CRAVAN, ARTHUR (1887-1918)   
Born Fabian Avernius Lloyd in Lausanne, Switzerland to expatriate English parents, Cravan was a self-styled “poet-pugilist,” nephew of Oscar WILDE, and husband of British poet Mina LOY. Cravan’s literary legacy is largely constituted by his connection to avant-garde circles in both Paris and New York, and the way that his anti-art position offered an aesthetic model for DADA and SURREALISM. Cravan published the journal *Maintenant* in Paris in 1912-1915, which in its indiscriminate combativeness toward other artists and writers represents what Roger Shattuck called “a literary transposition of boxing technique.” Cravan’s pugnacious persona drew on his formal training as a boxer, exalting viscerality and violence against the putative effeteness of artistic convention: “if you have the good fortune to be a brute you’ve got to keep being one.”[1] In this regard, Cravan was particularly influenced by contemporaneous African-American heavyweight Jack Johnson, a recurrent figure in his writing often troped as “primitive” or “brutal.” In 1915 Cravan and Johnson staged a boxing match in Barcelona attended by avant-gardists such as Francis PICABIA and Blaise CENDRARS, which Johnson won. By 1916 Cravan had moved to New York, where he met Loy, and taken up with members of the Arensberg Circle. His combination of an anti-art stance and penchant for spectacle made him an important precursor for dada and surrealism; Cendrars once wrote that “Dada is Dada and Arthur Cravan is its prophet.” In 1918, Cravan vanished off the coast of Salina Cruz, Mexico in a boat of his own repair.

[2] Cravan, Arthur, “Exhibition at the Independents” *The Dada Poets and Painters: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell. Boston, G.K. Hall, 1981, p. 12.

Further Reading

Shattuck, Roger, *The Banquet Years: The Arts in France, 1885-1918.* New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1955, p. 354.