure 2.22
Jules Chéret, *Pippermint*, 1899,
color lithograph



Figure 2.23
Jules Chéret
Ceiling of the Billiards room, Villa la Sapinière, Évian
278



Figure 2.24
Jules Chéret, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (*Luncheon on the Grass*), 1904,
oil on canvas,
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nice



Figure 2.25
Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Alsace*, 1896
color lithograph, 88 x 62.5 cm

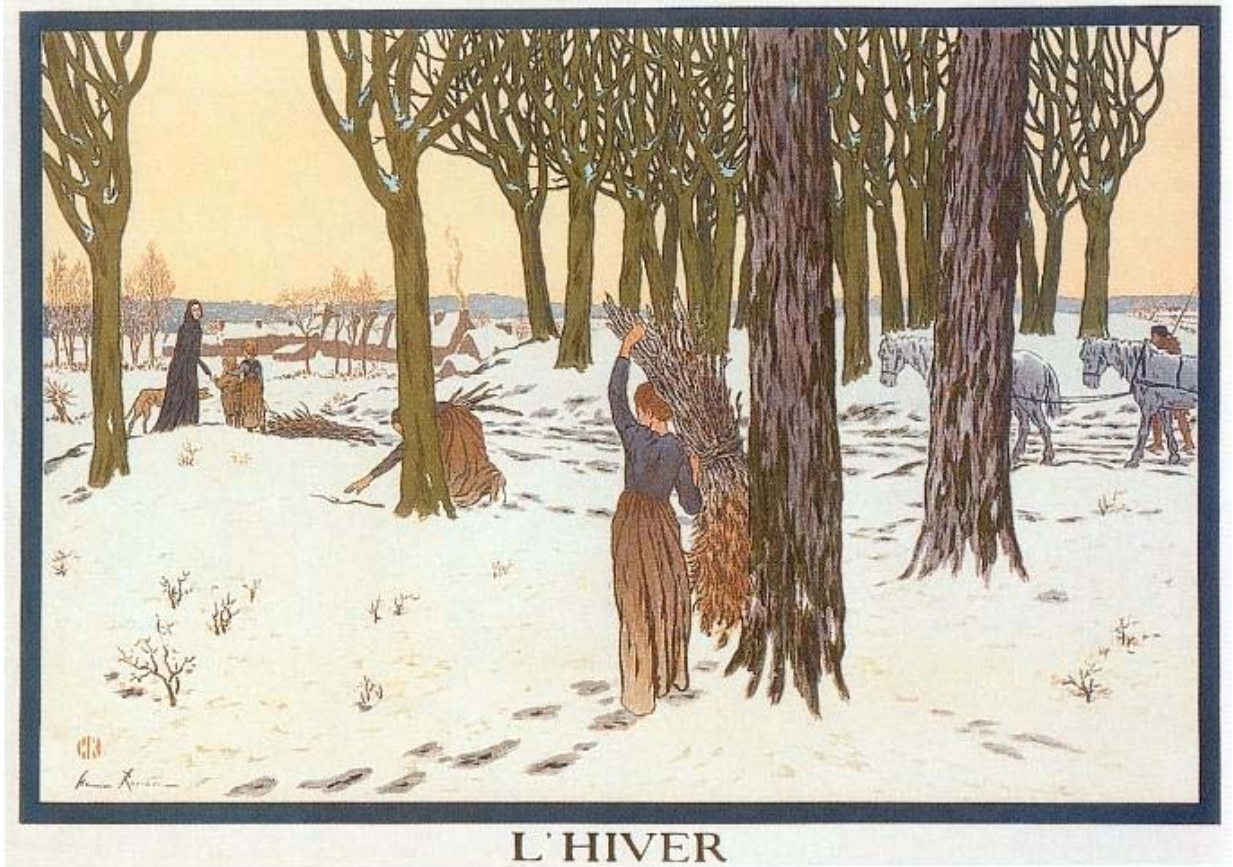


Figure 2.26
Henri Rivière, *L'Hiver (Winter)*, 1896,
color lithograph, 66 x 90 cm



Figure 3.1

Paul Signac, *Au temps d'harmonie: l'âge d'or n'est pas dans le passé, il est dans l'avenir*
(*In the Time of Harmony: The Golden Age Is Not in the Past, It Is in the Future*), 1894-
95,
oil on canvas, 300 x 400 cm,
Mairie de Montreuil, Montreuil



Figure 3.2

Paul Signac, *Projet pour la décoration de la salle des fêtes de la mairie d'Asnières: Esquisse du panneau central no. 3* (Project for the Asnières City Hall Decoration: Sketch for the Central Panel no. 3), 1900, oil on canvas, 49 x 224 cm, Private Collection



Figure 3.3

Paul Signac, *Projet pour la décoration de la mairie d'Asnières: Esquisse de la voûte unique* (Project for the Asnières City Hall Decoration: Sketch for the Single Vault), 1900, oil on canvas, 49 x 120 cm, Private collection



Figure 3.4

Paul Signac, *Portrait de M. Félix Fénéon, Opus 127 (Portrait of Félix Fénéon)*, 1890-1891,

oil on canvas, 73.5 x 92.5 cm,
Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 3.5
Paul Signac, *Un Dimanche (A Sunday)*, 1888-90,
oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm,
Private Collection

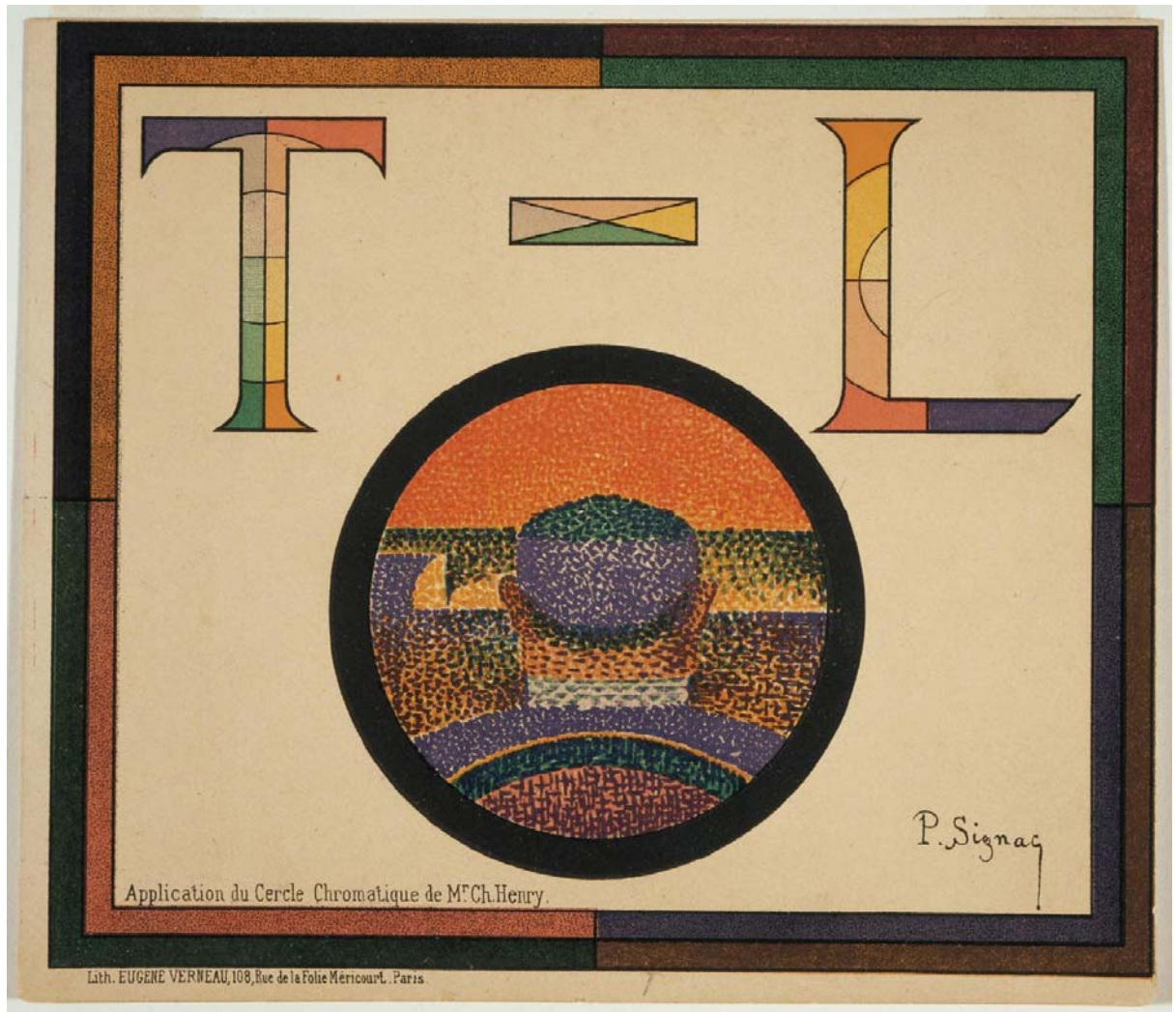


Figure 3.6
Paul Signac, *Application du Cercle Chromatique de Mr. Ch. Henry*, 1888,
color lithograph printed on a program for the Théâtre-Libre, 16.2 x 20 cm,
Private Collection



Figure 3.7
Paul Signac, *Femmes au puits*, Opus 238 (*Women at the Well*), 1892,
oil on canvas, 195 x 131 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

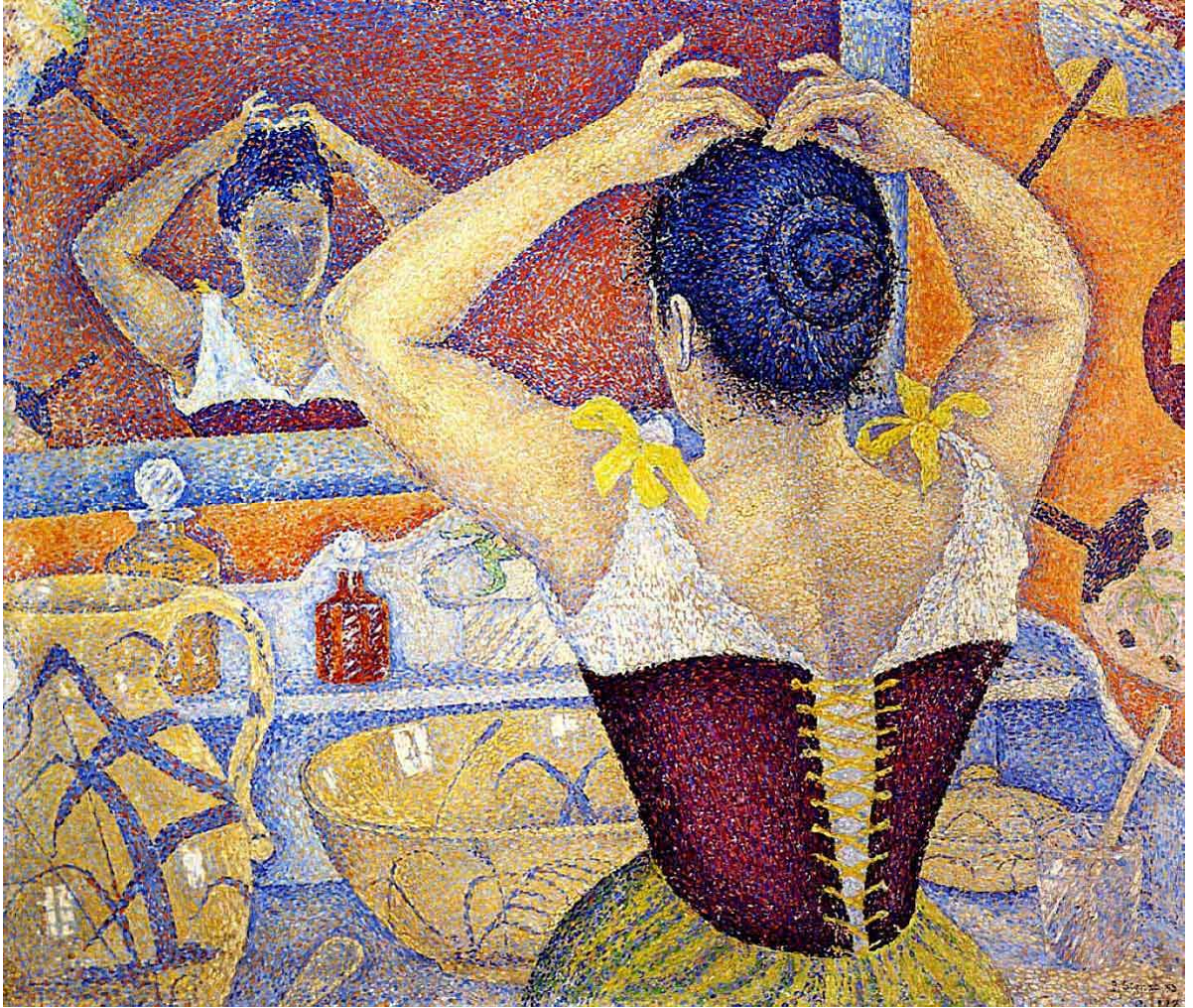


Figure 3.8
Paul Signac, *Femme se coiffant*, Opus 227 (*Woman Arranging Her Hair*, Opus 227),
1892,
oil on canvas, 59 x 70 cm,
Private Collection



Figure 3.9
Georges Seurat, *Jeune femme se poudrant* (*Young Woman Powdering Herself*), 1889-90,
oil on canvas, 95.5 x 79.5 cm,
Courthould Institute of Art



Figure 3.10
Paul Signac, *Le démolisseur* (*The Wrecker*), 1897-1899,
oil on canvas, 250 x 152 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

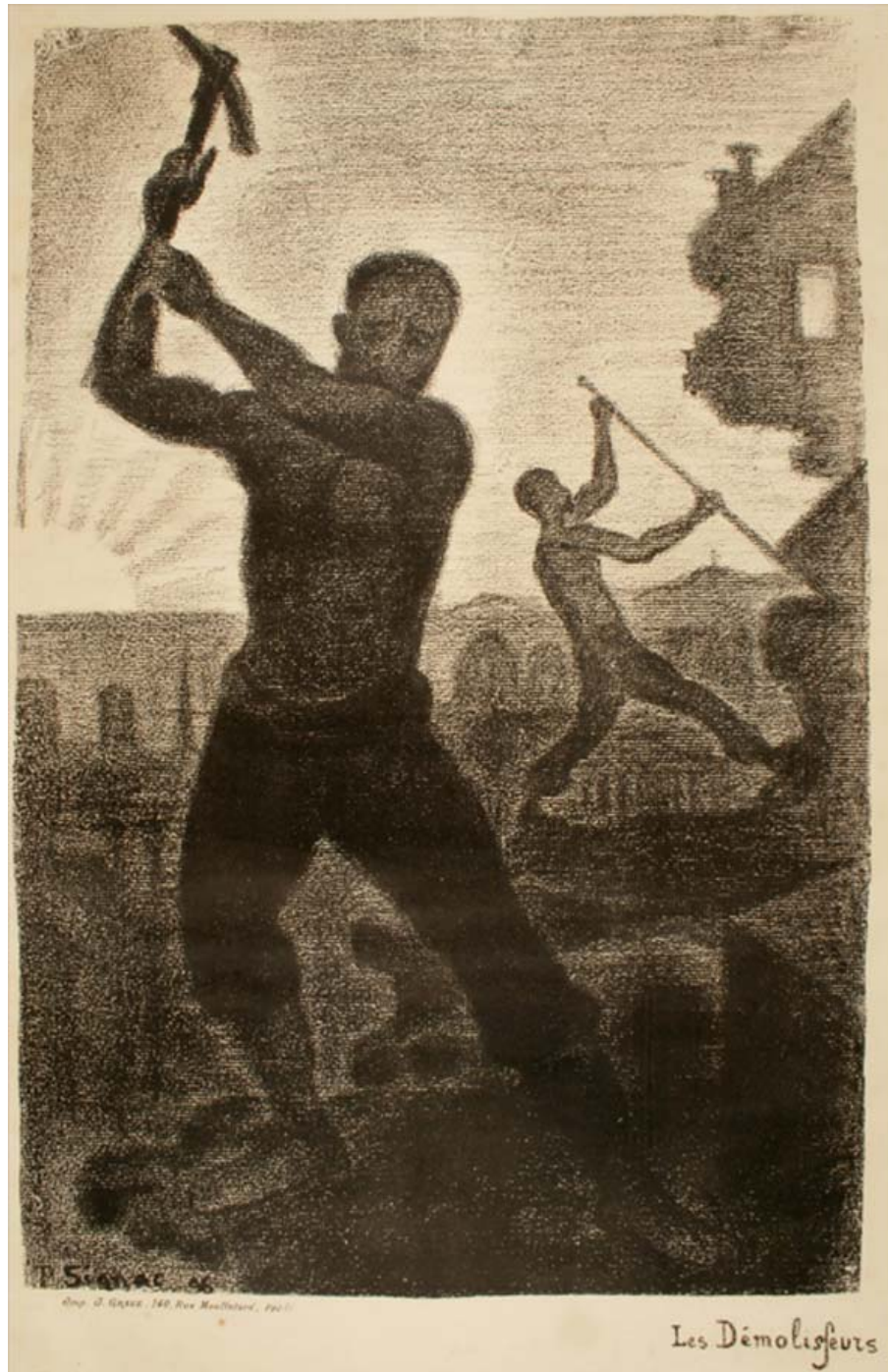


Figure 3.11
Paul Signac, *Les démolisseurs*, 1896,
Lithograph, 52 x 36 cm

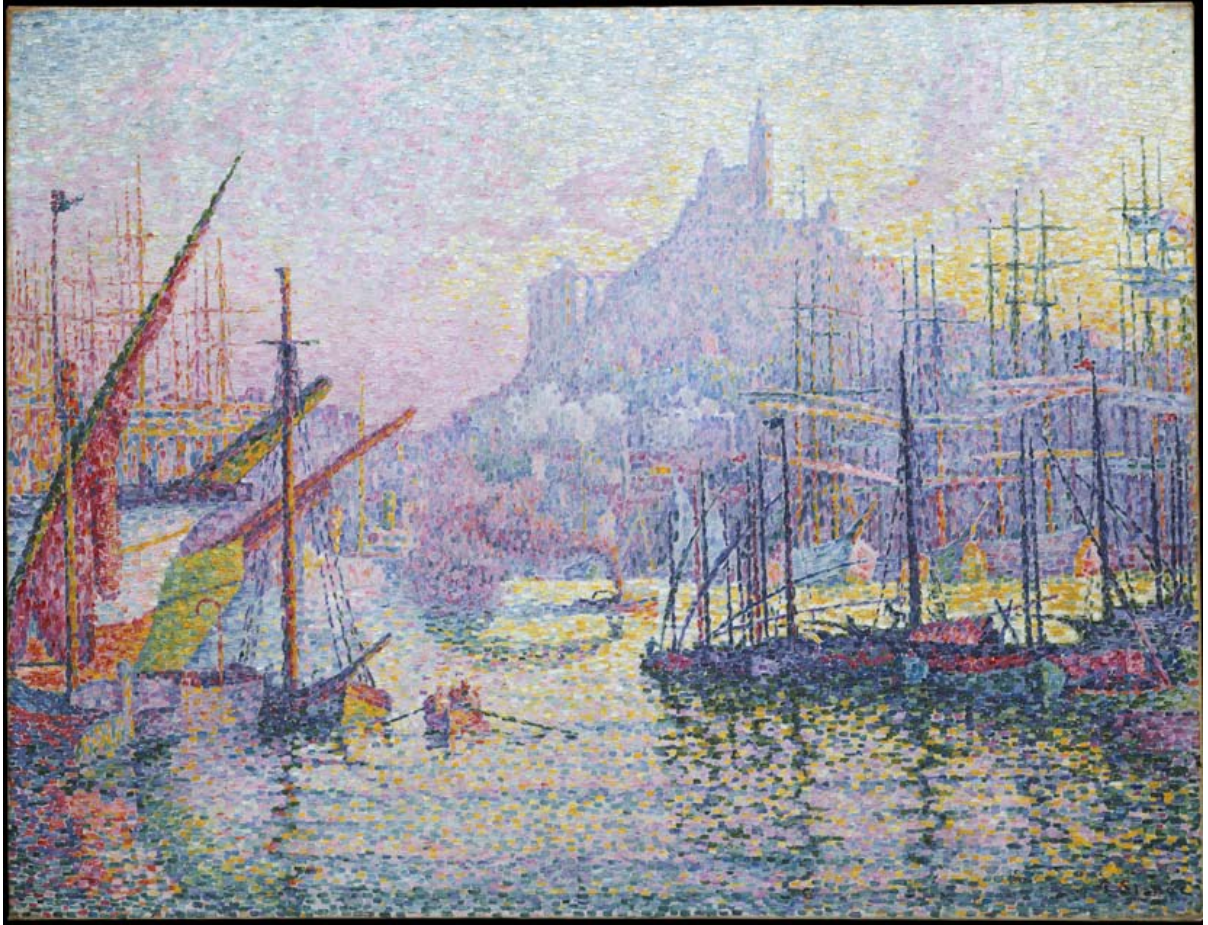


Figure 3.12

Paul Signac, Marseille, *La Bonne Mère (Notre Dame de la Garde)*, 1905-1906,
oil on canvas, 88.9 x 116.2 cm,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Robert Lehman, 1955 (55.220.1)



Figure 3.13
Paul Signac, *Collioure, La Plage de la Ville, Opus 165*, 1887,
oil on canvas, 62.9 x 80 cm,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975
(1975.1.208)



Figure 3.14

Paul Signac, *Concarneau, Calme du soir*, Opus 220 (*allegro maestoso*), 1891,
oil on canvas, 64.8 x 81.3 cm (framed: 102.2 x 86.4 cm),
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975
(1975.1.209)



Figure 4.1
Maurice Denis, *Mystère catholique (Catholic Mystery)*, 1889,
oil on canvas, 97 x 143 cm,
Musée départemental Maurice Denis, Saint Germain en Laye



Figure 4.2
Maurice Denis, *Panneau pour une chambre de jeune fille: Soir de septembre* (Panel for a girl's bedroom: September evening), 1891,
oil on canvas, 38 x 61 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 4.3

Maurice Denis, *L'Échelle dans le feuillage* or *Arabesques poétiques pour la décoration d'un plafond* (*Ladder in Foliage* or *Poetic Arabesques for a Ceiling Decoration*), 1892, oil on canvas, 172 x 235 cm, Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.4
Maurice Denis, *Les Muses (The Muses)*, 1893,
oil on canvas, 137 x 171 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 4.5
Maurice Denis, *Le Chemin de la Vie* (*The Path of Life*), 1895,
stained glass window executed by Henri Carot, 305 x 100 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.6
Maurice Denis, *Le Départ (The Departure)*, 1897,
oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.7
Maurice Denis, 1897, *Le Lâcher des chiens* (*The Release of the Dogs*),
oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye

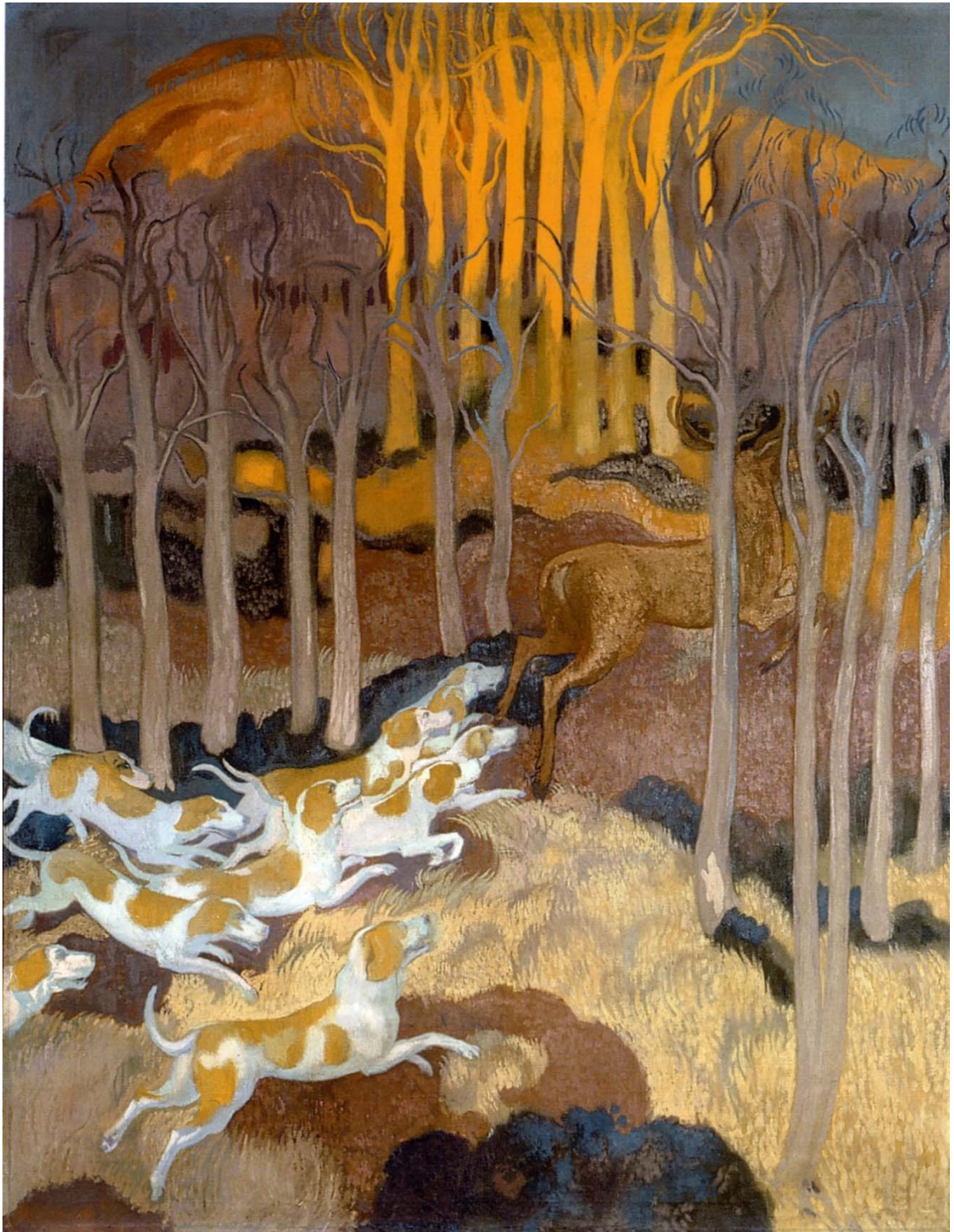


Figure 4.8
Maurice Denis, *Le Bien-aller*, 1897,
oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.9
Maurice Denis, *Le Miracle (The Miracle)*, 1897,
oil on canvas, 225 x 212 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.10
Maurice Denis, *Le Défait (Losing the Scent)*, 1897,
oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.11
Maurice Denis, *La Chasse infernale (The Devil's Hunt)*, 1897,
oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.12
Maurice Denis, *L'Arrivée à l'ermitage* (*The Arrival at the Hermitage*), 1897,
oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.13
Maurice Denis, *Homage à Cézanne (Homage to Cézanne)*, 1900,
oil on canvas, 180 x 240 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 4.14
Chapel of the Collège Ste Croix (Le Vésinet),
Photograph c. 1900



Figure 4.15

Photo-montage (by Fabienne Stahl) reconstructing *L'Exaltation de la Croix* in situ



Figure 4.16
Maurice Denis, Detail from *L'Exaltation de la Croix (Anges et enfants aux encensoirs)*,
1899,
oil on canvas, 225 x 225 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 4.17
Maurice Denis, Detail from *L'Exaltation de la Croix* (*Anges et enfants lançant des pétales*), 1899,
oil on canvas, 225 x 225 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 4.18
Maurice Denis, Detail from *L'Exaltation de la Croix (Paysage)*, 1899,
oil on canvas, 115 x 164 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 4.19
Maurice Denis, Detail from *L'Exaltation de la Croix*, 1899,
oil on canvas, 220 x 597 cm,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 4.20
Maurice Denis, ceiling decoration of the Chapelle de la Vierge, Église de Sainte
Marguerite, 1901,
oil on canvas,
Le Vésinet, France



Figure 4.21
Maurice Denis, ceiling decoration of the chapelle du Sacré Coeur, Église de Sainte
Marguerite (prior to 2009), 1901,
oil on canvas,
Le Vésinet, France



Figure 4.22
Maurice Denis, *La Vierge à l'École* (*Our Lady of the Schools*), 1903,
oil on canvas, 158 x 200 cm,
Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles



Figure 4.23
Maurice Denis, ceiling decoration of the chapelle du Sacré Coeur, Église de Sainte Marguerite (prior to 2009) including view of Montmartre, 1901, oil on canvas, Le Vésinet, France



Figure 4.24
Maurice Denis, view of the chapelle du Sacré Coeur, *Coup de lance* is visible to the right,
Église de Sainte Marguerite (prior to 2009), 1901,
oil on canvas,
Le Vésinet, France



Figure 4.25

Photograph of *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie* (*Latin Earth, Muse of Art and Poetry*) in situ prior to 1924



Figure 4.26
Photograph of *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie* (*Latin Earth, Muse of Art and Poetry*) in situ prior to 1924



Figure 4.27
Maurice Denis, *Les arts plastiques (The Fine Arts)*, part of *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie*, 1907,
oil on canvas,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.28
Maurice Denis, *La poésie (Poetry)*, part of *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie*,
1907,
oil on canvas,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.29
Maurice Denis, *Le paysage (Landscape)*, part of *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie*, 1907,
oil on canvas,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.30
Maurice Denis, *La musique (Music)*, part of *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie*,
1907,
oil on canvas,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.31
Maurice Denis, *Les arts plastiques*, part of *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie*,
Detail with Aristide Maillol, 1907,
oil on canvas,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.32
Maurice Denis, *Le Bain (The Bath)*, panel from *Éternel Printemps (Eternal Springtime)*,
1908,
oil on canvas, 246 x 102 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.33
Maurice Denis, *La Couronne de fleurs* (*The Wreath of Flowers*), panel from *Éternel Printemps*, 1908,
oil on canvas, 246 x 154 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.34
Maurice Denis, *Les Musiciennes* (*The Musicians*), panel from *Éternel Printemps*, 1908,
oil on canvas, 246 x 150 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye

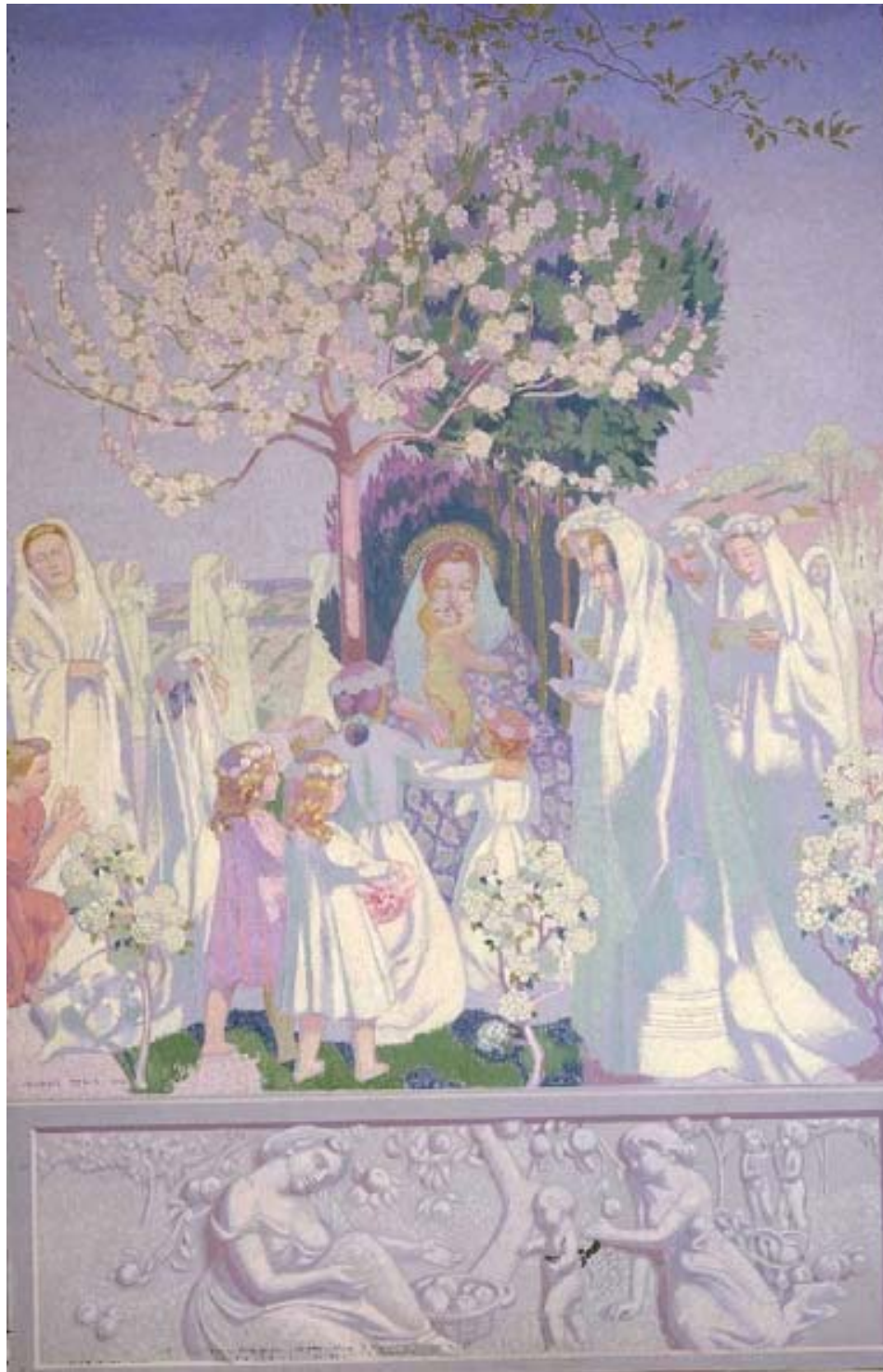


Figure 4.35
Maurice Denis, *La Madone (The Madonna)*, panel from *Éternel Printemps*, 1908,
oil on canvas, 246 x 150 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.36
Maurice Denis, *Temps des lilas* or *Le Printemps* (*Time of Lilacs* or *Springtime*), 1896,
oil on canvas, 190 x 210 cm,
Private Collection



Figure 4.37
Maurice Denis, *Avril (April)*, 1894,
oil on canvas, 182 cm diameter,
Private Collection

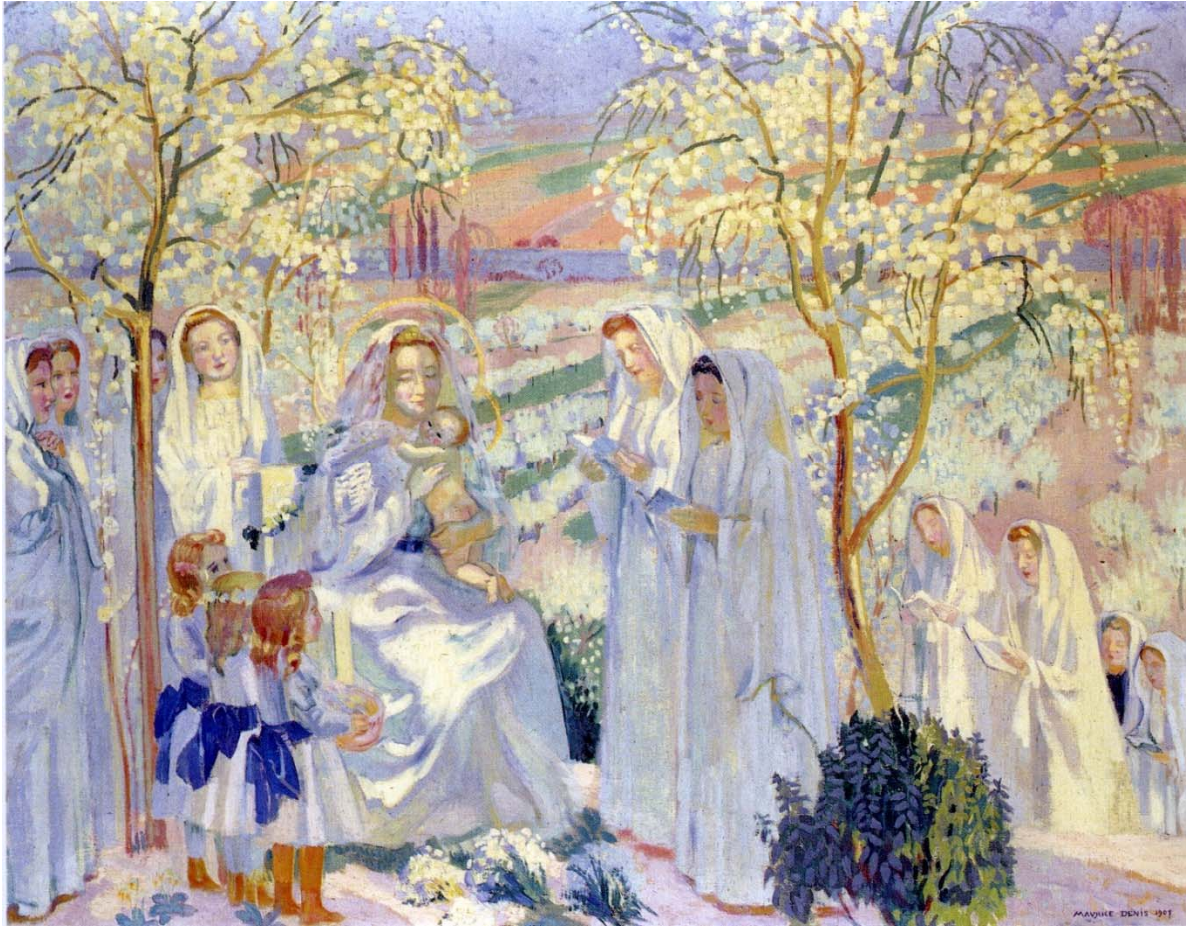


Figure 4.38
Maurice Denis, *Le Mois de Marie* (*The Month of Mary*), 1907,
oil on canvas, 115 x 147 cm,
The Yamazaki Mazak Museum of Art, Nagoya



Figure 4.39
Maurice Denis, *Captifs (The Captives)*, 1907,
oil on canvas, 80 x 121 cm,
Musee des Beaux-Arts, Reims

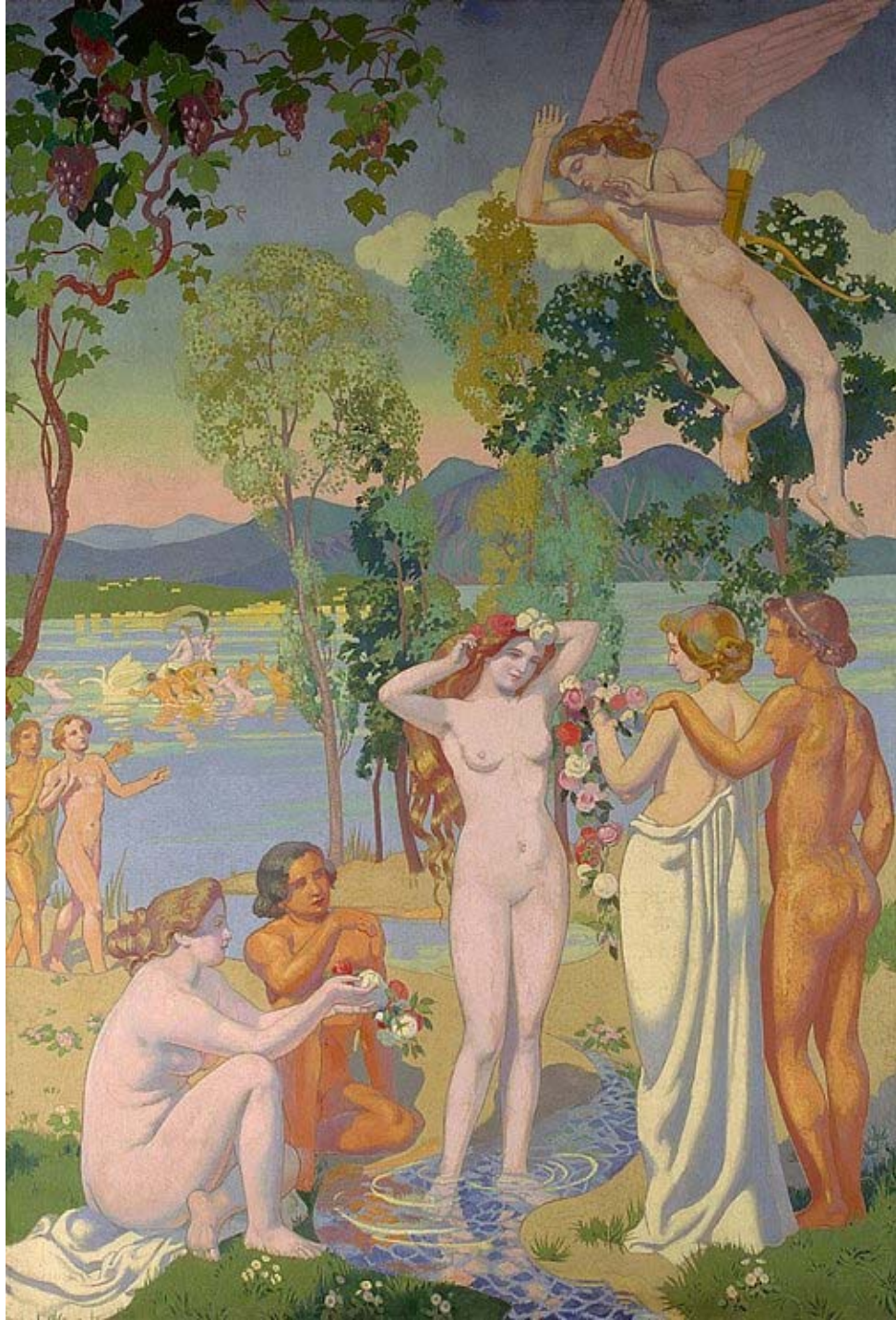


Figure 4.40

Maurice Denis, *L'Amour s'éprend de la beauté de Psyché, objet innocent du culte des mortels et de la jalousie de Vénus* (*Cupid Falls for the Beauty of Psyche, Innocent Object of Mortal Worship and of Venus's Jealousy*), panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 394 x 269 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

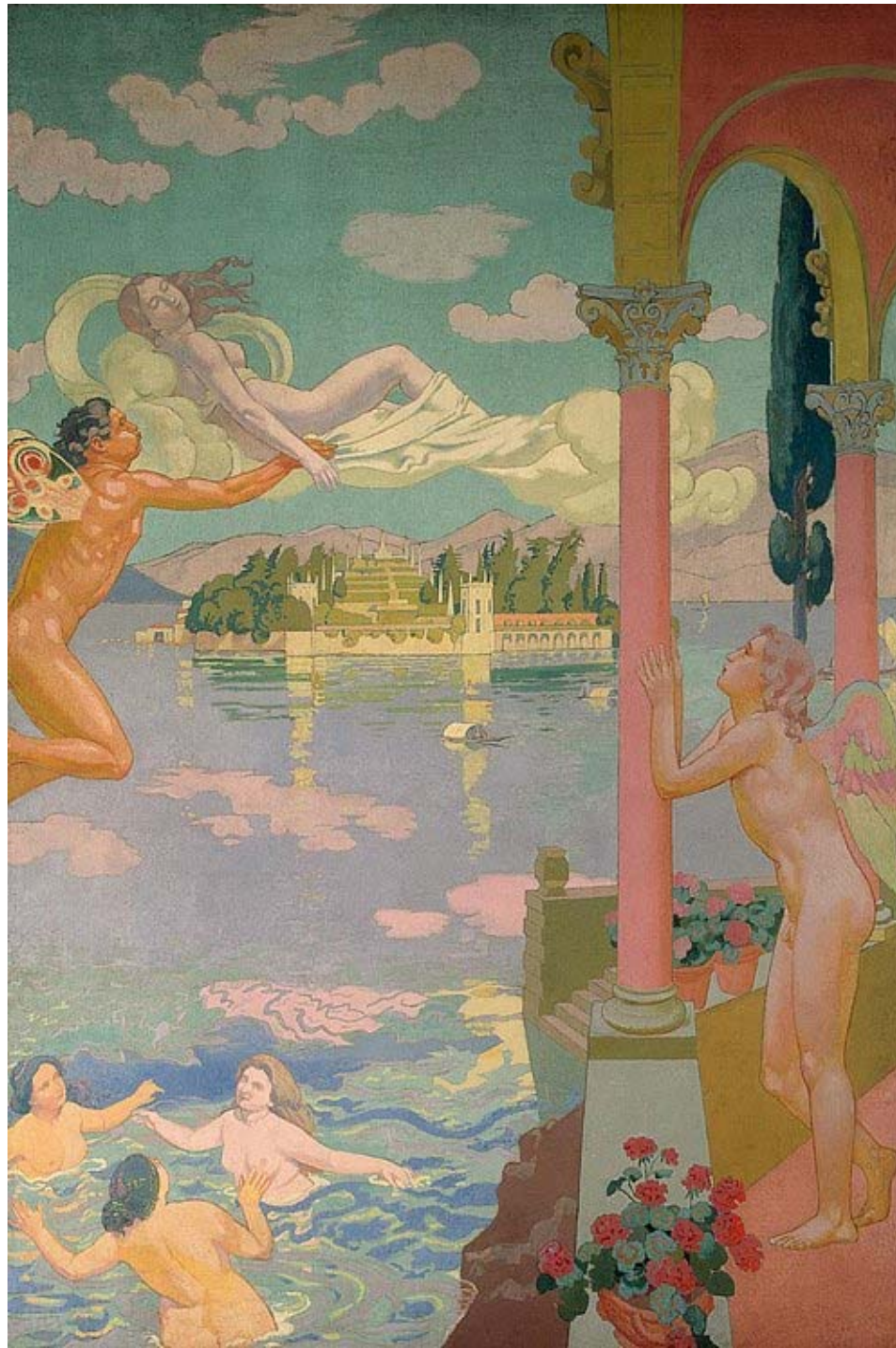


Figure 4.41

Maurice Denis, *Le Zéphyr, sur l'ordre de l'Amour, transporte Psyché dans une île de délices* (Zephyr Transporting Psyche to the Island of Delight as Ordered by Cupid), panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 395 x 267 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 4.42

Maurice Denis, *Psyché découvre que son mystérieux amant est l'Amour* (*Psyche Discovers that Her Mysterious Lover is Love*), panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 395 x 274 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 4.43

Maurice Denis, *Soumise par Vénus aux plus dures épreuves, Psyché, pour son malheur, cède une seconde fois à la curiosité: dans cette extrémité, elle est secourue par l'Amour* (*Psyche Having Opened the Box with the Dreams of the Underworld is Falling Deeply Asleep*), panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908, oil on canvas, 395 x 272 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

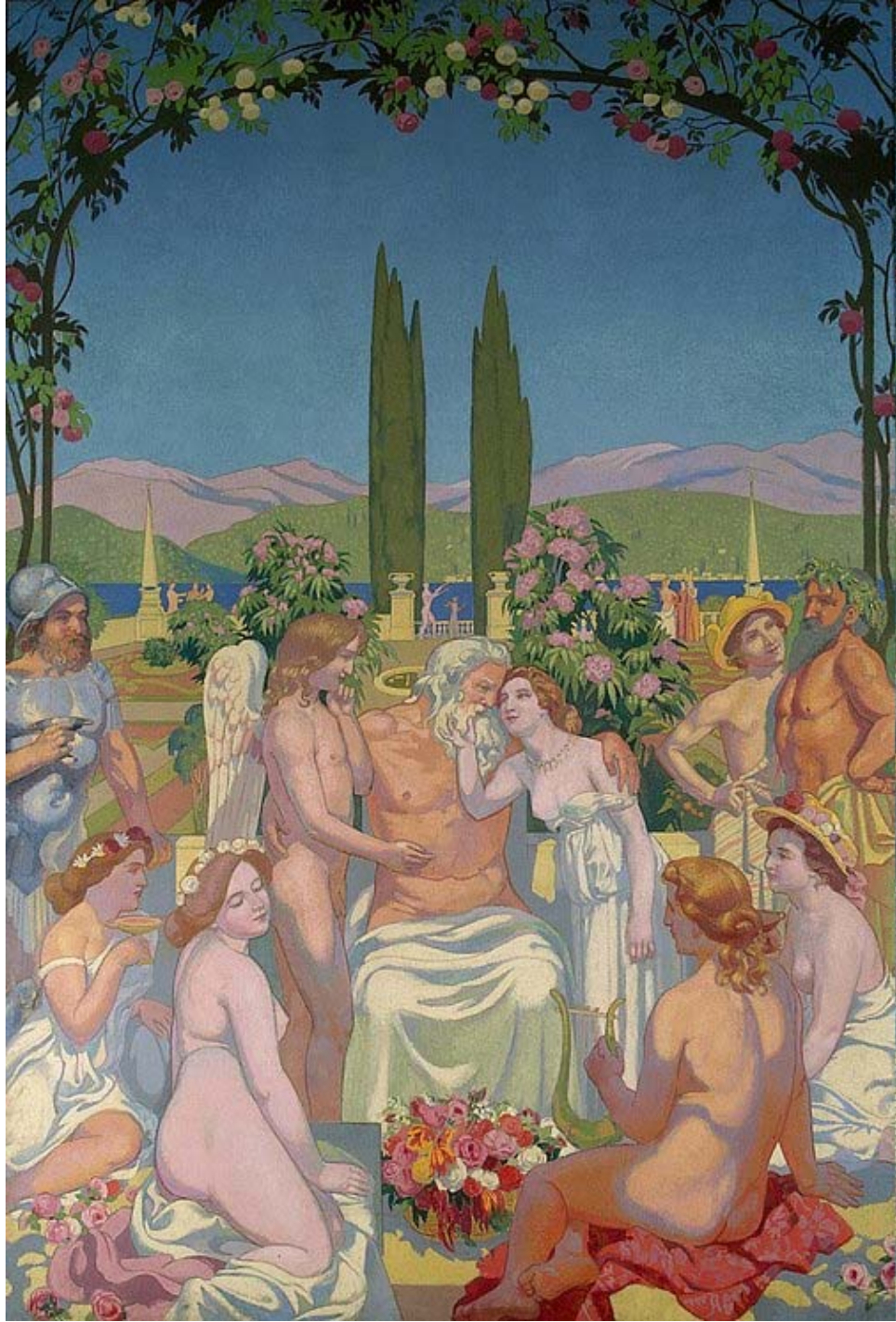


Figure 4.44

Maurice Denis, *Jupiter, en présence des dieux, accorde à psyché l'apothéose et célèbre son hymen avec l'Amour* (*Jupiter Bestows Immortality on Psyche and Celebrates Her Marriage to Cupid*), panel from *Histoire de Psyché*, 1908,
oil on canvas, 399 x 272 cm,
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Figure 4.45
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Vénus anadyomène*, 1848,
oil on canvas, 163 x 92 cm,
Musée Condé, Chantilly



Figure 4.46
Giulio Romano, *Wedding Banquet of Cupid and Psyche*,
Palazzo del Te, Mantua, Italy



Figure 4.47
Maurice Denis, *Histoire de la Musique* (*The History of Music*), 1912,
oil on canvas,
Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris

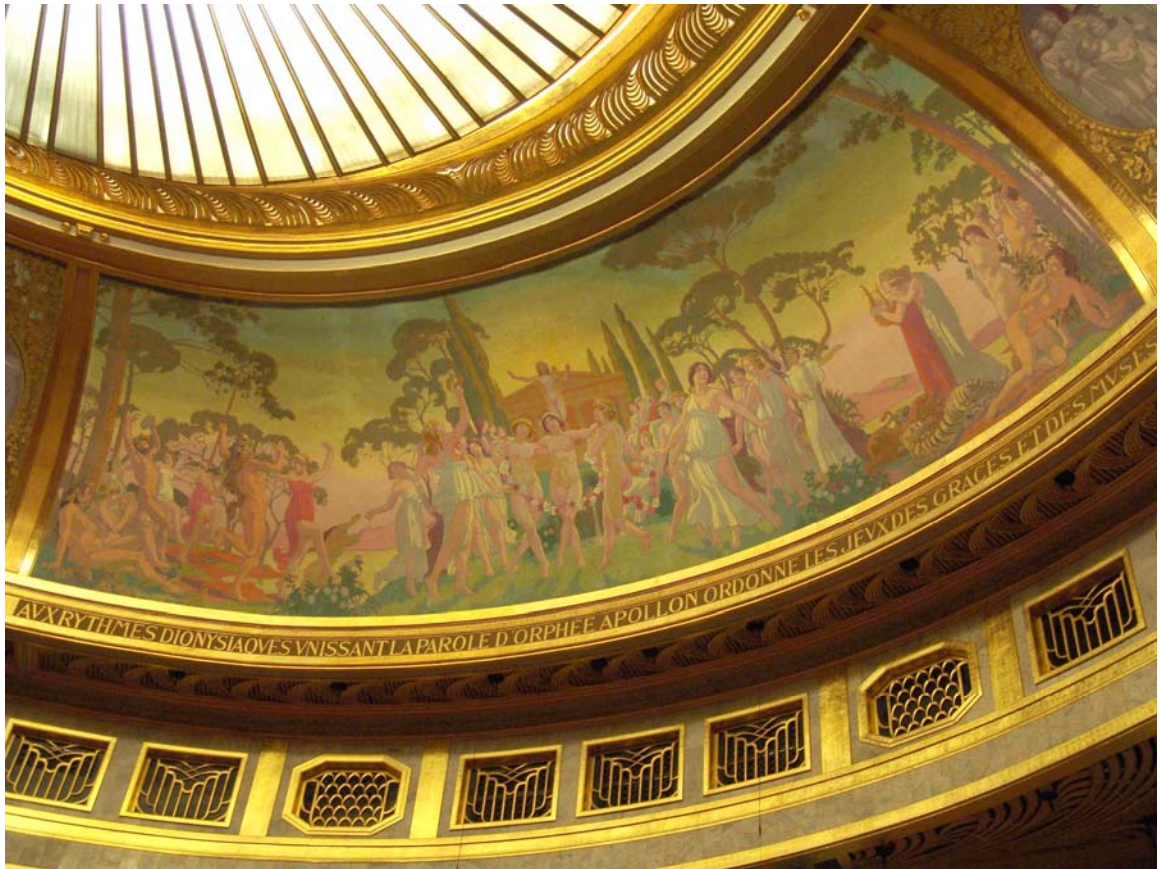


Figure 4.48
Maurice Denis, *L'Orchestique grecque* (Greek Song and Dance), part of *Histoire de la Musique*, 1912,
oil on canvas,
Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris

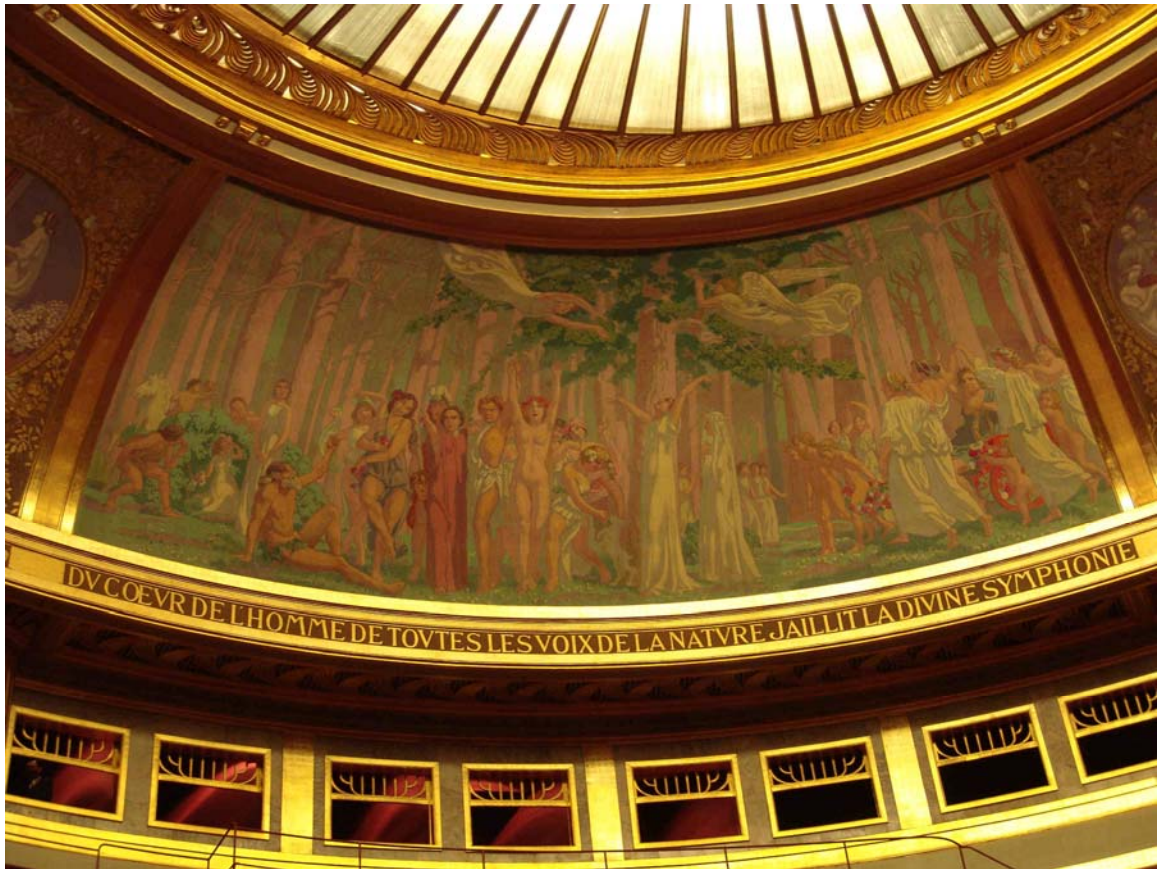


Figure 4.49
Maurice Denis, *La Symphonie* (*The Symphony*), part of *Histoire de la Musique*, 1912,
oil on canvas,
Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris



Figure 4.50
Maurice Denis, *L'Opéra (The Opera)*, part of *Histoire de la Musique*, 1912,
oil on canvas,
Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris



Figure 4.51
Maurice Denis, *Le Drame Lyrique* (*Lyric*), part of *Histoire de la Musique*, 1912,
oil on canvas,
Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris



Cat 140

Figure 4.52
Maurice Denis, preparatory drawing for *Presto, figure de l'Exèdre, Natalia Trouhanowa*,
1913,
Charcoal, white chalk and pastel on paper, 78 x 103 cm,
Musée Maurice Denis, St. Germain-en-Laye



Figure 4.53
Maurice Denis, *Les jeux des laveuses (Washerwomen's games)*, 1914,
oil on canvas, 160 x 386 cm,
Private Collection



Figure 4.54
Maurice Denis, *Le Réveil d'Ulysse (The Awakening of Ulysses)*, 1914,
oil on canvas, 160 x 285 cm,
Private Collection

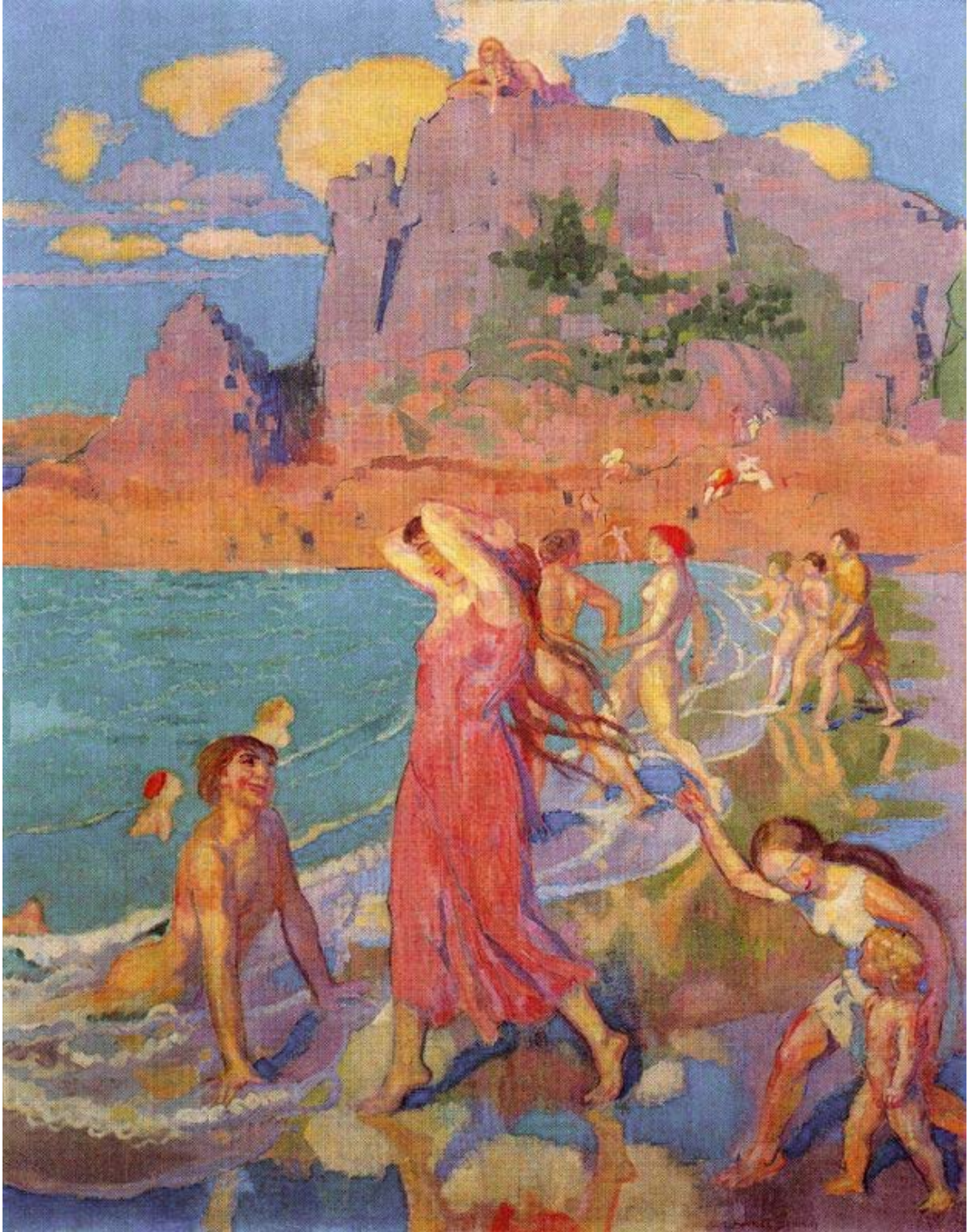


Figure 4.55
Maurice Denis, *La Galatée (Galatea)*, 1917,
oil on canvas, 112 x 88 cm,
Musée de peinture et de sculpture, Grenoble

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARCHIVES CONSULTED:

Archives Paul Signac, Paris, France

Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des estampes et de la photographie, Paris, France

Collection of press clippings on Jules Chéret

Letters from Jules Chéret to Henri Béraldi, contained in the latter's copy of his
Les Graveurs du XIXe siècle

Bibliothèque nationale de France, département de l'Opéra, Paris, France

Correspondence Jacques Rouché

Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, Paris, France

Letters from Charles Henry to Félix Fénéon

Getty Research Library, Special Collections, Los Angeles, California

Paul Signac Correspondence

Théo van Rysselberghe Correspondence

Maurice Denis Correspondence

Institut national de l'histoire de l'art, Paris, France

Fonds Roger Marx

Musée Maurice Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

Archives and Correspondence related to Maurice Denis

SOURCES CITED:

Abraham, Pierre, ed. *Arts et littératures I*. Vol. XVI, L'Encyclopédie Française, edited by Lucien Febvre. Paris: Comité de l'Encyclopédie Française Éditeur, 1935.

Albert, Charles. "La 21^e Exposition des Artistes Indépendants." *Les Temps nouveaux* 10 (April 8-14, 1905): 6-7.

Anger, Jenny. *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Angrand, Charles. *Correspondances, 1883-1926*. Edited by François Lespinasse. Rouen: F. Lespinasse, 1988.

- Antliff, Mark. *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Antony, Louise M., and Charlotte Witt. *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
- Aquilino, Marie Jeannine. "Decoration by Design: The Development of the Mural Aesthetic in Nineteenth Century French Painting." PhD diss., Brown University, 1989.
- . "Painted Promises: The Politics of Public Art in Late Nineteenth-Century France." *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 4 (December 1993): 697-712.
- Arambasin, Nella. *La conception du sacré dans la critique d'art en Europe entre 1880 et 1914*. Geneva: Droz, 1996.
- Argüelles, José. *Charles Henry and the Formation of a Psychophysical Aesthetic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Aristotle. *Poetics (with the Tractatus Coislinianus, reconstruction of Poetics II, and the fragments of the On Poets)*. Translated by Richard Janko. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.
- Badier, Walter. *Émile Henry: De la propagande par le fait au terrorisme anarchiste*. Toulouse: Les Éditions Libertaires, 2007.
- Barbillon, Claire. "Un canon d'art sacré: l'école de Beuron, entre la géométrie et le nombre." In *Les Canons du corps humain au XIX^e siècle: L'Art et la Règle*. 219-56. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004.
- Bargiel, Réjane, and Ségolène Le Men, eds. *La Belle Époque de Jules Chéret: De l'affiche au décor*. Paris: Les Arts Décoratifs and Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010.
- Barrows, Susanna. *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.
- Barruel, Thérèse. "La Coupole de Maurice Denis." In *1913: Le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées*. 72-88. Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1987.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Baudelaire, œuvres complètes*. Edited by Michel Jamet. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999.
- . *Le peintre de la vie moderne*. Edited by Silvia Acierno and Julio Baquero Cruz. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2009.
- Bazin, René. "Puvis de Chavannes et l'action morale (A propos d'une affiche)." *Bulletin de l'Union pour l'action morale*, no. 1 (December 1, 1896): 27-31.
- Beaunier, André. "Les Salons de 1908." *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 1 (June 1908): 377-84.
- Béguery, Jocelyne. "Le dessin: vers un problématique enseignement artistique." In *L'École républicaine et la question des savoirs: Enquête au cœur du Dictionnaire de pédagogie de Ferdinand Buisson*, edited by Daniel Denis and Pierre Kahn. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003.
- Bellanger, Claude, Jacques Godechot, Pierre Guiral, and Fernand Terrou, eds. *Histoire générale de la presse française: De 1871 à 1940*. 4 vols. Vol. 3. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972.
- Belville, Eugène. "Un Hôtel particulier à Paris." *L'Art décoratif* (August 1909): 41-58.
- Benjamin, Roger. "The Decorative Landscape, Fauvism and the Arabesque of Observation." *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 2 (June 1993).

- . *Matisse's "Notes of a Painter": Criticism, Theory and Context, 1891-1908*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987.
- Béraldi, Henri. "Chéret." In *Les Graveurs du XIX^e siècle: Guide de l'amateur d'estampes modernes*. 168-203. Paris: Librairie L. Conquet, 1886.
- Béraud-Sudreau, Violaine. "Maurice Denis à l'hôtel Rouché: Terre latine, inspiratrice des arts." *L'Atelier: Bulletin de l'association "Le Temps d'Albert Besnard"*, no. 5 (December 2009): 32-46.
- Blais, Marie-Claude. *La solidarité: Histoire d'une idée*. Bibliothèque des idées. Paris: Gallimard, 2007.
- Bloch, Henriette. *La psychologie scientifique en France*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2006.
- Bouhey, Vivien. *Les Anarchistes contre la République, 1880 à 1914: Contribution à l'histoire des réseaux sous la Troisième République*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008.
- Bouillon, Jean-Paul. "Denis: Du bon usage des théories." In *Nabis, 1888-1900*, edited by Claire Frèches-Thory and Ursula Perucchi-Petri. 61-67. Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais in association with Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993.
- . "L'expérience de *La Légende*." In *Maurice Denis: La Légende de saint Hubert, 1896-1897*, edited by Agnès Delannoy et al., 27-38. Paris: Somogy éditions d'art, 1999.
- . *Maurice Denis: Le spirituel dans l'art*. Paris: Découvertes Gallimard and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2006.
- . *Maurice Denis*. Geneva: Skira, 1993.
- , ed. *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2006.
- . "The Politics of Maurice Denis." In *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*. 95-109. Lyon: Musée des Beaux Arts, Lyon, in association with Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994.
- . "Vuillard et Denis: le tournant classique de 1898." *48/14 La Revue du musée d'Orsay*, no. 17 (Autumn 2003): 80-91.
- Bourgeois, Léon. *Solidarité*. Paris: A. Colin, 1896.
- Bourget, Paul. *Essais de psychologie contemporaine: Baudelaire, M. Renan, Flaubert, M. Taine, Stendhal*. Seventh ed. Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1891.
- Brauman, Annick, Maurice Culot, Marie Demanet, and Marc Gierst, eds. *Architecture pour le peuple. Maisons du peuple: Belgique, Allemagne, Autriche, France, Grand-Bretagne, Italie, Pays-Bas, Suisse*. Bruxelles: Archives d'architecture moderne, 1984.
- Brion, Katherine. "Paul Signac's Decorative Propaganda of the 1890s." *RIHA Journal* 0044 (Special Issue "New Directions in Neo-Impressionism") (July 14, 2012). <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2012/2012-jul-sep/special-issue-neo-imp/brion-signacs-decorative-propaganda>.
- Brunetière, Ferdinand. "L'idée de la solidarité." In *Discours de combat: Nouvelle série*. 51-83. Paris: Perrin et C^{ie}, 1904.
- . *La renaissance de l'idéalisme*. Paris: Firmin-Didot et C^{ie}, 1896.
- . "La statue de Baudelaire." In *Nouveaux essais sur la littérature contemporaine*. 133-156. Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1895.

- Cachin, Françoise, ed. *1893, l'Europe des peintres*. Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1993.
- . “Le Portrait de Fénéon par Signac: Une Source inédite.” *La Revue de l'art*, no. 6 (1969): 90-91.
- . *Signac: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000.
- Cachin, Françoise, Jean-Paul Monerey, and Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, eds. *Signac & Saint-Tropez, 1892-1913*. Saint-Tropez: Musée de l'Annonciade, 1992.
- Cahm, Caroline. *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Carrère, Jean. “Conférence de Laurent Tailhade, à propos de l'*Ennemi du Peuple* d'Ibsen.” *L'Ermitage: Revue artistique et littéraire* 7, no. 12 (December 1893): 370-71.
- Carter, Karen L. “Joris-Karl Huysmans, A *Dénicheur* of Jules Chéret's Posters.” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 41, no. 1 & 2 (Fall-Winter 2012-2013): 122-41.
- . “The Spectatorship of the *Affiche Illustrée* and the Modern City of Paris, 1880-1900.” *Journal of Design History* 25, no. 1 (April 23, 2012 March 2012): 11-31.
- Carter, Karen Lynn. “L'Age de l'Affiche: The Reception, Display and Collection of Posters in Fin-de-siècle Paris.” PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2001.
- Chaubet, François. *Paul Desjardins et les Décades de Pontigny*. Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2000.
- Christophe, Jules. “Georges Seurat.” *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui* 9, no. 368 (April 1890).
- Claretie, Léo. “L'affiche murale et morale.” *Le monde illustré*, no. 2061 (September 26, 1896): 195.
- . “La vie et les moeurs.” *Revue encyclopédique: Chronique universelle*, no. 120 (September 26, 1896): 153-54.
- Clark, T.J. *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*. Third ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- . “We Field-Women.” In *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2001.
- Clausen, Meredith L. *Frantz Jourdain and the Samaritaine: Art Nouveau Theory and Criticism*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987.
- Cochin, Henri. “Les Symboles de Maurice Denis.” *La Revue hebdomadaire* (March 1, 1913): 34-57.
- Collins, Bradford Ray Jr. “Jules Chéret and the Nineteenth-Century French Poster.” PhD diss., Yale University, 1980.
- Collins, Bradford Ray Jr. “The Poster as Art; Jules Chéret and the Struggle for the Equality of the Arts in Late Nineteenth-Century France.” *Design Issues* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 41-50.
- “Communisme et individualisme.” *La Révolte: Organe communiste-anarchiste* 1, no. 22 (February 18-24, 1888): 1-2.
- Cottingham, David. *Cubism and its Histories*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- . *Cubism in the Shadow of War: the Avant-garde and Politics in Paris 1905-1914*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

- Crane, Walter. "L'Art et les artistes." *La Plume: Littéraire, artistique, et sociale*, no. 97 (May 1, 1893): 212-13.
- . "Le Socialisme et les artistes." *La Révolte (supplément littéraire)* 4, no. 26 (March 7-13, 1891): 201-202.
- Crary, Jonathan. "1888: Illuminations of Disenchantment." In *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999.
- . *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990.
- Crauzat, Ernest de. "Les affiches illustrées en 1896." *L'Estampe et l'affiche* 1 (1897): 13-20.
- . "Murailles." *L'Estampe et l'affiche* (December 15, 1899): 250-52.
- . "Murailles: Une enquête sur le musée de l'affiche." *L'Estampe et l'affiche* (April 15, 1899): 130.
- . "Murailles: Une enquête sur le musée de l'affiche." *L'Estampe et l'affiche* (March 15, 1899): 69-72.
- Cronan, Todd. *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Cros, Henry, and Charles Henry. *L'Encaustique et les autres procédés de peinture chez les anciens: Histoire et technique*. Paris: J. Rouam, 1884.
- Crow, Thomas E. *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Dardel, Aline. "Les Temps Nouveaux," 1895-1914: *Un hebdomadaire anarchiste et la propagande par l'image*. Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1987.
- Datta, Venita. *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- David, Véronique, and Fabienne Stahl. "Les vitraux de l'hôtel Rouché." *L'Atelier: Bulletin de l'association "Le Temps d'Albert Besnard"*, no. 5 (December 2009): 68-74.
- Delannoy, Agnès, and et al. *Maurice Denis: La Légende de saint Hubert, 1896-1897*. Paris: Somogy éditions d'art, 1999.
- Denis, Maurice. "De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au Classicisme." *L'Occident*, no. 90 (May 1909): 187-202.
- . "De la gaucherie des Primitifs." *Les Arts de la vie*, no. 7 (July 1904): 11-18.
- . "Épilogue de l'enquête sur le 'sujet': L'opinion de M. Maurice Denis." *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 20 (October 15, 1924): 460-64.
- . *Journal*. 3 vols. Paris: La Colombe, 1957.
- . "L'Importance du sujet dans la peinture religieuse." *Les Questions liturgiques et paroissiales* (February 1924): 201-231.
- . "La peinture." *L'Ermitage* (May 15, 1905): 310-20.
- . *Le ciel et l'arcadie*. Edited by Jean-Paul Bouillon. Paris: Hermann, 2003.
- . "Les Arts à Rome, ou la méthode classique." *Le Spectateur Catholique IV* (Juillet-Décembre 1898): 197-209.
- . *Nouvelles Théories: Sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré, 1914-1921*. Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1922.

- . *Théories, 1890-1910, du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique*. Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1920.
- Desjardins, Paul. *Le devoir présent*. Fifth ed. Paris: Armand Colin et C^{ie}, 1894.
- Deutscher, Penelope. *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Dimier, Louis. “Chronique artistique: Nouvelle exposition d’antiques au Louvre. M. Maurice Denis et l’art chrétien. M. Charles Morice et les amis de Carrière.” *L’Action française: organe du nationalisme intégral*, no. 35 (February 4, 1912).
- . “Enquête sur l’art chrétien.” *L’Action française mensuelle* 38, no. 260 (May 15, 1912): 376-400.
- . “Enquête sur l’art chrétien.” *L’Action française mensuelle* 39, no. 262 (July 15, 1912): 9-33.
- Distel, Anne, Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, John Leighton, and Susan Alyson Stein, eds. *Signac, 1863-1935*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001.
- Dorra, Henri. “Charles Henry’s ‘Scientific’ Aesthetic.” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 74, no. 1121 (December 1969): 345-56.
- Dupont, Jacques. “La couleur dans (presque) tous ses états.” In *Huysmans: Une esthétique de la décadence*. 155-66. Geneva and Paris: Éditions Slatkine, 1987.
- Duranty, Edmond. “La Nouvelle Peinture.” In *Les écrivains devant l’impressionnisme*. 108-34. Paris: Éditions Macula, 1989.
- Dymond, Anne. “A Politicized Pastoral: Signac and the Cultural Geography of Mediterranean France.” *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 2 (June 2003): 353-70.
- . “Valiant, Independent, and Harmonious: Paul Signac and Neo-Impressionism after 1900 “ *RIHA Journal* 0046 (Special Issue ‘New Directions in Neo-Impressionism’) (July 14, 2012). <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2012/2012-jul-sep/special-issue-neo-impressionism/dymond-valiant-independent-and-harmonious>.
- Eisenzweig, Uri. *Fictions de l’anarchisme*. Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 2001.
- Exposition Jules Chéret: Pastels, lithographies, dessins, affiches illustrées (Décembre 1889-Janvier 1890, Galeries du Théâtre d’Application, 18 rue Saint-Lazare)*. Paris: Imprimeries Chaix (Succursale Chéret), 1889.
- Fénéon, Félix. *Œuvres plus que complètes: Chroniques d’art*. edited by Joan U. Halperin. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1970.
- . “Signac.” *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui*, no. 373 (May 1890).
- Fénéon, Marie-Louise, and Félix Fénéon. *Le procès des trente: Vu à travers la presse de l’époque telle qu’elle a été conservée par Madame Fénéon mère et annotée par Félix Fénéon à l’issue de son procès*. Edited by Maurice Imbert. Tusson: Histoires Littéraires & Du Lérot, 2004.
- Ferretti-Bocquillon, Marina. “Paul Signac au temps d’harmonie, 1892-1913.” In *Signac et la libération de la couleur*, edited by Erich Franz. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1997.
- . “Signac and Van Rysselberghe: The Story of a Friendship 1887-1907.” *Apollo* (June 1998): 11-18.
- Fleury, Maurice de. *Introduction à la médecine de l’esprit*. 5th ed. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1898.

- . “La Maison d’un moderniste.” *Le Figaro (Supplément littéraire du dimanche)*, no. 38 (September 22, 1888): 150-51.
- . “La Maison d’un moderniste: l’Architecture de demain.” *Le Figaro (Supplément littéraire du dimanche)*, no. 37 (September 15, 1888): 146-7.
- . “Les névroses urbaines.” *Les Cahiers de la République des lettres, des sciences et des arts* 12 (“Vers un Paris Nouveau?”) (1929): 105-9.
- Forth, Christopher E. *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- . “Neurasthenia and Manhood in Fin-de-Siècle France.” In *Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War*, edited by Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter. 329-61. Amsterdam: New York, NY: Rodopi, 2001.
- Franz, Erich, ed. *Signac et la libération de la couleur*. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1997.
- Frèches-Thory, Claire, and Ursula Perucchi-Petri, eds. *Nabis, 1888-1900*. Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais in association with Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993.
- Froissart Pezone, Rossella. *L’Art dans tout: Les arts décoratifs en France et l’utopie d’un art nouveau*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2004.
- . “Théories de l’ornement en France au tournant du XIX^e siècle: L’abstraction entre nature et géométrie.” *Ligeia*, no. 89-92 (January-June 2009): 47-64.
- Gamboni, Dario. *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art*. London: Reaktion, 2002.
- . “Vuillard and Ambiguity.” In *Édouard Vuillard*, edited by Guy Cogeval. 405-22. New Haven and London: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Yale University Press, 2003.
- Garban, Dominique. *Jacques Rouché: L’homme qui sauva l’Opéra de Paris*. Paris: Somogy éditions d’art, 2007.
- Gaulis, Georges. “Les Salons de Peinture: La Société nationale.” *Journal de Genève: National, politique et littéraire*, no. 105 (April 15, 1908).
- Gautier, Théophile. “L’Art en 1848.” *L’Artiste* 1, no. 5 (May 15, 1848): 113-15.
- Geffroy, Gustave. “L’affiche morale.” In *La vie artistique*. 110-19. Paris: H. Floury, 1897.
- Geyer, Marie-Jeanne, and Thierry Laps. *Le Salon de la rue: L’affiche illustrée de 1890 à 1910*. Strasbourg: Éditions des Musées de Strasbourg, 2007.
- Gide, André. *Le Voyage d’Urien, suivi de Paludes*. Second ed. Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1897.
- Gide, André, and Maurice Denis. *Correspondance: 1892-1945*. Cahiers de la NRF. Edited by Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer. Paris: Gallimard, 2006.
- Gide, André, and Eugène Rouart. *Correspondance*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2006.
- Giocanti, Stéphane. *Charles Maurras: Le chaos et l’ordre*. Paris: Flammarion, 2006.
- Grave, Jean. *La société future*. Bibliothèque sociologique. Paris: P.V. Stock, 1895.
- . *La société mourante et l’anarchie*. Paris: Au Bureau de “La Révolte”, 1893.
- . “La Thèse dans l’art.” *Les Temps nouveaux* 5, no. 30 (November 18-24, 1899): 1-2.

- . *Quarante ans de propagande anarchiste*. Edited by Mireille Delfau. Paris: Flammarion, 1973.
- Green, Christopher. *Art in France: 1900-1940*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- . *Cubism and its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French art, 1916-1928*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Green, Nicholas. "Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformations of the Artistic Field in France During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century." *Art History* 10, no. 1 (March 1987): 59-78.
- . *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France*. New York: Manchester University Press and St Martin's Press, 1990.
- Groom, Gloria. *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001.
- . *Edouard Vuillard, Painter-Decorator: Patrons and Projects, 1892-1912*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Guyaux, André, ed. *La querelle de la statue de Baudelaire, août-décembre 1892*. Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007.
- Guyot, Yves. *La morale de la concurrence*. Paris: Armand Colin et C^{ie}, 1896.
- Hahn, H. Hazel. *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Halperin, Joan Ungersma. *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Hannoosh, Michèle. *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.
- Henry, Charles. *Cercle chromatique: Présentant tous les compléments et toutes les harmonies de couleurs, avec une introduction sur la théorie générale du contraste, du rythme et de la mesure*. Paris: Charles Verdin, 1888.
- . *Harmonies de formes et de couleurs: Démonstrations pratiques avec le rapporteur esthétique et le cercle chromatique (Conférence faite à la bibliothèque municipale professionnelle d'art et d'industrie Forney le 27 mars 1890)*. Paris: Librairie Scientifique A. Hermann, 1891.
- . *Introduction à une esthétique scientifique*. Paris: La Revue contemporaine, 1885.
- . *Quelques aperçus sur l'Esthétique des formes*. Paris: Librairie Nony & C^{ie}, 1895.
- . *Rapporteur esthétique de M. Charles Henry. Notice sur les applications à l'art industriel, à l'histoire de l'art, à l'interprétation de la méthode graphique, en général à l'étude et à la rectification esthétiques de toutes formes*. Paris: G. Séguin, 1888.
- Herbert, Robert L. *Seurat, Drawings and Paintings*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Herbert, Robert L., Françoise Cachin, Anne Distel, Susan Alyson Stein, and Gary Tinterow. *Georges Seurat, 1859-1891*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991.

- Herbert, Robert L., and Eugenia Herbert. "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and Others I." *The Burlington Magazine* 102, no. 692 (November 1960): 473-82.
- . "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and Others II." *The Burlington Magazine* 102, no. 693 (December 1960): 517-22.
- Homer, William Innes. *Seurat and the Science of Painting*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1964.
- Hutton, John G. *Neo-impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994.
- Huysmans. *À rebours*. Paris: Flammarion, 2004.
- . *Écrits sur l'art*. Edited by Jérôme Picon. Paris: Flammarion, 2008.
- Interim. "Chronique artistique: Le sixième Salon d'Automne." *L'Action française: organe du nationalisme intégral* (October 3, 1908).
- Janneau, Guillaume. "L'art et ses 'sujets'." *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 14 (July 15, 1924): 305-7.
- Jarrassé, Dominique. "'Retour à l'ordre' ou 'Retour de Rome'? Le maniérisme des Prix de Rome dans l'entre-deux-guerres." In *Du Romantisme à l'Art Déco: Lectures croisées*, edited by Rossella Froissart, Laurent Houssais and Jean-François Luneau. 249-262. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011.
- Jumeau-Lafond, Jean-David. "L'enfance de Sainte-Geneviève: Une affiche de Puvis de Chavannes au service de l'Union pour l'action morale." *Revue de l'art*, no. 109 (1995): 63-74.
- Kauffmann, Grégoire. "De Drumont à Maurras, une veine pamphlétaire." In *Le maurrassisme et la culture*, edited by Olivier Dard, Michel Leymarie and Neil McWilliam. 17-23. Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2010.
- Kessler, Harry. *Journey to the Abyss: The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler, 1880-1918*. Translated by Laird McLeod Easton. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.
- Kochin, Michael Shalom. *Gender and Rhetoric in Plato's Political Thought*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Kropotkine, Pierre. *Paroles d'un révolté*. Paris: Ernest Flammarion, Éditeur, 1885.
- Kuenzli, Katherine Marie. "Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus: Maurice Denis's *Homage to Cézanne*." *Art History* 30, no. 5 (November 2007): 683-711.
- . *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010.
- "L'Affiche morale." *Le Temps* (September 10, 1896).
- L'affichomanie*. Paris: musée de l'Affiche, 1980.
- "L'art et ses 'sujets': Fin de l'enquête." *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 19 (October 1, 1924): 432-40.
- "L'art et ses 'sujets': Notre enquête." *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 18 (September 15, 1924): 405-16.
- "L'œuvre d'art exige-t-il un sujet? Une enquête." *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, no. 14 (July 15, 1924): 307-13.

- “La verité sans phrase.” 1, no. 38 (June 23-28, 1888): 1-2.
- Lay, Howard G. “The Aesthetics of Terror: On Signac’s Portrait of Fénéon.” Unpublished manuscript.
- . “*Beau Geste!* (On the Readability of Terrorism).” *Yale French Studies*, no. 101 (2002): 79-102.
- . “Pictorial Acrobatics.” In *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture*, edited by Gabriel P. Weisberg. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
- . “*Réflexes d’un gniaff*. On Emile Pouget and *Le Père Peinard*.” In *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France*, edited by Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski. 82-159. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999.
- “Le Banquet.” *La Plume: Littéraire, artistique, et sociale*, no. 138 (January 15, 1895): 46-54.
- Le Bon, Gustave. *La Psychologie des foules*. 2nd ed. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1896.
- Le Men, Ségolène. “L’art de l’affiche à l’Exposition universelle de 1889.” *Bulletin de la Bibliothèque nationale* (June 1991): 64-71.
- . *Seurat & Chéret: Le peintre, le cirque et l’affiche*. Paris: CNRS éditions, 1994.
- Le retour à l’ordre dans les arts plastiques et l’architecture, 1919-1925*. Saint-Étienne: Centre interdisciplinaire d’étude et de recherche sur l’expression contemporaine, 1975.
- Le Triomphe des mairies: Grands décors républicains à Paris, 1870-1914 (Musée du Petit Palais, 8 novembre 1986-18 janvier 1987)*. Paris: Musées de la ville de Paris, 1986.
- Lecomte, Georges. “Société des artistes indépendants.” *L’Art moderne* 10 (March 30, 1890): 100-101.
- Leighten, Patricia Dee. *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Lenz, Pierre. *L’Esthétique de Beuron*. Translated by Paul Sérusier. Paris: Bibliothèque de l’Occident, 1905.
- “Les Affiches Estampes.” *Le Temps*, no. 9132 (May 3, 1886).
- “Les décors de l’hôtel Rouché à Paris par Albert Besnard, George Desvallières, Maurice Denis et René Lalique.” *L’Atelier: Bulletin de l’association “Le Temps d’Albert Besnard”*, no. 5 (2009).
- Les Maîtres de l’Affiche: Publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles Affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers*. 5 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1896-1900.
- “Les œuvres et les hommes, courrier de la littérature, des arts et du théâtre: Moralisation par l’affiche.” *Le Correspondant* (September 28, 1896): 1162-64.
- Levin, Miriam R. “Democratic Vistas—Democratic Media: Defining a Role for Printed Images in Industrializing France.” *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 82-108.
- Levine, Steven Z. “Decor/Decorative/Decoration in Monet’s Art.” *Arts* 51 (February 1977): 136-39.

- Liste des travaux de M. Charles Henry.* Rome: Imprimerie des Sciences mathématiques et physiques, October 1880.
- Littré, Émile. *Dictionnaire de la langue française.* 4 vols. Vols. 2 and 4, Paris: L. Hachette, 1873-4.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. *Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy.* 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Loué, Thomas. "Une révolte culturelle: L'entrée en catholicisme de la Revue des Deux Mondes (1895-1906)." *Cahiers d'Histoire: revue d'histoire critique*, no. 87 (2002): 61-79.
- Louis, Pierre [Maurice Denis]. "Notes sur l'exposition des Indépendants." *La Revue Blanche*, no. 7 (April 25, 1892): 232-34.
- Lugné-Poe. *Acrobaties: Souvenirs et impressions de théâtre (1894-1902).* La Parade. 4 vols. Vol. 2, Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1931.
- "Lutte et théorie." *La Révolte, organe communiste-anarchiste* 1, no. 21 (February 11-17, 1888): 1-2.
- Magee, Bryan. *Wagner and Philosophy.* London: Allen Lane Penguin Press, 2000.
- Maindron, Ernest. *Les affiches illustrées (1886-1895).* Paris: G. Boudet, 1896.
- Maitron, Jean. *Le mouvement anarchiste en France: Des origines à 1914.* 2 vols. Vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. "La musique et les lettres: lecture d'Oxford et de Cambridge." *La Revue Blanche* 30 (April 1894): 307.
- Marlais, Michael. "Conservative Style/Conservative Politics: Maurice Denis in Le Vésinet." *Art History* 16, no. 1 (1993): 125-46.
- Marty, Albert. *L'Action française racontée par elle-même.* Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1986.
- Marx, Roger. "Cartons d'artistes: Jules Chéret." *L'Image: Revue mensuelle, littéraire et artistique*, no. 2 (January 1897): 43-48.
- . *L'art social.* Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1913.
- . "Le Vernissage de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts." *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, no. 16 (April 18, 1908): 142-46.
- . "Les Salons de 1895." *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (June 1, 1895): 441-56.
- . "Les Salons de 1899." *Revue encyclopédique* 9, no. 306 (July 15, 1899).
- . "Puvis de Chavannes." *Revue encyclopédique* 9, no. 329 (December 23, 1899): 1077-86.
- Mauclair, Camille. "La réaction nationaliste en art et l'ignorance de l'homme des lettres." *La revue mondiale* (January 15, 1905): 151-72.
- . "Le Salon d'Automne." *Revue Bleue* 10, no. 16 (October 17, 1908): 487-91.
- . "Le Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts." *Revue bleue* 9, no. 17 (April 25, 1908): 527-31.
- Maurice Denis, 1870-1943.* Lyon: Musée des Beaux Arts, Lyon, in association with Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994.
- "Maurice Talmeyr." *La Croix*, no. 14935 (November 4, 1931): 4.
- Maus, Madeleine Octave. "Le Salon de Paris." *L'Art Moderne: Revue critique des arts et de la littérature*, no. 22 (May 28, 1899): 181-82.

- McGuinness, Patrick. "Mallarmé and the Poetics of Explosion." *MLN* 124, no. 4 (September 2009): 797-824.
- McWilliam, Neil. "Action Française, Classicism, and the Dilemmas of Traditionalism in France, 1900-1914." In *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870-1914*, edited by June Hargrove and Neil McWilliam. 269-91. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- . "Érudition et engagement politique: La double vie de Louis Dimier." In *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art en France au XIX^e siècle*, edited by Roland Recht, Philippe Sénéchal, Claire Barbillon and François-René Martin. 403-17. Paris: La Documentation Française, 2008.
- . "Qui a peur de George Sand?: Antirromantisme et antiféminisme chez les maurrassiens." In *Le maurrassisme et la culture*, edited by Olivier Dard, Michel Leymarie and Neil McWilliam. 173-84. Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2010.
- Meneux, Catherine. "Le Solidarisme et l'art selon Roger Marx." In *Regards de critique d'art: Autour de Roger Marx (1858-1913)*, edited by Catherine Meneux. 135-42. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008.
- . "Roger Marx (1859-1913), critique d'art." PhD diss., Université Paris IV Sorbonne, 2007.
- , ed. *Roger Marx, un critique aux côtés de Gallé, Monet, Rodin, Gauguin...* Paris: Ville de Nancy and Éditions Artlys, 2006.
- Michel, André. "Promenade au Salon." *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (May 9, 1899).
- Michel, Georges. "Les progrès de la publicité moderne: L'industrie de l'affiche." *L'Économiste français* (August 7, 1897): 175-77.
- Mirbeau, Octave. "Pour Jean Grave." In *Combats politiques*, edited by Pierre Michel and Jean-François Nivet. 141-47. Paris: Librairie Séguier, 1990.
- Mithouard, Adrien. *Le Tourment de l'unité*. Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1901.
- "Moralistes modernes." *Le Temps* (September 11, 1896).
- Mourey, Gabriel. "Revue artistique: M. Maurice Denis, décorateur." *La Revue universelle*, no. 97 (November 1, 1903): 561-64.
- Nitti, Francesco Saverio. *Le socialisme catholique*. Collection d'Auteurs étrangers. Paris: Guillaumin, 1894.
- Nye, Robert. *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic*. London: Sage Publications, 1975.
- Oriol, Philippe. *À propos de l'attentat Foyot: Quelques questions et quelques tentatives de réponses*. Paris: Éditions du Fourneau, 1993.
- Paris, Ville de. *Commission de Décoration de L'Hôtel de Ville: Procès-Verbaux*. Vol. 1.
- Pasture, Patrick, and Jan Art, eds. *Beyond the Feminization Thesis: Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012.
- Picard, André. "M. Laurent Tailhade et l'Anarchie: Interview de M. Laurent Tailhade." *Le Gaulois*, April 6, 1894, 1-2.
- "Pierre Puvis de Chavannes." *Bulletin de l'Union pour l'action morale* (November 15, 1898): 68-72.

- Pissarro, Camille. *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*. Edited by Janine Bailly-Herzberg. 5 vols. Vol. 3 and 4, Paris: Éditions du Valhermeil, 1980-91.
- Prévotat, Jacques. *Les catholiques et l'Action française: Histoire d'une condamnation 1899-1939*. Paris: Fayard, 2001.
- Price, Aimée Brown. *Pierre Puvis de Chavannes: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Painted Work*. 2 vols. Vol. 2, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010.
- "Question d'art." *La Révolte: organe communiste-anarchiste* 4, no. 43 (July 10-17, 1891): 2.
- Reclus, Élisée. "La Révolution." *La Plume: Littéraire, artistique, et sociale*, no. 97 (May 1, 1893): 206-7.
- Reed, Christopher. *Not at Home: the Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996.
- Retté, Adolphe. "Septième exposition des artistes indépendants." *L'Ermitage* (May 1891): 293-301.
- Richart, Brigitte. *Maurice Denis au fil de l'eau (exposition 21 avril-22 septembre 2013)*. Granville: Musée d'art moderne Richard Anacréon, 2013.
- Robinson, Joyce Henri. "'Hi Honey, I'm Home': Weary (Neurasthenic) Businessmen and the Formulation of a Serenely Modern Aesthetic." In *What is Architecture?*, edited by Andrew Ballantyne. 112-28. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Roche, Paul. "Encore une bombe." *Le Gaulois* 5136 (April 5, 1894): 1-2.
- Rooney, Phyllis. "Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conceptions of Reason." *Hypatia* 6, no. 2 (1991): 77-103.
- Roos, Jane Mayo. *Early impressionism and the French State (1866-1874)*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Roque, George. "Seurat and Color theory." In *Seurat re-viewed*, edited by Paul Smith. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009.
- Roslak, Robyn. "Artisans, Consumers and Corporeality in Signac's Parisian Interiors." *Art History* 29, no. 5 (November 2006): 860-86.
- . *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France: Painting, Politics and Landscape*. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007.
- . "The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony: Neo-Impressionism, Science, and Anarchism." *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 3 (September 1991): 381-90.
- . "Symphonic Seas, Oceans of Liberty: Paul Signac's *La Mer: Les Barques (Concarneau)*." In *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2005). <http://19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/component/content/article/64-spring05article/302-symphonic-seas-oceans-of-liberty-paul-signacs-la-mer-les-barques-concarneau>.
- Salmon, Marie-José, ed. *L'Âge d'or de Maurice Denis*. Beauvais: Musée départemental de l'Oise, 1982.
- . "La peinture décorative: à la recherche d'une utopie picturale, Maurice Denis et *L'Âge d'or*." In *De Thomas Couture à Maurice Denis: Vingt ans d'acquisitions du Conseil général de l'Oise*. 99-126. Beauvais: Conseil général de l'Oise and Éditions d'art Monelle Hayot, 1994.
- Salons of the "Indépendants" 1884-1891*. Edited by Theodore Reff. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981.

- Sanders, Kerry. "Michèle Le Doeuff: Reconsidering Rationality." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71, no. 4 (December 1, 1993): 425-35.
- Saunier, Charles. "L'Art nouveau, II: Les Indépendants." *La Revue indépendante* 23, no. 66 (April 1892): 41-48.
- . "Salon des Indépendants." *La Plume*, no. 92 (April 15, 1893): 171-73.
- Schäfer, Carina. *Maurice Denis et le comte Kessler (1902-1913)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997.
- Seeley, Paul. "O Sainte Mère: Liberalism and the Socialization of Catholic Men in Nineteenth-Century France." *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (December 1998): 862-91.
- Ségard, Achille. *Peintres d'aujourd'hui: Les Décorateurs*. Third ed. 2 vols. Vol. 2, Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1914.
- Shaw, Jennifer L. *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.
- . "The Wandering Gaze: Modernism, Subjectivity and the Art of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes." In *Moving Forward, Holding Fast: The Dynamics of Nineteenth-Century French Culture*, edited by Barbara Cooper and Mary Donaldson-Evans. 1997.
- Shiff, Richard. *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Shyrock, Richard. "Reaction within Symbolism: The École Romane." *The French Review* 71, no. 4 (March 1998): 577-84.
- Siegfried, Susan L. *Ingres: Painting Reimagined*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Signac, Paul. *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impersonnisme*. Edited by Françoise Cachin. Paris: Hermann, 1978.
- . "Extraits du Journal inédit de Paul Signac I, 1894-1895." *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 36 (1949): 97-128.
- . "Extraits du Journal inédit de Paul Signac II, 1897-1898." *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 39 (1952): 265-84.
- . "Extraits du Journal inédit de Paul Signac III, 1898-1899." *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 42 (July-August 1953): 27-57.
- . "Fragments du Journal de Paul Signac." *Arts de France* 11, no. 11-12 (1947): 97-102.
- . "Letter to Vincent Van Gogh. Cassis, Friday, April 12, 1889 (Letter 757)." In *Vincent Van Gogh, The Letters*. <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let757/letter.html>.
- . "Variétés: Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires." *48 |14 La Revue du musée d'Orsay*, no. 12 (Spring 2001): 98-101.
- Silver, Kenneth. *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Silverman, Debora. *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

- Sorlot, Marc. *Léon Bourgeois, 1851-1925: Un moraliste en politique*. Paris: B. Leprince, 2005.
- Stahl, Fabienne. "L'enfant dans la vie et l'œuvre de Maurice Denis." In *Maurice Denis: Le matin de la vie*. 190-94. Kyoto, Japan: Nissha Printing Company, 2011.
- . "Les décorations religieuses de Maurice Denis (1870-1943) entre les deux guerres." PhD diss., Université Blaise-Pascal de Clermont-Ferrand, 2009.
- Sternhell, Zeev. *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme française*. New ed. Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2000.
- Subtil, Julie. "On va retrouver l'harmonie!" In *Tous Montreuil: Le journal de la ville et de ses habitant-e-s* no. 74 (April 3-16, 2012): 25.
http://www.montreuil.fr/uploads/tx_egestiondoc/TM74_optim_01.pdf.
- Sutton, Michael. *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics, 1890-1914*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Talmeyr, Maurice. "L'âge de l'affiche." In *La cité du sang: Tableaux du siècle passé*. Paris: Perrin, 1901.
- . "L'âge de l'affiche." *Revue des Deux Mondes* 137 (September 1, 1896): 201-16.
- "Temps nouveaux." *Les Temps nouveaux* 1, no. 1 (May 4-10, 1895): 1-2.
- Thiébaud, Philippe. "Art nouveau et néo-impressionnisme: Les ateliers de Signac." *Revue de l'art* 92, no. 1 (1991): 72-78.
- . "Art Nouveau et néo-impressionnisme: Une rencontre éphémère." *Péristyles*, no. 11 (January 1998): 25-32.
- Thomson, Richard. "Ruines, rhétoriques et révolution: Paul Signac et l'anarchisme dans les années 1890." In *Arts & Sociétés: Lettre du séminaire* 44 (December 9, 2010).
<http://www.artsetsocietes.org/f-thomson2.html>.
- . *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Tiersten, Lisa. *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.
- Tillier, Bertrand. *Les artistes et l'affaire Dreyfus, 1898-1908*. Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2009.
- Tout-Paris. "Bloc-Notes parisien: Exposition de Chéret." *Le Gaulois* (December 22, 1889): n.p.
- Troimaux, Edgard. "Émile Henry: Les explosions du café Terminus et de la rue des Bons-Enfants." *L'Écho de Paris: Journal littéraire et politique du matin*, no. 3626 (April 30, 1894): 1-2.
- Troy, Nancy J. *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Van de Velde, Henry. "Les expositions d'art: À Bruxelles, la peinture au 3^e Salon de la Libre Esthétique." *La Revue Blanche* 10 (1896): 284-87.
- Varias, Alexander. "Art and Anarchy." In *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives during the Fin-de-Siècle*. 121-69. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Verhaeren, Émile. "Le Salon de la Libre Esthétique." *L'Art moderne* (March 8, 1896): 73-75.

- Verhagen, Marcus. "The Poster in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris: 'That Mobile and Degenerate Art.'" In *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, edited by Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Verleysen, Cathérine. *Maurice Denis et la Belgique, 1890-1930*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010.
- Véron, Eugène. *L'Esthétique*. Paris: C. Reinwald et C^{ie}, 1878.
- Vidler, Anthony. *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.
- Ward, Martha. *Pissarro, Neo-impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Watkins, Nicholas. "The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic." In *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930*, edited by Gloria Groom. 1-28. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Werth, Margaret. *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900*. Berkeley University of California Press, 2002.
- Wilde, Oscar. "Individualisme." *La Révolte (supplément littéraire)* 3, no. 43 (July 12-18, 1890): 1-2.
- Williams, Rosalind H. *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Witt, Charlotte. "Feminist History of Philosophy." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2012. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/feminism-femhist/>.
- Wittmann, Jean-Michel. "Gide, un 'anti-Maurras'?" In *Le maurrassisme et la culture*, edited by Olivier Dard, Michel Leymarie and Neil McWilliam. 99-109. Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2010.
- Woloshyn, Tania. "Colonizing the Côte d'Azur: Neo-Impressionism, Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical Terre Libre of the Maures, c.1892-1908." *RIHA Journal* 0045 (Special Issue 'New Directions in Neo-Impressionism') (July 14, 2012). <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2012/2012-jul-sep/special-issue-neo-impressionism/woloshyn-colonizing-the-cote-dazur>.
- . "Vers la lumière: Painters and Patients on the Côte d'Azur, c.1887-1910." PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2008.
- Wright, Alistair. *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- . "Maximilien Luce and the Specter of Neo-Impressionism." In *Twenty-First-Century Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg*. 254-62. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008.
- Young, Marnin. "The Death of Georges Seurat: Neo-Impressionism and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in 1891." *RIHA Journal* 0043 (Special Issue 'New Directions in Neo-Impressionism') (July 14, 2012). <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2012/2012-jul-sep/special-issue-neo-impressionism/young-death-of-seurat/>.
- Zimmermann, Michael F. *Les Mondes de Seurat: Son œuvre et le débat artistique de son temps*. Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1991.