Japanese Connections

The Birth of Modern Décor

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The Birth of Modern Décor

Edited by Isabelle Cahn

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LOUVRE ABU DHABI

Musée d'Orsay

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FOREWORD

Following on from our opening exhibitions, "From One Louvre to Another" and "Globes: Visions of the World", I am particularly proud to announce this new season dedicated entirely to cultural exchange. The theme of exchange is fundamental to our identity and will continue throughout the year in all four exhibitions.

The first of these—"Japanese Connections: The Birth of Modern Décor"—traces the fascination that Western painters developed for the art of the Far East from the time that Japan opened its doors to the world in 1853, after spending over 200 years in isolation. "Japonism", the craze for all things Japanese, followed on from "Orientalism", that had appealed to the Romantic artists during the first half of the 19th century, and had itself superseded the vogue for chinoiserie in the courts of Europe at the end of the 18th century.

It is not a coincidence that the Nabi painters, so taken with the East and Far East, should be brought together again at the Louvre Abu Dhabi: in the 21st century, the Emirate also looks to Asia as a source of inspiration and cultural exchange. And the attraction is reciprocal, as 20% of our museum visitors are from Asia.

This exhibition is another facet of the fruitful collaboration between the French museums and the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which complements the programme of long-term artwork loans for the museum's permanent galleries. It also illustrates the confident and friendly relations that have developed between the Emirati and French partner teams.

HE Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak
Chairman, Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi

FOREWORD

The inauguration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi was a great success that saw it described as "the most beautiful museum of the 21st century". Maintaining this success in the long term entails both cultivating relationships with its public and staging an ongoing program of temporary exhibitions connected to its permanent collection.

The Louvre Abu Dhabi has already presented two ground-breaking exhibitions, jointly organized with French museums, that have attracted a large number of visitors. "From One Louvre to Another", which surveyed the birth of the Musée du Louvre and the genesis of the idea of the universal museum, was followed by "Globes: Visions of the World", organized by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, which traced the development of representations of the Earth through history and across civilizations.

Staged in collaboration with the Musée d'Orsay, the Louvre Abu Dhabi's third exhibition addresses a very different subject: the relationship between the Japonism that flourished in late-19th-century Europe and the emergence of modern décor. For those who called themselves "the Nabis"—Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis and Pierre Bonnard amongst others—the discovery of the Japanese print, prompted by their encounter with Paul Gauguin, proved a revelation. It led to the birth of a distinctive artistic movement that combined the aesthetic of the Italian primitive painters with that of Japanese masters such as Hokusai and Hiroshige, and sought to erase the boundaries between the arts sanctified by the academic tradition to found a new, total art, embracing painting, the applied arts and architectural decoration.

As an exhibition, "Japanese Connections, The Birth of Modern Décor" reflects the Louvre Abu Dhabi's ambition to highlight the cultural exchanges between East and West and the successive breakaways that led to the emergence of modern art, this through a series of exhibitions devoted to the avant-garde to be held each autumn at the same time as Abu Dhabi Art fair, which showcases the art of the 21st century.

In the variety of the themes addressed, these three exhibitions testify to the scope and diversity of the French museum collections. They are also fascinating illustrations of the story the Louvre Abu Dhabi has set out to tell: how, through successive interactions, a common visual culture has emerged across the world.

I would like to acknowledge the remarkable work of the exhibition's curator, Isabelle Cahn. I would also like extend my thanks to the staff of the Musée d'Orsay and to its president Laurence des Cars, as well as to the staff of the Agence France-Muséums who worked on this exhibition.

I hope that "Japanese Connections" will contribute—150 years after the beginning of the Meiji period that saw Japan open up to the world—to a better understanding of the relationship of mutual fascination between Asia and Europe.

Jean-Luc Martinez
President of the Scientific Council of the Agence France-Muséums
President-Director of the Musée du Louvre

FOREWORD

The very name of the exhibition "Japanese Connections: The Birth of Modern Décor" is a declaration of the desire of the Louvre Abu Dhabi to instil the concept of cultural exchange at the heart of its activities. As the opening event in the museum's second season, this exhibition highlights the fundamental contribution made by the Japanese aesthetic in the evolution of modern décor. It also brings out a little known aspect of the art of the Nabis, whose most eminent members were Édouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis and Ker-Xavier Roussel.

This project, conceived by Isabelle Cahn, the Chief Curator of Paintings at the Musée d'Orsay, brings together paintings, decorations and folding screens painted by the Nabis, works by Paul Sérusier and an exceptional set of panels by Odilon Redon.

A selection of Japanese prints and screens from the collections of the Musée d'Orsay, the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet and the Louvre Abu Dhabi shed further light on this theme.

The first exhibition of this scale devoted to the influence of *ukiyo-e* and Japanese painting on the decorative works of the Nabis will be complemented by a cultural programme focused on *manga*, which underlines the constancy of the attraction of popular Japanese art. Louvre Abu Dhabi makes a point of rooting its cultural policy in history and of highlighting mutual influences and exchanges.

This exhibition could not have been created without the close cooperation between the teams of the Louvre Abu Dhabi and its French partner museums.

I am particularly grateful, for their invaluable support, to the president of the Musée d'Orsay, Laurence des Cars, and its former president, Guy Cogeval, as well as to Sophie Makariou, president of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet in addition to other lenders to this exhibition: the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

Manuel Rabaté
Director of the Louvre Abu Dhabi

FOREWORD

It was in 1872, when Japan opened up to trade with the rest of the world and a fascinated West discovered the subtle refinements of Japanese art, that the word "Japonism" emerged to denote both the enthusiasm for Japanese style and the Japanese influence on European art, and on the decorative arts in particular.

The "new sense of color" that Edmond de Goncourt spoke of was especially evident in the Japanese print, which influenced not only the Impressionists but also Van Gogh and Gauguin, whose researches brought about a revolution in the visual order to which the Nabis were the direct heirs. The young painters took inspiration from the prints they keenly collected to develop a style of their own, clearly reflected in their interior décors. Expressive line, flat color, fragmented space, the rejection of all illusionism: the Nabis' principles, born of their encounter with the Far East, inaugurated modernism in painting and sought to dispel the traditional hierarchical relation between decorative painting and easel painting.

The first exhibition at the Louvre Abu Dhabi to be organized by the Musée d'Orsay, "Japanese Connections" returns to this moment of historic dialogue and transnational circulation of art. A world premier, it presents some thirty outstanding works from the Musée d'Orsay alongside a selection of Japanese prints from the Musée Guimet and the collections of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, highlighting the key points in this encounter of civilizations. Taking an aesthetic rather than a thematic approach, its free-ranging exploration calls into play a certain universality of the gaze—as is fitting at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, a universal museum at the confluence of cultures.

Home to the world's largest collection of works by the Nabis, the Musée d'Orsay is one of the Louvre Abu Dhabi's key partners. By regularly lending many of its masterpieces, it shares its collections with the world while raising their international profile. To offer all visitors, whatever their origin, the keys to the understanding of our collections, and see them come to new life under fresh and different eyes: that is the challenge of this two-way partnership that has the pleasure of the gaze as its shared foundation.

This exhibition is the first of a series of collaborations, and, as a former scientific director of the Agence France-Muséums, it is my great pleasure to witness the realization of a project that I helped instigate. I would like to express my warmest gratitude to Isabelle Cahn, chief curator of paintings at the Musée d'Orsay, for her scholarly contribution and her work as curator of this very original exhibition, and also to acknowledge the commitment of our partners in making a success of the project: the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Agence France-Muséums and the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet.

Laurence des Cars
President of the Musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie

Paris 1900

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1097 PARIS. — La Tour Eiffel X Phot

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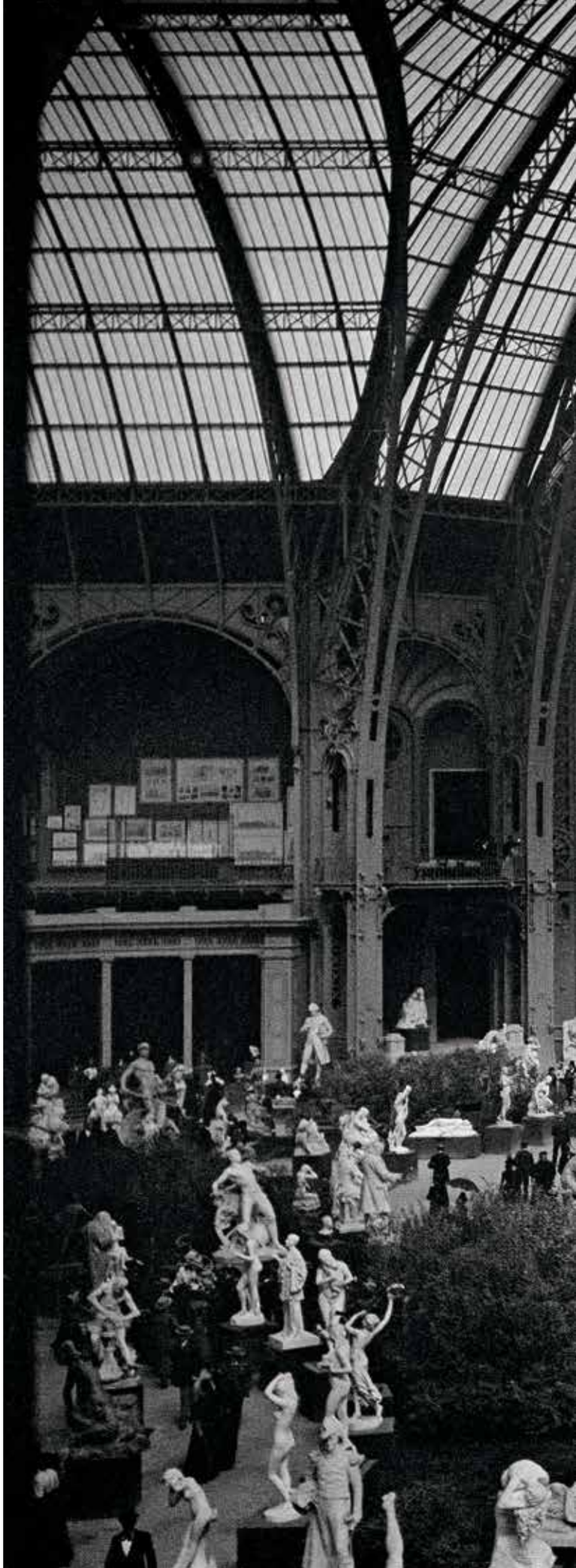

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Isabelle Cahn

The Nabis: Decorative Painting and the New Sensibility

FIG. 1. Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Vision after the Sermon*, 1888
Oil on canvas, 73 × 92 cm
Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, NG1643

PARIS 1889, MIRROR OF THE WORLD

In the spring of 1889, a small group of art students from the Académie Julian experienced a sudden revelation at the Paris World's Fair (Exposition Universelle de Paris). There, installed for the occasion at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, Monsieur Volpini's Café des Arts housed an exhibition of contemporary art.[1] Upon entering they found the walls covered in paintings and prints by Paul Gauguin, Émile Bernard, and other friends of Gauguin.[2]

With their discrete areas of flat, bright color, their expressive lines, and simplified motifs in a depthless space, these paintings offered non-realistic representations of scenes observed or imagined. These pupils of Rodolphe Julian had never seen such radical paintings. "Initially, what amazement," Maurice Denis recalled a few years later. "And then, what a revelation! Unlike Impressionists' paintings that were like windows on nature, these were emphatically decorative surfaces, highly colored and contoured in heavy line, compartmentalized—a technique referred to as Cloissonnism (*cloissonisme*) or Japonism (*japonisme*). We found in these unusual works the influence of Japanese prints, of the *image d'Épinal*, of sign painting, of the stylization characteristic of the Romanesque."[3]

The encounter with Gauguin's work [FIG. 1]—about which they had already heard a great deal—made a deep impression on the group and greatly influenced its members' later development. The experience hailed the beginning of a decade-long aesthetic exploration that brought together artists of markedly different backgrounds. In the wake of the Impressionist revolution of the 1870s, which paralleled France's transition from Empire to Republic, a new burst of creativity emerged among young artists keen to go beyond an Impressionism that had exhausted its possibilities, offering no more than a variation grounded in observation, unconnected to inner life. "Our age," wrote the critic Roger Marx, "hates nothing so much as repetition, recipes handed down from the past; it is tormented by a craving for the forbidden, it longs for *a new sensibility*; to escape the perpetual threat of *déjà vu*, to banish what is taught, what is willed in advance, that is its ambition, if not its rule."[4]

The accelerating pace of scientific discovery and its application in the fields of energy, transport, and medicine had brought

1 Entitled "Exhibition by the Impressionist and Synthetist Group", it featured works by Paul Gauguin, Charles Laval, Léon Fauché, Émile Schuffenecker, Louis Anquetin, George-Daniel (de Monfreid), Émile Bernard, Louis Roy, and Ludovic Némo (alias Émile Bernard).
2 Gauguin first stayed in the Breton village of Pont-Aven, Finistère, in 1886. He made longer visits in 1888 and 1889, when he was joined by Émile Bernard, Paul Sérusier, Jacob Meyer de Haan, and other artists who considered him their master.
3 Maurice Denis, "L'époque du symbolisme", *Gazette des beaux-arts*, March 1934, cited in Denis, 1993, p. 207.
4 Marx, 1891, p. 145.

FIG. 2. Georges Garen (1854–after 1912?),
Illumination of the Eiffel Tower, 1889
Color engraving, 65 × 45.3 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, ARO 1981 944-1

FIG. 3. Neurdein brothers (1887–1915),
Javanese Dancers, World's Fair of 1889, Paris
Photograph, 13 × 21 cm
Roger-Viollet, ND-15326

about fundamental changes in taste and ways of life, especially in bigger cities. The forward-looking and dynamic society of the late 19th century called for a new aesthetic, a new art for its modern interiors. As it happened, this emancipatory, anti-academic impulse coincided with the celebration of the centenary of the French Revolution. This was marked by the Paris World's Fair of 1889, a showcase for the ambivalent modern society of the West, dominated by faith in scientific and technological progress as the key to universal development, within a context of colonial expansion. The cultures of the entire world were brought together at the Fair, each nation having its own pavilion—an arrangement that allowed for the peaceful coexistence of peoples from five continents. Within a relatively confined area, vernacular productions could be seen alongside examples of the latest technology, among them the Eiffel Tower [FIG. 2], the Decauville railway, and Coutan's electrically powered and illuminated fountain. These spectacular attractions filled visitors with enthusiasm, creating an optimistic mood. Over its six months' duration, the Fair broadened the outlook and stimulated the imaginations of thousands of visitors from all over the world.

After visiting the villages of the colonial section and succumbing to the charms of the Javanese dancers [FIG. 3], Gauguin decided to go and live in the tropics, so as to revitalize his art amid a "primitive" civilization that he believed to be more authentic than that of the West. He was not alone in his desire for creative hybridization, which was in tune with the thinking of a number of artists and artisans of the time, who turned to sources both learned and popular, ancient and modern, Western and oriental, to revive a flagging inspiration.

PROPHETS OF A NEW ART

Like Gauguin, the young painters of the Académie Julian who came together as the Nabis were in search of a new Eden, though they did not yearn, like him, to leave the old life behind. They wanted, rather, to make the contemporary world into an idyll, in which beauty and spirituality would counterbalance the positivism and materialism of the age. The term "Nabi," which appeared for the first time in Paul Sérusier's correspondence in 1890,[5] derives from the Arabic and Hebrew words for "prophet" (*nabi* and *navi* respectively). Sérusier used it to refer to the artists who met weekly in Paul Ranson's studio to discuss the premises and the theory of a new art. Inspired by the example of Gauguin, they championed an art that could touch a new, unprecedented chord.

5 "I dream of a future brotherhood purged of dross, composed only of committed artists, lovers of beauty and goodness who bring to their work and conduct that indefinable character that I designate as 'Nabi.'" Letter from Paul Sérusier to Maurice Denis, summer 1890, in Sérusier, 1950, p. 40.

FIG. 4. Paul Sérusier (1864–1927), *The Talisman*, October 1888
Oil on panel, 27 × 22 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1985-13

This called for a different vocabulary and new formal solutions, which they were happy to explore together without any insistence on uniformity. They saw themselves as prophets guiding society toward a better aesthetic and spiritual future.

The group began to crystallize in the autumn of 1888, a few months before the World's Fair opened. That October, Paul Sérusier had shown his art-school friends a small landscape of the Bois d'Amour at Pont-Aven. Painted under Gauguin's close supervision, it was composed of juxtaposed patches of strong color without modeling or depth, giving an almost abstract character to the motif. The painting greatly intrigued his young peers, the fascination it elicited soon earning it the name of *Talisman* [FIG. 4]. It was passed around among the group of friends before finally being presented by its creator to Maurice Denis, who kept it his entire life.

The Nabis were not a strictly defined circle of friends, but a group of changing composition, like the English Pre-Raphaelites. The initial nucleus consisted of the painters Paul Sérusier (1864–1927), Paul Ranson (1861–1909), Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940), and Maurice Denis (1870–1943), all pupils at Julian's. They would soon be joined by Henri-Gabriel Ibels (1867–1936), Georges Lacombe (1868–1916), Aristide Maillol (1861–1944), József Rippl-Rónai (1861–1927), Ker-Xavier Roussel (1867–1944), Félix Vallotton (1865–1925), and Jan Verkade (1868–1946). Each was given a pseudonym, as if recruited to a secret society whose members were bound together by a shared aesthetic and moral pact, a dream of what reality could be. These nicknames all began with the word Nabi, followed by a modifier, as in "le Nabi zouave" for Vuillard, who had just done his military service (the "zouave" being a tongue-in-cheek reference to the renowned Algerian infantry regiments in the French army), "le Nabi aux belles icônes" (the Nabi of the Beautiful Icons) for Denis, who venerated the works of the Italian Primitives, or "le Nabi à la barbe rutilante" (the Red-bearded Nabi) for Sérusier. A schoolboy humor prevailed at meetings of the group, which did not take itself too seriously. Yet the assertive personalities of its members soon saw differences of opinion emerge, and it would break up irrevocably in 1900.

Two main tendencies coexisted within the group. One, spearheaded by Paul Sérusier, brought together the Nabis who were more concerned with aesthetic principles and theories, including Maurice Denis [FIG. 5], Paul Ranson, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Jan Verkade and Charles Filiger. These artists were interested in intellectual matters related to spirituality, poetry, esotericism. This combined with a certain skepticism of science that brought with it an interest in religion, an inclination toward superstition, a penchant for the subjective and the fictional. Sérusier and Ranson were fascinated by esotericism and theosophy, while Maurice Denis and Jan Verkade rooted themselves in a Catholic spirituality. All were drawn to Symbolism.

FIG. 5. Maurice Denis (1870–1943), *Yellow Boats*, September 1893
Wallpaper design, gouache on paper pasted on card, 79 × 50 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée Départemental Maurice Denis–Le Prieuré (Denis Family Donation, 1976), PMD976.1.90

FIG. 6. Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), poster for *La Revue blanche*, 1894
Lithographic color print, 74 × 58 cm
Private collection, The Stapleton Collection

The second tendency involved Pierre Bonnard [FIG. 6], Édouard Vuillard, Félix Vallotton, and József Rippl-Rónai, who sought to give expression to a joyful modernity, treating subjects drawn from contemporary society. They used color and line to create a dynamic environment that reflected the movement of life. Without directly representing the frenzy of modern society, their art sought to articulate deeper-lying psychological issues and tensions associated with prevailing social values.

Despite their differences, the Nabis were united by the idea of an essentially decorative art, and an art for all, rather than one destined only for a rich and cultured elite. They wanted to make everyday life more beautiful through accessible, affordable works like prints, posters, wallpapers, and manufactured objects. Produced in a run of 100, Bonnard's screen of four lithographic panels after a painted composition [CAT. 28] is a renowned example of such multiples, whose distribution nonetheless remained highly limited.

FREEDOM VIA JAPAN

"Painting . . . must above all be decorative," declared Bonnard in 1891, speaking to a journalist from the *Écho de Paris*. Only 23 years old, the "Nabi très japonard"—the ultra-Japanese Nabi, as he had been dubbed by critic Félix Fénéon[6]—had just made his mark at the Salon des Artistes Indépendants with four decorative panels originally intended as a screen [FIGS 7-10]. The sinuous figures set within the vertical panels suggested oversized prints or *kakemono* scroll paintings.

The Nabis' encounter with Japanese art played a significant role in their choice of style and subjects. Like their Japanese artists, they were interested in the representation of fugitive time. The female figures symbolizing the cycle of the seasons in the paintings of Bonnard, Sérusier and Roussel embody a vision of the impermanence of the world taken from the makers of *ukiyo-e* prints.[7]

There is no evidence to show precisely when the Nabis began to interest themselves in Japanese art. It's possible that at least some of them saw the first, historic exhibition staged by Siegfried Bing in Paris at his gallery, L'Art Japonais, in 1888. It is, however, well established that most of the Nabis visited the exhibition of Japanese prints held at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in

6 Félix Fénéon, "Au pavillon de la Ville de Paris. Société des artistes indépendants", *Le Chat noir*, 2 April 1892, reprinted in Fénéon, 1970, p. 213.
7 This term, meaning "image of the floating world," designates a Japanese art movement of the Edo period (1603–1868), embracing popular painting and the woodblock print.

FIGS 7–10. Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), *Women in the Garden: Woman in a Dress with White Dots; Woman Seated with Cat; Woman in a Cape; Woman in a Checkered Dress*, 1891
Glue-based distemper on canvas; decorative panels of 160.3 × 48 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, accepted in lieu of tax, 1984, RF 1984-159, RF 1984-160, RF 1984-162, RF 1984-161

the spring of 1890 [FIG. 11].[8] This featured hundreds of 18th- and 19th-century prints loaned by collectors. Bing, one of the exhibition's chief organizers, noted in his catalogue introduction how this art, previously unknown in Europe, had become the subject of serious scholarship, and how such work had prompted an enthusiasm for the Orient that was now increasingly influencing Western aesthetics. Furthermore, Japanese art was now valued for its own distinctive qualities, rather than as a curiosity. The late 19th century saw Japanese design serve as inspiration and model for Western artists and craftsmen, as Edmond de Goncourt too pointed out.[9] The Japanese genius was particularly admired for its simplification of forms, its eloquent understatement, its love of light and color, its ability to register fugitive impressions, its taste for the unexpected, and its instinctive fantasy. It became a model for a new generation of artists and manufacturers.

The Nabis were not the first to discover Japanese art, but they belonged to a second generation that sought to incorporate its Synthetist principles into their own work. Like their elders—Whistler, Tissot, Manet, and Monet among them—they collected Japanese woodblock prints, buying from Paris department stores cheap examples they could pin on their studio walls. While relatively little is known of Bonnard's collection, the prints collected by Vuillard or Maurice Denis are better documented, having been retained in the possession of their descendants.[10] The crinkled-paper or "crepon" prints the Nabis liked to have in front of them did not serve directly as models, but provided a more indirect inspiration.[11] They encouraged greater freedom of line, color, and perspective and incited a light and humorous treatment of serious subjects. "Japanese art . . . convinced by its subtle, naive charm," Roger Marx declared in 1891, "its wealth of imagination, the quality of its detailed observation."[12]

The 1890s' vogue for all things Japanese offered Western artists plenty of opportunities to find out about this Eastern culture. From 1888 to 1891, Bing published *Le Japon artistique. Documents d'art et d'industrie* [CATS 3–11], was an illustrated monthly magazine intended to make readers aware of the great diversity

8 25 April–22 May 1890.
9 "When I said that Japonism was in the process of revolutionizing the vision of the European peoples, I meant that Japonism brought to Europe a new sense of color, a new decorative system, and, if you like, a poetic imagination in the invention of the objet d'art, which never existed, even in the most perfect medieval or Renaissance pieces": Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal*, 19 April 1884.
10 Gaboriau, 2015–16.
11 See Perucchi-Petri, 2014, pp. 87–93.
12 Marx, 1891, p. 146.

FIG. 11. Jules Chéret (1836–1932), poster for the exhibition of Japanese prints at the École des Beaux-Arts de Paris, 1890
Lithographic color print, 85 × 125 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Prints and Photographs Department, ENT DN-1 (CHAIX18)-ROUL

of Japanese art and to provide artists, manufacturers and artisans with models for their own work.[13] In the first issue, Bing insisted on the importance of external influence for the survival of French art: "How could the vitality of [the national] genius have been maintained had it not been recruited from fresh sources from time to time? . . . a drop of blood that has come to be mixed with our own that no power on earth can now eliminate."[14] The Nabis, who were among the earliest readers of the magazine, were able to absorb the emancipatory principles of Japanese art from its plentiful illustrations. From the prints, they adopted the simplicity of the flat, screen-like surface against which motifs stood out without relief, together with the all-embracing bird's eye perspective. They favored a sinuous line of flourish and festoon and experimented with all kinds of innovative forms, so as to escape the linear unfolding of narrative. Maurice Denis summed up their ambitions in a fine phrase that would later become famous: "It should be remembered that a picture—before being a warhorse, a nude, or an anecdote of some sort—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."[15] This stylization that neglected detail in favor of the essential made it possible to express an inner truth, to reveal the invisible world of thought and dream, the source of the Beautiful and the Good [FIG. 12].

In adopting the formula of the folding screen, made newly popular by the vogue for the Japanese, the Nabis took advantage of the complex, hinged support to break with the conventional idea of unity of composition, their goal being to abandon the traditional perspective of Western painting, conceived since the Renaissance as a window onto nature.[16] The tension between the continuity and discontinuity of motifs and planes and the combination in one space of multiple points of view allowed the introduction of a certain decorative fancy. They also folded paper to introduce the illusion of volume into a flat surface. In Maurice Denis's *Screen with Doves* [CAT. 29], the zigzag course of the garden fence underlines its articulation in three dimensions.

13 "I propose to furnish the lovers of Japanese Art, by the aid of the best processes of engraving, with a continuous series of diversified specimens, taken from every branch of that art, at all its various epochs. The work will constitute a sort of graphic encyclopædia, for the use of all those students of Japanese Art who are desirous of tracing the course of its development": Bing, 1888, p. 4. *Artistic Japan, A Monthly Illustrated Journal of Arts and Industries, compiled by S. Bing*, ed. Marcus B. Huish, London, Sampson, Low, Marston, Earle and Rivington, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 3]

14 Bing, 1888, pp. 5 and 9.

15 Maurice Denis, "Définition du néo-traditionnisme", *Art et critique*, no. 65, 23 August 1890, p. 540, reprinted in Denis, 1993, p. 5.

16 The philosopher, painter, mathematician, architect and theorist of art and language Leon Battista Alberti (Genoa, 1404–Rome, 1472) was the first to set out rules for rendering a three-dimensional scene on a two-dimensional surface.

FIG. 12. Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940), *The Album*, 1895
Oil on canvas, 67.9 × 204.5 cm
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 2000, Bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002, 2000.93.2

"WALLS, WALLS TO BE DECORATED!"

It was not long before the Nabis were showing an interest in decorative art, following Gauguin in declaring easel painting to be dead, supplanted by decoration, and appealing for walls to adorn.[17] Their work in this field began at the turn of the 1890s, as they collaborated on avant-garde theater projects with their friends among the Symbolist writers and poets. Sérusier, Ranson, Denis, Bonnard, and Vuillard were all involved with the Théâtre d'Art, an experimental theater run by their friend Paul Fort. Afterwards, they joined Aurélien Lugné, known as Lugné-Poe—a fellow pupil of Denis's and Vuillard's at the Lycée Condorcet—when he founded the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1893. It was this theater that first staged in Paris the works of the Symbolist playwrights of Belgium and Scandinavia, among them Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Bjørnson. The Nabis used water- or glue-based distemper—quick-drying, unlike oils—to paint the scenery for this intimiste and cerebral repertoire. Vuillard would continue to make use of this technique, suited to preserve the spontaneity of gesture, for the decorative panels he painted for friends and patrons such as Alexandre Natanson.

Alexandre was the eldest of the three brothers who together had founded the *La Revue blanche*,[18] a magazine that championed Symbolism and new ideas in art, music, literature, and politics more generally. He asked Vuillard to decorate the large space that served as both drawing room and dining room at his house in Paris's 16th arrondissement, between the Étoile and the Bois de Boulogne. The subject of the nine panels was left to Vuillard,[19] who chose to portray the life of the French capital's public gardens [CATS 30–34 and FIGS 13–14].[20] It was a commission that allowed him to bring together his impressions and observations on a theme that inspired many of his compositions. The large-format panels present a series of decorative images consisting of simplified renderings of foliage, tree-trunks, gravel paths, and fabrics, a simplification Vuillard had witnessed in the medieval tapestries

17 "Early in 1890, a war cry was taken up from one studio to another: 'No more easel paintings! Down with useless furniture! Painting must not wrongfully lay claim to a freedom that cuts it off from the other arts. The work of the painter begins when the architect considers his finished. Walls, walls to be decorated! Down with perspective! The wall must remain a surface, must not be breached by the representation of infinite horizons. There are no pictures, there are only decorations!'" Verkade, 1926, p. 94.

18 Published from 1889 to 1903, *La Revue blanche* was a bi-monthly magazine of anarchist inclination dedicated to literature and Symbolist art. Bonnard, Vuillard, Maurice Denis, and other Nabis published drawings in it, as did Toulouse-Lautrec.

19 "Offer of interior decoration, to do what I want. Why not attempt it, why not pursue one's vague desires, why not have confidence in those dreams that will become realities for others as soon as I have imagined them first?": Vuillard, Journal, vol. 2, fol. 66 recto.

20 The nine paintings are today dispersed among different collections: *First Steps* (private collection), *The Promenade* (Houston, Museum of Fine Arts), *The Two Schoolboys* (Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium), *Under the Trees* (Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art), *Girls Playing*, *The Question*, *The Nurses*, *The Conversation* and *The Red Parasol* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay).

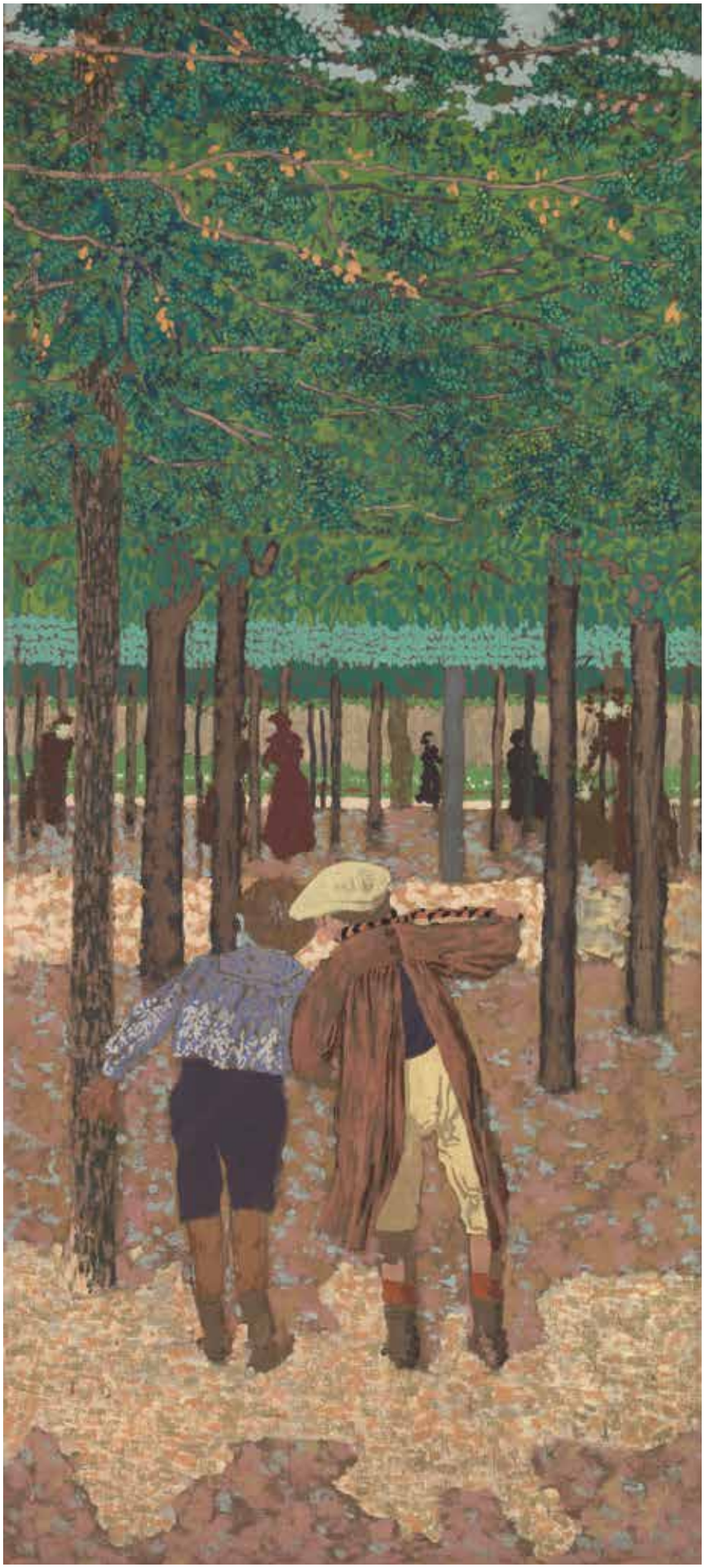


FIG. 13. Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940), *Public Gardens: The Two Schoolboys*, 1894
Glue-based distemper on canvas, 214 × 95 cm
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Inv. 6681

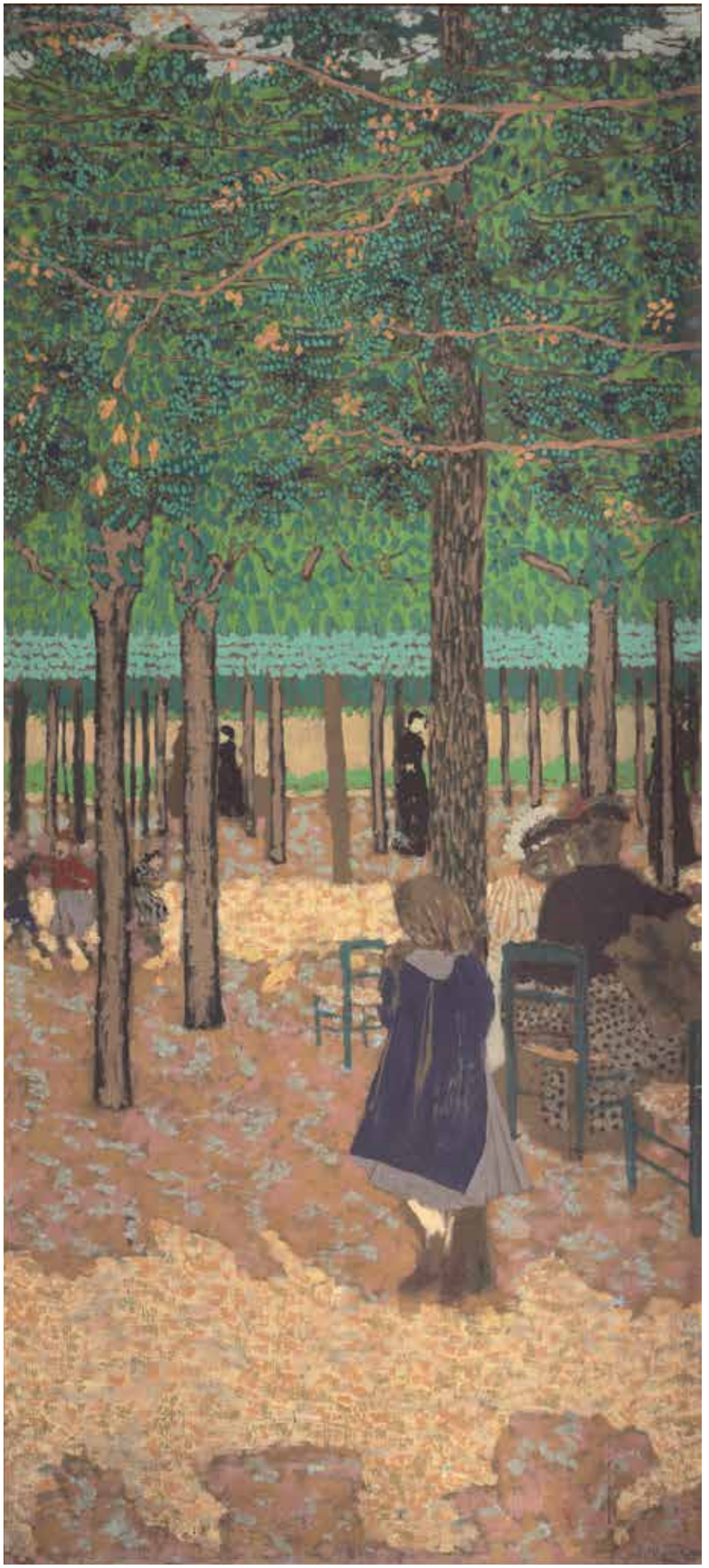


FIG. 14. Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940), *Public Gardens: Under the Trees*, 1894
Glue-based distemper on canvas, 214.6 × 97.7 cm
Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the Hanna Fund 1953.212

exhibited at the Musée de Cluny.[21] "Upon reflection," he wrote in his diary, "a subject that is too objectively precise would easily become insupportable. The imagination always generalizes." One of the most astonishing things about this décor is the centrality of empty space in the continuity of the sequence, a device inspired by the oriental painting whose influence is patent in his diptych and triptych compositions.

Vuillard's décor for Natanson was dismantled and dispersed in 1929, though five of the nine panels are today held by the Musée d'Orsay. There exists no photograph showing their original locations on the walls, between the wood panels, and it is difficult to imagine today the effect of immersion this décor of open-air scenes would have had on visitors to the renowned salon that hosted the Parisian intelligentsia in the days of the *Revue blanche*.

A NEW SENSIBILITY

The Nabis' desire to create a new environment played an important role in the birth of modern décor. In his daybook, Octave Mirbeau saluted these "newcomers who feel that art should be exclusively personal and decorative and who abandon tradition to return to some kind of primitive condition."[22] The expression of a joyous and musical modernity was in keeping with their youth and an idealizing vision of the world. An unconscious desire to return to the "the green paradise of childhood loves,"[23] and, for Maurice Denis, to a mythic world of medieval chivalry, is reflected in certain works rich in an innocent and unworldly imagination [CATS 19 and 20].

The Nabis were part of an aesthetic tendency indebted to German romanticism that centered on the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which may be translated as the total or all-embracing work of art. It was a concept that considered works of art and interior decoration at the same level as the building housing them, together with its exterior spaces. "I can picture quite clearly the role of the painting in the decoration of the modern house," wrote Maurice Denis, while still only twenty-two:

> That is, an interior arranged with the greatest refinement by a painter of taste, such as Pierre Bonnard, with furniture in the modern style and wallpaper of surprising and unexpected design, an interior light, simple and pleasing, neither a museum nor a bazaar. Here and there, but sparingly, paintings of suitable size and appropriate effect. I would want them of noble appearance, of rare and fabled beauty, adding to the impersonal luxury of color and arabesque the poetry of inner life, that one should find in them a whole world of aesthetic emotions, free, without a doubt, of any literary admixture and all the more exalted for that.[24] [FIG. 15]

The Nabis received no commissions for public buildings, which might have seen their décors preserved *in situ*. Their work in this area was confined to the homes of a narrow circle of art lovers from a well-off, cultivated, urban background. The most radical practitioner of mural decoration was Odilon Redon, with whom the Nabis came into contact in 1890. They considered him a role model for the power of his visions, the force of his blacks, the sparkle of his colors. In 1901, Redon painted a series of panels for the Baron de Domecy whose iconographic program featured individual or fragmented plants, insects, flowers, and phantasmagorical figures. This fantastical, dream-like vision corresponded to the Symbolist conception of painting as formulated by the critic Gabriel-Albert Aurier:

> Decorative painting is, properly speaking, the true painting. Painting can only have been invented to decorate with thoughts, dreams and ideas the mural banalities of human edifices. Easel painting is nothing but an illogical refinement invented to satisfy the whimsy or commercial spirit of decadent civilizations. In primitive societies the first attempts at making pictures can only have been decorative in intent.[25]

This quest for a return to an original and intuitive condition of art,[26] beyond the influence of time or fashion, corresponded to the desire for universality felt by late-19th-century artists. Going beyond language and the codes that divide, the Nabis wanted to touch upon the sensibility their contemporaries, delivering a profound message in a graceful and accessible manner. Like the Japanese artists, they sought "first to please the eye before moving or delighting the mind."[27] In an age when the oriental genius for decoration was considered by some to be unexcelled,[28] they wanted to establish a dialogue of equals between the two cultures, so as to create a new earth and a new heaven,[29] harmonious in line and color.

21 Vuillard, Journal, vol. 2, fol. 47 verso.
22 Mirbeau, 1892, p. 75.
23 "But the green paradise of childhood loves, / That innocent paradise, full of furtive pleasures, / Is it already more distant than India, China?" Baudelaire, "Moesta et errabunda" in *Les Fleurs du mal, Spleen et Idéal*, 1857.
24 Louis [Maurice Denis], 1892, p. 232.
25 Aurier, 1891, p. 163.
26 Verkade, 1926, p. 81.
27 Gonse, 1888, p. 12.
28 Ibid., p. 11.
29 Book of Revelation, 21:1.

FIG. 15. Maurice Denis (1870–1943),
Homage to Cézanne, 1900
Oil on canvas, 180 × 240 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay,
Gift of André Gide, RF 1977-137

Brigitte Koyama-Richard

Siegfried Bing and the Nabi Painters: Between Japonism and Art Nouveau

FIG. 1. Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940), *Chestnut Trees*, c. 1894–1895
Cartoon for a Tiffany stained-glass window commissioned by S. Bing in 1895
Glue-based distemper on cardboard, mounted on canvas, 110 × 70 cm
Dallas Museum of Art, The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., Inv. 2010.15.McD

One cannot talk about the Nabi painters without discussing the influence of Japanese art. The inspiration they found in *ukiyo-e* prints led to the creation of works of great originality, but they would likely not have been so enthusiastic about these woodblock prints in the first place had it not been for the immense labors of Siegfried Bing in promoting a true appreciation of Japanese art. The Nabis came to know this art dealer and shrewd collector, who became a friend and professional ally. Before going on to consider the fruits of their collaboration, however, something should be said about the personality of this talented aesthete and visionary.

THE PASSION FOR JAPAN

In the second half of the 19th century, Japanese art occasioned an unprecedented fascination in France, which then spread to the rest of Europe and to the United States. The Japanese prints that first inspired this enthusiasm were soon coveted by such passionate collectors as the engraver Félix Bracquemond, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Vincent van Gogh, and the Goncourt brothers, to mention a few.

> The other day at the Porte Chinoise, I bought Japanese drawings printed on paper that resembled a fabric, as soft and supple as wool. I have never seen anything so extraordinary, so imaginative, so admirable and poetic in its art. The colors are as subtle in their tones as plumage, as bright as enamels; poses, clothes, faces, and women who seem to appear from dream . . . An art miraculous, natural, as profuse in variety as a flora, as fascinating as a magic mirror.[1]

So reads the entry in the Goncourts' *Journal* for 8 June 1861. But it would be many years before it was known how these prints were made, or what were the names of the artists behind the *ukiyo-e*.

Some, like engraver Henri Rivière, even attempted to produce woodblock prints in the Japanese manner:

> They were woodcuts, printed not in oil colors as with us but in water-based colors, printed without a press, by hand, and that is how I decided to print those I was going to cut myself. But how? I knew nothing of the techniques or tricks of inking, printing, tracing, and I set out to investigate. I first cut a number of blocks of line and color (five, six, seven, or eight per print) in pearwood cut along the grain, without knowing how I should print them . . . I ground and mixed my colors and with a burnisher of my own devising I printed my blocks by hand![2]

1 Goncourt, 1989, vol. I, p. 706.
2 Rivière, 2004, p. 65.

Enthusiasts for Japanese art longed to know more about the painters and the history of the Japanese print.

SIEGFRIED BING AND HAYASHI TADAMASA: TWO INFLUENTIAL DEALERS

Two men fortunately came to their aid: Hayashi Tadamasa and Siegfried Bing. Having come to Paris as an interpreter for the World's Fair (Exposition Universelle) of 1878, Hayashi Tadamasa then specialized in the sale of Japanese objets d'art. Respected and liked for his knowledge and congenial nature, he was the indispensable counselor to lovers of things Japanese. Louis Gonse incurred a great debt to him in writing his book *Japanese Art*, and without him Edmond de Goncourt would never have published his monographs on Utamaro (1892) and Hokusai (1896). He was also the first Japanese to take an interest in Impressionism and introduce it to his own country.[3]

Hayashi Tadamasa's competitor, Siegfried Bing, played an equally important role in promoting an understanding of Japanese art and disseminating it internationally. German by birth and having obtained French citizenship in 1876, Siegfried Bing was a scion of a family of Hamburg porcelain manufacturers and had come to France in 1854 to help his father in his business there.[4] He later took over the management of the firm and in 1863 joined with Jean-Baptiste Leullier to form Leullier fils & Bing, producing ceramics for the Parisian and international markets. Understanding the potential represented by the growing enthusiasm for Japan, Bing turned to collecting, abandoning porcelain for oriental objets d'art. A directory of 1879 shows him to have opened a shop in the Rue Chauchat, and in 1880 he made his first trip to Japan. His brother August joined him there, and subsequently spent lengthy spells in Yokohama attending to the family's business. Back in Paris, Siegfried Bing opened three new shops, one in the Rue de Provence, not far from Hayashi's premises, the others in the Rue de la Paix and the Rue Bleue.

Unlike Hayashi Tadamasa, Siegfried Bing aimed to serve a diverse clientele and offered items suited to every purse. The competition between the two was benign and their relationship remained cordial, as witnessed by the collector Raymond Kœchlin: "Between the Rue d'Hauteville where Hayashi lived and the Rue de Provence where Bing opened his shop, a polite struggle ensued that never once saw the two rivals depart from the most perfect civility."[5] While Hayashi secluded his clients in little rooms, at Bing's:

> . . . on the other hand, everything happened, or seemed to happen, in public: clients came and went, opening cupboards, leafing through portfolios, and in the little room under the eaves specially reserved for prints there would often be five or six rubbing shoulders . . . When the packing cases arrived at the Rue de Provence, it was madness; I was never allowed to attend the unpacking in the basement, but Gonse and Vever told me of their emotion on untying the string of the precious packets, as we awaited them upstairs, quaking with impatience: what masterpieces were we about to discover, and which one would we long to have?[6]

To promote a better understanding of Japanese art and to popularize it among a wider public, Bing had the ingenious idea of publishing a magazine, one that would play a major role among artists—the Nabis in particular—and craftsmen.

ARTISTIC JAPAN

Launched in 1888, the resulting sumptuous magazine was published in French, English, and German.[7] All lovers of Japanese art recognized the scholarly quality of the new publication. Raymond Kœchlin was one of them: "Bing published *Artistic Japan* [FIG. 2 and CATS 3–11], a periodical admirably well illustrated for the time, to which articles were contributed by those most knowledgeable, and which was perfectly conceived to inform the art lover and to introduce the neophyte to Japan."[8] Bing turned to Flammarion to take care of the publishing side and to Charles Firmin Gillot, considered the best of printers, for the reproduction. In his introductory "Programme," S. Bing (for so he signed his articles), wrote:

> In presenting to the public *Artistic Japan*, I lay no claim to the addition of a fresh chapter to the many works upon the history of Japanese Art already in existence . . . It is primarily intended for the instruction of the general public in the real and rare beauties of an Art which has hitherto attracted chiefly through its superficial qualities . . . It is especially addressed to those persons who, on any grounds, are interested in the future of the industrial arts, and especially to those who, whether as manufacturers or as artisans, have an active share in their production. In the new forms of art which have come to us from the utter-most parts of the East, we see something more than a Platonic feast set

3 On Hayashi Tadamasa, see in Japanese the works of his granddaughter, Kigi, 1987; Kigi, 2000; Kigi, 2009. And in French, Koyama-Richard, 2001–1; Koyama-Richard, 2001–2; and Koyama-Richard, 1989, pp. 60–258.
4 On Bing, see Weisberg, Becker, and Possémé, 2004, more especially Gabriel P. Weisberg, "La création du japonisme," pp. 51–71.
5 Kœchlin, 1930; Mabuchi, 2009, vol. 1, p. 12.
6 Kœchlin, 1930; Mabuchi, 2009, vol. 1, pp. 20–21.
7 This large-format magazine (h. 33 cm, w. 25 cm) included many black-and-white engravings, but also fine color plates. Each cover reproduced a renowned color print.
8 Kœchlin, 1930, p. 13.

FIG. 2. Front cover of the French edition of *Artistic Japan*, no. 3, July 1888
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Prints and Photographs Department, RESERVE 4-YA5-1

> before our contemplative dilettanti . . . The only patronage this publication would wish to avoid is that of the so-called *mode* for things Japanese that has for some time afflicted our exhibitions of art and design. This fashion for the tawdry, indeed, has nothing in common with that delicate art, which may be aristocratic or popular but takes always sobriety and distinction for its most fundamental law. Far from being enslaved to the whims of frivolous infatuation, this art is now united to ours by ties imperishable.[9]

The magazine's 36 issues, richly illustrated and with texts by renowned specialists and amateur cognoscenti, were celebrated for both their seriousness and their beauty. With it, Siegfried Bing helped make Japanese art a model for artists across the world. It also showed, with its reports of constantly rising prices, that the purchase of Japanese pieces of quality was a good investment. Yet this remarkable publication, so appealing to both the intellect and the senses, was criticized by some who wondered whether Bing truly was motivated by a love of Japanese art, rather than merely hoping to profit from it. In any event, *Artistic Japan* had a profound impact on many artists, who found inspiration in the works presented, which were reproductions of superb quality for the time.

THE FIRST MAJOR EXHIBITION OF JAPANESE PRINTS

Siegfried Bing was also the organizer of the great exhibition of Japanese prints held at the École des Beaux-Arts de Paris in 1890. With more than 700 prints, it offered a panoramic survey of an art that had, by then, already broadened the horizons of a generation of Western artists [see FIG. 11, p. 50]. In his introduction to the catalogue, Bing wrote:

> Only a few years ago, the Japanese print was still something unknown to us, and this event is the culmination of a series of successive revelations about Japan. It had taken two centuries for the Land of the Rising Sun to give up the last secrets of an ancient civilization that had grown to maturity in silence and isolation . . . They are known to all, the names of those few persons of taste, be they artists or men of letters, who, in our country, extended a warm welcome to the first messengers of an art both surprising and full of charm: carved miniatures of wood or ivory, lost-wax bronzes, ceramics raised by fingertips, embroideries of tender harmony. Eventually, among this whole proliferation, the most perspicacious discovered images

9 Bing, 2013.

FIG. 3. Henry Somm (1844–1907), *Fantaisies japonaises, chez S. Bing, rue Chauchat*
[Japanese Fancies at Bing's, Rue Chauchat]
Etching, 8 × 11.7 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Prints and Photographs Department, FOL-EF-573(1)

> of astonishing effect. Assembled in imitation albums, these presented fairytale scenes in an unfamiliar and fascinating palette. We know today that these pages, which provoked such wonder and such lively pleasure, were but very late productions of the Japanese engraver's art, representing only its most popular aspect . . . Missions were organized to explore the different centers and to identify those native lovers of the art who had the monopoly on this kind of collection. Publishers' old stocks were examined in Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, and Osaka. Admittance was gained to family homes, everywhere promising a liberal remuneration in the hope of unearthing what seemed to be buried there. The impetus once given, the harvest was abundant beyond expectation. The Japanese yielded up first their less valuable collections, the more recent works; but then one after another appeared the names of the great artists, of craftsmen, of leading exponents of schools . . . It was not enough, however, to have amassed all these materials. It was necessary to untangle the threads, to set them in relation, to establish an overview. [Bing elsewhere expressed his amazement at Japan's "neglect of the documented history of its arts."] The public will thus be little surprised that it took some years to find a way through the complex labyrinth of a foreign art, so old itself and so new to us. The main lines have today been mapped, and the time would seem to have come to make known this art, now that it is possible to outline the different phases of its development, from its beginnings to modern times.[10]

The exhibition delighted its visitors, remaining long in the memory and prompting the writing of many enthusiastic accounts.

BING AND ART NOUVEAU

The visionary Bing understood that the time had come for a decorative art that would expand upon the lessons of the Japanese. While visiting Brussels, he met the young artists behind the burgeoning Art Nouveau, becoming their champion and promoter. As Raymond Kœchlin would later remember:

> Bing, as we all know, was extraordinarily astute as a dealer . . . he had in him a kind of sleeping prophet whom one would see suddenly emerge. He rightly congratulated himself on having been one of the most helpful in introducing Japanese art to France . . . There was much talk, between 1890 and 1900, of the renewal of decorative art and many artists were

10 Bing, 1890, pp. X–XV.

FIG. 4. Édouard Pourchet (1848–?, active 1894–1907), interior view of Siegfried Bing's Salon de l'Art Nouveau, on the corner of Rue de Provence and Rue Chauchat, Paris, 1895
Paris, Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Fonds Louis Bonnier, P-35-035-027

FIG. 5. Advertisement for an exhibition of bonsai at the Galerie de l'Art Nouveau, Paris
Paris, Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Collection Maciet, 268/3-39

> engaged in it to good effect; the simplicity of the great art of the Far East in all its refinement seemed to Bing to be what was needed in Europe; while visiting the United States, he had been struck by the possibilities opened up for decorative art by the new techniques of the day; the idea took root in his mind that he should be the apostle of this renewal, in which Japan, properly understood, would serve as tutor to our modern art and, having gradually disposed of his Eastern curios and objets d'art, he opened in his newly transformed premises in the Rue de Provence the Magasins de l'Art Nouveau [FIGS 4–5].[11]

It was a turn that saw Bing surround himself with young artists, among them some of the Nabis.

THE NABIS AND JAPANESE ART

The Nabi artists were all fascinated by Japanese art[12], especially by the prints which seemed to offer the new thing they were looking for. At first, like many early Japan enthusiasts, they thought of the Japanese print as a primitive art, on account of the absence of light and shade and its use of a system of perspective different from that which had prevailed in Europe since the Renaissance. They later realized that Japanese art was, in fact, highly developed and elaborate, and only appreciated it all the more. An unstinting enthusiasm earned some of them nicknames reflecting their passion: Pierre Bonnard, "le Nabi très japonard" (the ultra-Japanese Nabi), having a companion in Paul Ranson, "le Nabi plus japonard que le Nabi japonard" ("the even more ultra-Japanese Nabi"). All of them collected Japanese prints or paintings. Bonnard recognized the influence of the prints on his work. He bought his at the department stores, which sold few works of quality. "It is there that I found for a few pence crepe or crumpled rice papers printed in astonishing colors . . . I filled the walls of my room with this naive and gaudy imagery."[13]

Despite their poor quality, these late prints played a crucial role for Bonnard: "I had understood from these unsophisticated popular images that color could, as here, express everything, without need of relief or modeling. It appeared to me that it was possible to render light, form and character with color alone, without resort to other values."[14] In a letter to his friend Madame Hahnloser he confessed:

11 Kœchlin, 1930, p. 47.
12 On this, see Perucchi-Petri, 1980, pp. 261–89; Perucchi-Petri, 1993, pp. 33–61; Perucchi-Petri, 2014, pp. 87–94; also Cahn, 2016, p. 76 and Fossier, 1993, p. 27.
13 Terrasse, 1967, p. 24.
14 Ibid., p. 11.

FIG. 6. Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), poster for France-Champagne, 1891
Lithographic print in three colors on woven paper, printed by Edward Ancourt, 80 × 60 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Prints and Photographs Department, ENT DN-1 (BONNARD, Pierre)-FT 6

> I got carried away when young by the wonderful motley of cheap Japanese prints on thick crepe paper, very much a popular art form. Much later I understood the beauty of the great Japanese engravers, so much more sober but less revealing of the relationship of color to color. Fénéon[15] called me "Bonnard très japonard."[16]

In maturity, Bonnard explained:

> When my friends and I wished to continue the researches of the Impressionists and tried to develop upon them, we sought to go beyond their naturalistic impressions of color. Art is not nature. We were more severe in matters of composition. There was also much more to be had from color as a means of expression.[17]

The Japanese print enabled them to reach the goal they had set themselves.

Bonnard would never deny the profound influence of Japanese art on his work. At the very beginning of his career he created for France-Champagne one of the most Japoniste posters of the time [FIG. 6]. But his debts to Japanese art went much further. "What do I owe to Japonism? The checker motif," he once announced.[18] But here again he forgets to mention many other features of the Japanese print that are to be found not only in his work but in that of his Nabi friends, also lovers and collectors of *ukiyo-e*.

Édouard Vuillard owned many, together with ink paintings and albums, while Maurice Denis's collection included at least seventy Japanese prints. As for Paul Sérusier, he bought them and used them to decorate the walls of his room at Huelgoat: "The Japanese fascinated me. I copied them . . . The copying (or rather translation) of the Japanese served us well: what skill and knowledge was theirs!"[19]

So various and so colorful, the Japanese prints inspired the Nabis group to try a new way of painting. They were won over by the flat color and the clearly contoured forms. They borrowed

15 This was art critic Félix Fénéon (1861–1944).
16 Letter from Bonnard dated 4 January 1946, cited in Vaillant, 1965, p. 182.
17 Bonnard was 47 years old when he offered the recollection cited by Terrasse, 1967, p. 94.
18 Fossier, 1993, p. 35.
19 Letter to the Dutch painter Jan Verkade, 1892. See Sérusier, 1950, pp. 61–62.

FIG. 7. Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), *Arrival of an Elegant Lady*, c. 1804
Woodcut, 37.2 × 24.5 cm
Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Inv. 60060

from the Japanese their high-angle, low-angle, and diagonal views, their multiple perspectives within a single work. They also used the empty space—the *ma* so important to Japanese artists. The silhouettes so favored by Félix Vallotton,[20] the figures pictured from the back [FIG. 8], and the S-curve of the women [FIGS 7 and 9], symbolic of the feminine in the Japanese tradition,[21] were all masterfully appropriated. No longer contenting themselves with old screens as decorative accessories, the Nabis made and decorated their own. Their works, so novel, were a surprise to many, their originality and modernity beyond question [FIG. 10].

A FRUITFUL COLLABORATION: SIEGFRIED BING AND THE NABIS

Extending his field of activity to the United States, Bing found himself agreeably surprised by the creations of American artist and glassmaker Louis Comfort Tiffany, becoming his agent and helping him market his work throughout Europe. Bing commissioned designs for stained glass from eleven artists, eight of them Nabis, these being Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Paul Ranson, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Paul Sérusier, Félix Vallotton, and Édouard Vuillard.[22] He had them produced by Tiffany in the United States and showed them at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris, in April 1895. There, their primitive aspect provoked astonishment. They were very different from anything seen before, just as Bing had intended. He then showed them at his Maison de l'Art Nouveau in the Rue de Provence, where their beauty was enhanced by both the natural light and the artificial illumination of the premises. While critical opinion was divided, these innovative works found champions in the French and American press, notably in *L'Art moderne* and the *Revue blanche*. In this way, thanks to Bing, the Nabis were given a chance to try their hands at a new form of artistic expression [FIG. 1].

Admired and respected by Japan enthusiasts and other art lovers, Bing also helped to strengthen ties between France and Japan. By the end of his life, he had become the most important dealer in Japanese art in Europe and the United States. Many of those who looked to Japan, the Nabis among them, were greatly indebted to him for what he had done to communicate the essential character of the Japanese art that—as he had hoped—had come to inspire artists and craftsmen of every kind, all over the Western world.

20 See in particular Cahn and Cogeval, 2013; also Cahn, 2013.
21 See Koyama-Richard, 2016.
22 In his remarkable Vuillard catalogue of 2003, Guy Cogeval states that thirteen windows were executed by eleven artists. He adds that the only ones so far discovered are those of Roussel, Bonnard, and Toulouse-Lautrec. See Cogeval, 2003.

FIG. 8. Hishikawa Moronobu (1618–94), *Mikaeri bijin zu* [A Beauty Looking Back], 17th century
Ink and colors on silk, 63 × 31.2 cm
Tokyo, Tokyo National Museum, A60

FIG. 9. Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), *Orie, Wife of Jûtarô, Compelled to Sell Her Favours*, from his *puppet theater* series, 1806
Nishike-e print, 38.5 × 25.7 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, EO1642

FIG. 10. Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), *The Nakadaya Tea House*, 1794–95
Nishike-e print, 54 × 41.5 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, E01767

Élise Dubreuil

The Nabis and Decorative Artists: Toward the Modern Interior

FIG. 1. Paul Ranson (1861–1909), *Spring*, 1895
Needlepoint, wool on canvas, 167 × 132 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, OAO 1788

The Nabis worked together as a group throughout the 1890s, before their individual artistic development saw them go their separate ways from 1900 onward. Brought together by a new concept of painting originating from Paul Sérusier's experiences in Pont-Aven in the summer of 1888, they found themselves confronting the question of décor both in their artistic explorations and in their theoretical reflections. While their works played a part in a redefinition of décor and of the interior, they were also theorists of the decorative, very much engaged with the 1890s' debate on the issue.

The last decade of the century saw the debate intensify as interior décor emerged as a key element in the definition of artistic modernity. The question of the concrete expression and imaginative representation of a modern décor—of an environment appropriate to new modes of living—was an important part of the wider exploration of how modern life was to be translated into art forms. Since the 1850s, voices had sporadically been heard questioning the conditions of production of material goods, calling for a change in the very paradigm of design. Pastiche was increasingly condemned for its sterility as the later decades of the 19th century turned toward the new. This bore many names—Art Nouveau, the Modern Style, Jugendstil, Secession, *style métro*, or *art nouille* (noodle art) among them. From the minimally descriptive to the disparaging, these terms—applied by contemporary commentators—reflect the difficulty of defining the movement. While its sources of inspiration (history, nature, the Orient) were hardly novel, the use it made of them was radically different, given the new technical, social, and material circumstances. The consequent artistic innovations prompted lively debate and much interrogation, and amid such fierce upheavals, it is no surprise that some choices led to aesthetic dead ends. Yet it is undeniable that these debates and bold initiatives led to the emergence of the forms of modernity, reflecting the transformation of modes of life and how they were represented, and creating an entire material and visual culture.

Throughout the 19th century, in fact, there had been debate on the decorative arts, developments in the production of material goods, and changes in lifestyles, prompting reconsideration of the status of works of decorative art and of the question of décor. In 1789, the abolition of the guilds had shattered the traditional organization of craft production, radically altering the conditions of production of "applied art." The structures of the Ancien Régime, which had been formative for the social and urban organization of the French capital, gave way to a time of questioning, debate, and experiment. Traditionally exclusive to those who were not yet called "decorative artists," the more academic sphere of the fine arts changed less radically, though it too would see significant transformations in the second half of the century. The early years of the 19th century, however, had already seen the decorative arts become a political issue, which explains their salience both in

the public sphere and in public debate. By virtue of their links to the realm of factories, and thus of the emerging working class, they were a matter of interest to industrial and social policy. Embodied in prestigious expressions of what was understood as "French style" and reflected in royal and princely collections, the decorative arts were to be a source of national pride. These two concerns found themselves paradoxically united with the emergence of a capitalist society that needed sales and exports. The bourgeoisie, rising and then triumphant, sought a style in keeping with its place and character just as much as it sought to keep the wheels of factories and workshops turning.

There had been talk since the beginning of the century of the need to revive the French decorative art and style, under pressure from foreign threats to French supremacy in matters of taste, from England and afterwards from Germany. Great exhibitions followed one after the other, first national and then international, the sections devoted to industrial manufactures overflowing with goods. Official reports concurred: it was necessary to reform the teaching of styles through drawing and to establish the conditions for an industrial design equal to the political, commercial and symbolic issues at stake. The institutional arrangements were put in place under the Second Empire; the Société du Progrès de l'Art Industriel (Society for the Advancement of Industrial Art)[1] regularly organized exhibitions at the Palais de l'Industrie on the Champs-Élysées. The Exposition des Beaux-Arts Appliqués à l'Industrie (Exhibition of the Fine Arts Applied to Industry) in 1863 marked a milestone, prompting the establishment of the Union Centrale des Beaux-Arts Appliqués à l'Industrie. This was the first step toward the formation, in 1882, of the Union Central des Arts Décoratifs (UCAD),[2] which would preside over the renewal of design over the half century between 1880 and 1930 and drive the recognition of the profession of "decorative artist."

The exhibitions of the Second Empire saw the triumph of eclecticism and exoticism, trends amplified by technical progress in the working of materials. It was a period dominated by reference to the "historic" styles, inflected with Eastern and Asian accents. While not always without its own virtuosity, such reference rarely testified, however, to any real understanding of the original sources. Versions by less inspired practitioners often ended up in the merely picturesque, leading to multiplying indictments of abstruse motifs slapped onto soulless forms. The competitive excesses of the decorative, palpable in the *horror vacui* of displays and interiors, reflected a loss of real meaning. In reaction, many embarked on a quest for a new authenticity. Reference to elsewhere, the Orient or the past, did not disappear, but there was a change of approach. It was no longer a matter of assimilating a variety of motifs, but of plunging, as Baudelaire put it, "into the depths of the unknown to find something new."[3] Now, stratum by stratum, the generation of the late 19th century would have to confront their innermost thoughts, finding deep within the self the distant, the foreign, and the unknown. For the artist, the exotic elsewhere became a mediator, not a goal. This quest paid no heed to the traditional artistic hierarchy, being common to both the fine and the decorative arts.

In 1889, the Paris World's Fair (Exposition Universelle de Paris) on the Champ-de-Mars testified to the advances of French decorative art and featured some foreshadowings of Art Nouveau, notably in the work of Émile Gallé.[4] The World's Fair of 1900 impressed with its new buildings, among them the Grand Palais and the striking temporary pavilions on the Champ-de-Mars and the banks of the Seine. On the Esplanade des Invalides, the Decorative Arts Pavilion designed by Georges Hoentschel[5] marked the triumph of Art Nouveau, while also suggesting that it would have no direct descendant, but instead be succeeded by a less extravagant modernism. Displayed in the pavilions of the Esplanade des Invalides, at the Centennial Exhibition of French Art curated by Roger Marx[6] and in the collections of the UCAD, Art Nouveau works were well represented at the fair. Underlined by the presentation in national pavilions, their stylistic diversity lent itself to a political reading of the movement and to French rejection of a more radical Art Nouveau from Germany and elsewhere in favor of one of distantly Rocaille inspiration, a style admittedly over-eccentric, but one felt to herald a more domesticated modernism that France could make its own. The year 1900 also saw the Nabis' last group exhibition, at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery.

The decade that lies between the two World's Fairs and their associated events was very fruitful, seeing not only the emergence and consolidation of Art Nouveau, but also, and above all, the resolution of the theoretical question of the decorative arts, now recognized as integral to the arts as a whole. The Nabi decade offers an opportunity to explore the ambiguity of this irruption of the decorative arts into the domain of the fine arts, the efforts of the

1 Established by Édouard Guichard in 1858, the society joined with Baron Taylor's Société des Inventeurs (Society of Inventors) to show innovative design at the Palais de l'Industrie; their Exposition des Beaux-Arts Appliqués à l'Industrie of 1864 made a great impression.

2 1864 saw the foundation of the Union Centrale des Beaux-Arts Appliqués under the chairmanship of Édouard Guichard; it established a library and museum collection and was granted responsibilities in the field of design education. In 1882, it merged with the Société du Musée des Arts Décoratifs, founded in 1877, to form the UCAD. The UCAD moved into premises in the Louvre's Pavillon de Marsan in 1905.

3 Charles Baudelaire, "Le Voyage", in *Les Fleurs du mal*, 1857, strophe VIII, whose last lines are: "We want, so burns this fire our brain,/To plunge into the abyss—Heaven or Hell, what odds?/Into the depths of the unknown to find the new!"

4 The following works of Émile Gallé were exhibited: the *Orphée* vase now in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (Inv. 11975), the *Flore hivernale* glazed cabinet in the Musée d'Orsay (OAO 873), and the *Flora marina, Flora exotica* jardinière in the Musée de l'École de Nancy (Inv. NV76).

5 The pavilion was reinstalled at the Pavillon de Marsan in 1905, when the UCAD and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs took up occupation there.

6 "Exposition centennale de l'art français, 1800–1900," curated by Roger Marx as deputy to Émile Molinier, appointed head of fine arts for the World's Fair.

Art dans tout movement,[7] and the fate of the union of the arts.

The Nabis were thus active in the decorative arts over this decade of artistic renewal. The mission conferred on decorative artists, to create the appropriate environment for modern life, explains, on the one hand, the unprecedented scale of the movement and, on the other, the abundance of critical and theoretical productions. The traditional boundary between fine and applied art tended to blur, and—in theory at least—the hierarchy that subordinated the latter to the former was thrown into question. The Parisian painterly avant-garde thus took up its position on this terrain. The Neo-Impressionists had been the first to venture upon it, and the 1890s then saw the Nabis occupy the meeting place between the redefinition of the fundamentals of painting and the quest for the modern living environment pursued, in sometimes anachronistic fashion, by decorative artists. The Nabi painters developed both a theoretical point of view on the question of decoration and of the interior and a practical engagement with a range of decorative arts: stained glass, illustration, tapestry, and more. In his retrospective analysis of Gauguin and his crucial role in the evolution of the Nabis, Maurice Denis explains the group's interest in decoration through the influence of the man whom he called their "undisputed Master":[8]

> We saw in him only the very exemplar of Expression through Decoration . . . We concluded from this wise maxim that every painting has decoration for its goal, that it must be ornamental. Art Nouveau and its snobbery did not yet exist . . . So it was that he had the chance, at a very particular moment, to inculcate in the minds of a number of young people the dazzling idea that art is above all a means of expression. He had taught them, without intending to, that every art object should be decorative.[9]

Frequently cited with reference to the decorative dimension of the Nabis' painting, these lines of Maurice Denis' have the great merit of specifying the precise place of the decorative arts in the Nabis' approach, being, after all, quite different from Gauguin's own multidisciplinary process. Denis, in fact, carefully locates the moment of the Nabis on the timeline of the decorative arts, between the World's Fairs of 1889 and 1900, and places its beginning before the identification and diffusion of Art Nouveau as a style. We may recall that Siegfried Bing opened his gallery, L'Art Nouveau, in Paris in December 1895.[10] Furthermore, he reminds us that the Nabis' interest in the decorative was motivated above all by their concern for painting proper, their starting and finishing point remaining "the painting." Katherine Marie Kuenzli brings out this aspect in her analysis of Vuillard's practice in the decorative arts: the use of ceramics, like the incorporation of certain works in multidisciplinary decorative ensembles, remains very marginal to his work as a whole.[11] What is more, while this practice did see the production of works, it was primarily important for its role in his development as a painter. He explains in his writing how the material constraints of the decorative arts had advanced him in his Synthetism and brought new impetus to his painting.[12]

Examination and analysis of the different points of contact between the Nabi painters and the emerging modernity of the decorative arts greatly aids an understanding of this prolific context. So well known as to require no detailed consideration here, the large-scale décors created by members of the group were intended to "revive the decorative dimension of painting," as Claire Frèches-Thory put it.[13] Their contribution to the domain of decoration does, however, merit attention, even if such projects remain marginal to the artists' work as a whole. The screen, a literal interface between painting and decoration, wall and window, also stands at the interface between Western and Eastern traditions. It regularly engaged the Nabis' interest: Pierre Bonnard did several, as did Édouard Vuillard, Maurice Denis, and Paul and Marguerite Sérusier. Another item that testified to the convergence of French and Japanese style and appealed to 19th-century painters was the fan. For the Nabis, the fans of Degas and Gauguin were important sources of inspiration. In their early years, then, the Nabis shared with the representatives of Art Nouveau a profound interest in Japanese culture, whose subtly assimilated influence was one of the foundations of the aesthetic renewal.

The Nabi painters thus engaged with the decorative arts in the creation of objects,[14] in particular lampshades and ceramic decoration; especially noteworthy are the faience plates produced by Metthey with motifs by Vuillard. There were two other fields where the Nabis could provide "cartoons," to use the traditional term, leaving it to a third party to translate their artwork into a medium of which they were not themselves masters: tapestry, on the one hand, and stained glass on the other. In tapestry,

7 *Art dans tout* or "Art in Everything" was a movement between 1896 and 1901 that brought together artists interested in abolishing the traditional hierarchy of the arts and to promote the diffusion of an avant-garde aesthetic. Notable members were Alexandre Charpentier, Charles Plumet, François-Rupert Carabin, Tony Selmersheim, Henri Sauvage, Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, Jules Desbois, and Paul Follot. See Froissart Pezone, 2004.
8 Denis, 1913, p. 163. In an article entitled "L'influence de Paul Gauguin," first published in 1903, he declared: "But Gauguin was nonetheless the Master, the undisputed Master."
9 Denis, 1913, p. 165.
10 Weisberg, Becker, and Possémé, 2004.
11 Kuenzli, 2010.
12 Ibid., pp. 170–71.
13 Claire Frèches-Thory, "Les ensembles décoratifs," in Frèches-Thory and Terrasse, 1990, p. 93.
14 Nothing will be said here of the Nabis' activities in the field of illustration and poster design, which do not belong among the decorative arts in the strict sense; it is nonetheless important to keep in mind that their explorations extended to these fields as well.

FIG. 2. Photograph captioned "No. 123-IV, no. 122 IV, no. 120-V/Paper-knives in marquetry, Length 0.35m maximum/Maurice BIAIS", in *Documents sur l'art industriel au vingtième siècle*, Paris, Édition de La Maison Moderne, 1901, p. 2

FIG. 3. Photograph captioned "Tapestries Ranson, furniture Van de Velde and Abel Landry", in *Documents sur l'art industriel au vingtième siècle*, Paris, Édition de La Maison Moderne, 1901, p. 36

the work of Paul and France Ranson is the most significant, Mme Ranson working from designs by her husband. The Nabis' contribution to stained glass is essentially represented by a project of Siegfried Bing's. After travelling to the United States in 1894, he returned enthused by the possibilities of Louis Comfort Tiffany's Favrile glass, and commissioned designs for stained-glass windows from a number of the Nabis, as well as from Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. It was then, too, that he transformed his gallery—still chiefly devoted to Japanese arts and crafts—into a gallery of modern decorative art where he could also exhibit avant-garde artists, the Nabis among them. Renamed L'Art Nouveau, it no longer presented the profuse miscellany made fashionable by the prolific displays of the World's Fairs, but consisted rather of a series of rooms that evoked a modern, stylistically coherent apartment, in the manner of the UCAD's exhibitions.[15] The Nabis were involved in this project—some, like Maurice Denis, designing a room (a bedroom in his case), while others helped furnish them, like Vuillard, who showed his plates in the dining room, together with five works from "The Album"[16] that hung on the walls of the anteroom [see FIG. 12, p. 51]. Henry van de Velde, however, was the figure on whom all depended, designing not only décor and furniture for the rooms, but he also sought out the harmonious coexistence of Nabi works and Art Nouveau furniture within the same space. It was he who designed the dining room where Vuillard showed his plates, for which he had Ranson paint the decorative wall panels, whose subject, like that of Ranson's tapestries, was women picking fruit. This is one of the very few concrete examples of a whole multidisciplinary interior combining Nabi works and Art Nouveau furniture. As witnessed by Henry van de Velde's writings, the collaboration was not without its difficulties.[17] Maurice Denis refused to have Gallé's furniture in his bedroom, for which he finally designed furniture of his own to appear alongside his seven decorative panels. The limitations encountered by this experiment are highly revealing. Unlike Vienna or Darmstadt, Paris never saw the formation of truly multidisciplinary teams working together on a footing of equality on the creation of a total work of art, and the 1890s in Paris did not see the "completeness" of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* reflected in close collaboration between painters and decorative artists.

15 Conversely, Siegfried Bing's pavilion for the World's Fair of 1900, which adopted the same principle of organization by room, marked the climax of the process by which, over the 1880s and 1890s, the domestic interior gradually came to dominate the presentation of displays of the applied arts.

16 Five decorative panels commissioned from Édouard Vuillard in 1894–95 by Thadée and Misia Natanson, known collectively as "The Album" and sold at Drouot's in 1908: *The Tapestry* (New York, Museum of Modern Art), *Woman in a Striped Dress* (Washington, National Gallery of Art), *The Dressing Table*, *The Earthenware Pot* (private collections) and *The Album* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

17 Van de Velde, 1992.

The case of the Nabi painters represents one of the most far-reaching attempts at the fusion of the fine and the applied arts, yet one, it has to be said, that did not last and had no immediate successors.

Another initiative in bringing the Nabi avant-garde together with the decorative arts was that of Julius Meier-Graefe at his gallery, La Maison Moderne.[18] A collaborator of Siegfried Bing's in the early 1890s, this German art critic[19] shared in his conviction that the decorative arts had their place in the artistic avant-garde. Meier-Graefe's work as a critic and theorist gave him a broad and far-reaching vision of the modern, and his knowledge of the decorative arts internationally, and those of Belgium, Germany, and Austria more particularly, guided him in his selections. It was also Henry van de Velde that Meier-Graefe turned to for the look of La Maison Moderne, which opened its doors in 1899.[20] Also laid out on the model of a private apartment, the gallery offered for sale the various elements of an elegant, modern interior. Meier-Graefe was aware of the need to create a modern style of decoration; the critic and lover of painting in him led him to conceive of this style to accord with the characteristics of the contemporary painting he liked. Close in this to the Nabis—likewise to their personal development, at the turn of the century, toward a more markedly spiritual dimension in their art—he essentially understood the modern interior as a refuge for the art lover, who would find reflected in it the painterly principles they admired, a new, almost abstract vocabulary of line and color. Rather than the Huysmannian, self-consciously decadent interiors of Nancy Art Nouveau, Julius Meier-Graefe preferred a more discreet décor that did not strive for effect, but whose influence on those who lived in it would help them find a spiritual harmony in accord with the sense of modern painting. One room designed by Van de Velde at La Maison Moderne brought furniture by Abel Landry together with tapestries by Paul Ranson, among them *Spring* [FIG. 1].[21] The decorative artists who worked with Meier-Graefe also created pieces whose decoration was close to the Nabi aesthetic in spirit: the decorative stained glass in Landry's fireplace recalls compositions by Ranson,[22] while the marquetry of Maurice Biais features motifs and compositions inspired by the decorative works of Bonnard and Vuillard [FIGS 2 and 3].[23] The image of the child in the check shirt on the paper knife seems, in fact, to be directly derived from the decorative panels of the *Public Gardens*[24] [see FIGS 13 and 14, pp. 52–53, and CATS 30–34] and the *Child Making a Sandcastle,*[25] testifying to these artists' real familiarity with the Nabis' productions. Alongside them, La Maison Moderne also worked with the younger generation of Parisian decorative artists, some of whom would be met with success in the years after the First World War, among them Paul Follot, Maurice Dufrène, and Clément Mère.

Yet La Maison Moderne proved to be a commercial failure. The business was wound up in 1904, and Julius Meier-Graefe returned to Berlin. The increasingly tense geo-political context must certainly have made it more difficult for him to win a following for the Germanically inflected, pan-European style that he championed.[26] At the Salon d'Automne of 1910, the exhibition of work by Munich's Deutsche Werkstätten scandalized the Paris critics, who, while mocking the "Germanic" style, more forcefully than ever called on French decorative artists to redouble their efforts toward the renewal of the national style.[27] The early 20th century saw the political dimension of the argument get the better of the universalist vocation of an Art Nouveau that, despite its character as an international movement, gave birth to very different styles in different countries, a change that too easily turned to nationalistic ends. Within the developmental dynamic of the decorative arts, however, the Nabi artists occupied a distinctive position. Close to some of the leading representatives of Art Nouveau and very interested in current debates, they were enthused by the idea of the unity of the arts and sought to contribute to the development of a modern style, the embodiment of an aesthetic of the everyday.

18 Mothes, 2014.
19 Born in what is today Romania, Julius Meier-Graefe was brought up in Düsseldorf. He arrived in Paris for the World's Fair in 1889.
20 See especially *Documents sur l'art industriel*, 1901.
21 Plate: Ranson tapestries, Van de Velde and Abel Landry furniture, *Documents sur l'art industriel*, 1901, p. 36.
22 Carved wood fireplace and decorative stained-glass windows by Abel Landry, *Documents sur l'art industriel*, 1901, p. 33.
23 Photograph captioned "n° 123-IV, n° 122 IV, n° 120-V / Coupe-papiers en marqueterie, Longueur 0 m 35 maximum / Maurice BIAIS," in *Documents sur l'art industriel*, 1901, p. 2; also a photograph of three marquetry frames, one captioned "Cadre en marqueterie, n° 125-IV / format cabinet, ouverture 0 m 09 sur 0 m 13 / Cadres en marqueterie de Maurice BIAIS," in *Documents sur l'art industriel*, 1901, p. 4.
24 Nine panels painted by Édouard Vuillard in 1894 for Alexandre Natanson's dining room: *The Two Schoolboys* (Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium), *Under the Trees* (Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art), *The Promenade* (Houston, Museum of Fine Arts), *First Steps* (private collection), *Girls Playing* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1978-46), *The Question* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1978-47), *The Conversation*, *The Nurses*, and *The Red Parasol* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1977-365).
25 Pierre Bonnard, *Child Making a Sandcastle*, *c.* 1894, Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1982-69.
26 See especially Troy, 1991.
27 Pillard Verneuil, 1910.

Fabienne Fravalo

Defining the Modern Décor: The Nabis and the Critics

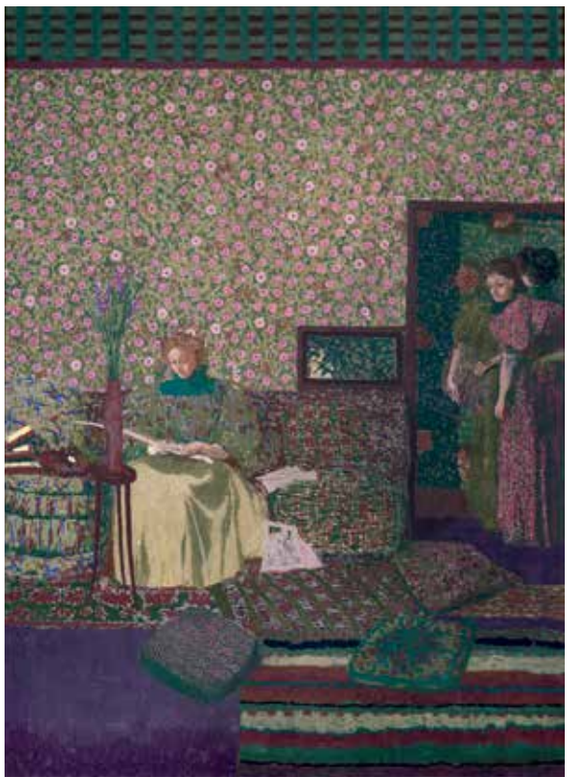


FIG. 1. Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940), *Figures in an Interior: Intimacy,* 1896
One of four decorative panels painted for the library of Dr Vaquez
Glue-based distemper on canvas, 212.5 × 154.5 cm
Paris, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Inv. PPP2439

Thanks to legal, economic, and technical developments, the French press at the turn of the 19th century reached new dynamic heights. Following the abolition of censorship by the legislation of 31 July 1889, it enjoyed an unprecedented freedom of expression, while progress in technology now meant not only color illustrations, but also the reproduction of photographs, giving images a much more significant role in print media. This coincided with a great expansion of activity in the arts and crafts, marked by the proliferation of salons—large-scale, annual, institutional shows—and museum and gallery exhibitions. The inclusion of the applied arts in such events led, from 1891 onward, to the development of a cadre of specialist critics, who notably found an outlet in a new kind of magazines devoted to the decorative arts. The artists and critics involved in the promotion of the applied arts and the revival of their aesthetic in Art Nouveau contributed to these magazines through graphic design and illustration, writing and editing. Through this specialist press they contributed not only to a reappraisal of the very notion of the decorative, now considered the foundation of the unity of the arts, but also to the establishment of theoretical and aesthetic criteria for modern décor. Despite their involvement in the renewal of interior décor, the Nabis had, before 1900, only a very marginal place in the whole discussion—a circumstance that suggests it might be worthwhile looking at how their work in the decorative arts relates to these criteria.

EMERGENCE OF THE DECORATIVE ARTS MAGAZINES

While the emergence of a properly critical discourse on the decorative arts coincides more or less with the admission of the applied arts to the major annual exhibitions,[1] the earliest periodicals devoted to the subject predated this by some decades. These appeared under the Second Empire, in the form of collections of industrial models. With *L'Art pour tous,* (1861–?), an album of engraved plates accompanied by brief commentary, Émile Reiber introduced a formula both practical and educational in its intent that would be revived at the close of the century in *Portefeuille des arts décoratifs* (1888–98), *L'Art pratique* (1891–98) and *Le Modèle* (1894–1904), intended for a broad public of amateur artists. At the same time, a certain number of titles remained more closely tied to industrial occupations and technologies and their concomitant commercial concerns. Several, in fact, were the products of trade bodies, such as *La Céramique et la Verrerie* (1882–1939) for glass and ceramics, or *Les Arts du métal* (1892–94), formerly a supplement to the jewelers' and watchmakers' *Moniteur de la bijouterie*

1 Works of applied art were accepted at the annual exhibition of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts from its establishment in 1891, and at that of the Société des Artistes Français from 1895.

et de l'horlogerie. Renamed *L'Art décoratif moderne*, between 1894 and 1898 this periodical acted as a platform for the recognition of industrial artists and designers and, notably, for their right to attribution. Also engaged in promoting the unity of the arts, the *Revue des arts décoratifs* (1880–1902), edited by publicist Victor Champier, offered a mix of criticism and history. Primarily pedagogical in intent, it encouraged the formal renovation of the decorative arts. Through the art of the past, it hoped to inform the design imagination while maintaining a proper respect for national tradition. As well as paying increasing attention to current developments in the applied arts from 1891 onward, the magazine maintained a steady focus on the art of the past.

Among this group of periodicals more or less practical in orientation, often not very interested in the renewal of creativity, the magazine *Art et Décoration* (1897–) adopted a different approach from the outset. Modeled on the British publication *The Studio*, founded in 1893 by Charles Holme and Joseph Gleeson White, *Art et Décoration* was the first French periodical to be exclusively devoted to critical commentary on contemporary decorative art. Driven by the comradely team of artists and critics assembled by its founder, the publisher Émile Lévy,[2] its mission was to encourage the development of a modern French decorative art by examining contemporary production in the light of rationalist criteria derived from the thinking of Viollet-le-Duc. The discourse elaborated by the critics of *Art et Décoration* thus stands in a direct line of descent from the latter's *Entretiens sur l'architecture*,[3] notably emphasizing a necessary correspondence between décor, form, and function, grounded in an organic conception of nature and informed by the great principles that governed the art of the past, particularly that of Gothic art.

In October 1898, *L'Art décoratif*—the Parisian version of the Munich magazine *Dekorative Kunst*, also edited by Julius Meier-Graefe for Friedrich Bruckmann publishers—arrived in its turn to offer critical reflection on contemporary decorative art.[4] Despite sharing a rationalism rooted in the French tradition, *L'Art décoratif* and *Art et Décoration* at first differed greatly in editorial policy: oriented to the promotion of an industrially based and socially conscious decorative art, *L'Art décoratif* also gave greater prominence to international work. After 1902, when it absorbed *La Revue des arts décoratifs*, the arrival at the helm of Gustave Soulier—formerly chief subeditor at *Art et Décoration*—saw their editorial lines converge. Hyper-specialization gave way to a growing attention to fine art. The focus turned toward French production at the cost of the international, and an increasing place was soon given to the art of the past.

At the end of the 1890s, *Art et Décoration* and *L'Art décoratif* stood out among the specialist press for the rigor and commitment of their critical discourse. Prescriptive by nature, this stance championed a decorative art very broadly conceived, understood as one of the highest manifestations of the creative faculty, by reason of its intimate relationship with the home, and thus with life.

THE UNITY OF ART AND INTERIOR DÉCOR

The interest in the arts of décor that characterized the artists and critics involved in Art Nouveau in the late 1890s was inseparable from the doctrine of the unity of the arts. With its roots in the thinking of William Morris and Viollet-le-Duc, it was an idea advocated both by the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs (UCAD) and by critic and civil servant Roger Marx. A response to the divorce between art and industry, notably highlighted by Léon de Laborde[5] in the wake of the first of the World's Fairs (Expositions Universelles), London's Great Exhibition of 1851, it was also an appeal to heal an injury inflicted on the original unity of the creative principle. With this, the second half of the 19th century saw the very idea of the decorative greatly reappraised, thanks to a proliferation of theoretical writings, from Eugène Véron to Félix Bracquemond, and of anthologies, grammars, and textbooks devoted to ornament as a tool or to decoration as the result of composition or the arrangement of elements.

The critical commentary developed in the specialist magazines also played its part. They reported on all fields of art in their decorative aspects, without hierarchy or distinction. This was particularly true of *Art et Décoration*: not only did it treat painting and sculpture alongside the applied arts, but the very binary element of its title posited an equality between the two components of "art" and "decoration", rather than insisting on their disciplinary specificity. Among artists, it encouraged multiple careers that manifested a variety of talents and engaged with a range of different media. More generally, the magazine developed an extensive conception of decorative art that included the arts of the interior alongside architectural decoration, its interests ranging from ornaments to the grand decorative schemes of republican public art, and indeed also easel painting. Rather than simply something to be promoted, the decorative came to be seen as one of the essential conditions—a non-negotiable criterion—of art as such, notable by virtue of the utilitarian and social functions that came with its integration into the everyday environment.

2 On Émile Lévy and his publishing house, the Librairie Centrale des Beaux-Arts, see Fravalo, 2015, pp. 125–50.
3 Viollet-le-Duc, 1863–72, repr. 2010.
4 Foulon, 2002; Krahmer, 2004, pp. 231–54.
5 Laborde, 1856.

FIG. 2. Maurice Denis (1870–1943), *Poetic Arabesques for the Decoration of a Ceiling*, also known as *Ladder in the Foliage*, 1892
Décor for the house of Henry Lerolle (Paris), oil on canvas, 235 × 172 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée Départemental Maurice Denis – Le Prieuré, PMD976-1-75

FIG. 3. Édouard Pourchet (1848–?, active 1894–1907), Dining room at Siegfried Bing's Salon de l'Art Nouveau Furniture by Henry van de Velde, wall painting by Paul Ranson and dinner service by Édouard Vuillard, 1895
Paris, Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine / Archives d'Architecture du XXe siècle, Fonds Louis Bonnier, P-35-035-030

The role of decoration in life was stressed in particular by Gustave Soulier, first in *Art et Décoration* and then in *L'Art décoratif*. He wanted to see the emergence of a "domestic" art that would elevate the soul through exposure to "ordinary, everyday beauty."[6] For Soulier, it was a question of "returning art to life"[7] in the domestic sphere. Such ideas certainly found an echo in the artistic practice of the Nabis. Most members of the group—Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard, Maurice Denis, Paul Ranson, József Rippl-Rónai, Félix Vallotton, and Aristide Maillol—consciously sought to embody precisely the multidisciplinary artist promoted by Lévy's *Art et Décoration*. As Bonnard himself explained, "Our generation always sought to link art with life," creating "objects of everyday use"[8] alongside its paintings. And the painting itself, of course, found decorative application in major projects for private patrons, from Bonnard's *Women in the Garden* (1891) to Vuillard's panels for the Desmarais family (1892), the Natansons (*Public Gardens* [CATS 30–34, FIGS 13 and 14, pp. 52–53], 1894) or the Vaquez family (1895) [FIG. 1], also noting Maurice Denis's décors for Henry Lerolle (1892) [FIG. 2] or Ernest Chausson (1894–95), or the Nabis' participation in Siegfried Bing's early Salons de l'Art Nouveau [FIG. 3].[9] Yet all this went practically unnoticed by the critics of *Art et Décoration*—a silence explained only in part by the fact that the work predated the creation of the magazine. Already in existence at the beginning of the decade, the *Revue des arts décoratifs* had shown no more interest. Only *L'Art décoratif* paid the Nabis any real attention, in the shape of three monographic articles—on Denis, Vallotton, and Ranson[10]—from the pen of its editor Julius Meier-Graefe.

Judging from the scattered observations in the supplements to *Art et Décoration* and passing references in articles more specifically devoted to textiles, the problem was more of an aesthetic order, the Nabis not being seen as representing the kind of modern décor the specialist critics were looking for.

TOWARD THE DEFINITION OF MODERN DECORATIVE ART

To contribute to the development of a modern decorative art was, in fact, the very goal of *Art et Décoration*, an ambition clearly expressed in its subtitle: *revue mensuelle d'art modern"* (A Monthly Review of Modern Art). In the mid-1890s, the quest for a new art at first appeared as a widespread reaction to a prevailing aesthetic

6 Soulier, 1897, pp. 270–75.
7 Soulier, 1905, p. 3. See also Fravalo, 2012, pp. 125–34.
8 Pierre Bonnard, cited in Frèches-Thory, 1997, p. 16.
9 Kuenzli, 2010.
10 Meier-Graefe, 1899, pp. 204–05; Natanson, 1900, pp. 1–6; Meier-Graefe, 1898, pp. 49–50.

mired in the pseudo-academic conventions of a bygone time, now seen as anachronistic. It was essentially a matter—for the applied arts more especially—of abandoning the imitation of past styles to inaugurate a "modern" art; that is, as the word was then understood, an art specific to the present, and adequate to the lifestyle and the social and material circumstances of the day. Far from connoting the unprecedented, the hitherto unknown, the originality expected of modern decorative art has to be understood primarily in the rationalist sense:

> It is not to the incoherence of form that we should look for originality, but to its perfect adaptation to the idea of which it is the expression, which supposes in the artist a knowledge of the laws of proportion, balance and harmony, respect for relative values, whether in relief or in color, and, finally and above all, study of the characteristics of each material and the means of working it.[11]

Such a rationalism, imbued with the thought of Viollet-le-Duc, also underpinned the aesthetic and formal criteria of the decorative commended by the magazine. It was chiefly Maurice Pillard Verneuil who developed the elements of a theory of the decorative that would serve as the foundation of his method of ornamental composition: a documented and analytical study of nature, intended to identify its fundamental invariants—or organic laws—followed by its synthetic interpretation, designated as the key to "style." More generally, this cast of mind found systematic expression in the writings of the critics, in their elaboration and application of a set of criteria for describing, analyzing and evaluating the decorative character of a work. Respect for logic, the principle of utility, and the primacy of overall design all served to judge the decorative aspect, and indeed the intrinsic importance, of the pieces under consideration. The creation of a work of decorative art was thus held to be governed by a series of rational mutual adaptations between form, matter, technique, and ornament. In accordance with organicist principle, this last necessarily followed from structure. Ideally, one and the same artist should be responsible for both the design of the room and the interior decoration; failing this, collective projects undertaken in collaborative fashion also lent themselves to the implementation of these principles.

While such a conception, with its global ambitions, might seem at first sight not so distant from that of the Nabis, with its aspiration to the symbolist totality of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the very principle of unity was fundamentally different in the two cases. The unification of the work by rhythms of line and color—painterly equivalents of Wagnerian musical principles[12]—has essentially nothing in common with the organicist vision of the disciples of Viollet-le-Duc. In terms of form, too, there is little that they share. It is true that for the critics of *Art et Décoration* the recourse to nature as a source of organizational inspiration implies a rejection of naturalism and illusionism; this is reflected, especially in the arts of two dimensions, in a simplification of form and modeling and sustained attention to contrasts and harmonies of color—features also characteristic of Nabi painting. In tapestry, for example, artists were thus enjoined by Jules Guiffrey not only to avoid copying paintings, but also to reassert the flatness proper to the medium itself:

> It was necessary first of all to restore to it its decorative character, by simplifying the modeling, employing flat color, and using line to clearly separate figure from ground, reacting against the blandness of tone that the prevailing enthusiasm for ancient hangings and a certain fear of bright and cheerful color threatened everywhere to impose.[13]

Yet the implementation of such principles in the tapestries of Ranson [see FIG. 1, p. 67], Maillol or Rippl-Rónai did not convince the critics of *Art et Décoration*. The absence of tonal gradation—judged to be "coarse," though the whole point of the design, itself described as "formidable"—displeased Maurice Pillard Verneuil and Hippolyte Fierens-Gevaert.[14] Just as the "awkwardness" and "too insistently hieratic character" of Georges Lacombe's sculptures, the "rudimentary" forms of Maurice Denis and the "crude and menacing" silhouettes of Vuillard's figures had disconcerted the anonymous critic who reviewed the exhibition at the Durand-Ruel gallery in the spring of 1899.[15] In the end, the Nabis' more radical implementation of some of the principles of decorative aesthetics championed by *Art et Décoration* was found unacceptable by critics still attached to a workmanship more respectful of inherited tradition.

While the Nabis indisputably played a part in the emergence of a modern aesthetic of décor, their contribution generally failed to satisfy the criteria developed by the specialist critics in the years before 1900. And while it is true that the emancipation from technique proclaimed by some—Bonnard, for example—was bound to alienate the adepts of rationalism who were the critics of *Art et Décoration,* their incomprehension was also of a formal order. If the radical approach adopted by the Nabis offended the sensibilities of critics fond of a sleeker, more conventional

11 Magne, 1899, p. 32.
12 Kuenzli, 2010.
13 Guiffrey, 1900, p. 148.
14 Fierens-Gevaert, 1897, p. 86; Pillard Verneuil, 1897, pp. 78–79.
15 Anonymous, 1899, Supplément, pp. 1–2.

FIG. 4. Maurice Denis (1870–1943), *Décor for the Cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées*, reproduced in Maurice Guillemot, "L'édifice, la salle et la scène", *Art et Décoration*, April 1913, p. 112
Private collection

112 *Art et Décoration*

les pièces promises à sa futilité et à son inattention habituelles.

Et rien de cela ne se devine sur la façade du Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, façade emblématique seulement de la grande salle où l'on communiera avec les chefs-d'œuvre ; l'ambiance y est mystérieuse, recueillie, comme il convient à un Temple de l'Art, le cadre ne saurait distraire l'attention, la détourner de l'office esthétique qui s'accomplit par delà la rampe, l'harmonie vous enlace, vous étreint, sans que vous voyiez d'où elle monte jusqu'à vous.

Il faudrait toute une colonne pour décrire en détail l'énorme entreprise qu'est ce modèle des théâtres modernes ; ces quelques pages ne sont, pour ainsi dire, que les légendes des plans et des vues reproduits ici, le compte-rendu d'une visite rapide sur un chantier en pleine fièvre de travail, tandis que les triomphateurs d'aujourd'hui, MM. Gabriel Astruc et Gabriel Thomas, présidaient aux derniers agencements de leur conception merveilleuse.

MAURICE GUILLEMOT.

La coupole.

painterly facture, these critics themselves had great difficulty in bringing their theoretically broad but narrowly rigid principles to bear on concrete aesthetic endeavors. Confronted by the prescriptive demands of these specialist critics, the Nabi painters finally found greater support from the more informal milieu of literary journals such as the *Revue blanche* or the *Mercure de France*.[16] With the emergence around 1910 of the first signs of a new classicism, *Art et Décoration* gradually came to canonize Maurice Denis as the embodiment of modern decoration for his ability to combine the concept of decorative Synthetism, championed by the magazine's critics, with classical models. In 1913, the décors that Denis produced for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, together with Vuillard and Roussel, with Bourdelle for the sculpture, would be considered by the magazine to be the very paradigm of modern décor [FIG. 4].

16 Dessy, 2011.

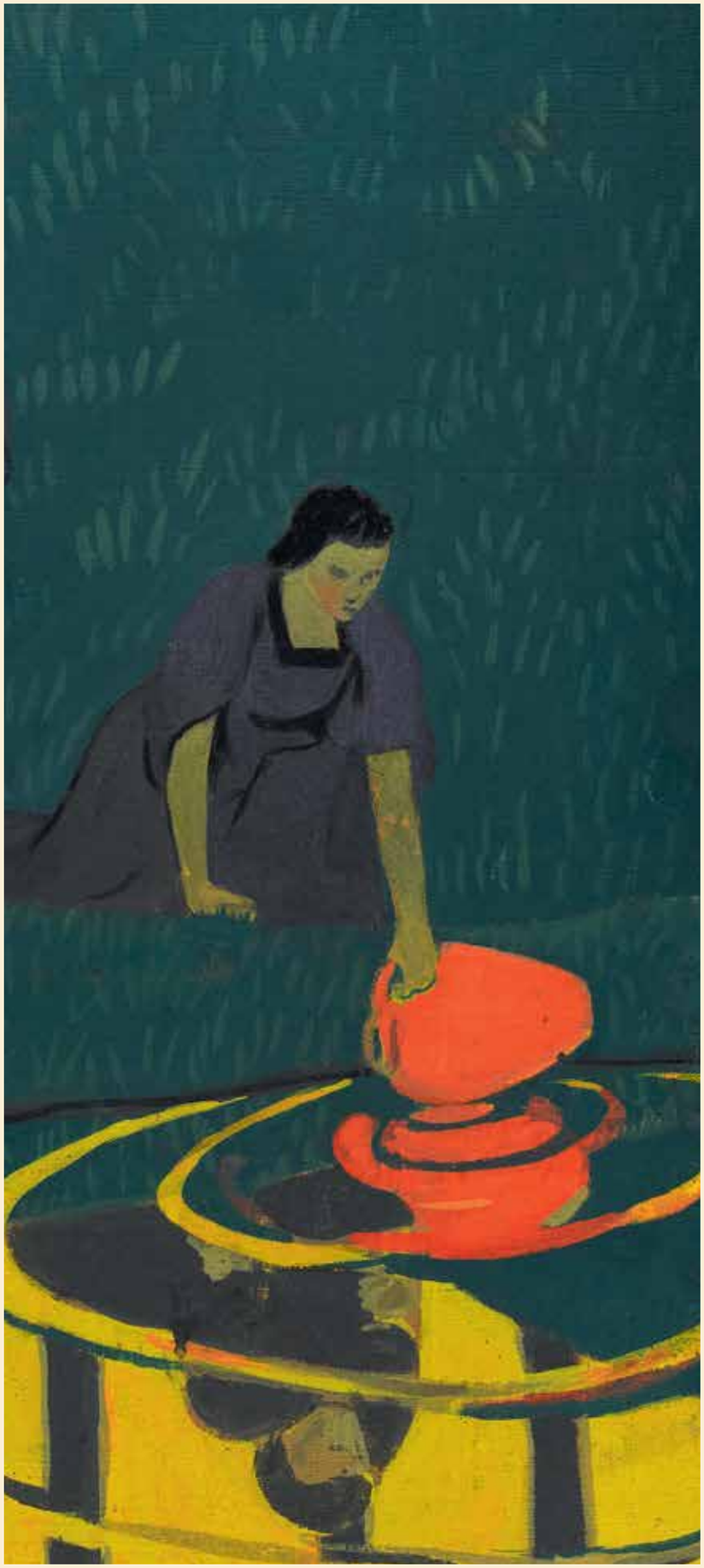
The Nabis were different from the other artists of the time in that their painting sought not to reproduce the appearance of reality, but to convey an inner vision. They therefore rejected the illusionistic three-dimensional space of perspective in favor of a flattened representation of the world comprised of juxtaposed plane surfaces arranged in tiers.

The principle of the flat screen offered by the two-dimensional surface of the support allowed the Nabis to articulate a poetic, symbolic and spiritual vision of the world in both small-format works and large-scale compositions. Their painting relied on a strong contrast between areas of light and dark and the energy of the colors applied in distinct, flat patches—a simplification that conferred an important decorative role on the linear contours giving rhythm to the composition.

The Musée d'Orsay recently acquired some rare examples of the Nabis' decorative works, among them a panel by Paul Sérusier entitled *Field of Golden Corn and Buckwheat* [cat. 12], whose elongated format recalls that of a *kakemono* scroll painting, and a screen painted [cat. 18] by his wife Marguerite Sérusier, whose motifs are directly inspired by Hiroshige prints.

The Nabis were keen collectors of Japanese prints. They were also avid readers of *Artistic Japan*, the magazine created by Siegfried Bing, a specialist in Japanese art and champion of the 1890s revival of the French decorative arts.

The Flat Screen



Detail from cat. 13

Executed in 1890, when Denis was no more than twenty, this little painting exemplifies the kind of experiment the Nabis engaged in after the revelation imparted by Sérusier's *Talisman*, painted two years earlier, which became an icon for the group. The subject here—the terrace of the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye—is so completely Synthetist in treatment as to verge on abstraction, almost lost in a blaze of colors. The work is not defined by a subject imitating nature, but by its materiality, its plane surface, its broad areas of flat color and its organic arabesques. The force of the color contrast, and especially the inversion of light and shade, produce a real dazzling effect, a sensory shock unprecedented in the artist's career.

L.P.

CAT. 1

Maurice Denis
(Grandville, 1870–Paris, 1943),
Sunlight on the Terrace, 1890

Oil on card, 23.5 × 20.5 cm
Dated lower right in red: *oct. 90*
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1986-70

Provenance: collection of Dominique Maurice-Denis (1909–97), son of Maurice Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 1986

Oct 90

Executed from 1831 to 1832, the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* is one of the most famous of Katsushika Hokusai's works, playing a decisive role in the establishment of the landscape print as a genre. Here, Mount Fuji is presented in non-perspectival view, hiding the rest of the landscape, only the clouds surrounding the summit offer a suggestion of depth. The tight framing confers on it a monumental aspect, recalling its status as a holy mountain. The use of a limited number of colors gives the work a distinctive force, the red of the mountain and the clouds left in white set off the Prussian blue of sky and forest. Imported into Japan since 1820, thanks to the activities of Dutch traders, this chemical pigment offered great subtleties of shade, opening up rich new possibilities for Japanese artists.

E.B.

CAT. 2

Katsushika Hokusai
(Edo, 1760–Edo, 1849),
South Wind, Clear Sky, from the series
Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, 1831–32

Polychrome xylography on paper, 26.3 × 38 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, EO 3288

ARTISTIC JAPAN: *A MONTHLY ILLUSTRATED JOURNAL OF ARTS AND INDUSTRIES*, DEVOTED TO JAPANESE ART AND DESIGN

A specialist in Japanese art and a key figure in the renewal of the decorative arts in France in the 1890s, the collector Siegfried Bing founded the magazine Artistic Japan in 1888, at the height of the vogue for Japonism. His goal was to educate readers in Japanese art and design, illustrating the articles with reproductions of the highest quality.

Published in French, English, and German and spanning 36 monthly issues from May 1888 to April 1891, the magazine stood out for the quality of its color illustrations, reproduced by means of gillotage, a new photoengraving process developed by its printer, Charles Firmin Gillot.

Artistic Japan aimed not only to inform the public, but also to offer new models to craftsmen and manufacturers. In the "Programme" that introduced the first issue, Bing explains that he intends "to speak to the eye by faithful reproduction of the originals" and to furnish "examples worthy to be followed in every respect . . . brought to the support and aid of our national genius." For Japan, he adds, "offers a glimpse of freedom and fresh air."

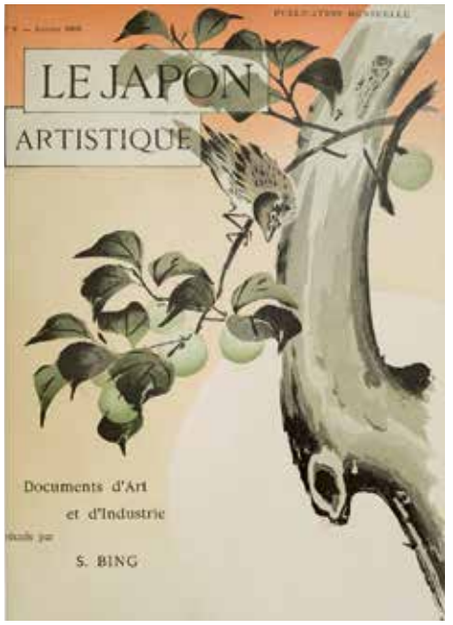
The magazine enjoyed great success among lovers of Japanese art. The Nabis appreciated it for the quality of its articles and the beauty of its reproductions. Some members of the group were subscribers who passed their copies around. The front covers were particularly attractive.

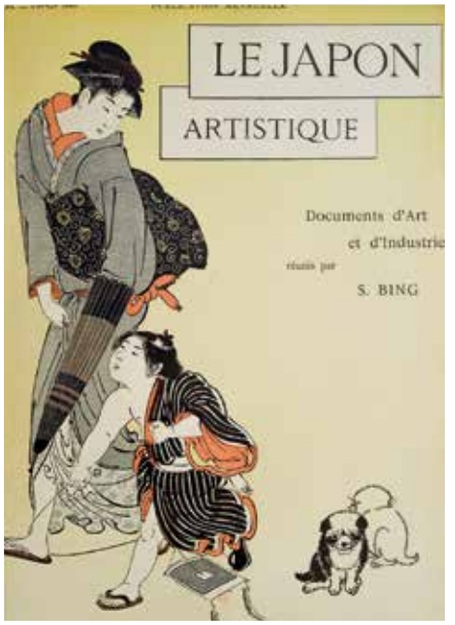
I.C.

CATS 3–11

Front covers of the French edition of *Artistic Japan: A Monthly Illustrated Journal of Arts and Industries*,

no. 9, January 1889
no. 10, February 1889
no. 14, June 1889
no. 15, July 1889
no. 16, August 1889
no. 17, September 1889
no. 20, December 1889
no. 30, October 1890
no. 36, April 1891
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
Prints and Photographs Department, RESERVE 4-YA5-1


LE JAPON
ARTISTIQUE
Documents d'Art
et d'Industrie
S. BING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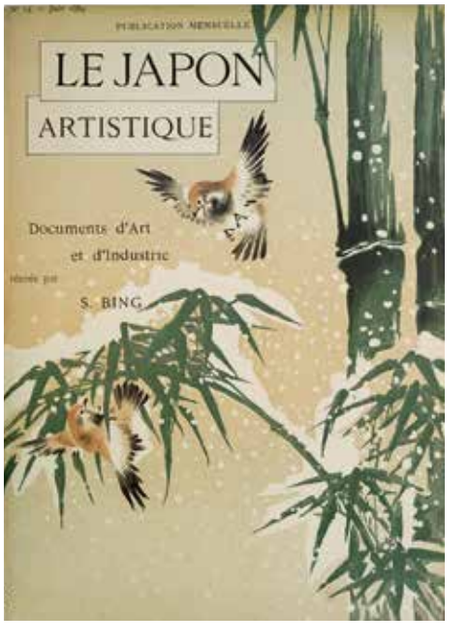
Documents d'Art
et d'Industrie
S. BING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et d'Industrie
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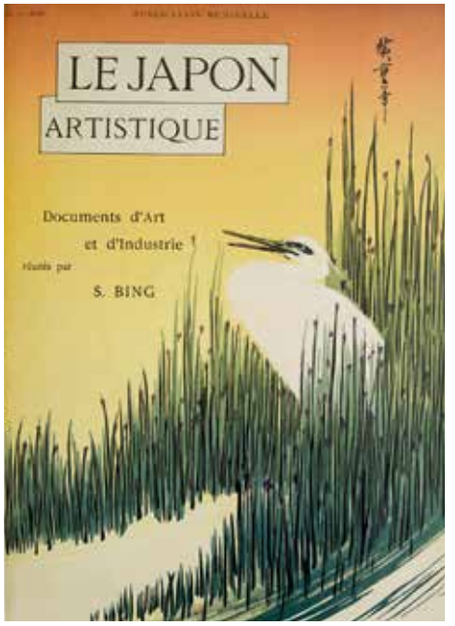
et d'Industrie
S. BING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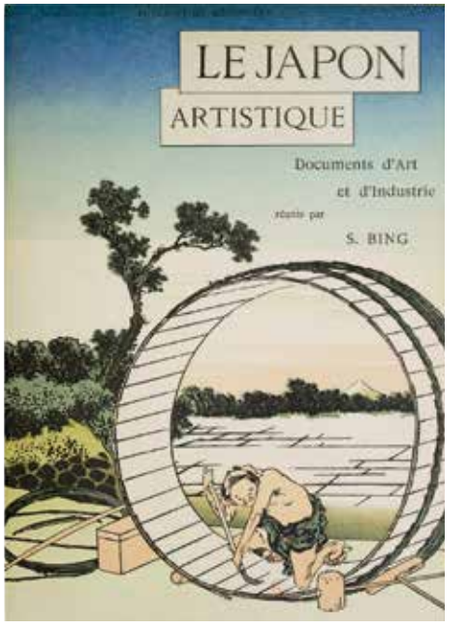
LE JAPON
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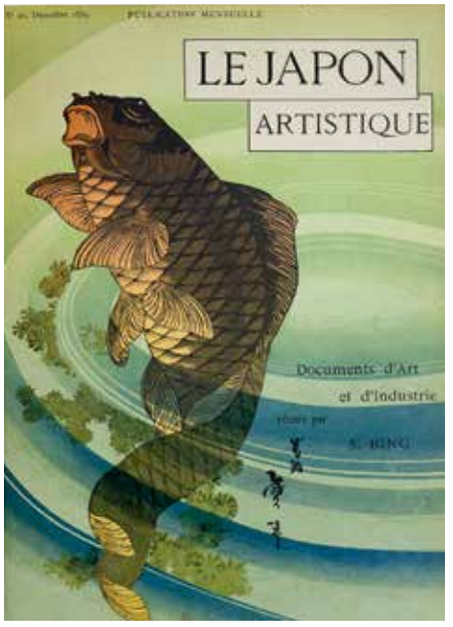
Documents d'Art
et d'Industrie
S. BING


LE JAPON
ARTISTIQUE
Documents d'Art
et d'Industrie
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LE JAPON
ARTISTIQUE

LE JAPON
ARTISTIQUE

In 1896, Paul Sérusier began to spend a great deal of time in Brittany, at Le Pouldu and then Châteauneuf-du-Faou. His finest works from that period are landscapes of the environs of Châteauneuf, of which this is one example. While the tight framing makes it impossible to pinpoint an exact location, it is certainly suggestive of Brittany: the cornflowers, poppies, and bleeding hearts of the foreground, recalling the *millefiori* tapestries of the Middle Ages, bring out the flickering reds and yellows of the wheat and buckwheat that await harvest.

The horizontal division of the canvas—split between the dense vegetation of the foreground and a second register occupied by the sky with the pine trees standing out against it—can be found in other paintings of Sérusier's of this period (*La Colline aux grands arbres* [*Hill with Tall Trees*], private collection). A succession of chromatic zones, dominated by green, yellow, red, or blue, in turn, takes the place of traditional perspective, accentuating the decorative aspect of the composition. In the thinness of the paint, its matte appearance only emphasized by the lack of varnish, and in the structure of the composition and the distinctively vertical format, both Japanese-inspired, *Field of Golden Corn and Buckwheat* resembles the decorative works of Vuillard and Bonnard, while its palette and its mode of Synthetism are typical of Sérusier himself.

This painting, which was not originally mounted on a stretcher, probably formed part of a larger décor. We know that while at Châteauneuf-du-Faou Sérusier painted a number of décors for private clients and also created works for his own home.

C.B.

CAT. 12

Paul Sérusier
(Paris, 1864–Morlaix, 1927),
Field of Golden Corn and Buckwheat,
c. 1900

Oil on canvas, 103 × 47.3 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 2013-7

This canvas by Paul Sérusier derives its force from its considerable decorative abstraction. A group of women form a solemn procession to a well or spring. Drawing water and carrying their earthenware jars in a continuous flow, they are bathed in an unreal, golden light. The scene is charged with the hieratic splendor of myth: condemned by the Greek gods to forever fill their amphorae in vain in an eternal purgatory for having killed their husbands, the Danaides—the daughters of King Danaos—seem here to be reconciled to their fate.

This was originally one of a series of decorative panels that Sérusier painted for Georges Lacombe's home (the Château de l'Ermitage at Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois, near Alençon), when the "sculptor Nabi" had it decorated by his painter comrades around 1899. As he had done already in 1893, at his friend's studio in Versailles—nicknamed the *ergasterium* by the Nabis—Sérusier inscribed upon "the walls of Alençon the sacred aesthetic measures" that he had meditated upon during his recent stay at the Benedictine monastery of Beuron, in Bavaria. This painted décor expresses both a quest for concentration and an impulse to a geometrical, even mathematical, construction of space in the regular rhythm of the trees, their reflections and the serial arrangement of the women along the path.

C.B.

CAT. 13

Paul Sérusier
(Paris, 1864–Morlaix, 1927),
Women at the Well, c. 1899

Distemper on canvas, 131 × 57.4 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF MO P 2016-8

These two prints were made as part of the first edition of the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō* in 1833–34. With some editions issued in over 10,000 prints, this was one of the greatest popular successes in the history of the Japanese print. Hiroshige would go on to make new versions of this series, exploring other facets of the different places pictured. These two prints showing the twelfth and fourteenth stations on the Edo-Kyoto road (Numazu and Yoshiwara respectively) illustrate a particular mode of perspective in which the effect of depth is produced by the winding highway and the presence of a distant background. The sense of twilight in the Numazu print exemplifies Hiroshige's great gift for evoking the atmospherics of landscape through time.

E.B.

CAT. 14

Utagawa Hiroshige
(Edo, *c.* 1797–Edo, 1858),
Fuji from Yoshiwara (14th station),
from the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, 1833–34

Polychrome xylography on paper, 23 × 35 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, EO 996

CAT. 15

Utagawa Hiroshige
(Edo, *c.* 1797–Edo, 1858),
Twilight at Numazu (12th station),
from the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*, 1833–34

Polychrome xylography on paper, 24 × 37 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, EO 280

東海道五拾三次之内
吉原

東海道五拾三次之内
沼津

In the series of *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, the mountainous province of Kai appears in three of the prints. This print, the last of the three, shows the Inume Pass, the River Fuefuki in the center, bordered by cliffs on either side. This is a forceful composition, structured by craggy rocks with scattered trees in precarious equilibrium. On the right, under the light of a cold autumn day, three travelers set out to negotiate the slopes of this desolate landscape, while others further up contemplate the spectacular view of Mount Fuji. The panorama is traversed by a thick bank of clouds, and a flight of birds above adds to the melancholy atmosphere of the scene. It is known that Hiroshige visited this location in 1841 because he described in his notebook the inspirational beauty of the place. Yet he has not simply reproduced reality, he integrated multiple, distant artistic influences in the print. The treatment of Mount Fuji and of the soft clouds above the gorge are reminiscent of certain Western intaglio prints, while the rocks of the pass recall the Chinese landscape painting of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1644, 1644–1911).

G.A.

CAT. 16

Utagawa Hiroshige
(Edo, *c.* 1797–Edo, 1858),
Inume Pass in Kai Province, 1858

Color print on paper, 34 × 22 cm
Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, LAD 2013.041

富士三十六景
甲斐大目峠
北斎
十四

In this scene, two men admire a waterfall while others take rest in a hut on the right. Almost entirely fused with the landscape, these figures do nothing to distract from the true subject of the work, the 30-meter waterfall, a natural attraction located in today's Gifu province. The first to paint the waterfall as a theme in itself, Hokusai here takes advantage of the recently imported Prussian Blue, making generous use of two shades of blue wash, which he matches with three dilutions of green. The series of eight prints Hokusai devoted to waterfalls followed not long after his better known *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*. In its inventive exploration of ways to represent cascading water, it is a pioneering work and an excellent illustration of the originality of Hokusai's genius. The artist's devotion to Shinto and Buddhist belief shines through, giving this print both a highly atmospheric sense of space and a distinctive and timeless intimacy with the landscape.

G.A.

CAT. 17

Katsushika Hokusai
(Edo, 1760–Edo, 1849),
Yôrô Waterfall in Mino Province,
1833–34

Color print on paper, 38 × 26 cm
Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, LAD 2015.029

諸國瀧巡り
美濃ノ国
養老の滝

A talented dressmaker and embroiderer, Marguerite Sérusier was also a painter, creating stage scenery and large-scale mural decorations. She was the first manager of the Atelier Martine, the textile-design studio staffed by young women, set up by couturier Paul Poiret in 1911. Marguerite met Paul Sérusier in 1909 when she studied under him at the Académie Ranson, and they married in 1912. From then on, she shared his somewhat reclusive life in the Breton village of Châteauneuf-du-Faou, where she continued to live after her husband's death in 1927.

Like her friend France Rousseau (wife of Paul Ranson), Marguerite applied the Nabis' aesthetic principles to the decorative arts. In her work, she was inspired in particular by the decorative motifs found in that of her husband, and her designs for rugs and screens feature the same vegetal universe of forest saplings, mosses, and seagrass.

The close relationship between this *Rolling Landscape* and her spouse's *Screen with Stream* of 1893 suggests that Marguerite was familiar with the work and drew directly on it in developing her own composition. The same rolling countryside, a Japanese-style treatment of the Breton landscape, occupies the whole surface of the four-section canvas, the sky no more than a narrow band across the top; a scatter of the same mushrooms (fly agarics of a fine, bright red) can be seen at the bottom. A stream crosses all four leaves, bending away as it reaches the second from the left. Directly inspired by a motif found in Japanese prints in the drawing of the wave formed after the fall, it also bears a certain relationship to the Japanese-style waves of Nabi Georges Lacombe.

C.B.

CAT. 18

Marguerite Sérusier,
née Louise Marguerite Gabriel-Claude
(Lons-le-Saunier, 1879–
Châteauneuf-du-Faou, 1950),
Rolling Landscape, 1900

Four-leaved screen
Oil on canvas, wood frame, monogrammed *MS*,
each leaf 130 × 53.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF MO P 2015-39

In their compositions, the Nabis often favored a frontal representation of the figures, as if they were actors on a stage. Yet painting's relationship to narrative is problematic, given the immobility of the image and the impossibility of representing the passage of time. They got around this difficulty through a melodic orchestration of lines and colors, privileging the curve and the arabesque, expressive of the winding course of thought.

The decorative panels that Maurice Denis painted for a girl's bedroom—two of which are held by the Musée d'Orsay [cats 19 and 20]—offer a perfect example of this symbolic narration. Their fluid lines delineate the motifs and link them together across the different planes of the composition. They also suggest an interaction between the figures and landscape. There are evident borrowings from the Japanese print in the simplified treatment of the motifs and the absence of shade that reduces them to cut-out silhouettes against a background.

Like the Japanese printmakers, the Nabis were interested in representing the impermanence of the world and the association of female figures with the seasons. Whereas the *ukiyo-e* artists always respected the relative scale of their motifs, the Nabis' characters sometimes seem as large as the scenery elements around them. This stylization excluded any narrative function.

Arabesque Narratives

Detail from cat. 19

Dated 1891, *September* and *October* are the first two decorative panels of a series, having pendants in the *April* and *July* that Denis painted the following year. The two pairs of panels were, in fact, separately conceived before being exhibited together under the title "Poetic Subject (Four Panels to Decorate a Young Girl's Bedroom)" at the Salon des Indépendants of 1892. They are less concerned with evoking the seasons than with following the development of a young woman's love over the months: the purity of the girl gathering flowers in April, the carefree summer of July, the expectancy of betrothal in September, and preparation for married life in October. Inspired by his love for Marthe Meurier, Denis thus offers a personal interpretation of the seasons, deliberately leaving out winter and blurring the difference between the rest to accentuate the sense of eternal happiness. Responding to the Nabis' call for easel painting to be replaced by "mythic" décor, Denis also finds himself in accord with Symbolist painting, the decoration of dream. Everything comes together here to confer on personal life the intensity of legend: the figure of the knight from medieval poetry and the ideal silhouettes that float in a twilit earthly paradise. The decorative character of the chestnut leaves strewn upon the ground and of the Japanese-style motifs (the curled-up cat, the sinuous tree trunks, the high horizon line) also help root this work in the art of its time.

L.P.

CAT. 19

Maurice Denis
(Grandville, 1870–Paris, 1943),
September, also known as *September Evening* or *Women Sitting on the Terrace*, 1891

Oil on canvas, 38 × 61 cm
Signed and dated lower right, vertical monogram: *MAVD91*
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, gift of Comtesse Vitali, in memory of her brother, Vicomte Guy de Cholet, 1923, RF 2009-16

Provenance: Galerie Ambroise Vollard, 1892, purchased from the artist (CDV no. 80, "3 panneaux chambre de jeune fille", 400 francs); collection of Vicomte Guy de Cholet; Société des Amis du Musée du Luxembourg, 1916; bequest of Vicomte Guy de Cholet; Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 2009

CAT. 20

Maurice Denis
(Grandville, 1870–Paris, 1943),
October, also known as *October Evening*, 1891

Oil on canvas, 38 × 61.2 cm
Signed and dated bottom right, vertical monogram: *MAVD91*
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 2005-2

Provenance: Paul Poujaud collection, 1892, purchased from the artist (artist's ledger of sales and gifts, 250 F); Galerie Druet, received 16 February 1929, sold 7 May 1929; Arthur G. Altschul collection, New York, 9 January 1967; private collection; Galerie Hopkins-Custot, Paris, until 2005; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, purchased with financial support co-ordinated by the Nikkei Group, 16 February 2005

Although the horizontal, frieze-like format of this panel, recalling that of the Italian Renaissance predella, does rather suggest a decorative vocation, it does not seem to form part of a decorative cycle properly speaking, despite the existence of another version of *The Seasons of Life* and of another painting entitled *The Two Ages of Life*. The variations of motif and "framing" between the three works and the absence of any evidence of architectural destination tend, rather, to support the idea of three consecutive versions of the same composition. As implied by the title coined after the artist's death, the panel evokes the ages of life, interpreted by the artist as a cycle of the seasons. The traditional succession of innocence, maturity, and wisdom is thus represented by spring, summer, autumn, and the winter personified by the elderly woman seated on the left, in a landscape of distinctly autumnal palette. The distance between the women and the hieratic quality of the figures with their almost Greek profiles confer on the whole a timeless atmosphere worthy of the allegorical compositions of Denis or Puvis de Chavannes.
A certain theatrical solemnity inhabits these figures, somehow isolated from each other, like cut-outs set against an artificial landscape background, suggestive of the puppet theatre productions the Nabis occasionally contributed to.
A highly personal work, this painting also has its place among the Nabis' explorations of color and space, and of a certain Japanese refinement in the treatment of the clothes and hair.

L.P.

CAT. 21

Ker-Xavier Roussel
(Lorry-lès-Metz, 1867–
L'Étang-la-Ville, 1944),
The Seasons of Life,
between 1892 and 1895

Oil on canvas, 58 × 122 cm
Studio stamp bottom left: *K.X Roussel*
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1990-15

Provenance: collection of Jacques Roussel, the artist's son; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, accepted in lieu of property transfer duty, 22 June 1990

CAT. 22

Tōshūsai Sharaku
(active 1794–95),
Portrait of a Kabuki Actor (okubi-e): *The Actor Ichkawa Monnosuke II in the role of Date no Yosaku,* 1794

Polychrome xylography on paper (*nishiki-e*), micaceous background, 38.4 × 25.4 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, EO1529

CAT. 23

Tōshūsai Sharaku
(active 1794–95),
Portrait of a Kabuki Actor (okubi-e): *The Actor Bandô Hikosaburô III in the role of de Sagisaka Sanai,* 1794

Polychrome xylography on paper (*nishiki-e*), micaceous background, 37.5 × 24.8 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, EO1527

The series of *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* to which this and the following work belong was the last to be conceived by Hiroshige and produced under his control. We do not know whether this project, which marks a return to the same subject after fifty years, represents a tribute to or an attempt to rival Hokusai, who had been the first to tackle the theme, and that in the same number of prints. Like him, Hiroshige chose to celebrate the mountain cherished by the Japanese, observed through the changing seasons and from varying distance, though sometimes making only a discreet appearance in the background, as here. Representing eleven works out of the thirty-six, the views of Mount Fuji from the Japanese capital of Edo are the largest group in the series. Furthermore, they are placed at its head of the thirty-six views, conferring on them an additional importance. The first prints depict the winter, at the beginning of the first month of the year, with the seasons thereafter rapidly succeeding each other. As in most of his landscapes, Hiroshige includes figures that animate the scene. On a spring evening, no doubt in the Yoshiwara district, three young women arrive by boat to admire the cherry blossoms. In the distance, on the left, Mount Fuji looms up in the grey light of evening.

G.A.

CAT. 24

Utagawa Hiroshige
(Edo, *c.* 1797–Edo, 1858),
The Bank of the Sumida River in Edo, 1858

Color print on paper, 34 × 22 cm
Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, LAD 2013.016

富士三十六景
東都隅田堤

While illustrated guides to celebrated points of view had existed for several centuries, it was left to Hokusai and Hiroshige to popularize the long series of landscape prints. In taking up the theme of thirty-six views of Mount Fuji, Hiroshige brought to it a highly personal vision that sometimes saw the landscape rendered in a quasi-abstract fashion. Here, in this panoramic view from Asuka Hill in the capital of Edo, he appears to adopt a relatively traditional treatment. The top of the hill offered a magnificent view of Mount Fuji and quickly became famous as a popular place to stroll. The scene is set in spring, at the time of year when travelers come to admire the cherry trees in blossom on the hill. In this landscape, already featured in several of his other series of his and rendered a different way each time, Hiroshige is interested not just in the cherry trees in bloom but also in the sacred mountain, which he sets discreetly between the trees. Hiroshige here constructs a very well-balanced composition and uses the slope of the land on the right to lead the eye to the inns and restaurants below, for the first time permitting the contemporary world to intrude upon his contemplative vision of the location.

G.A.

CAT. 25

Utagawa Hiroshige
(Edo, *c.* 1797–Edo, 1858),
Asuka Hill in Edo, 1858

Color print on paper, 34 × 22 cm
Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, LAD 2013.017

富士三十六景
赤坂乗雪山
歌川重宣

CAT. 26

Katsushika Hokusai
(Edo, 1760–Edo, 1849),
Sarumaru Daiyû, from the series
One Hundred Poems Explained
[By the Hundreds Poets]
by the Nurse, 1835

Polychrome xylography on paper, 26.3 × 36.3 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet,
EO1931

Together with *Conversation on the Terrace* and *Réunion des dames* (*The Ladies Meet*), this panel is one of a group of three sketches submitted for the decoration of the function room at the Bagnolet town hall in 1893. Roussel's chosen theme of the public garden, and of the Jardin des Tuileries in particular, did not win the approbation of the jury, which went for one more pertinent to the local history of this commune on Paris's eastern boundary. The innovative style of the Nabis' painted decoration in any event found more favor among private patrons than with public authorities. The decorative effect of the panel derives from the horizontal nature of its format, further accentuated by the division of the depthless space into three superimposed registers, with the reclining woman and her book, the terrace wall, the balustrade. An admirer of the Japanese print, like his Nabi friends, Roussel made use of some of its characteristic tricks in the framing (the trunk of the tree cut off at the top, the frieze-like band of scattered leaves) and the motifs (the figure of the sage, the elegant silhouettes) to capture the whole beauty of the everyday. The intimate character of the scene, treated in a harmony of matt, pastel colors engendering a soft and even light, is reinforced by the vertical elements that isolate the reclining figure (the pillar, the tree, the woman entering on the right) while balancing the lines. Roussel here renders woman's inner life through the image of the enclosed garden, its mysterious and contemplative atmosphere evocative of Symbolism.

L.P.

CAT. 27

Ker-Xavier Roussel
(Lorry-lès-Metz, 1867–
L'Étang-la-Ville, 1944),
The Terrace, 1892–93

Oil on canvas, 37 × 75.5 cm
Signed bottom left: *K-X Roussel*
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1992-1

Provenance: collection of Jacques Roussel, the artist's son, until 1991; sale by auction, Saint-Étienne, 16 November 1991; Galerie Huguette Berès, Paris; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 21 February 1992

The Nabis experimented with all kinds of innovative formulae in order to escape the linear progression of narrative. They multiplied points of view within the same space and introduced breaks in the composition. In adopting the format of the folding screen, made newly fashionable by the rise of Japonism, they used this support to break with the idea of the painting as a window on the world first formulated by the Renaissance theorist Leon Battista Alberti.

Departing from the plane image we see in Bonnard's screen [cat. 28], Maurice Denis takes advantage of the hinged connection between the leaves in his vision of an Italian terrace with fountain [cat. 29]. The landscape is rendered in each panel in such a way as to take account of the alternating back-and-forth required for the screen to stand up, the unity of the different views being underlined by the zigzag line of the green fence that echoes the articulation of the panels.

The idea of continuity and discontinuity was important for the Nabis, confronted with the design of mural décors subordinated to the architecture of the room. In his panels for Alexandre Natanson [cats 30–34, figs 13 and 14, pp. 52–53], Vuillard grouped scenes in diptychs and triptychs, with breaks in sky, vegetation, and ground between each panel, while groups of figures are each contained within a panel, without any interruption. The eye recomposes the scenes at a distance in a panoramic vision comprehending all. The process suggests the idea of a limitless space, as in Japanese painting.

Continuity and Discontinuity

Detail from cat. 30

Composed of four five-color lithographic prints the size of theater posters, this screen is a technical triumph as well as a masterpiece of lithographic art. Before having it put into production by the publisher Molines in 1897, Bonnard made an original model in distemper in 1894 and a painted version for a stage set in 1895. Now, with a reproducible work, he was responding to the Nabi demand for the integration of art into everyday life through the design of furniture. At a time when the mode for things Japanese had brought the screen back into fashion, this work forged a link between two traditions, the Western and the Eastern. A keen collector of Japanese prints, nicknamed "le Nabi très japonard" (the ultra-Japanese Nabi) by his painter comrades, Bonnard drew on the example of the *kakemono*, the Japanese scroll painting, to make the best of the vertical format of the leaves, while playing on the articulation of the screen in the distribution of the motifs between and across the panels. The line of carriages parked on the Place de la Concorde assures the cohesion of the whole, while two groups of figures inhabit the otherwise empty space of the square's "little Sahara": the serenity of the three still silhouettes of the nursemaids by the balustrade contrasts with the excitement of the children running after their hoops. Through his humorous treatment of these figures fleetingly distorted by their action, Bonnard transforms a humdrum street scene into a celebration of everyday life.

L.P.

CAT. 28

Pierre Bonnard
(Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1867–
Le Cannet, 1947),
Nannies' Promenade,
Frieze of Carriages, 1897

Publisher: Molines

Screen composed of a series of four lithographic prints in five colors: bistre, yellow, pale blue, red, and black; edition of 110
Signed on the stone at bottom right of third leaf: monogram *PB*
143.4 × 46.1 cm (each leaf)
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, OAO 1244; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Prints and Photographs Department, Est 92 620

Provenance: Galerie du Nouvel Essor, Paris, 1939; Colette Guillemard collection, Paris, from 1939; Galerie Jean-Claude Bellier and Galerie Huguette Berès, Paris, 1991; Musées Nationaux, purchased on behalf of the Musée d'Orsay and the BNF supported by the Fonds du Patrimoine, 18 December 1991

The great boldness of composition of this screen shows how Maurice Denis had studied and assimilated certain principles of Asian and, more particularly, Japanese art. The artist, in fact, has chosen to play on the four-part structure of the work, endowing the subject matter on each panel with a perspective of its own, without compromising the coherence of the whole. The course of the green fence reinforces this division in unity with its rhythmic shifts of direction. The limited chromatic range and the clear, pastel shades suggestive of fresco underline the artist's decorative intent. The latter, however, does nothing to rob the work of semantic complexity, a number of readings being possible in registers both sacred and profane. Furthermore, this image of young women in an environment of plenteous serenity deploys a number of age-old iconographic elements drawn from the Catholic tradition. The fenced-off area might thus allude to the *hortus conclusus* or "garden enclosed," a symbol of purity in medieval European iconography. In this context, the young woman carving an inscription into the bark of the tree might be the artist's young wife, who very often featured in his works. The motif of the doves at the spring is also open to a variety of interpretations: as well as combining traditional symbols for peace, purity, and rebirth, this may also refer to the Old Testament book, the Song of Solomon or Song of Songs, in which one verse evokes this image.

E.B.

CAT. 29

Maurice Denis
(Grandville, 1870–Paris, 1943),
Screen with Doves, *c.* 1896

Oil on canvas, four panels, each 164 × 54 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 2009-12, 1 to 4

Provenance: Purchased 2009

Commissioned by Alexandre Natanson in 1894 for his house at 60, Avenue du Bois de Boulogne in Paris, *Public Gardens* adorned a ground-floor reception room. The nine panels, five of which are held by the Musée d'Orsay, were arranged in such a fashion as to reflect the layout of the gardens, giving the illusion of a panorama open to the skies on one side and closed off by chestnut trees on the other. Opposite the triptych formed by *The Conversation*, *The Nurses*, and *The Red Parasol* on one long wall were *The Two Schoolboys* and *Under the Trees* on the other, while *Girls Playing* and *The Question* flanked a door on one short wall and *The Promenade* and *First Steps* stood on either side of a window on the other. The décor was later taken down to follow the family when they moved house. This was Vuillard's first large-scale decorative project, because his first décor, created for Paul Desmarais in 1892, had been more modest in scale, while his set for Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, staged at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1893, was not intended to last. From the theatre, he retained the glue-based distemper mixed from powder pigments used to paint scenery whose matte, fresco-like surface avoided the problem of shiny reflections from the lights. Playing his own part in the Nabi quest for new pictorial techniques appropriate to a non-imitative conception of painting, Vuillard innovated using distemper for non-ephemeral decoration, successfully employing it as he replaced conventional modeling with a tactile paint finish. The vagueness of the title *Public Gardens* answers to the intended universality of the scene, set in two public open spaces, views of which are here combined in one: the paths of the Bois de Boulogne, and the chestnuts of the Jardin des Tuileries. Interested more in the public gardens than in the bustling streets of the French capital, Vuillard offers an intimist vision of his subject, treating the outdoors in the manner of an interior. It is the theme of the nanny or nursemaid, more particularly, that introduces the note of intimacy and domesticity into the open-air scene: while Vuillard shows that women and their sinuous forms have a perfect echo in nature and its arabesques, he also reminds us that the garden is a natural location for the crystallization of childhood memories, for the early play that explores the mysteries of the outside world. The garden is also Vuillard's way of showing that art is found in nature, an ordered nature in whose decorative effects he finds inspiration. He handles his figures in exactly the same way as leaves, shadows or the ground, treating them ornamentally, in the manner of tapestry, making no hierarchical distinctions.

L.P.

CATS 30–34

Édouard Vuillard
(Cuiseaux, 1868–La Baule, 1940)

Public Gardens, 1894

Glue-based distemper on canvas
Signed and dated lower right: *E. Vuillard 94*
Paris, Musée d'Orsay

Girls Playing

214.5 × 88 cm, bequest of the widow of Alexandre Radot, RF 1978-46

The Question

214.5 × 92 cm, bequest of the widow of Alexandre Radot, RF 1978-47

Provenance: Hôtel Drouot, Paris, Alexandre Natanson sale, 16 May 1929 (no. 120, no. 124, 30,000 francs each); collection of M. Level, Paris; Hôtel Drouot, Paris, sale of oriental objets d'art and modern paintings, 19–20 February 1934 (no. 168 A and B, 11,250 francs); collection of Mme Knessler; collection of Mme Édith-May Hirschler; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, bequest of Mme Édith-May Reitlinger (widow of Alexandre Radot), 8 November 1978

The Nurses
The Conversation
The Red Parasol

213.8 × 73 cm ; 213.5 × 154 cm ; 214 × 81 cm, RF 1977-365

Provenance: Hôtel Drouot, Paris, Alexandre Natanson sale, 16 May 1929 (no. 125, no. 118, no. 117, 66,667 francs each); Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1929; Musée du Luxembourg, Paris; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 1977

Fusuma, the paper-covered sliding panels that serve as both doors and interior walls, are one of the characteristic features of traditional Japanese architecture. Alongside the screen, they were the favored support for schemes of interior decoration. Drawing on models consecrated by the officially recognized Kanō and Tosa schools, a gold background unites the whole work. The winter landscape, half-lost in mist, extends evenly across the four panels heedless of the breaks. Such décors, derived from the traditional iconography of Chinese "flower and bird" painting, were often installed in the audience halls of shoguns or the residences of military governors.

E.B.

CAT. 35

Set of four *fusuma,*
Japan, 18th century

Ink, colors and gold on paper, 182.5 × 554 cm
Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, LAD 2013.008

Founded in the mid-15th century, the Kanō school of painting won official patronage and dominated the world of Japanese art until the end of the Edo period (1603–1868). Receiving many official commissions for interior décors, its members were chiefly celebrated for their fusion of Chinese iconographic elements with a Japanese aesthetic. The plants represented here—bamboo, plum tree, and pine, known as "the three friends of winter"—are a characteristic motif of Chinese painting. Particularly resilient, the only plants to continue to grow amid the rigors of winter, they are here associated with cranes, symbols of longevity in Chinese culture, together forming a sign of good fortune.

E.B.

CATS 36–37

Kanō Tanshin (1785–1835),
Cranes Among Bamboo,
Plum Tree and Pine,
late 18th century and early 19th century

Pair of screens, ink and color on paper, each 59.3 × 130 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet,
MG 10471 and MG 10472

This landscape of 1898–99 forms part of Maurice Denis's scheme for the decoration of the chapel at a Catholic private secondary school at Le Vésinet in the Paris suburbs. Built by Gaston Lebal in 1899, the chapel was abandoned in 1905, and the canvases mounted on the back wall were taken down and returned to the artist. The central panel was divided into four in order to do this, transforming the original three panels into six. The whole work depicted angels and choristers glorifying the sacrifice of Jesus, who died on the cross to redeem mankind, the sacrifice celebrated at Mass. The scene is set in the open air, in a stylized landscape typical of the Île-de-France. The river and the vegetation suggest the panorama visible from the terrace of the chateau at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the painter's adoptive town. A great admirer of the Italian Primitives, Denis here employs their naïve simplification in his treatment of space and motif, while his technique imitates the matt effect of fresco.

I.C.

CAT. 38

Maurice Denis
(Grandville, 1870–Paris, 1943),
Landscape, central panel of the decoration of the chapel at the Collège Sainte-Croix du Vésinet, 1899

Oil on canvas, 115 × 164 cm
Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs (Inv. 18362 E), on long-term loan to the Musée d'Orsay since 1980, DO 1980-6

The very tight framing of the motif as well as the sobriety and economy of the composition place great emphasis on the cherry blossom flowers, which extend over all six panels, their white contrasting strongly with the gold background. A motif that epitomizes the Japanese aesthetic, the cherry blossom that marks the coming of spring is also, by virtue of its own evanescence, a symbol of the ephemeral character of worldly beauty, of life itself. It is here treated in a precise and delicate manner typical of the productions of the Hara school, much favored by the imperial court. The treatment of the trunk evidences the artist's great mastery of the techniques of Chinese painting applied to the rendering of typically Japanese subject matter.

E.B.

CAT. 39

Hara Zaimei (1778–1844),
Cherry Tree in Blossom Against a Gold Background, 19th century

Six-leaf screen, paper, ink, gofun, gold ground, 168 × 374 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, MG 10408

The intellectual, oneiric, and spiritual character of their works saw the Nabis described as “ideist” painters. Their décors, in particular, turn away from the representation of reality to picture a world of the imagination. The Symbolist artist Odilon Redon met the group in the early 1890s, just as he had abandoned charcoal and lithography to create the colored compositions they much admired. Paint and pastel led him to a decorative art that allowed him to “bring gaiety to bare walls.”

The Musée d’Orsay possesses an outstanding group of fifteen panels painted by Redon for Baron Robert de Domecy in 1901 [cats 40–54]. Varied in size, these panels depict motifs from nature, presented without context and sometimes outsized. Together, they represent a world—sometimes golden with sunlight, sometimes silvered by the moon—peopled by strange creatures: flowers, trees, insects, figures. Breaking with notions of verisimilitude and symmetry, Redon created an imaginary world, aleatory in order, in which motifs float suspended in a tinted continuum without ever engaging with each other. The soft harmony of the unreal colors transmutes reality into dream.

Using his power of imagination, Redon exemplified for his contemporaries a hybridity in which the genius of the West met with that of the East.

Symbolist Dreamscapes

Detail from cat. 40

Having been one of the Redon's most important collectors since the early 1890s, in 1899 Baron Robert de Domecy commissioned him to decorate the dining room of his recently completed chateau at Domecy-sur-le-Vault in Burgundy. While not without its difficulties, this commission—an unusual project for a painter hitherto accustomed to working in small or medium formats—proved in the end to be highly gratifying to the artist, who believed it to be among the best of his works.

Domecy did not prescribe any precise iconographic program, specifying only that yellow and red should dominate a chromatic unity that would confer great coherence on the whole. Redon responded with fifteen painted panels and an immense pastel work that were set amid the dark wooden paneling. Returning in these works, on a larger scale, to motifs earlier developed in his lithographs, Redon created a dreamlike and mysterious universe chiefly comprised of highly stylized botanical elements. The influence of Japonism is evident in the composition of the panels. The deployment of isolated motifs in an indeterminate space that accommodates large voids, the continuity of subject from one panel to another, or, conversely, the way in which certain elements seem to extend beyond the canvas are all striking examples.

What is more, Redon made use of a highly distinctive, almost experimental technique, painting with very fluid oils and adding numerous highlights in distemper, creating a contrast of materials and bringing a sense of depth to the pictorial layer. This unique technique only adds to the singularity of the work.

The two large panels depicting figures clad in red drapery [cats 53–54] have a special place in the whole. Created as pendants and set one on either side of the fireplace, they simultaneously suggest medieval figures, Hindu priestesses, or depictions of the Buddha. Combining cultural and religious elements from Europe and the East, these mysterious figures with their air of the sacred testify to Redon's interest in mysticism, introducing a spiritual dimension into a work originally purely decorative in intent.

In its scale, its complex, unreal atmosphere, its technical innovation, and the boldness of its composition, this vast project of Redon's expresses the full flourishing of a decorative pictorial art that had already been reinvigorated by the Nabis' endeavors since the early 1890s.

E.B.

CATS 40–54

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Decorations of the chateau at
Domecy-sur-le-Vault, 1900–01

Provenance: accepted by the state in lieu of property transfer duty, 1988

CAT. 40

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Branch of Yellow Flowers, 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas, 247.5 × 163.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-32

CAT. 41

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Trees on a Yellow Background,
1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
247.5 × 173 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-31

CAT. 42

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Tree on a Yellow Background,
1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
249.5 × 185.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-30

CAT. 43

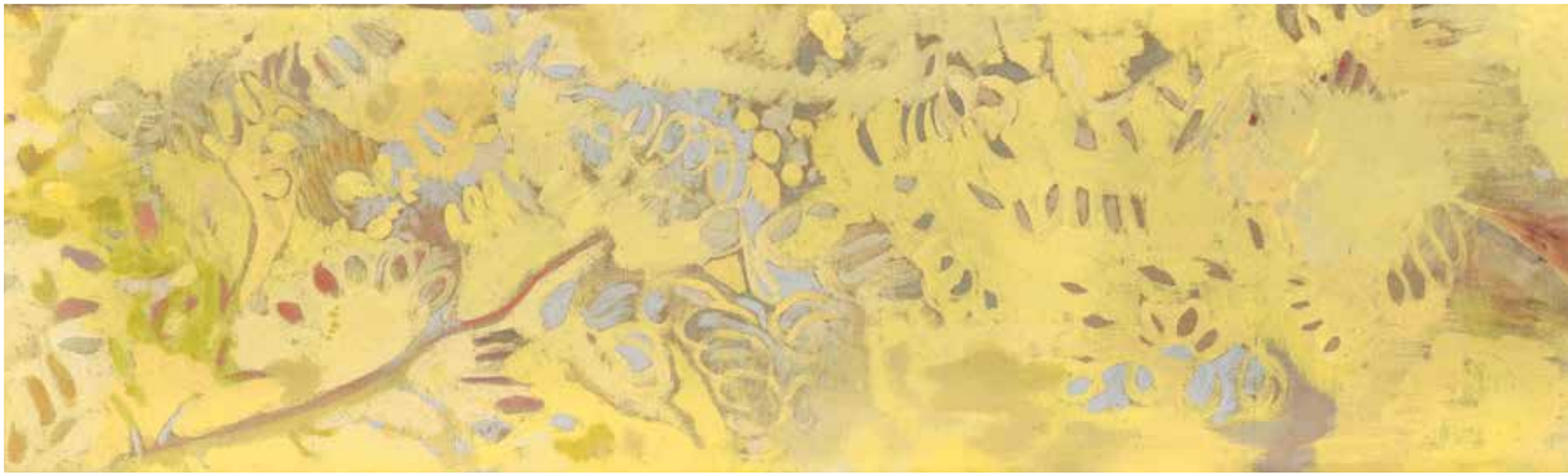
Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Daisies and Rowan Berries,
1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
122.5 × 152.3 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-40

CAT. 44

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Daisies, 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
123 × 149.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-39



CAT. 45

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Yellow Frieze, 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
37.5 × 245.3 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-41

CAT. 46

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Gray Frieze, 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
41.5 × 357 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-42

CAT. 47

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Flowers and Berries Frieze,
1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
35.3 × 163.7 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-38

CAT. 48

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Flower Frieze, Pink Daisy,
1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
35 × 165.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-37

CAT. 49

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Large Panel with Plant Motifs (Pale Background), 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas, 250.7 × 89.4 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-36

CAT. 50

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Large Panel with Plant Motifs (Pale Background), 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas, 244 × 103.7 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-35

CAT. 51

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Small Gray Panel I, 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
41.5 × 55.3 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-43

CAT. 52

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Small Gray Panel II, 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
43 × 55.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-44

CAT. 53

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Figure, 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
244.5 × 58.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-34

CAT. 54

Odilon Redon
(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916),
Figure (Yellow Flower), 1900–01

Oil, distemper, and pastel on canvas,
243.8 × 58.3 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1988-33

James Whistler (1834–1903),
Caprice in Purple and Gold: The Golden Screen, 1864
Oil on panel, 50.1 × 68.5 cm
Washington, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1904.75a

Anthology: The Passion for Japan

"And when I said that Japonism was in the process of revolutionizing the vision of the European peoples . . . "

Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal*, 19 April 1884

Pierre Loti (1850–1923),
title page of *Madame Chrysanthème*,
Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1888, with drawings
and watercolors by Rossi and Myrbach
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
Literature and Art Department, 8-Y2-41008

Voyage to Japan

"At dawn of day we sighted Japan. Precisely at the foretold moment, Japan arose before us, afar off, like a clear and distinct dot in the vast sea, which for so many days had been but a blank space . . . What a country of verdure and shade is Japan; what an unlooked-for Eden!

"At this moment, my impressions of Japan are charming enough; I feel myself fairly launched upon this tiny, artificial, fictitious world, which I felt I knew already from the paintings of lacquer and porcelains. It is so exact a representation!

"I cannot help smiling when I think of some of the so-called Japanese drawing rooms, overcrowded with knick-knacks and curios and hung with coarse gold embroideries on exported satins, of our Parisian fine ladies. I would advise those persons to come and look at the houses of people of taste out here; to visit the white solitudes of the palaces at Yeddo. In France, we have works of art in order to enjoy them; here, they possess them merely to ticket them and lock them up carefully in a kind of mysterious underground room shut in by iron gratings called a *godoun*. On rare occasions, only to honor some visitor of distinction, do they open this impenetrable depository. The true Japanese manner of understanding luxury consists in a scrupulous and indeed almost excessive cleanliness, white mats and white woodwork; an appearance of extreme simplicity, and an incredible nicety in the most infinitesimal details."

Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, translated by Laura Ensor, London, George Routledge and Sons, 1897, pp. 11, 14, 42 and 2002

Front cover of *Paris illustré*, Japan issue, vol. 4, nos 45–46, May 1886
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, FOL 186 U 3

Japonism

"When the general public became aware of Japonism, it encountered above all a deluge of screens, fans and brightly colored parasols, over-rich embroideries, effeminate porcelains, cheap, gaudy prints, and knick-knacks for export only, of no artistic value, a flood that gradually invaded every home, turning each sitting room into a kind of oriental bazaar."

Raymond Kœchlin, *Souvenirs d'un vieil amateur d'art d'Extrême-Orient,* Chalon-sur-Saône, Imprimerie française et orientale E. Bertrand, 1930, pp. 8–9

"From then on, in any event, it was not to [Tadamasa Hayashi] alone that one would go to find true works of Japanese art in Paris. A competitor had emerged, S. Bing, once a simple wholesale importer, who had been quick to understand what role might be his should he venture to exercise his curiosity; now educated by several voyages to the Far East, he had an exceptionally refined taste and a marvelously astute intelligence. Between the Rue d'Hauteville where Hayashi lived and the Rue de Provence where Bing opened his shop, a polite struggle ensued that never once saw the two rivals depart from the most perfect civility . . . Hayashi, somewhat private and reserved, in the manner of the Japanese, distributed his customers among the many little rooms that formed the apartment; you each had your corner where he would come and join you, and you couldn't see who it was behind the door of the next room. This mystery had its own charm, and the master of the house excelled at giving the impression of special treatment. At Bing's, on the other hand everything happened, or seemed to happen, in public: clients came and went, opening cupboards, leafing through portfolios, and in the little room under the eaves specially reserved for prints there would often be five or six rubbing shoulders."

Raymond Kœchlin, *Souvenirs d'un vieil amateur d'art d'Extrême-Orient,* Chalon-sur-Saône, Imprimerie française et orientale E. Bertrand, 1930, pp. 11–12 and 18

Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849),
Okiku's Ghost Rising from the Well,
from the series of *One Hundred Tales,*
18th century, *Nishike-e* print
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
Prints and Photographs Department,
RESERVE DE-12-FOL

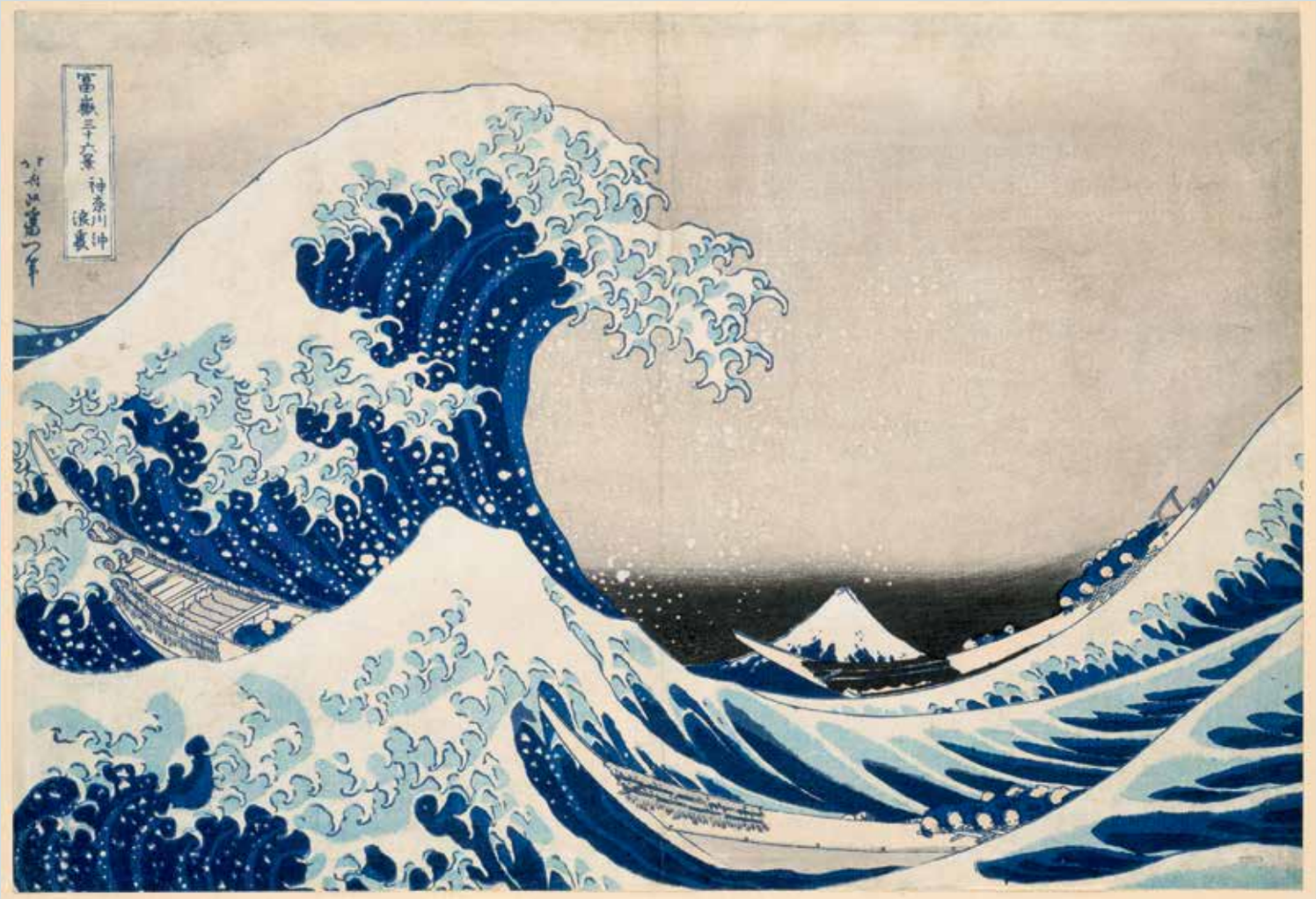
Japanese prints

"In 1890, at the École des Beaux-Arts, Bing organized an exhibition of Japanese prints drawn from the collections of the most important enthusiasts . . . With no great confidence, I made my way there . . . It was love at first sight. I spent two hours in rhapsody over these vividly colored prints."

Raymond Kœchlin, *Souvenirs d'un vieil amateur d'art d'Extrême-Orient*, Chalon-sur-Saône, Imprimerie française et orientale E. Bertrand, 1930, pp. 13–14

"The Japanese engravers were, and still are, incomparably skilled. Cherry wood, tender, supple, and resistant, lends itself readily to the finest and most delicate work, and is equally suited to heavier drawings. The engraver's work alone was nothing in comparison to the minute care given to the impressions. It is from the technical side of the impressions that Japanese wood engraving appeals to workers in the same line as an object of art without rival . . . The Japanese engraver, always preserving his delicate skill of hand, reaches, by very simple and almost primitive means, tones that are faded and soft, or bold and clear; he expresses a play of color and a gaiety that would seem to be possible only to the brush. Of all the miracles of Japanese art this is, perhaps, the most surprising."

Louis Gonse, *Japanese Art*, Paris, translated by M. P. Nickerson, Chicago, Belford-Clarke, 1891, pp. 258–59



Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849),
Under the Wave off Kanagawa,
from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, 1830–32
Color woodblock print, 25.5 × 37.5 cm
Paris, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, E0174

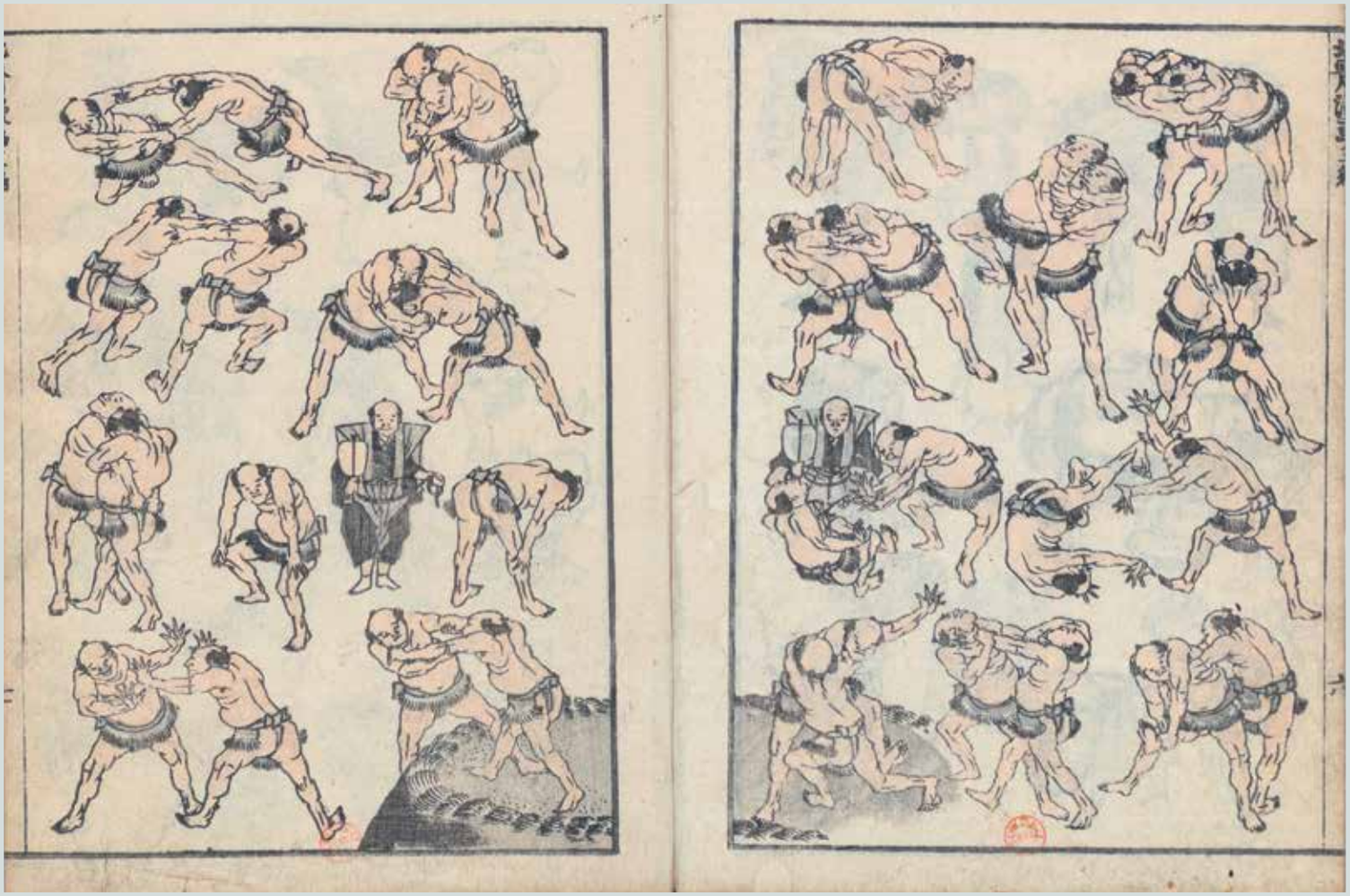
Japanese Painting

"Japanese painting, like its parent art, Chinese painting, differs from its modern European counterpart in that it deliberately foregoes all means of producing an immediate illusion. It knows nothing of the third dimension but confines itself to decorative effects in one plane; at the same time, the extraordinarily developed powers of observation in the Japanese enable it to convey an unusual amount of life and spirit. With the Japanese, space is not indicated by receding degrees of depth, and if represented at all, at least in the best period of their art, is not subject to the laws of a strict perspective, being merely indicated by a series of scenes, as on the stage."

Woldemar von Seidlitz, *A History of Japanese Colour-Prints*, translated by Anne Heard Dyer and Grace Tripler, London, Heinemann, 1910, p. 1

"Hokusai is one of the greatest painters of his nation. From our European point of view, he is at once the greatest and the most genial . . . His works are an encyclopedia of the whole country, a human comedy of the people. Hokusai belonged to the popular school, but he rose above it by the richness and the personality of his picturesque conceptions, by depth of sentiment and a powerful sense of the comic. He was the Rembrandt, the Callot, the Goya, and the Daumier of Japan."

Louis Gonse, *Japanese Art*, Paris, translated by M. P. Nickerson, Chicago, Belford-Clarke, 1891, p. 27



Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849),
Sumo wrestler from Hokusai's sketchbook *Denshin kaishu Hokusai manga*—"An initiation into the transmission of the essence of things", 1815
15 volumes (vol. 3, fol. 6v°–7r°)
Illustrated book with two-color woodblock prints, 22.7 × 15.5 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Prints and Photographs Department, RESERVE DD-649-4

Japanese Art at the Louvre?

"However numerous the enthusiasts, interest in the Japanese print remained confined to a small circle; the general public knew nothing of it, and the same went, of course, for the arts administration. No doubt there were a few at the Musée Guimet, but these were not pieces to give a very elevated idea of the art; happily, Gaston Migeon—who was at the Louvre as assistant to Émile Molinier in the department of objets d'art and gradually took over his role—was determined, as a passionate lover of the country's art, to get Japan, and the Japanese print in particular, into the national collections. This was no easy task; when he spoke of it, some of his colleagues were dumbstruck: to open the doors of the temple to such monkeys, what an idea!"

Raymond Kœchlin, *Souvenirs d'un vieil amateur d'art d'Extrême-Orient*, Chalon-sur-Saône, Imprimerie française et orientale E. Bertrand, 1930, p. 28

Appendices

BIOGRAPHIES

PIERRE BONNARD

(Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1867–Le Cannet, 1947)

Weary of the classes in copying from the antique at the École des Arts Décoratifs, in 1887, Pierre Bonnard enrolled at the Académie Julian where he became part of the first Nabi circle, with Sérusier, Denis, Ranson, and Ibels. Nicknamed "le Nabi très japonard"(the ultra-Japanese Nabi) on account of his passion for Japanese art, he liked to adorn the walls of his room with the gaudy, crepe prints that could be bought for a few pennies in the big department stores. The decorative stylization and artful framing of Japanese art found a particularly eloquent echo in Bonnard, who so completely rejected illusionism as to meld his subject with the background. He sought outlets for his talent in a number of different disciplines: in lithography, with posters, illustrations and prints for magazines, or luxury albums, and also in the decorative arts, with fans, screens, furniture, and stained glass. In this domain, his researches, those that touched on format in particular, saw him play the role of pioneer among the Nabis. Having first conceived an idea, he would cut the canvas and pin it to the wall, without stretcher or easel, and then simply stand there and paint on it, engaging only with the work before him. Resistant to Sérusier's mysticism, he began in 1900 to develop a manner almost Fauvist. Color dissolves form so completely that contour loses itself in the bold juxtaposition of vibrant patches of color, never intermixed, never "sullied". With such color raised to its highest intensity by 1913, the reintroduction of form, modeling, and depth in his work puts Bonnard in a class of his own.

L.P.

MAURICE DENIS

(Grandville, 1870–Paris, 1943)

Noted as a brilliant pupil at the prestigious Lycée Condorcet, Maurice Denis became the chief theorist of the Nabis—the group he formed with Sérusier on arriving at the Académie Julian in 1888—when, in 1890, he published its first manifesto under the title *Définition du néo-traditionnisme*. A proponent of the abolition of genre in art, he was the very embodiment of the universal artist, leaving behind a considerable body of work in many disciplines: from woodblock and lithography for book illustration to sets and costumes for the theatre and also large-scale décors (paintings, stained glass, mosaic) for private houses and churches. His artistic development, from beginnings characterized by a Neo-Impressionist brushstroke and a moderate Cloisonnism, led him to a poetic and timeless painting in the vein of Puvis de Chavannes. Although an admirer of the great tradition represented by the Quattrocento frescoes he encountered in Italy, he developed a personal style that borrowed from the Japanese art familiar to him from his large collection of prints and of frontispieces from the magazine *Artistic Japan*, notably the decorative arabesques with their curved lines. He believed in the autonomy and worth of the decorative work, comprised of forms and colors created for the delight of the eye, and sought to render an event by means of signs charged with the same emotion as it had itself engendered. Nicknamed "le Nabi aux belles icônes" (the Nabi of the Beautiful Icons), he went beyond his vocation of "monk-painter", contributing to the revival of religious painting with the foundation of the Ateliers d'Art Sacré in 1919.

L.P.

HARA ZAIMEI

(1778–1844)

Hara Zaimei was the second son of Hara Zaichū (1750–1837), founder of the Hara school, and succeeded his father at its head. Based in Kyoto, the Hara family were the prime movers of a school of painting that contributed to the late-18th-century artistic resurgence of the imperial capital in the face of the rise of Edo, the administrative capital, seat of government of the Tokugawa shoguns. A court artist and a strongly influential figure in Kyoto's artistic circles, Hara Zaichū had benefited from a comprehensive artistic education open to the innovations of his time. Engaged in his younger years with the long-established Kanō and Tosa schools, he was also introduced to the Chinese painting of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). He was, most importantly, close to the painter Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–95), the leading figure in the realist tendency in the Japanese art of the time, founded on the observation of nature. At the intersection of these varied influences, Hara Zaichū and his successors produced a delicate and elegant painting particularly appealing to the tastes of the court. Under the leadership of Hara Zaimei, the school was made responsible for the official painting studio of the Shinto shrine of Kasuga-taisha, one of the most important holy sites in the country, located in the city of Nara, near to Kyoto.

E.B.

UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE

(Edo, *c.* 1797–Edo, 1858)

The son of a fire brigade officer at the shogun's court, Andō Tokutaro grew up in the dynamic city of Edo, present-day Tokyo, the administrative capital of the empire. Having shown a marked interest in drawing as a child, around the age of fourteen he was accepted as a pupil of Utagawa Toyohiro (1773–1828), thus joining one of the most productive studios of the period. In 1812, he was given his honorary artist name of Utagawa Hiroshige, under which he would become famous. Particularly skillful in landscape painting, he was renowned for his bold compositions and his ability to convey the atmosphere of places and seasons. He was one of the greatest representatives of a particular genre of *ukiyo-e*, the *meisho-e* or "painting of famous views." His most celebrated work, *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, was executed between 1833 and 1834. The previous year, Hiroshige, having succeeded his father in his post, was commanded by the shogun to accompany an official delegation taking horses to be offered as gifts to the imperial court at Kyoto. On his return, the artist produced 55 illustrations, one for each of the stations on the road, and one each for the cities of departure and arrival. These prints immediately became enormously popular and Hiroshige would repeat the formula in many different versions thereafter. When the Japanese print was discovered by the West around 1870, he would become one of the most prized artists by aficionados in Europe, particularly in France.

E.B.

KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI

(Edo, 1760–Edo, 1849)

Not much is known of the origins of Katsushika Hokusai, only that he was born in a rural district near Edo (the Katsushika whose name he kept) and that he was adopted at the age of three by a craftsman—a mirror-maker who worked for the shogunate. He began to paint at five years old, demonstrating his artistic aptitude so rapidly that at the age of thirteen he joined the workshop of a woodblock cutter. In 1778, he entered the studio of Katsukawa Shunshō (1726–92), a leading painter of the time who specialized in portraits of actors. There, he began to produce prints and illustrated books in his own name. On the death of his master, he briefly joined the officially supported Kanō school and then studied Western art and the theory of perspective, like others influenced by the example of painter Shiba Kōkan (1747–1818). Associated with a number of different artistic and intellectual milieus, he was distinguished by an enormous scientific curiosity and a great appetite for travel, reflected not only in the publication of several theoretical works, but also in his *Manga*, the fifteen volumes of sketches he would publish from 1814 on, testimony to his great interest in observing his fellows. A particularly prolific artist, who left more than 30,000 drawings, he ventured into every genre of *ukiyo-e*, even if he is remembered more for his masterly contribution to the art of the landscape print. Unusual, indeed somewhat eccentric of character, he lived a life plagued by recurrent poverty and marked by frequent changes of name and address, each associated with a new facet of his art. A fervent Buddhist deeply influenced by the Shinto religion, he made no effort to seek official recognition but devoted his life to his artistic researches. Touchingly, the works of his later years are signed with the pseudonym *Gakyōjin*, meaning "the old man mad about drawing."

E.B.

KANŌ TANSHIN MOROMICHI

(1785–1835)

Today an almost forgotten member of the prestigious, state-sponsored Kanō school of painting, Tanshin Morimishi was nonetheless one of the heads of the Kajibashi studio, the sixth since its establishment in 1621. Founded in Kyoto in the mid-15th century by Kanō Masanobu (1434–1530), the Kanō school was organized on hereditary lines, the successive heads of the school and of its constituent studios all being members of the Kanō family by descent or adoption. Very close to both the imperial family and the shogunal government, for almost four centuries the Kanō painters enjoyed an almost hegemonic position on the Japanese art scene, receiving the most important commissions for the decoration of the palaces and residences of the ruling families. The school underwent a significant expansion during the Edo period (1603–1867), thanks to the energy and initiative of the great painter Kanō Tannyū (1602–74). Close to the new Tokugawa shogun dynasty, Kanō Tannyū left the school's original center in Kyoto to open a second branch in Edo, the new administrative capital of the empire. Located in the Kajibashi quarter, the new studio rapidly flourished, its success prompting over the following decades the establishment of three more Kanō studios in the city. Several generations of Kanō Tannyū's successors—among them his direct descendant Kanō Tanshin Morimishi—maintained the revitalized tradition of decorative art he had inaugurated, eschewing monumental compositions and overly rich color for tightly-framed subjects and the vitality of the inked line.

E.B.

ODILON REDON

(Bordeaux, 1840–Paris, 1916)

Brought up in the wine-growing region of the Médoc and then Bordeaux, Bertrand Redon, later known as Odilon Redon, had a solitary childhood that accentuated his contemplative temperament and deep attachment to nature. He began his artistic education at the age of fifteen, under Stanislas Gorin, a watercolorist well known in the southwest of France, and began to study architecture in 1857. Having failed the entrance examination for the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, in 1864 he entered the studio of Jean-Léon Gérôme, an experience so disappointing that he rapidly came to reject the idea of an academic training. His encounter with the draughtsman and engraver Rodolphe Bresdin marked a turning point in his life, introducing him to the etching and the lithography to which he would devote himself for almost two decades, producing numerous engravings and charcoal drawings entirely in black and white that he called his "Noirs." The early 1890s saw him reintroduce color into his work as he turned to oil paint and pastels, in which he revealed himself to be a colorist of genius.
A contemporary of the Impressionists, he maintained his distance from the art movements of his time to produce an uncategorizable body of work that would greatly influence later generations. His singularity as an artist did not, however, preclude his involvement in the wider artistic milieu of the time. A tutelary figure to the avant-garde, rather than the leader of a school, he established a very close relationship with the young Nabis and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Symbolist writers.

E.B.

KER-XAVIER ROUSSEL

(Lorry-lès-Metz, 1867–L'Étang-la-Ville, 1944)

Born in eastern France in 1867, Ker-Xavier Roussel was encouraged in his artistic vocation from an early age by his parents. After studying at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, where he met Édouard Vuillard, whose sister he would marry, he entered—together with Vuillard—the studio of Diogène Maillart. There, he found himself impressed by the work of Charles Cottet, leader of the Bande Noire, the "Black Band" of artists who rejected the luminous palette of the Impressionists. Although an admirer of Cézanne, Degas, Renoir, and Monet, he sought to broaden his artistic horizons by enrolling at the Académie Julian, an alternative provider of traditional art education. He left the Académie in the 1890s when he joined the Nabis, the group that had formed around Paul Sérusier, another pupil at the school and a champion of Gauguin's Synthetism. While his early works are thoroughly imbued with the Nabi aesthetic, he soon distinguished himself by a predilection for the poetic in a Mallarmean and intimist register. He would undergo a radical change of artistic orientation after the group's dissolution in the early years of the new century. Under the shock of the powerful Mediterranean sun, encountered on successive visits to the South of France, his palette grew lighter and he turned to bucolic Arcadian landscapes peopled by nymphs and fauns. From the Nabis, he nonetheless retained decorative skills that he would exploit in his décors for the Comédie des Champs-Élysées in 1913, the headquarters of the League of Nations in Geneva in 1936, and the Palais de Chaillot in 1937.

L.P.

MARGUERITE SÉRUSIER

(Lons-le-Saunier, 1879–Châteauneuf-du-Faou, 1950)

Born in the Jura in 1879, Marguerite, daughter of French army officer Pierre Abel Gabriel-Claude, began her artistic education as a brilliant student at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris before completing her training at the Académie Ranson, established in 1908 by the Nabi Paul Ranson. She was one of the first to enroll at the new school in the Rue Henri-Monnier, and the best pupil of Paul Sérusier, a teacher there at the time whom she later married in 1912. After a period of employment as a drawing teacher in the Paris schools, she was appointed head of the Atelier Martine, Paul Poiret's design studio staffed by young women. As a specialist in decoration, she had an important influence on the textile arts in Paris in the years before 1914. She also stoked her husband's interest in tapestry, a fascination that finds expression in his painted frescoes for Châteauneuf-du-Faou and in the appearance of the embroiderer as a theme in his paintings. Her fondness for the floral themes she found in nature and translated into decorative motifs for screens and rugs also inspired her husband to a less esoteric painting—his researches in the decorative prevailing over the mystical in tonally harmonious landscapes influenced both by embroidery and by Japanese art. After Paul Sérusier's death in 1927, Marguerite pursued her artistic career from her home in Châteauneuf-du-Faou, all the while preserving her husband's memory for posterity.

L.P.

PAUL SÉRUSIER

(Paris, 1864–Morlaix, 1927)

Elected a student representative at the Académie Julian, where he enrolled in 1885, Paul Sérusier embodied, in his eloquence and his philosophy, the spirit of the Nabi group that formed around him in 1888. Closely engaged with the Symbolism then prevailing in literature, he developed the group's doctrine by casting its reflections in a contemporary language. His thinking was influenced by his encounter with Émile Bernard in Pont-Aven in the summer of 1888. Through him, that autumn, he met Gauguin, who invited the young artist to paint a view of the Bois d'Amour in accordance with Synthetist principles, that is, by using areas of pure, flat color to reconstitute the primal sensation of nature. That painting, dubbed *The Talisman*, became the Nabi icon. The following summer, it was in learning how to paint a picture from memory in the studio that he succeeded in freeing himself of the illusionist temptation. The years 1896 to 1903 were, for Sérusier, a period of heightened mystical sensibility nourished by his retreats at the Archabbey of Beuron in Germany. Introduced to the abbey's doctrine of sacred art by Verkade, now a monk, and Father Desiderius Lenz, he was attracted to an aesthetic that sought in its decorative works to recover the mysticism of Egyptian, Greek and Italian Primitive art through the mathematical organization of the composition. This led him to an archaizing, hieratic solemnity before he turned once again to nature and the simple joy of color. He did not hesitate to start a painting with the boldest of hues, then to calm the whole by the simplicity of the Japanese-inspired composition.

L.P.

TŌSHŪSAI SHARAKU

(active *c.* 1794–95)

The life and true identity of Tōshūsai Sharaku remain unknown today, making this artist one of the great puzzles of Japanese art. A period of ten months between 1794 and 1795 saw the publication of some 160 prints signed with this name, revealing a fully developed talent whose production was as sudden as it was ephemeral. The most remarkable being portraits of actors which stand in the long, already highly formalized tradition of the *yakusa-e*, portraits of renowned kabuki actors, at the time one of the most popular genres among the vast production of Japanese prints. These portraits of one or two characters depicted in close-up, in full or three-quarter profile, in accordance with the canon of the *okubi-e*, the portrait in bust, were nonetheless very different from the traditional offering. For Sharaku introduced into his portraits a physical realism and a psychological force foreign to the highly codified world of kabuki. In the classical form of dance-drama that had emerged in the late 17th century, an actor's quality was judged by his capacity to embody character types through highly stylized gestures and sophisticated conventions of make-up and costume. Revealing the actors' personality and the reality of their physical features beneath the nonetheless very present make-up, Sharaku's portraits were not particularly appreciated at the time. Rediscovered in the late 19th century, first by Western and then by Japanese collectors, Sharaku is today considered to be one of the great masters of the Japanese print. His work would have a profound influence on artists of the Parisian avant-garde, notably Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

E.B.

ÉDOUARD VUILLARD

(Cuiseaux, 1868–La Baule, 1940)

Supported in his vocation as a painter by his friend Ker-Xavier Roussel, Édouard Vuillard enrolled at the Académie Julian in 1886. He joined the Nabis, however, only after having met Bonnard through Maurice Denis in 1890. Less mystical than Sérusier or Denis, he shared with Roussel and Bonnard an interest in painting as an immediate sensation. While his early works of 1888 were still under the influence of the great masters he admired at the Louvre, he then sought a path of his own, experimenting first with pointillist technique before turning in 1890 to Gauguin's Synthetism, whose solid application of paint he retained. It was in Japanese art, above all, that he found inspiration, and in the decorative motif that is everywhere in the dress fabrics and the wallpapers in the background. Inspired by the women's world he encountered at his mother's corsetry workshop, he creates an intimate atmosphere with his palette of half-tones and the familial character of the scenes depicted, be they domestic interiors, bucolic scenes, or glimpses of public squares. He also proved to be an accomplished decorative artist, both on the domestic scale for his private clients and in the wider realm of the theatre and other public buildings. His extensive network of patrons afforded him access to Parisian high society, whose portraitist he became, and prompted him to abandon Nabi teaching in favor of a return to tradition in the treatment of space and the rendering of varying light sources, at which he excelled.

L.P.

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