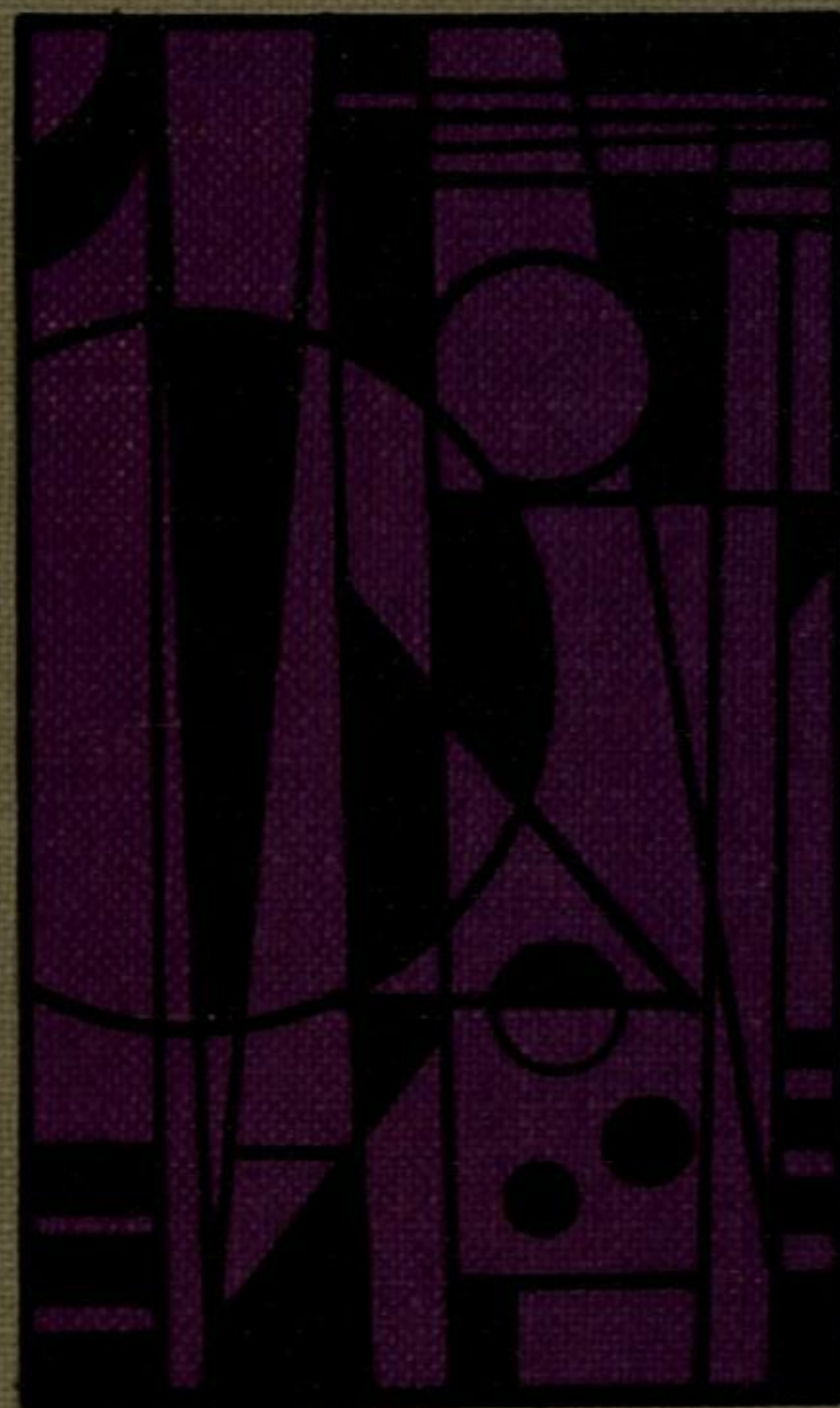


**Les XX and
Belgian Avant-Gardism
1868-1894**

Jane Block



**UMI Research Press
Studies in the Fine Arts: The Avant-Garde**

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Belgian Avant-Gardism
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by

Jane Block



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Introduction

This study will examine the origins and history of the Belgian avant-garde group Les XX, which existed from 1884-1893. During that decade Les XX became the most important artistic group of its kind in Belgium and achieved international significance. One element of its achievement was the bringing together of the arts through lectures, readings of new poetry, and musical performance—all held in the exhibition rooms. The unity of the arts was part of Les XX's program of avant-gardism. By playing the music of contemporary composers, especially French and Belgian, by hosting lectures given by the elite of the French literary world, and by displaying the works of predominantly Belgian, French, and English artists, Les XX sought to create a showcase for artistic excellence and novelty. In its unification of the avant-garde in the literary, visual, and musical spheres, Les XX hoped not only to identify the avant-garde elements at home but to nurture and sustain them as well.

Another of Les XX's distinguishing features was that it invited foreign artists to exhibit with it at its annual exhibitions. These invitations were made with particular skill and included such names as Seurat, Gauguin, Lautrec, Van Gogh, and Crane, artists who at that time were controversial or little known. Modern surveys of art history in their scant references to Les XX usually stress the group's importance as an exhibition vehicle for French and British artists,¹ but Les XX already, in its own time, was known for the international character of its exhibitions. This internationalism turned Les XX into a forum for avant-gardism so important that a number of foreign artists, including Raffaëlli, Rodin, Whistler, and Gauguin lobbied to become either members of the group or *invités*.

A third aspect of Les XX's success was its establishment of Brussels as the artistic capital of Belgium. The Triennial Salon, held alternately in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, meant Belgium had three artistic centers. Ghent and especially Antwerp were tied to a Flemish heritage which was content to preserve the past glories and not to produce new ones. French-speaking Brussels on the other hand, was more open to international currents especially from Paris and sought a dynamic, ever-changing concept of modern art. Les XX and its successor La Libre Esthétique were such important outlets that the artistic dominance of Brussels was assured.

Scholarship on Les XX is fairly meager. Two notable exceptions are Francine-Claire Legrand's catalogue *Le Groupe des XX et son temps* (1962) and Madeleine Octave Maus's book *Trente Années de Lutte pour l'Art* (1926).² Madame Maus, the wife of the group's secretary, Octave Maus, has written a highly personalized and anecdotal history of her husband's work while Madame Legrand has devoted most of her energy to catalogue entries which, although containing invaluable biographical information, do not provide us with a full sense of Les XX's evolution and significance. In addition, Susan Canning's dissertation, "A History and Critical Review of the Salons of 'Les Vingt', 1884-1893," provides a chronological survey of Les XX's exhibitions.³

Since Legrand's groundbreaking catalogue on Les XX, the Archives de l'art contemporain, under her auspices, has published primary source material from the archives of Les XX and La Libre Esthétique, Les XX's successor. Thus far, they have published letters from James Ensor, Théo van Rysselberghe, Paul Signac, and Jan Toorop to Octave Maus.⁴ These letters shed important light on the role Les XX played in the correspondents' lives.

More recently the sesquicentennial anniversary of Belgium as a country was celebrated in the United States and Belgium with a series of exhibitions. The Brooklyn Museum's show, *Belgian Art 1880-1914*, did much to reclaim the artistic importance and impact of Belgian art upon Europe at the fin-de-siècle.⁵

A number of books and articles, of course, touch on individual members of the group. For example, Robert Herbert's masterful *Neo-Impressionism* (1968) and Jean Sutter's *The Neo-Impressionists* (1970) have significantly contributed to awareness in the United States of the role of Belgian Vingtistes such as Willy Finch, Georges Lemmen, Théo van Rysselberghe, and Henry van de Velde in the Neo-Impressionist movement.⁶ However, these studies treat these individuals as Neo-Impressionists and do not try to deal with the history or significance of Les XX. Social historians such as Eugenia Herbert in *The Artist and Social Reform* and Donald Egbert in *Social Radicalism and the Arts* have briefly discussed Les XX as an avant-garde society.⁷ However the main foci of such historians are the condition and responsibilities of the artist in society and the economic and social factors which affected the artist's role. Little is said about the evolution and internal dynamics of Les XX's group activity.

This study, on the other hand, attempts both to offer a comprehensive view of Belgian avant-garde art from 1868 to 1894 and to relate its artistic aims to the political and social milieu while charting the path of Les XX from its roots in other avant-garde groups, its reaction to the academic tradition, and its internal aesthetic evolution which ranged from Impressionism to the Decorative Arts. This research should also serve to illuminate the strong reciprocal nature of the ties between artistic centers, especially Paris and Brussels, and reveal the unique contribution of Les XX to modern art. What the study does not do is follow the careers of the thirty-two individual artists

who were members of Les XX nor even attempt to identify all the works actually shown at Les XX. This would be impossible because of the insufficient descriptions in the Les XX catalogues and in the contemporary press. Instead, this study seeks to discuss the contribution of the group as a whole and its impact on Belgian art and the artistic establishment. It describes how and why Les XX came to be one of the most avant-garde groups in Europe during its time.

That Les XX was founded in Brussels in 1883 was not an accident of fate. Brussels, under the liberal policies of Kings Léopold I and II, had served as a refuge for political exiles from France. The proximity of Belgium to their home country, the common language, and a press constitutionally protected from government censorship appealed to many of these exiles. Artists and writers such as Victor Hugo, Charles Baudelaire, Gustave Courbet, and Jules Vallès had fled from France to Brussels. In this relatively liberal context Belgium was undergoing a period of great social unrest. Recessions, unemployment, and an influx of radical ideas from France galvanized the working class to demand universal suffrage, compulsory education, and better working conditions.

Les XX arose in this atmosphere of social and economic turbulence. Just as working class radicals sought to throw off the yoke of the bourgeoisie, Les XX sought to unshackle art from an antiquated system of Salons and juries. The monopoly on exhibitions which the Salon held had been previously challenged in Paris by the Salon des Refusés and the Impressionist shows, in London by the Pre-Raphaelites and by the Grosvenor Gallery, and in Brussels by the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts (S.L.B.A.), La Chrysalide, and L'Essor. However none of these groups (excepting the S.L.B.A.) characterized its struggle against the Salon as an international one. The parallel between the international anarchist and socialist challenge to the ruling establishment and Les XX's struggles was pointedly made by Emile Verhaeren: "Elle est ardente, jeune, âpre, violente; elle rencontre mêmes tendances, mêmes ennemis, mêmes espoirs, même but, mêmes obstacles."⁸

Les XX was composed of a group of artists sympathetic to anarchist ideas who detested established art and sought out *les apporteurs de neuf* both at home and abroad. The protection and hospitality the group afforded both members and *invités* provided the Belgians with an opportunity to see the most avant-garde styles of art on their own soil. This had the effect of turning Les XX into a forum of avant-garde art. Its exhibitions became a marketplace of avant-gardism where artists and critics could see the latest and most controversial art produced. For an innovative core of artists, such as Lemmen, Finch, and Van de Velde, these exhibitions helped expand their creative powers. It is doubtful that without Les XX as a catalyst, these artists could have achieved what they did in such a short span of time.

Thus this anarchist group of avant-gardists, working imaginatively on an international scale, successfully challenged the existing artistic establishment at

home and created an exciting, revolutionary milieu in which its members could thrive. Both outside and within its borders, Les XX spawned imitators who adopted Les XX's organization. By doing so, Les XX expanded the narrow definition of art upheld by the Academy and ultimately helped contribute to the Salon's demise. Because of its active campaign to undermine the authority of the Salon system throughout Europe, Les XX was both a symptom and a cause of the Salon's decline.

Although it was the gallery system that would eventually become the dominant artistic institution of the twentieth century, Les XX helped further the tradition of artist-controlled societies. Les XX, unlike the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists, was devoted not to any one style, but rather to a philosophy that would nurture a wide range of avant-garde art. This tradition was carried by Van de Velde to Weimar where the concept of the unity of the arts reached its pinnacle in the achievements of the Bauhaus.

The Avant-Garde Predecessors of Les XX

“Bonsoir aux vieux!
Salut aux jeunes!”

Théo Hannon in *L'Artiste*,
12 November 1876

In Belgium, as in the rest of Europe, art during the nineteenth century was regulated by the government-sponsored Academies and Salons. Artists who deviated from the artistic norm which was embodied in precepts taught by the Academy were either rejected by the juries of placement for the annual Salon or, if admitted, the works of these artists were hung in inaccessible and obscure corners. This had serious economic consequences for artists because the Salon was almost the only place for artists to market their works and establish a reputation.

During the years 1830 through 1880, Belgian art largely mirrored artistic development in France, usually lagging by several years. After Belgium's independence from the Dutch in 1830, François-Joseph Navez (1787-1869), a pupil of Jacques-Louis David, became director of the Brussels Academy and head of the Neoclassical movement there. About the same time Gustave Wappers (1803-1874) and his followers introduced Romanticism into Belgium.

In 1851, after Courbet showed his *Stone Breakers*, a Realist school arose in Belgium. Charles de Groux (1825-1870) and Constantin Meunier (1831-1905), both pupils of Navez, were at the center of the Realist movement. As in France, Realism in Belgium represented a major challenge to academic art and was scorned by the critics and all elements of the establishment. In 1868, Meunier and De Groux helped form the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts (S.L.B.A.) as an alternate exhibition mechanism to the Salon and as a rallying point against the *vieilles perruques*—all those conservative painters whose work was either Neoclassical or Romantic. The formation of the S.L.B.A. in Brussels is generally viewed as the beginning of avant-gardism in Belgium.¹

Unfortunately no archives or documents now exist which could help answer the many questions pertaining to the activities of the S.L.B.A. Even the exact date of its formation is unknown.² Most of the information about this

group comes from a single periodical, the bimonthly *L'Art Libre*, which began publication on 15 December 1871 some three years after the group's formation. The publication served to defend the S.L.B.A. against reactionary criticism and to disseminate its avant-garde ideas. The group's manifesto was displayed in the second issue of *L'Art Libre* on 1 January 1872 and was reprinted in each issue until the periodical's final number of 1 December 1872.³ In this unsigned manifesto written by Camille van Camp, one of the S.L.B.A.'s founding members, *L'Art Libre* declared itself the enemy of dogmatism which it considered the negation of liberty. Above all *L'Art Libre* wished to be a review of free discussion and called for "l'interprétation libre et individuelle de la nature."⁴ In trying to overcome official bias, the S.L.B.A. appealed to artists of all nations and attracted an eclectic core of honorary members including Jules Breton, Jean-François Millet, Alfred Stevens, Théodore Rousseau, Camille Corot, Eugène Fromentin, Honoré Daumier and Félix Bracquemond.

The S.L.B.A. organized its first exhibition in December 1868 at 5 Galerie du Roi in Brussels. *La Chronique* reviewed the exhibition declaring the group "des apôtres plus ou moins avancés de la donnée moderne."⁵ The group's next exhibition seems to have taken place in March 1872 as a benefit for the *écoles gardiennes* for the indigent children of Minimes. During the year the S.L.B.A. also organized a subscription for the victims of the Chicago fire. These benefits may reflect the group's belief that, as oppressed artists, the members shared a common bond with the less fortunate members of society and with disaster victims. Additional exhibitions were held in Brussels on 15 May 1872 and on 4 August 1872 at Blankenberghe. The August exhibition at Blankenberghe seems to have been the last.

The paucity of information on the S.L.B.A. is such that there is no list of all its members nor any evidence that catalogues were printed for its exhibitions. Edmond Lambrichs's undated painting *Portraits des Membres de la Société Libre des Beaux Arts* (Illustration 1) hanging in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, provides us with as complete a list of the organizing committee of the S.L.B.A. as we are ever likely to have. The painting is a group portrait and includes the major artists of the Realist movement in Belgium: Charles de Groux, who was declared the leader of this movement in 1853 when he exhibited his *L'Ivrogne* (Illustration 2); Louis Dubois, former pupil of Thomas Couture in Paris, who showed the closest affinities to Gustave Courbet; Louis Artan who painted at Barbizon and was friendly with Corot and who is known primarily for his seascapes; Félicien Rops, painter and engraver, who frequented Paris and studied there with the master etchers Bracquemond and Jacquemart. The standing figures from the extreme left are: Edmond Lambrichs (tacking up the "ordre du jour" of the S.L.B.A. for 28 February 1870), Louis Artan, Félicien Rops, Jules Raeymaeckers, Jean-Baptiste Meunier, Eugène Smits, Théodore Baron, and Hippolyte de la Charlerie (whose portrait is an effigy since he died 14 November 1869). The

seated figures from the extreme left are Edouard Huberti, F. Boudin, the amateur painter whose fortune made him president of the society, Charles de Groux, Camille van Camp, the sculptor Antoine-Félix Bouré, Alfred Verwée, Constantin Meunier (brother of Jean-Baptiste Meunier), and Louis Dubois whose arm rests upon issues of *L'Art Libre* and its successor *L'Art Universel*.

In *L'Art Libre* of 1 August 1872 Camille Lemonnier, novelist, art critic, and future editor of *L'Art Universel*, advised artists to turn to realism:

Je dis aux artistes: Soyez de votre siècle. Il vous appartient d'être les historiens de votre temps, de le raconter tel que vous le voyez, de l'exprimer tel que vous le sentez, sous toutes ses faces, sous toutes ses formes, dans toutes ses manifestations, à travers toutes ses vicissitudes et toutes ses grandeurs.⁶

I appeal to artists: be part of your century. It behooves you to be the historians of your time: to relate it the way you see it, to express it the way you feel it, from every aspect, in all its guises and manifestations, through all its vicissitudes and greatness.

Rops in a letter to his friend, Edmond Picard, echoed Lemonnier's sentiments in revealing his own artistic manifesto:

Avant tout je voudrais peindre notre époque. . . . Quand je dis qu'un peintre doit peindre son temps, je crois qu'il doit peindre surtout le caractère, le sentiment moral, les passions, et l'impression psychologique de ce temps, avant d'en peindre les costumes et les accessoires. . . .⁷

Above all, I would like to paint our own time. . . . I believe that most importantly (an artist) must paint the character, moral feeling, passions, and psychological impression of his time, before painting its dress and accessories. . . .

The official jury was harsh towards this band of innovators. Their paintings were either refused or hung badly at the salons. Camille Lemonnier declared,

En vain, la Société Libre multipliait ses efforts en vue de la représentation des minorités aux Commissions organisatrices des Salons. . . . Il en résultait pour les zéloteurs des tendances nouvelles, soit des exclusions systématiques, soit des placements désavantageux qui signalaient la vivacité des rancuns et rendaient plus tranchées les démarcations.⁸

The Société Libre vainly multiplied its efforts to get representation for minorities at the organizing commission of the Salons. . . . It followed that the zealots of the new tendencies were either systematically excluded or their works disadvantageously placed. This signaled the sharpness of the rancor and rendered the boundary lines more distinct.

However, the lessening of the opposition to Realism was marked by the Salon's acceptance in 1872 of many of the artists associated with the S.L.B.A. At the Salon of 1875 the huge success of Charles Hermans's painting *A l'aube* marked an important turning point in the struggle against Neoclassical and Romantic painting.

The demise of the S.L.B.A. probably occurred in the mid-1870s. As with its formation, there are no documents to pinpoint the date of the group's dissolution. The weakening of resistance to Realism at the Salons and the financial bankruptcy of its defenders, *L'Art Libre* and *L'Art Universel*, undoubtedly contributed to the S.L.B.A.'s decline.

The immediate heir to the S.L.B.A. was the group La Chrysalide. Information on La Chrysalide is also scant and once again comes mainly from the contemporary press. The weekly art journal *L'Artiste*, founded on 28 November 1875 under the directorship of Théo Hannon (1851-1916), art critic, poet, and artist, defended the cause of the new group.

Like the S.L.B.A., La Chrysalide organized its own shows but appears to have had a catalogue for its first exhibition.⁹ There is a great deal of continuity with the Société Libre des Beaux Arts in the membership of La Chrysalide. Artists such as Alfred Verwée, Théodore Baron, Constantin Meunier, Louis Artan, Charles Louis Cardon, Victor Fontaine, Leopold Speeckaert, Périclès Pantazis, Edouard Agneessens, Marie Collart, and Charles van der Stappen exhibited with both organizations.

Félicien Rops designed the invitation for the first exhibition which was held on 4 November 1876 at an old tavern, Le Ballon, on the rue Cantersteen. His etching (Illustration 3) shows a worm eating *La Chronique Artistique* and butterflies fluttering around the sarcophagus of *Pictura Academica*. Hence, La Chrysalide or "Chrysalis"—the cocoon stage of the development of the butterfly—symbolized the impending triumph of the new art over the conservative academic painting. Rops's etching in turn inspired a poem published in *L'Artiste* in which Hannon sums up the confrontation between conservative and avant-garde: "Bonsoir aux vieux! Salut aux jeunes!"¹⁰

In La Chrysalide's first exhibition these *révolutionnaires* paid homage to the deceased Hippolyte Boulenger (1837-1874), leader of the independent school in Belgium, by exhibiting one of his works, *La Messe de St. Hubert* (Illustration 4). Camille Lemonnier, as one might expect, befriended the Chrysalidiens in his review.¹¹ However, the critic for *La Chronique* sharply attacked them for exhibiting unfinished works (*esquisses*) which should not leave the atelier.¹² On the evening of a banquet held for the members of La Chrysalide, a Chrysalidien (a Monsieur G. we are told) composed a song dedicated to his group which revealed the intransigent stance of la Chrysalide: "Au Ballon révolutionnaire hurlent nos tableaux pétrolins. . . ." ¹³ The first exhibition was open free to the public every evening from 7:00 to 9:00 P.M. and remained open from 4 November to 4 December 1876. According to the newspaper *L'Etoile Belge* of 1 December 1876 the exhibition was a financial success as many of the artists sold their works.¹⁴

The second exhibition in 1878 took place in a private room above the tavern of Le Petit Louvain, Place de Louvain and was open free from 7:00 to 9:00 P.M.¹⁵ The final exhibition took place at the Salle Janssens, 9 rue de

l'Ecuyer, and ran from 8 May to 8 June 1881, from 10:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. This time an entry fee of fifty centimes was charged.

La Chrysalide, like the S.L.B.A., was characterized by its commitment to nature. Victor Reding of the *Fédération Artistique* remarked of this last exhibition, "A la porte les machines historiques, religieuses et les compositions académiques, place aux impressions, aux imitations de la nature."¹⁶

While La Chrysalide was the avant-garde successor to the S.L.B.A., a more moderate group, L'Essor, also existed at this time. L'Essor's original name, Le Cercle d'Elèves et Anciens Elèves des Académies des Beaux-Arts, reflects its links to the Academy and its conservative tendencies.¹⁷ L'Essor's first exhibition was held from 20 December 1876 to 19 January 1877 at Lucas-Huys on the rue Ducale in Brussels.¹⁸ It was open free to the public from 11:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. and from 8:00 P.M. until 10:00 P.M.¹⁹ The show was financed by the sale of lottery tickets. A ticket cost fifty centimes and subscribers were encouraged to buy ten at a time which entitled them to a photograph of one of the works at the exhibition. The proceeds from these tickets were used by the executive committee to purchase works which were raffled off at the close of the exhibition.

L'Essor used the lottery primarily as a merchandising device to gain financial support. However, the existence of the lottery reflected two important characteristics of the group: its emulation of the Salon and its emphasis on the commercialization of art.

The way in which L'Essor selected works for the lottery was imitative of the Salon. The executive committee, acting as a jury, chose the works that would be raffled off. Being chosen for the lottery not only guaranteed the artist a sale, but was an honor similar to receiving a Salon medal. Artists were thus encouraged to create works that appealed to the largest audience since these would most likely be purchased by the *tombola*. An inevitable result of the lottery system was that artists tended to pander to public taste.

The lottery also commercialized the exhibitions. Not only did it inject an element of chance and create a circuslike atmosphere, but it was an extremely practical way of selling paintings. The lottery made it possible for anyone, regardless of means, potentially to own a work. This popular appeal attracted visitors to the exhibition, especially since admission was free.

As we shall see in Chapter 5, Les XX rejected L'Essor's lottery system and concept of art as a commodity. Les XX charged admission and deliberately created a serious exhibition atmosphere. Les XX would not permit chance to intervene in so important a decision as acquiring art. Despite this elitism, Les XX did desire to elevate public taste, but only on Les XX's own terms.

L'Essor's exhibitions were, however, extremely successful. In its first year there were many buyers.²⁰ Among the patrons were the Count of Flanders and the English ambassador.²¹ *La Chronique* reported that the king bought five of

the works at the show.²² It was quite a coup for the new group that the king, who opened the official Salon, visited L'Essor's show and promised to attend the next one as well.²³ He kept his word and visited the second exhibition at the Salle Marugg, 15 rue du Bois Sauvage, where he bought the works of nine artists.²⁴ Over the next several years, he continued to support the group, at times buying as many as 800 lottery tickets.²⁵

The critic for *L'Artiste*, Marc Véry, alias Théo Hannon and member of La Chrysalide, found this official acceptance and patronage objectionable. "Au Lucas-Huys, nous sommes peut-être en présence des académiciens de demain. Il règne là un vague relent de commandes officielles, de récompenses académiques, de chemins de la croix gouvernementaux, de palmes, de rubans, de médailles. . . ." ²⁶ [At Lucas-Huys we are perhaps in the presence of the academicians of tomorrow. There reigns a faint musty odor of official commissions, academic rewards, decorations, ribbons, and medals. . . .] We should recall that the S.L.B.A. and La Chrysalide received no such royal patronage.

At the second exhibition in 1878, Hannon continued his attack in the same vein: "Ce qui manque en général à cette exposition, c'est la jeunesse, c'est l'exubérance et le laisser aller naïf des exécutants qui débutent et n'obéissent encore qu'à leur instinct secret, à leur sens intime, à leurs aspirations vagues d'artistes. . . ." ²⁷ [In general, what is missing from this exhibition is youthfulness, exuberance, and an unsophisticated letting-go by these beginning artists, who obey only their secret instinct, their innermost feeling, their vague artistic aspirations. . . .] Thus Hannon, while clearly partisan, saw from the very inception of L'Essor its bourgeois, conservative tendencies.

However Hannon makes his argument more extreme than the facts would warrant. Coexisting with this conservative bourgeois element was a progressive faction including several members of La Chrysalide. The very fact that these Chrysalidiens were included in L'Essor indicates a receptivity to all types of art. This eclecticism was perhaps L'Essor's greatest strength and undoubtedly contributed to its longevity.

Lucien Solvay's review in *La Gazette* of 22 February 1881 helps clarify L'Essor's artistic position. In this article Solvay compared three artistic groups in which the young painters of Brussels were participants. L'Union des Arts which was formed in 1876 as a result of a scission of L'Essor, is clearly the most conservative. L'Essor comprised both conservative and advanced elements, whereas La Chrysalide was "le plus pointu des trois." ²⁸

Emile Verhaeren supported Solvay's opinion of L'Essor with his 28 February 1882 article in the *Journal des Beaux Arts*. Once again L'Essor is compared to the inferior L'Union des Arts: "Les deux sociétés sont composées de jeunes, de débutants, dans la carrière et par conséquent de lutteurs. Ce qui charmait dans l'Exposition de l'Essor, c'était l'audace, l'exploration en pays d'originalité, la fougue, la confiance en soi. . . ." ²⁹

With the L'Essor exhibition in 1881 we discover *L'Art Moderne's* opinion of this group. This periodical had a particular importance since later it was to become the principal defender of Les XX. In its very first issue, 6 March 1881, *L'Art Moderne* professed to see "Beaucoup d'efforts dans les directions variées: parfois le vieux jeu, plus souvent le nouveau. Une école peu définie, mais saine sauf quelques écarts."³⁰ The author continued his review praising Fernand Khnopff and Willy Finch, both future Vingtistes, as well as Amedée Lynen and Léon Frederic, both loyal to L'Essor until its dissolution in 1891. However Léon Herbo is singled out for criticism because his characters are "proches voisins de ceux qui se voient dans les machines qu'on appelait la grrrande [sic] peinture vers 1830."³¹ Hannon in fact complained about Herbo as early as the first L'Essor exhibition, declaring, "M. Herbo dans la sève de ses vingt ans peint comme un académicien de la cinquantaine...."³²

The year 1882 brought continued attacks on Léon Herbo. *L'Art Moderne* of 15 January 1882 stated, "Nous sommes vraiment affligés de voir Herbo se lancer de plus en plus dans une peinture commune, fausse et irritante...."³³ *L'Art Moderne* further accused Herbo of appealing to mercantile interests in order to sell his works.

Verhaeren in the *Journal des Beaux Arts et de la Littérature*, although praising L'Essor for its liveliness, claimed Herbo's work occupied an undeserved place of honor:

... tout en tas de sujets de chromolithographie, fulgurants de médiocrité des portraits de femmes olives, des types orientales alanguies, aux yeux sales, aux mains de cire, aux cheveux bleus à force d'être noirs.... Comment M. Herbo peut-il croire que des tableaux pareils intéressent encore, après que certains artistes ont pris de nous en dégoûter à tout jamais.³⁴

... a huge pile of chromolithographic subjects, fulgurating with mediocrity; portraits of olive-skinned women, of languishing oriental types with dull eyes, waxen hands, whose hair is blue by dint of being black.... How can Monsieur Herbo really believe that such paintings can still be appealing?

In 1883 *L'Art Moderne* continued the attack on Herbo and singled out his *Psyché* (Illustration 5) and *Bacchante* for their

poses savamment bêtes et niaisement voluptueuses... des poupées fardées, ravissantes, pour les imaginations naïvement érotiques... Des Carolus Duran de contrebande, des Cabanal de contrefaçon, mais toujours le faux goût, l'horrible prétention, le contraire de la vérité, la vie en travestissement....³⁵

poses knowingly stupid and foolishly voluptuous... painted dolls, ravishing in their naively erotic poses... contraband Carolus-Duran, counterfeit Cabanal, but always false taste, horrible pretention, the opposite of truth, life in travesty....

However, critics who were largely conservative, such as those who wrote for the Antwerp-based *Fédération Artistique*, were great admirers of Herbo's

work. Here *Psyché* is praised as a "morceau de peinture sérieuse, en même temps qu'agréable à voir. . . . C'est l'un des clous du Salon."³⁶

The controversy over Herbo's work came to epitomize the split between academic and avant-garde art. It also reflected the division within Belgium between Flemish-speaking Antwerp and French-speaking Brussels. That Antwerp (and its sister Flemish city, Ghent) should become the chief proponent of an official and conservative art is not surprising. Proud of its Flemish heritage, the artistic ideal of Antwerp was represented by artists such as Rubens and Jordaens. This preoccupation with the past made artistic experimentation almost impossible. Within Antwerp's hermetic world, painters were drawn to historical and mythological subject matter which was the mainstay of academic art.

Reinforcing this conservative art was the *mouvement flamand* which reached a climax in 1884. In that year, the Catholic party elected a majority to Parliament and turned out the Liberals who had governed for thirty of the previous thirty-eight years. The Catholics took several steps to recognize and encourage the Flemish language and culture. Flemish was established as an official language in the courts; the Flemish University of Ghent was founded; and currency was finally printed in both French and Flemish languages. Although these reforms were clearly progressive from the Flemish point of view, the *mouvement flamand* was essentially a conservative movement. It sought to preserve and revive a suppressed Flemish heritage and was championed by the conservative Catholic party. It is thus not surprising that Flemish art and art criticism were especially conservative in the 1880s.

Les XX, however, was committed to fostering a climate in which constant artistic experimentation could take place. Thus it rejected the glorification of the past and regional tendencies of the *mouvement flamand* in favor of internationalism and a receptivity to everything that was new. Herbo's work came to symbolize for some, all that was wrong with academic art. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this controversy over Herbo has significance for the formation of Les XX since Frantz Charlet, one of the organizers of Les XX, will later claim that Herbo was the immediate cause of the group's secession from L'Essor.

Les XX—Heir to the Avant-Garde

“Ce qui me plaît extraordinairement dans les XX, c’est leur absence de programme. . . .”

Letter from Félicien Rops to Octave Maus,
29 December 1883

The Société Libre des Beaux Arts and La Chrysalide contained the most progressive artists in Belgium from 1869 through 1881. Their cause was aided by their periodicals *L’Art Libre*, *L’Art Universel*, and *L’Artiste*. Indeed the relationship is so close that the S.L.B.A. is sometimes referred to as the Art Libre group. Similarly in the 1880s and the 1890s both the literary and artistic avant-garde movements were championed in large part by three periodicals: *La Wallonie*, *La Jeune Belgique*, and *L’Art Moderne*. In fact A.J. Matthews, author of a study on *La Wallonie* has stated that, “The renaissance of letters in Belgium, even more completely than in France, was the work of literary reviews.”¹

La Wallonie was the foremost Symbolist review of Belgium and France. It incorporated the staff of the defunct Parisian *Ecrits pour l’art*. Among its collaborators were Francis Vielé Griffin, Stuart Merrill, Henri de Régnier, René Ghil, Georges Khnopff, brother of the Vingtiste Fernand Khnopff, and Emile Verhaeren. *La Wallonie*’s first issue appeared on 15 June 1886 although it had existed under the name *L’Elan Littéraire* in 1885. *La Wallonie* was a staunch supporter of Les XX.²

La Jeune Belgique was founded in 1881 from three student publications: Verhaeren’s *La Semaine des Etudiants*, Max Waller’s *Le Type*, and Albert Bauwens’s *La Jeune Revue Littéraire*. *La Jeune Belgique* quickly proclaimed its total estrangement from politics and became the defender of the Art for Art’s Sake movement in Belgium. *La Jeune Belgique* was primarily responsible for organizing a protest banquet of 27 May 1883 to honor Camille Lemonnier. Lemonnier had just published *Un Mâle* and was refused the quinquennial prize by the jury. Over 200 writers, poets, artists, musicians and lawyers attended this dinner. This was essentially a declaration of war on the establishment by some of the most avant-garde thinkers of the day.

However, *La Jeune Belgique*, edited by Albert Giraud, lost much of its vitality after the death of Max Waller in 1889. The Symbolist poet Charles van Lerberghe (1861-1907), writing in his diary in 1891, compared *La Jeune Belgique* to *La Wallonie*:

On pourrait encore dire que la J.[eune] B.[elgique] est la revue d'art conservatrice, doctrinaire. C'est le gouvernement; les reformes n'y sont admises que lentement, après plusieurs années de délibération et de réflexion. *La Wallonie* est la revue d'art progressiste ouverte à toutes les utopies chimériques, la J.[eune] B.[elgique] est constitutionnelle: La W.[allonie] révisionniste.³

One could say that *La Jeune Belgique* is still the conservative art review. It is the government; reforms are admitted there slowly, and only after several years of deliberation and reflection. *La Wallonie* is the progressive art review, open to all visionary utopias. *La Jeune Belgique* is constitutional; *La Wallonie*—revisionist.

L'Art Moderne which first appeared on 6 March 1881 was the spiritual successor to *L'Artiste*, whose last issue appeared on 26 December 1880. *L'Art Moderne* appeared as a weekly without any signature affixed to the articles. Total anonymity ceased with the issue of 8 April 1883 which named Victor Arnould, Octave Maus, Edmond Picard, and Eugène Robert as the editorial staff. However, the majority of the articles remained unsigned, thereby implying a unanimity of ideas and vision. As of 1 January 1888 the editorial committee was comprised of Maus, Picard, and Emile Verhaeren. For the most part, however, *L'Art Moderne* was the product of Edmond Picard and Octave Maus.

Edmond Picard (1836-1924) was a well-known lawyer, art collector, critic, and man of letters.⁴ As a patron of the arts, his fabulous home on the Toison d'Or served as a cultural center where members of the bar, politicians, musicians, and artists mingled. Aside from the opulent surroundings enhanced by works of Rops, Van Camp, Artan, Khnopff, Courbet, Ensor, and Van der Stappen, musical auditions and readings of unpublished works were held in the Picard home. Picard was also a militant socialist and passionate defender of the working man. He cofounded in 1865 the newspaper *La Liberté* which fought for universal suffrage and on 18 January 1866 he was asked by the workers' committee to assist in preparing a manifesto for electoral reform. This manifesto is sometimes thought to mark the birth of Belgian socialism.⁵ After the violent strikes of 1886, the government called on Picard to be a member of a commission to study industrial conditions. However when workers' delegates were denied admission, he resigned from the commission. In 1888 Picard served as counsel to the participants of the May 1887 and December 1888 strikes. Picard was repeatedly defeated in his bid for a Senate seat until 1894 when he was elected on the Worker's Party Platform.

Picard's social views, often expressed in *L'Art Moderne*, clearly shaped his artistic and literary philosophy. He believed that literature and art were effective agents in achieving a social transformation of society. For him, a work

of art was truly great only if it reflected the society and time in which it was produced. His viewpoint eventually collided with the Art for Art's Sake philosophy held by Max Waller and Albert Giraud of *La Jeune Belgique*. For the collaborators of *La Jeune Belgique*, beauty and not subject matter was the sole criterion determining the value of a work of art. *La Jeune Belgique* was repelled by Picard's vulgar concept of "l'Art social." This clash of ideologies became so heated that it led to a duel in 1885 between Picard and Giraud (Illustration 6).

The interests of Octave Maus (1856-1919) complemented those of his mentor Edmond Picard. Like Picard, Maus was a lawyer, a patron of the arts, a man of letters, and a socialist. In addition Maus was an amateur musician and loyal devotee of Richard Wagner.⁶ Thus Maus is almost certainly the author of some of the musical reviews in *L'Art Moderne*, while he and Picard (and later Verhaeren) shared in writing the art criticism. Unlike Picard, Maus did not run for public office and seems to have avoided the political limelight. Since Picard was such a powerful and well-known figure and since he gave the opening lecture at Les XX in 1884, critics sometimes identified Les XX as "la bande à Picard."⁷ The driving force behind Les XX once it was founded was in fact Octave Maus.

Maus, after becoming the official secretary, contributed much of his energy and administrative genius to Les XX and its successor, *La Libre Esthétique*. From 1884, the date of the first exhibition of Les XX, until 1914, the demise of *La Libre Esthétique*, Maus was the undisputed artistic impresario of Belgium. He supervised not only the yearly artistic exhibitions, but the concerts and lectures which were held with them. In fact Maus has become so identified in modern times with Les XX that he is often considered its founder and *raison d'être*. We shall see in Chapter 3 exactly how he became associated with Les XX and to what extent he was responsible for its success. However, if Maus was the organizational force behind Les XX, Picard was its theoretician.

On 9 February 1884 Picard's opening lecture at Les XX on "L'Art Jeune," placed the group in a historical and an artistic context. It is in this speech, published on 19 February in *L'Art Moderne*, that Picard made claim to Les XX's status as an avant-garde group by citing *L'Art Libre* and *La Chrysalide* as Les XX's artistic and spiritual predecessors. Picard stated, "Les XX continuent ces initiateurs, et de même leur association est la fille de sociétés tombées vite après leur naissance, qui se nommaient entre autres L'Art Libre et La Chrysalide."⁸ Picard insisted that Les XX was committed to the same principles of realism and the study of nature as its predecessors. In his 23 March 1884 article on Les XX in *L'Art Moderne*, he quoted the following passage from *L'Art Libre*:

Plus de grecs, plus de romains, rendez vos chlamydes, vos casques, vos boucliers, toute votre ferraille... assez de vieilleries, assez de carnaval... Il nous faut un *art vrai*, d'où la convention soit bannie; Il nous faut des sentiments sincères, des passions humaines, des

choses fouillées au plus profond des coeurs qui palpitent; il nous faut la vie enfin. A bas les masques et vive la nature!"⁹

No more Greeks and Romans. Return your chlamys, helmets, shields, all your worn-out armor. . . . Enough old rubbish, enough carnival. We need a *realistic art*, where convention is banished. We need sincere feelings, human passions, things plumbed to the bottom of hearts that throb. And finally, we need life. Down with masks and long live nature!

In citing this passage Picard affirmed a continuing link between the realism of the S.L.B.A. and Les XX.

In addition many of the members of Les XX had their artistic roots in these two groups. Seven of the artists who were associated with La Chrysalide (Jef Lambeaux, James Ensor, Willy French, Périclès Pantazis, Guillaume Vogels, Gustave Vanaise, and Félicien Rops) became members of Les XX. Artists such as Speeckaert, Van der Stappen, C. Meunier, and Artan who exhibited with the S.L.B.A. and La Chrysalide were *invités* of Les XX.

L'Art Moderne on 9 March 1884 quoted and embraced *L'Art Libre's* "profession de foi" which first appeared on 15 December 1871. The article graphically depicted the fierce struggle facing *L'Art Libre*, but proclaimed the inevitability of its triumph over its conservative enemies. It declared,

Nous pouvons mourrir demain, ou faiblir à la tâche; notre association peut se dissoudre, notre journal s'en aller, après une existence des plus éphémères. . . . Qu'importe? L'idée restera: d'autres la reprendront et la mèneront où nous aurons été incapables de la mener nous-mêmes.¹⁰

We can die tomorrow or weaken in the task. Our group can dissolve and, after a most ephemeral of existences, our journal disappear. What does it matter? The idea will remain: others will take it up and bring it to where we were incapable of bringing it ourselves.

So too Picard believed in the inevitable triumph of Les XX. Picard claimed that the S.L.B.A. was a prefiguration of Les XX and that it was Les XX's duty to bring the S.L.B.A.'s cause to fruition. He respected the S.L.B.A. not only for its ideas, but also for its aggressiveness. The defiant and combative language used by *L'Art Libre* was adopted wholeheartedly by Picard and in fact intensified. Picard was paraphrasing the above citation from *L'Art Libre* when he stated, "On peut dire que si tous mouraient, ou, pire que cela, si tous désertaient, ils seraient immédiatement remplacés par une phalange nouvelle qui reprendrait la mission qu'ils auraient abandonnée."¹¹ [If all died—or worse, if all deserted—they would be replaced immediately by a new phalanx that would resume the mission thus abandoned.] Aggressive language appealed to Picard because he loved controversy and because it coincided with his idea of what constituted avant-gardism.

Les XX and the S.L.B.A. both enlisted the aid of foreign artists in their struggle. While the S.L.B.A. could claim foreign artists as honorary members, these artists did not exhibit with the S.L.B.A. Les XX, however, extended

annual invitations to foreign artists to participate directly in the group's exhibitions. Both Les XX and S.L.B.A. saw their struggle vis-à-vis the establishment as an international one.

The S.L.B.A., La Chrysalide, and Les XX each had a review which defended and expounded its views. However *L'Art Moderne*, unlike its predecessors *L'Art Libre*, *L'Art Universel*, and *L'Artiste*, was in existence several years before it adopted its artistic group. *L'Art Moderne* had developed its own philosophy and following well before the appearance of Les XX. It supplied this loose confederation of artists with an avant-garde dogma and then set out to defend the group against the critical onslaught.

Interestingly enough Picard, in his 1884 lecture, carefully omitted any mention of L'Essor, the group from which Les XX actually arose. The chronology and the cause of the schism within L'Essor will be fully discussed in Chapter 3. However, the generally accepted reason for the schism, as cited by Madame Legrand in the exhibition catalogue *Le Groupe des XX et son temps*, is that "historiquement, le cercle des XX naît de la désintégration d'un autre cercle, l'Essor, qui 's'embourgeoisait.'" ¹² Thus Legrand accepts the notion that these ex-Essorians, dissatisfied with the bourgeois nature of L'Essor, broke away to form a more avant-garde group. Legrand's use of the word "désintégration" is ambiguous. This usage can be misread to mean that L'Essor disintegrated after the split with Les XX. ¹³ In fact L'Essor existed up until 1891. Even after Les XX was founded, L'Essor continued to serve as a recruitment center for Les XX. Jan Toorop, Henri de Groux, and Georges Lemmen all exhibited with L'Essor before being admitted as members to Les XX.

The idea that Les XX was formed in reaction to increasingly bourgeois tendencies in L'Essor is undoubtedly the view which Picard hoped to imply. However, despite Picard's silence, Les XX owed much to L'Essor.

In 1883, *La Gazette* praised L'Essor for its practice of hanging all the works of one artist together as opposed to the usual manner of scattering works. ¹⁴ Later Les XX would adopt this innovation, and *L'Art Moderne* in an official announcement would credit L'Essor with this idea. ¹⁵ This debt, acknowledged before Picard and Maus became identified with Les XX, would be *L'Art Moderne's* only admission of L'Essor's importance to Les XX.

L'Essor should also be credited with another innovation—that of the musical soirée. On 17 January 1883 L'Essor held a chamber music concert in the same salles where the works of art were exhibited. ¹⁶ This had a particular importance since Les XX would also give concerts in the same locale as the exhibition. Les XX's first concert was held on 14 February 1884 and was given by L'Union Instrumentale, the very same group which played at L'Essor's first concert. ¹⁷

Although Les XX's concerts in the first several years were not very avant-garde, Maus's friendship with French composer Vincent d'Indy led to systematically organized, innovative concerts from 1888 on. The concerts

stressed contemporary French music and the works of César Franck, Gabriel Fauré, Ernest Chausson, and Vincent d'Indy were favored. Maus continued the concerts at La Libre Esthétique and in 1894 the entire program was devoted to Claude Debussy, scarcely known at that time. From the first Maus believed in the importance of maintaining these concerts along with the exhibition and lecture series. Maus and Picard, fervent Wagnerians, believing that all arts were interrelated, sought to place music and literature on an equal footing with painting.

The idea of sponsoring lectures at its exhibitions was also pursued by L'Essor. In its 1882 catalogue, L'Essor claimed that it would hold discussions and lectures in addition to its yearly exhibitions. The first apparent lecture at L'Essor was given on 13 April 1883 when Lucien Solvay lectured on his recent trip to Spain and Morocco.¹⁸ This talk was held in conjunction with a special L'Essor exhibition of Frantz Charlet, Théo van Rysselberghe, and Dario de Regoyos's recent works executed in Spain and Morocco. At this session Regoyos drew sketches during the lecture to illustrate some of Solvay's points.

Les XX was also to hold annual lectures at its exhibitions but these were much more formal and serious in subject matter. Unlike the travelogue given by Solvay, Les XX prided itself upon its innovative, avant-garde lectures.

The debt Les XX owed to L'Essor is revealed in its very name. Unlike the Impressionists or Fauvists whose nomenclature was foisted upon them by irate critics, Les XX was self-baptized. Scholars have accepted Les XX's name at face value since it had twenty founding members. However, the artists who originally decided to establish this group numbered somewhere between eleven and seventeen.¹⁹ The number twenty symbolized something very important to the future Vingtistes and this meaning is related to Les XX's immediate roots in L'Essor.

L'Essor, unlike Les XX, had an elaborate and complex set of rules. These rules were codified into forty-eight articles which governed every phase of L'Essor's activities.²⁰ The rules were enforced by a president and a governing committee which served in effect as a jury. This governing committee was composed of twenty Essorians.²¹ The number takes on added significance in light of the fact that L'Essor itself was founded by twenty artists.²²

Les XX, on the other hand, stressed that it had neither a president nor a governing committee, only a secretary and a rotating committee of three who would be charged with the task of organizing exhibitions and handling correspondence. Each artist at Les XX would hang his own works and the placement of the works along the wall would be determined by lot. This was in sharp contrast to L'Essor whose committee of twenty determined the placement as well as the selection of works to be exhibited.

In effect, Les XX had no rules. Félicien Rops, an *invité* to the first exhibition in 1884, and then elected a member in 1885, wrote to the secretary, Octave Maus, praising this new organization: "Ce qui me plaît

extraordinairement dans les XX, c'est leur absence de programme."²³ In fact, *La Jeune Belgique* noticed the difference between Les XX's organization and L'Essor's when it announced the formation of Les XX:

Ils sont vingt, qui fondent, non pas une nouvelle société, maçonnée avec des statuts et des règlements arcbutée sur un président, bastionnée d'un secrétaire et flanquée d'un trésorier, mais tout simplement un groupe, une bande, un bataillon. Point d'organisation académique—car tous sont jeunes, audacieux, révolutionnaires."²⁴

They are twenty that found, not a new society built with statutes and rules buttressed by a secretary and flanked with a treasurer, but simply a group, a band, a batallion; no academic organization—because all are young, audacious, revolutionary.

By fixing their number at twenty, thereby recalling L'Essor's formation, Les XX laid claim to being the "new twenty." This rebellion indicated a dissatisfaction with L'Essor's jury system as well as with the general tendencies within L'Essor to follow rules similar to those established for the official Salon. Thus in its very name, Les XX rejected the conservative values which L'Essor embodied and asserted its determination to establish a new group of twenty.

While the double entendre implicit in Les XX's name was not noted by contemporary critics, the press was keenly aware of the competition between the two groups. The eighth annual L'Essor exhibition held at the Palais des Beaux-Arts from 22 December 1883 through 29 January 1884 closed just three days before the first Les XX show opened. L'Essor had lost a good portion of its most creative members to Les XX. However this eighth show was greeted with enthusiasm by most of the press. Camille Lemonnier, former editor of *L'Art Universel* said, "Certes, le coup fut rude pour L'Essor qui perdait, avec cette dispersion de son noyau primitif, une partie de sa sève la plus robuste et de ses plus fermes espérances. . . ." ²⁵ [Certainly the blow was rough for L'Essor, which lost, with this dispersion of its original group, a part of its hardest vigor and staunchest hopes. . . .] But Lemonnier continued to praise L'Essor for its courage and stressed the fact that L'Essor would continue to fight alongside Les XX.

More predictably, *L'Art Moderne*, now the mouthpiece of Les XX, dismissed L'Essor as "le vestibule dans lequel les talents jeunes attendent, non sans impatience, leur tour de célébrité. C'est l'antichambre des Salons. . . ." It disparagingly dismissed Herbo as "le peintre favori des bourgeois."²⁶

As we have seen from *L'Art Moderne*'s very first review of L'Essor in 1881 until the formation of Les XX, this periodical, although critical of artists such as Herbo, by and large respected L'Essor. However with the formation of Les XX and the selection of Maus as its secretary, *L'Art Moderne* changed its attitude towards L'Essor. This change cannot simply be explained by the fact that Les XX had lured away many of L'Essor's best artists. *L'Art Moderne* effectively used omission and outright attack to discredit L'Essor's position in the art scene.

Picard, in marked contrast to his lengthy three-part article on L'Essor in 1883, chose not to mention the group in any of his articles on Les XX in *L'Art Moderne* in 1884. This omission was deliberate on Picard's part because he wished to obliterate the role that L'Essor played in the formation of Les XX. Picard claimed Les XX followed in the direct lineage of the avant-garde tradition established by the S.L.B.A. and La Chrysalide. Les XX, like these predecessors, continued the battle of the avant-garde against tyranny and oppression by the conservative elements in the society. The admission that Les XX arose from L'Essor would undercut the radical origins which Picard was attempting to attribute to Les XX. The fact that L'Essor was eclectic and that it always embodied conservative as well as progressive elements meant that the battle lines were not always so clearcut. Picard attempted to polarize L'Essor and Les XX respectively into conservative and avant-garde camps by ignoring the conservative elements in Les XX and the liberal elements in L'Essor. Because L'Essor had been accepted by the artistic establishment, only by denouncing it as irrelevant to Les XX, could Picard firmly link Les XX to the embattled avant-garde tradition of the S.L.B.A. and La Chrysalide. Picard's rewriting of history had the added effect of outraging the conservative critics because it was so obviously contrived.

This tendency to overstate a case is characteristic of Picard and *L'Art Moderne* and is a trait frequently found in avant-garde manifestos. Thus some of the statements in *L'Art Moderne* cannot be taken at face value. *L'Art Moderne*, in its role as principal defender of avant-gardism in Belgium, resorted at times to propagandistic rhetoric which must often be corroborated in reconstructing the history and importance of Les XX.

The Belgian press, the other principal contemporaneous source of information, was so divided between progressive and conservative politics, that it too was often excessively propagandistic. Writers' political philosophy, with few exceptions, determined their art criticism. In conservative papers such as *Le Patriote* and *L'Emancipation*, we find hostile reviews. In progressive papers such as *La Nation* and *Le National Belge*, we invariably find positive reviews. This polarization in the press makes unbiased commentary difficult to come by. But this very polarization also insured that the enemies of avant-gardism missed no opportunity to point out *L'Art Moderne's* excessive claims.

The Formation of Les XX and the Inaugural Exhibition

“S'ils ne sont pas contents de leur place, qu'ils exposent chez eux.”

Salon de Bruxelles, 1884

quoted in the *Catalogue des XX*, 1885

The Salon of 1884 was particularly harsh on young artists, even according to the conservative critics.¹ Artists such as James Ensor, Willy Finch, and Achille Chainaye were totally rejected and the works of such others as Fernand Khnopff and Guillaume Vogels were hung so poorly as to be unviewable.² It is generally believed that Les XX was created in reaction to a remark uttered by a jury member of the 1884 Brussels Salon, “Qu'ils exposent chez eux.” This popular notion, first offered by Octave Maus, would have us believe that once the challenge was issued, Les XX was immediately founded in order to “exposer chez eux.”³ This account of the formation of Les XX appears not only in the oldest study devoted to Les XX (the book written by Madeleine Maus, wife of Octave Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art*) but also in a more recent one (Bruce Laughton's article in the November 1967 issue of *Apollo*, “The British and American Contribution to Les XX”).

Madeleine Maus cites as her source a lecture given by Octave Maus at the Société d'étudiants de belles-lettres in Lausanne in 1918.⁴ He defines the precise origins of the artistic revolution of 1884 as the result of a “quip tossed off by a member of the official jury. . . . ‘Let them exhibit at their own place.’”⁵ Bruce Laughton states more precisely that “when in 1883 a number of young artists submitted more or less realist paintings to the official Brussels Salon, a member of the jury remarked ‘Qu'ils exposent chez eux.’”⁶ However, the fact is that this comment was not uttered during the 1883 Salon (that year the Salon was held in Ghent), but during the 1884 Salon which opened in Brussels eleven months after the formation of Les XX. In saying “chez eux” the anonymous jury member was actually referring to Les XX itself. This is made clear by the fact that it was Les XX's second catalogue in 1885 which embraced this slogan. The remark therefore had nothing to do with the founding of Les XX, but by telling

the story this way years later Maus was—whether consciously or not—dramatizing the conflict between the Salon and the avant-garde spirit.

If Les XX's formation did not occur in this fashion, how then shall we account for its inception? To answer this, we must thoroughly examine the genesis of the group.

The earliest evidence of the "idea" of Les XX is found in a letter between two future Vingtistes, Willy Finch and Frantz Charlet, dated 25 September 1883.⁷ Finch wrote to Charlet, "Je vous ai dit verbalement que j'adhérais au projet de former une exposition à vingt peintres. J'y adhère maintenant par écrit." Finch also mentioned in this brief note the troubles which Charlet had had with "les vieux" of L'Essor. This document is most interesting for it shows even at this early date that the number of members was to be fixed at twenty.

The next mention of Les XX appeared in an official announcement in *L'Art Moderne* of 7 October 1883.⁸ This item announced the formation of Les XX and set forth the basic tenets of the group: The group would exhibit yearly from 1 February to 1 March and would exhibit not only the works of its members but works by both Belgian and foreign artists.⁹ Les XX's exhibitions would be organized in an analogous fashion to the Exposition Internationale of the rue de Sèze in Paris.¹⁰ As to placement, the works were to be hung individually by artists as at L'Essor.¹¹ Furthermore, the group would bear the name Les XX and would be composed of the following members: the sculptors Jef Lambeaux, Paul Dubois, Achille Chainaye; the painters Frantz Charlet, James Ensor, Jean Delvin, Fernand Khnopff, Franz Courtens, Willy Finch, Dario de Regoyos, Rodolphe Wytsman, Gustave Vanaise, Théo van Rysselberghe, Charles Goethals, Piet Verhaert, Théodore Verstraete, Willy Schlobach, and Guillaume van Strydonck.¹²

L'Art Moderne also mentioned that each year a special committee of three members, chosen by lot, would oversee invitations and the organization of the exhibitions. Committee members would be aided by Lucien Solvay who had accepted the position of secretary.

The very next mention of Les XX in the contemporary press occurred in *La Gazette* of 8 October 1883.¹³ While this notice simply names those artists who had accepted the invitation of Les XX, it has a special significance since it appeared in the newspaper of the newly appointed secretary, Lucien Solvay. Aside from perfunctory announcements, the press was silent on the group's formation. Finally in *La Gazette* of 21 October 1883 we learn that the first result of Les XX's projected exhibition was "celui de faire éclater dans le sein de la grande famille artistique des 'Jeunes', la guerre civile avec toutes ses horreurs."¹⁴

The "civil war" referred to was Les XX's break with L'Essor. This schism as we have seen has been attributed to the fact that L'Essor, once an avant-garde group, "s'embourgeoisait"¹⁵ and thus lost its appeal to its younger and more revolutionary members. According to the account in *La Gazette*, Les XX

had arranged its exhibition without saying anything to those colleagues in L'Essor "qui n'entraient pas dans la combinaison." The excluded members of L'Essor reproached Les XX for its conduct "dans des termes d'une amertume des plus accentuée, auxquels les *Vingt* ont répliqué, paraît-il, par d'autres termes non moins énergiques." [In the most pronounced words, to which Les *Vingt* replied, it appears, with other equally emphatic expressions.] The result was immediate discord. "Il y a eu des blâmés infligés, et ces blâmes ont eu pour conséquence la démission en masse des blâmes."¹⁶ [There were censures imposed which resulted in the mass resignations of the censured members.]

The bitterness to which *La Gazette* alluded is best documented by two letters published in George M. Matthijs's book on Julien Dillens, president of L'Essor.¹⁷ In these letters Dillens revealed his acrimonious attitude towards Les XX. One is addressed to "Messieurs les promoteurs du nouveau Cercle des XX, morceau de 'L'Essor'." Dillens accused Les XX of ingratitude and of pillaging and profiting from L'Essor. He concluded by saying, "Dans de telles conditions, ne me faites pas l'injure, je vous prie, de compter sur mon adhésion."¹⁸

The second text is even more vituperative than the first. Here Dillens claimed that the future *Vingdistes* owed their reputation to L'Essor and more specifically to its founders. These individuals "agissent mal envers 'L'Essor.' Ils sapent sa base d'existence et *conspirent* ainsi à sa perte. . . ." Dillens further added that L'Essor had existed for eight years due to its rules and there is every reason to believe that these very rules are its "cause d'existence." Reason and perseverance having failed to bring the members back to the fold, Dillens concluded by branding the adherents to the new society as "traîtres à l'Essor," their names were to be posted on the premises of L'Essor and they were thereby banished.¹⁹

In a letter written in October 1899, long after Les XX's formation, Frantz Charlet shed some light on the break with L'Essor:

Un point sur lequel je voulais que vous insistiez c'est que les vrais fondateurs des XX furent Théo Van Rysselberghe, Schlobach et moi. C'est après une mémorable séance de l'Essor que les XX furent fondés.²⁰

A point which I want you to stress is that the true founders of Les XX were Théo van Rysselberghe, Schlobach, and myself. It was after a memorable meeting of L'Essor that Les XX was founded.

Charlet recounted his demand that fellow Essorien Léon Herbo abstain from exhibiting.²¹ This request led to a general outcry and

. . . un blâme me fut infligé et voté par la majorité des membres, et cité au procès-verbal de la séance, ceux qui me donnèrent raison se levèrent et quittèrent la séance en même temps que moi, nous allâmes au café des Boulevards, place de la Nation, et nous fondâmes immédiatement les XX. Nous n'étions que 16 ou 17. . . .²²

... a censure was imposed upon me and voted by the majority of members, and cited in the minutes of the meeting. Those who agreed with me got up and left the meeting with me. We went to the café des Boulevards, place de la Nation, and immediately founded Les XX. There were only 16 or 17 of us...

Charlet named "Théo van Rysselberghe, Jan Toorop, Fernand Khnopff, Guillaume Vogels, James Ensor, Willy Finch etc, etc," as present at this meeting. Charlet declared he was named secretary "par déférence puisque j'étais en somme cause de la formation des XX."²³ At this moment according to Charlet, it was also decided that there would never be a president and that the group would dissolve after ten years. After serving briefly as secretary, Charlet realized it took up too much of his time and thus "c'est à la suite que nous demandâmes à Octave Maus de bien vouloir devenir secrétaire."²⁴

Between the time that Charlet declined the role of permanent secretary and the final choosing of Octave Maus, Lucien Solvay was selected. Solvay related the process of his selection in his autobiographical account *Une Vie de Journaliste* published in 1934. Soon after Solvay and Charlet's trip in 1883 to Spain and Morocco, Charlet, Van Rysselberghe and Van Strydonck met Solvay at a tavern to inform him of their newly devised plan. This plan involved organizing a group of artists who would exhibit yearly. Unlike L'Essor, they would not have a president or a director, only a secretary charged with the task of preparing yearly exhibitions. "Ils seraient peu nombreux, vingt seulement, choisis parmi les peintres et les sculpteurs jeunes. . . ."²⁵ It was at this meeting that Solvay claims to have been offered the secretariat.

At first, Solvay admits, the job appealed to him. Perhaps it was his initial enthusiasm which led to *L'Art Moderne's* 7 October publication of his acceptance. However, Solvay added that he soon saw the difficulties which would arise if he accepted the post. He felt that as a critic he needed to maintain his independence, which would be compromised if he became associated with Les XX. At a second meeting with the artists, Solvay rejected their offer, telling them to choose an independent person, "Je leur désignai Octave Maus."²⁶ According to Solvay, after this conversation, the three ring leaders of Les XX asked Maus to accept the functions of secretary. It seems doubtful, however, that Solvay proposed the name of Maus since this would have contradicted his own advice to select an independent secretary. Maus had been attached to *L'Art Moderne* since its founding in 1881, and was no more "independent" than Solvay.

A piece of notebook paper dated 28 October 1883 and preserved in the Archives des XX in Brussels links Octave Maus for the first time with Les XX. There are thirteen signatures affixed to this paper: F. Charlet, Jean Delvin, Paul Dubois, James Ensor, Charles Goethals, Fernand Khnopff, P. Pantazis, Frans Simons, G. Vanaise, Théo van Rysselberghe, G. van Strydonck, Théo Verstraete, and G. Vogels.²⁷

Maus revealed in a letter to his cousin, Eugène Boch, dated 1 November 1883, that he had announced the constitution of Les XX in *L'Art Moderne* and that "on m'a offert les fonctions de secrétaire que j'ai acceptées."²⁸ He further elaborated on the resignation of Solvay saying,

Solvay avait refusé, craignances de le compromettre parce qu'il s'agit en réalité d'un grand levier de boucliers contre tout ce qui est académiques, poncifs, perruques. C'est de l'art fier et indépendant qu'on veut faire et comme il s'agit de bousculer et de batailler, j'en suis.²⁹

Solvay had refused, fearing to compromise himself. It was, in fact, a question of a great uprising against everything that is academic, conventional, old-fashioned. It is a proud and independent art they wish to create, and, as it's a matter of turning everything upside down and doing battle, I'm for it.

Maus lamented the condition of art in Belgium: "Tout ce qui est beau, libre, sincère est étouffé par une coterie de pieuvres, qui pompent à elles la finance, la considération, la réputation."³⁰ [Everything that is beautiful, free, and sincere is stifled by a coterie of octopuses who suck up all the money, esteem, and reputation for themselves.] Maus closed this letter revealing for the first time the truly combative nature he saw embodied in Les XX: "Enfin, nous nous proposons de tout casser pour remettre notre pauvre bourgeois de pays le place qu'il devrait occuper."³¹ [Finally, we propose to topple everything and put our poor bourgeois country back on the map.]

On 1 November, the very same day he wrote this letter, Maus wrote Van Strydonck, Khnopff, and Lambeaux to inform them that a meeting would be held on 2 November at 8:00 P.M. at Maus's home. The purpose of the meeting was to prepare a letter to the Minister of the Interior, concerning the granting of exhibition space to Les XX at the Palais des Beaux-Arts.³² This letter is important for it identifies these artists as the special committee of three which would aid in the organization of Les XX's first exhibition.

The second announcement about Les XX appeared in *L'Art Moderne* of 11 November 1883. For the very first time Octave Maus is publicly designated as the secretary of Les XX and simultaneously Les XX takes on a bellicose role vis-à-vis officialdom. The first exhibition will be held on 1 February 1884 and will represent in reality "toute la Belgique artistique nouvelle et sera pour les arts plastiques le centre du magnifique mouvement en avant." The group is devoted to "un art indépendant dégagé de toute attache officielle" and will represent artists who live in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, and Liège. Each year the general assembly of Les XX will decide who will be invited to exhibit. For the first year, eight Belgians and fourteen foreigners have been chosen "parmi ceux qui sont plus particulièrement sympathiques à l'initiative que prend l'association."³³

This announcement in *L'Art Moderne* did not specify, however, where the exhibition of Les XX would take place. Sometime after 1 November,

Maus must have written to F. Schlimm, Minister of the Interior to request his assistance in securing exhibition space for Les XX at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Schlimm on 20 November 1883 wrote to Maus to allay his fears regarding the allocation of this space and optimistically suggests a favorable outcome.³⁴ Finally on 5 December 1883 Schlimm gave Maus the good word that J.-B. Rousseau, Director of Fine Arts, had agreed to grant Les XX the privilege of exhibiting at the Palais des Beaux-Arts.³⁵ Once given official approval, Maus's organizational skills quickly became apparent. He immediately sent invitations to those artists selected to exhibit with Les XX.³⁶ The letters responding to Maus's invitation arrived rapidly and enthusiastically.³⁷

Among the most famous acceptance letters is Félicien Rops's response of 29 December 1883. It is worth citing for it reveals the militancy of Les XX's struggle: "Quoique, par parti pris, n'exposant jamais, je tiens à vous montrer mon bon vouloir dans le bon combat que vous livrez, et à prendre mon rang de simple soldat derrière les chefs que vous appelez."³⁸ [In spite of my obstinate decision never to exhibit, I am eager to show you my good will in the good fight you are undertaking and to take my place as a simple soldier behind the leaders you are calling.]

It was not until 4 January 1884 that Maus formalized the creation of Les XX. He drafted a document declaring that the undersigned members of Les XX delegated to him the authority to fulfill the functions of secretary of Les XX, to take care of correspondence and invitations and to represent them in court if necessary.³⁹

It is doubtful that without Octave Maus the group would have enjoyed its ten-year longevity. Maus supplied the group with his supreme talents as an organizer and infused a vitality within Les XX which made it particularly receptive to all facets of the avant-garde in all its manifestations. It seems that without Octave Maus the group would have remained one faction in a petty schism.

Les XX's first exhibition was generally regarded as a huge success, not only from the point of view of attendance but aesthetically as well.⁴⁰ The critics repeatedly stated that the exhibition was so well attended that one could scarcely see the paintings or sculpture on view.⁴¹ Les XX was lauded in the press for its innovative placement of the paintings. One critic stated, "L'installation est des plus heureuses, les tableaux sont à la rampe. . . ."⁴² Because the placement of paintings were chosen by lot to avoid any hint of the favoritism often evidenced at the official Salon, several critics were somewhat distressed at the odd juxtapositions which occurred. That there was hostile criticism from the beginning is not to be denied. However, in general the exhibition was greeted with short but favorable comments by much of the press.

This generally warm reception changed perceptibly after *L'Art Moderne* published a series of anonymous articles on the exhibition. It is through this series of articles that we learn of the philosophy of Les XX. *L'Art Moderne* was now the official mouthpiece and defender of Les XX.

The first review in *L'Art Moderne* appeared on 10 February 1884.⁴³ Although unsigned, it represented a shortened version of the 9 February lecture given by Edmond Picard at Les XX and was certainly written by him. The article triumphantly declared that Les XX appeared "comme une affirmation d'indépendance, comme une protestation contre la routine académique."⁴⁴ According to Picard, Les XX continued the tradition of artists such as Louis Dubois, Charles de Groux, and Hippolyte Boulenger who were oppressed and crushed by officialdom for daring to practice their new art. As we have seen, Les XX based much of the validity for its own existence on these predecessors.

Picard saw a paralysis and stultification in the world of art. Les XX's mission would be to correct this unfortunate circumstance and to "donner du coeur au plus hésitants."⁴⁵ Picard further declared that in order to succeed one must be revolutionary and intransigent for "on ne pénètre dans la gloire que par escalade et effraction. Elle est aussi difficile à conquérir que le royaume des cieux ceux qui n'ont pas révolutionné l'art, n'ont jamais survécu."⁴⁶ [One can only attain Glory through scaling the heights. It is as difficult to reach as the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who have not revolutionized art can never survive.]

It was precisely this stress on the revolutionary nature of Les XX which so incited the press. Picard claimed that Les XX "a été recruté parmi les plus audacieux et les plus indomptés des néo-peintres, soit comme art, soit comme caractère."⁴⁷ Picard also claimed that Les XX had openly repudiated all official aid. This particularly incensed the critics since Les XX was exhibiting in the salles accorded to them by the government.⁴⁸

Picard, in his opening treatise on Les XX, attacked not only the government, but the press and public as well. Of the press, Picard said, "Elle parla peu, goguenarda ou effraya quelques-uns de ceux qui, au début, étaient prêts à payer de leur personne. . . ." ⁴⁹ [(The Press) speaks little, jeers or frightens some of them who, at the beginning, were ready to take risks. . . .] Regarding the public, Picard was equally harsh: "pâte molle, toujours disposé à suivre les bavardages ou à s'en fier au reportage, il fut sceptique et peu disposé à la bienveillance."⁵⁰ [Lily-livered, always eager to pursue gossip or to depend on reports, (the public) is sceptical and little disposed to kindness.]

Picard praised the *invités* who rallied around the Vingtistes valiantly and with enthusiasm. They understood that the struggle which Les XX had undertaken was an international one. Picard claimed that the opening of Les XX "est à la fois une date et une victoire."⁵¹

It is apparent that Picard was deliberately trying to antagonize the press. His characterization of the press as totally hostile toward Les XX was clearly false. If anything, his talk did more to arouse the wrath of the press than did the exhibition itself. As we have seen, most of the criticism before 10 February praised the disposition of works as well as the painters who exhibited. In fact, *L'Echo de Bruxelles* of 3 February 1884 claimed that "nos meilleurs peintres, nos principaux sculpteurs parcouraient les deux salles réservées aux tableaux des invités et des membres du nouveau cercle."⁵²

The very day of the publication of Picard's article, Emile Verhaeren, contributor to *La Jeune Belgique*, and later to become coeditor of *L'Art Moderne*, published in *Le National Belge* an article entitled "La lutte pour l'art." Verhaeren believed that Picard should have called his talk "l'art intransigent," since the Vingtistes were hostile to all influence, be it official, bourgeois, or academic. Les XX "se hérissait à la moindre concession demandée, se refuserait au moindre coup de pinceau conventionnel. . . ."⁵³

Between 10 February, the date of Picard's first article, and 17 February the reviews for Les XX are mixed. *La Chronique* of 10 February criticized Les XX, declaring that its only care is that of "la lumière et la justesse du ton. Peu leur importent la poésie et le sentiment. . . ."⁵⁴ However, the *Chronique des Beaux-Arts* of 10 February 1884 congratulated Les XX on their excellent results.⁵⁵ On 11 February, immediately following Picard's lecture, *La Gazette* concluded that "l'ensemble est médiocre."⁵⁶ However *L'Impartial de Gand* of 12 February 1884 spoke warmly of Picard's defense of Les XX.⁵⁷ On 16 February 1884 an article in *La Paix* presented a totally mocking negative review of Les XX. The critic admitted that he was a reactionary, a "perruque académique" who defined Picard's "néo-Peinture" as *tachisme* or "l'art d'abîmer de bonne, neuve et vierge toile, en y plaquant des tâches de couleurs. . . ."⁵⁸ However, contrary to this view on the very same day is the favorable article in *Le Journal de Charleroi*. The author here characterized Les XX's show as a battle and a victory

contre l'académisme doctrinaire et officiel, contre l'art vieux. Le nouveau cercle avait un caractère d'intransigence bien marqué et c'est ce qui donnait à son exposition une importance toute particulière.⁵⁹

against doctrinaire and official academicism, against old-fashioned art. The new group has a well-marked, intransigent nature and this is what gave its exhibition a very special importance.

Yves Didier in *Le National Belge* on 14 February buttressed Verhaeren's article in support of Les XX:

Tous, ils pratiquent un art jeune, neuf, dégagé des formules comme leurs caractères sont détachés des exigences officielles. . . . ils affirment que l'Art se transforme sans cesse, qu'il participe aux révolutions profondes, qui, même sans barricades et sans mousqueterie,

modifient l'état social des nations, qu'il domine parfois ces mouvements et exerce sur eux sa part d'influence. . . .⁶⁰

All of them practice a young, new art, as free of formulas as their personalities are free from official exigencies. . . . They affirm that art is constantly changing, that it participates in profound revolutions; that, even without barricades and musketry, it changes the social state of nations and, sometimes rising above movements, exerts over them its share of influence. . . .

Didier affirmed the independence of the artist and condemned "le fatal enseignement académique qui impose à toute une génération la même façon de peindre, la même manière de composer un tableau, la même vision de la lumière du clair obscur. . . ." ⁶¹ [the fatal academic teaching that imposes on an entire generation the same way of painting, the same manner of creating a painting, the same vision of light and chiaroscuro. . . .]

On 17 February 1884 the second article in *L'Art Moderne* appeared on Les XX entitled "l'Art Jeune." Picard said that the young school proclaimed as its artistic formula: "*L'étude et l'interprétation directe de la réalité contemporaine par l'artiste se laissant aller librement à son tempérament, et maître d'une technique approfondie.*" ⁶² [The study and direct interpretation of contemporary reality by the artist freely following his temperament and master of an extensive technique.] As for the choice of subject matter, Picard banned those conceptions of pure imagination, and conventional history scenes. Picard urged the painters to depict people and landscapes as they really existed, "les scènes de notre existence sociale, luxueuse ou pauvre avec l'intérêt constant qu'elles présentent. . . ." ⁶³ Picard also urged painters to paint color and light as they saw it in all its amazing varieties and manifestations, and not according to conventions taught by the academy. For Picard the true greatness of an artist stemmed from depicting the art of one's time. He called for an "art social," which would concern itself with the world in which the artist lived. For Picard art had the sacred mission to "fortifier l'homme, de l'aggrandir par l'émotion en le rendant meilleur." ⁶⁴ Picard stressed the importance of simplicity, naïveté, and lack of artifice in art so that art would be comprehensible to the greatest number of people and, one hoped, improve the lot of man.

The critics were incensed by Picard's arrogance and the press became increasingly hostile. One favorite device of the critics was to compare the *invités* to the *Vingtistes* in such an excessive manner as to make the achievements of the *Vingtistes* seem unimportant. *La Gazette* of 11 February 1884 stated that what was most clear about the Les XX exhibition, "C'est que les invités ont beaucoup de talent et que les *Vingt* ont beaucoup de courage." ⁶⁵ Trying to counter this negative viewpoint *L'Echo de Bruxelles* of 18 February declared, "A côté des toiles magistrales envoyées par les artistes invités, les tableaux des vingt ne font nullement triste figure, comme d'aucuns l'ont prétendu." ⁶⁶ [Some have declared that, next to the masterful canvases sent by the invited artists, the paintings of Les Vingt are only a sorrowful sight.] The

Vingtistes were also attacked for their lack of the most elementary artistic education. *La Gazette* of 11 February declared, "Avant donc que d'exposer, apprenez à peindre, apprenez surtout à dessiner. . . ." ⁶⁷ *Le Courrier de l'Art* of 22 February continued the attack in the same vein stating, "on chercherait, en effet, vainement chez eux trace de dessin, de modelé, de composition. . . ." ⁶⁸

The Vingtistes were accused of listening to those critics (probably Picard and Verhaeren) who turned their heads "par les phrases creuses des rhéteurs qui, sous prétexte d'indépendance, les félicitent de ne rien savoir et de patauger à l'aventure." ⁶⁹ [by empty sentences or orators who, under the pretext of independence, congratulate them for knowing nothing and floundering around aimlessly.] This criticism was found frequently in the press even when most of the critics were favorably disposed to the works exhibited at Les XX.

Another common method for attacking Les XX was to compare it unfavorably to its predecessor L'Essor. Since Les XX's split with L'Essor, beginning in 1883, until the demise of L'Essor in 1891, it was common practice for critics to compare these groups. In fact the very salles in which Les XX exhibited for the first time were the same in which L'Essor had shown the previous month. In *Le Patriote* of 19 February 1884 the author expressed his opinion that the exhibition of L'Essor was superior to Les XX's since it was more unified in its tendencies. ⁷⁰ In fact, the Vingtistes were often referred to as the "dissidents" or the "scissionnaires" of L'Essor. ⁷¹

Madeleine Maus wondered why the critics were relatively tolerant towards the works exhibited at Les XX, but bitter towards the Cercle des XX itself. ⁷² More than anything else, what incited the critics was not only the constant attacks upon them in *L'Art Moderne* and other partisan liberal papers, but the avowed revolutionary and militant stance expressed therein. The language employed by Picard and Verhaeren underlined the fact that there was a war to be fought and that Les XX was determined to win it. The critics found this self-glorification arrogant and threatening.

On 23 February 1884 Gustave Lagye in the *Fédération Artistique*, the conservative Antwerp-based rival to *L'Art Moderne*, published its first article on the Les XX exhibition. It also happened to be the most virulent attack on Les XX to date. Lagye tried systematically to discredit Picard's arguments by using many of the critical devices previously discussed. Mocking Picard's consistent stress on the combative stance of the Vingtistes, Lagye chose to characterize Les XX's position not as "une bataille" but rather as "une tempête dans un verre d'eau." ⁷³ Lagye stressed the fact that many of the works in the Les XX exhibition had already been shown either at the Cercle Artistique d'Anvers, the Cercle Artistique de Gand, or at the Antwerp and Ghent Salons. Lagye concluded that this exhibition was lacking in new works despite Picard's claim to the contrary. Furthermore, Lagye contended that several members of Les XX (Charlet, Delvin, Lambeaux, Vanaise, Verhaert, and Verstraete) had won medals at these official salons which Picard condemned. Verhaert,

Vanaise, and Lambeaux's works had even been bought by the museums of Antwerp and Ghent.

Lagye bristled particularly at the insolence of the Vingtistes, who placed themselves above all other schools of art. He too stressed the superiority of the *invités* vis-à-vis the Vingtistes by saying that the members of Les XX appeared as "des pommes de terre . . . avec des beefsteaks tout autour."⁷⁴ He felt that Les XX had proved that its intransigence was only "un éclecticisme bâtard" and he protested against "la signification tapageuse, agressive, émeutière" given publicly at Les XX.⁷⁵ Lagye made a direct appeal to the many artists who did have talent to rid themselves of "le rôle dangereux qu'on prétend vous faire jouer."⁷⁶

Unfortunately Lagye introduced a personal note into an aesthetic quarrel, accusing Picard of hypocrisy. Lagye stated that Picard wanted to be the vice-president of the Cercle Artistique and that since he was not elected to this post, he was maliciously trying to discredit these bastions of artistic officialdom. These attacks unleashed Picard's wrath and a series of mordant exchanges between Picard and Lagye followed.⁷⁷ While they add nothing to our knowledge of artistic events, they do, nevertheless, shed light on Picard's volatile and temperamental nature. These articles piqued the curiosity of the public and if they accomplished little in elevating public taste, they at least spread the notoriety of Les XX and helped fill the exhibition with paying customers.

Lagye's analysis was the most incisive and comprehensive criticism of Les XX. It is impossible to deny that many of the original Vingtistes whom Lagye cited (Delvin, Vanaise, Verhaert, and Verstraete), were extremely academic, as were a good number of the Belgian *invités*, such as De Vigne and Vinçotte. For instance, Gustave Vanaise's *St. Liévin en Flandres* (Illustration 7) shown at the 1884 exhibition seems quite dated in both style and subject matter when compared to Guillaume Vogels's *Ixelles Matinée Pluvieuse* (Illustration 8), also shown in 1884. Vanaise's work violates most of the tenets of avant-gardism that Picard had set forth in his series of articles dealing with Les XX's philosophy. Vanaise is not depicting a scene from contemporary life, but a religious scene. His figures, firmly modeled and statically posed, reveal their academic origin.

Unlike Vanaise, Vogels depicts a contemporary scene in which he portrays a rainy day in Ixelles, a suburb of Brussels. Figures and houses are realistically blurred by the inclement weather. Vogels adheres to the Realist's appreciation of scenes drawn from everyday life.

The fact that some conservative artists were part of Les XX from the beginning is evidence that the group was conceived more as a protest against L'Essor's system of having a jury and a president, than as a positive expression of an artistic program. However, as soon as *L'Art Moderne* adopted Les XX, the group became identified with an avant-garde stance. In 1884, *L'Art*

Moderne and its allies attacked the conservative element in Les XX, mounting what in retrospect (and probably was at the time) appeared to be a purge (see Chapter 5, Selection of Members).

On 15 February 1884 Emile Verhaeren attacked Théodore Verstraete declaring that "l'artiste manque essentiellement de caractère et de force pour empoigner les scènes flamandes."⁷⁸ [Essentially, the artist lacks the character and strength to depict Flemish scenes.] Verhaeren added that there was little variety in the subject matter of Verstraete's works and that sometimes his work "faiblit jusqu'à la décoloration, ou s'égaré jusqu'à rappeler les couchants de jour des chromolithographies."⁷⁹ [Is feeble to the point of discoloration, or digresses to the level of evoking chromolithographic twilights.] Severely criticized again by Georges Eekhoud in the *Chronique des Beaux-Arts* of 17 February 1884 Verstraete defended his work in *La Jeune Belgique* on 21 February 1884, asserting that his works were sincere and executed before nature.⁸⁰ He concluded by stating "tout critique que vous croyez être, vous n'avez pas le droit de parler de choses que vous ne connaissez point."⁸¹

As for Verhaert, he was chastised by *La Jeune Belgique* which said, "tout cette peinture contrarie, ennue, s'attarde dans la répétition et la redite; elle n'ouvre pas sur l'avenir, elle manque de largeur...."⁸² [All this painting annoys, bores, and is held back by repetition and redundancy. It does not look out on the future, it lacks breadth....] *La Chronique des Beaux-Arts* of 17 February 1884 accused Verhaert of remaining stationary, of resting "au niveau du goût des masses."⁸³

Simons is attacked in *La Jeune Belgique* by Verhaeren saying that "Simons s'attarde à la peinture d'antan avec ses luisants et ses pâtes noires, sa facture molle, ses tons morts. Son grand tableau laisse froid...."⁸⁴ [Simons lags behind in his painting of yesteryear, with its shiny surfaces and black colors, loose brushstrokes and dead tints. His large painting leaves one cold....] *La Chronique des Beaux-Arts* attacked him for his "sentimentalisme bourgeois."⁸⁵

For the most part, the rest of the Vingtistes were praised by both conservative and progressive critics. Because the works of Ensor and his colleagues Finch and Vogels were often grouped together as "intransigent" it is surprising that the work of Ensor was not attacked more stridently. The conservative critic Isidore van Cleef grudgingly conceded that if Ensor "voudra se débarrasser de ses exagérations voulues, James Ensor sera un bien grand artiste...."⁸⁶ The critics could have ridiculed *Les Masques Scandalisés* (Illustration 9) as a gross departure from academic tradition. Both subject matter and style challenged its principles. However this work escaped attention. *La Société Nouvelle* was only one of many which admired Ensor as "un coloriste puissant."⁸⁷ Presumably the critics' attention was diverted by *L'Art Moderne's* rhetoric.

As for the *invités*, generally their work was greeted with lavish praise. In fact, as we have seen, it was often more readily accepted than that of the *Vingtistes*. The critics generally regarded Whistler's portraits and Rodin's bust of *Victor Hugo* as the main attractions of the Salon. Only *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (Illustration 10) by Félicien Rops was singled out because it would "faire rougir un sapeur."⁸⁸ [Make a sailor blush.]

Les XX proved to be a financial as well as an artistic success in 1884. In the first two weeks some 5,000 people visited the show. In *L'Art Moderne* of 13 April 1884 Les XX listed a credit of 3,516.17BF, and a debit of 2,935.84BF leaving a profit of 580.33BF. Artists such as Verstraete, Schlobach, Van Rysselberghe, Wytsman, Van Strydonck, and Chainaye sold several of their works at Les XX and Khnopff received commissions for portraits as a result of this exhibition.⁸⁹

Les XX's reception in Brussels was tolerant if not always enthusiastic primarily because of its association with Maus and Picard. Maus and Picard were not only the backbone of *L'Art Moderne*, Les XX's defender, but were socially prominent and highly respected as art collectors. They brought to Les XX a receptive audience and a ready market through their wide circle of friends. The relative small size of Brussels ensured a congeniality which was lacking in Paris. *L'Art Moderne* trumpeted Les XX's audacity and novelty, thereby inviting both the curiosity seeker and the serious amateur art collector. To be sure there were those who came to scoff at Les XX's openings, but many did so annually, thus suggesting that one's presence at Les XX, regardless of one's artistic preferences, was *de rigueur*.

Les XX's success was clearly insured by the organizational skill of Maus and the publicity provided by *L'Art Moderne*. In the next nine years of its existence, the art of Les XX would come closer and closer to the avant-garde theory espoused by *L'Art Moderne*. The vigor and variety of the art exhibited at Les XX during its existence is due in large part to the climate of artistic freedom established by *L'Art Moderne* and its allies.

Les XX and *L'Art Moderne*: Artistic Theory and Political Implications

“Le catalogue est rouge, d'un rouge sang, d'un rouge de combat et de carnage. . . .”

L'Etoile Belge,
5 February 1888

Les XX and *L'Art Moderne*'s Theory of Avant-Gardism

As we have seen in Chapter 3, Les XX was founded by a loose association of artists seeking greater artistic freedom. However, it was the faithful support of the periodical *L'Art Moderne* that transformed this association into a cohesive group with a consistent aesthetic doctrine. *L'Art Moderne* championed the group not only by publicizing and explaining its aesthetic platform but by wheedling and attacking its critics.

Unlike *La Jeune Belgique*, which was principally a literary review, *L'Art Moderne* was devoted to art in all its manifestations—literature, painting, sculpture, engraving, music, architecture, furniture, and costume. This comprehensiveness made it the single most important chronicle of avant-garde events in Belgium over a thirty-four year period. While *L'Art Moderne* professed to be impartial, representing no particular school, its very definition of the artist, as someone who must be concerned with “nos monuments, nos maisons, nos meubles, nos vêtements, les moindres objets . . .,”¹ associated it with the Realist camp. It is therefore no surprise that *L'Art Moderne* fervently supported the works of Flaubert, Courbet, Manet, and Zola.

This sympathy for Realism was combined with a social activism that collided with *La Jeune Belgique*'s Art for Art Sake's philosophy. In a four-part article in *L'Art Moderne* entitled “Le jeune mouvement littéraire,” the author (probably Picard) rejected a theory of art based solely on amusement and on a study of form.² Instead, he asserted, the goal of art should be “to ameliorate, to combat, and to ennoble.”³ This rebirth of art would not be realized through outside forces but through a vertical movement in society from the lower

classes to the upper classes. *L'Art Moderne's* artistic views, colored by socialist political leanings, would set the tempo of Les XX as well as define avant-gardism in Belgium for nearly three and a half years.

L'Art Moderne's combative and polemical style, evident from the first, was heightened after its adoption of Les XX. While *L'Art Moderne* was undoubtedly a crucial factor in Les XX's success, the group has a profound effect on the periodical. For *L'Art Moderne*, Les XX was the embodiment of "l'art jeune" and its members "les apporteurs de neuf." *L'Art Moderne* was in open rebellion against the academy, the salon, and the status quo in general. "Le petit navire," a favorite sobriquet given to Les XX by *L'Art Moderne*, was launched to fight for artistic freedom and a new social order. Thus Les XX provided *L'Art Moderne* with a palpable, active model of the periodical's ideas. The Vingtistes demonstrated through their art the validity of *L'Art Moderne's* theories and by so doing enhanced its prestige and gave greater meaning to its mission. It was due to Les XX that Maus and Picard were able to expand their contacts in Paris and London, recruiting special foreign correspondents for *L'Art Moderne* such as Félix Fénéon on art, André Gide on literature, and Claude Debussy on music. Maus eventually became the Brussels correspondent for the Parisian *Revue Indépendante*. Without Les XX, *L'Art Moderne* would probably have remained a far more insular review whose influence would have been restricted to Belgium.

L'Art Moderne's basic philosophy was well established even before Les XX's creation in 1883. The periodical defined its enemies as the bourgeois public, the press, and the Salon. By refusing to champion any one particular style, *L'Art Moderne* incorporated within itself the unending possibility for renewal. *L'Art Moderne* undoubtedly hoped to remove the accent from artistic rivalries and focus upon what it considered the inexorable evolution of art. Thus it could remain avant-garde and not be subsumed by the next progressive movement or review on the horizon.

Whether the founding members of Les XX would accept *L'Art Moderne's* leadership and by implication its definition of avant-gardism, was the first major issue facing the group. From the beginning the ultraradical stance of Les XX's ideals as set forth in *L'Art Moderne* collided with the more conservative views of some of its members. The attempt to end the annual lecture series illustrates the rift that quickly developed.

In 1884, at the first annual exhibition, lectures were given by Edmond Picard; Albert Giraud, editor of *La Jeune Belgique*; Catulle Mendès, French Parnassian poet and friend of Richard Wagner; and Georges Rodenbach, Symbolist poet and contributor to *La Jeune Belgique*. Picard in his lecture entitled "L'art jeune" offered an impassioned defense of Realism and repudiated all official art. Albert Giraud's lecture on "La petite presse en Belgique" ridiculed the daily press and its reviews of Les XX. Catulle Mendès reminisced on his relationship with Richard Wagner who had died the previous

year and who through his synthesis of music, drama, and poetry was a source of inspiration to the avant-garde. Georges Rodenbach's lecture on "Les Jeunes Belges" was devoted to expounding the unity of the artistic and literary movements in their rejection of banal academic principles. It is thus hardly surprising that the more conservative members of Les XX would attempt to put an end to the lecture series.

Willy Finch, in a letter to Maus, vehemently objected to this proposal:

Quel est le pignouf qui a proposé la suppression des conférences? Nous sommes donc de nouveau envahit par *l'officiellisme*. C'est donc une bête féroce qui nous poursuivra partout. . . . Nous devons non seulement combattre *l'officiellisme* en dehors de la société mais encore chez nous en plein XX? Je suis indigné! Engagez bien les XX à voter pour le maintien des conférences. . . .⁴

Who is the pea-brain who has proposed the suppression of the lecture series? So we are invaded once more by officialdom—a ferocious beast which pursues us everywhere. . . . Must we not only fight off officialdom outside the group but within the very midst of Les XX as well? I am indignant! Urge Les XX to vote for keeping the lecture series. . . .

The *pignouf* who suggested the abolition of the lecture series was fellow Vingtiste Jean Delvin.⁵

Without additional documentation one can only guess at the reasons which prompted Delvin's suggestion. Most likely the conservative Delvin sought to avoid a recurrence of the fanfare of the 1884 lectures. A vote on 7 December 1884 resulted in the continuation of the lecture series.⁶ It is interesting that Delvin's negative vote was echoed by Vanaise and Verstraete, two other very conservative members and undoubtedly the bastions of *l'officiellisme* within Les XX.⁷

Some critics noted that Les XX, contrary to *L'Art Moderne's* claims, was not solely composed of radical elements. H. Vigoureux of *L'Etudiant* proclaimed, "En effet, il y a une extrême gauche, une gauche conservatrice et même une droite aux XX. . . ."⁸ Many critics agreed with Vigoureux's classification of Ensor, Vogels, Finch, Toorop, and Chainaye as the most radical Vingtistes; Simons and Verstraete the most conservative; and Verheyden, Schlobach, Van Rysselberghe, Charlet, Goethals, Van Strydonck, Khnopff, Dubois, and Charlier as moderates.⁹ The existence of the conservative element clearly ran counter to Picard's claim that Les XX included within its ranks "les plus audacieux et les plus indomptés des néo-peintres. . . ."¹⁰ This contradiction was a source of embarrassment and irritation which led *L'Art Moderne* to engineer a campaign to purge Les XX's conservative members.

Between 1884 and 1886, *L'Art Moderne* and its allies in the press attacked the conservative contingent in Les XX. First Verhaert, then Verstraete and Simons, then Delvin and Vanaise resigned in protest (see Chapter 5, Selection of Members). These artists were drummed out of Les XX by these repeated

attacks. Picard, undoubtedly referring to these artists, confessed in 1885 that, "Certains artistes sur lesquels on fondait des espérances ont envoyé des oeuvres médiocres ou mauvaises. . . ." ¹¹

Although this purge points to a convergence of avant-garde theory and artistic practice, Les XX was not yet the paradigm of the avant-garde that *L'Art Moderne* sought to establish. Examples abound of Les XX's desire for recognition from the artistic establishment. The election of 1884 of Isidore Verheyden, an established artist, over Jan Toorop, a newcomer, reflected Les XX's and Maus's inclination to temper the avant-garde dogma with clear examples of moderation. When Paul Dubois and Guillaume van Strydonck won the Government's Godecharles contest for *Hippomène* and *Tobias Triptych* (Illustration 11) respectively, *L'Art Moderne* claimed a brilliant victory. ¹² In fact, these award-winning works were examples of the very mythological and religious subjects scorned by Picard in his 1884 lecture.

From *L'Art Moderne*'s point of view, these compromises were probably necessary to attain a degree of acceptance among the art viewing and buying public. However, Les XX's critics did not pass up the opportunity to point out this contradiction. *Le Patriote* of 2 February 1885 best summed up the disparity between what one logically expected from Les XX, based on the prose of *L'Art Moderne*, and the reality encountered in the group's exhibitions.

Tous étaient à leur poste, en habit noir et cravate blanche, comme des académiciens. . . . Ceux qui étaient venus avec l'idée de rencontrer des révolutionnaires auront été étrangement surpris; dans leurs productions même, à part quelques-unes dont l'intransigeance est notoire; les autres sont imbus de principes voire même excellents. ¹³

All were at their posts in black dress and white tie, like academicians. . . . Those who came with the idea of encountering revolutionaries would have been strangely surprised. Aside from several whose intransigence is well known, their very works were imbued with, indeed, even excellent principles.

Another issue which tarnished Les XX's radical image was the extent to which the group acted as a jury despite its avowed rejection of the jury system. Simply because the number of members was limited and the *invités* were so carefully selected, Les XX constituted a jury. ¹⁴ On a few occasions Les XX actually rejected submitted works. The first instance was in 1886 when a work by Jean Delvin was rejected (see Chapter 5, Selection of Members).

This rejection may have had the desired result of purging an embarrassingly academic artist. However, regardless of the motives, Les XX did violate its basic tenet of liberty to all.

An event at the exhibition of 1888 casts additional doubt on the notion of artistic freedom at Les XX. The writer Grégoire Le Roy stated that there was a plot against Ensor to exclude his works from Les XX. ¹⁵ The contemporary press offered a variety of confusing statements. *L'Emancipation* and *Le Rapide* regretted not seeing any of Ensor's works at Les XX. ¹⁶ *The Journal de*

Bruxelles of 10 February 1888 provided an explanation for the absence of Ensor's works, stating that he was ill and would send to Les XX only drawings and etchings. The principle work would be *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (Illustration 12).¹⁷ However *La Chronique* of the same day has no mention of Ensor's illness, and stated "Le brave impressionniste James Ensor lui-même a failli voir tout son envoi refusé en bloc. . . ."¹⁸ *La Chronique* further explained that only after he protested his exclusion was his work admitted.

As Madame Legrand has shown, based on documentation in the Archives de l'art contemporain, Ensor was indeed ill and requested permission to send his works to Les XX after the official opening.¹⁹ Ensor stated, "Veuillez m'apprendre si vous vous chargez du déplacement des oeuvres de mon voisin M. Toulouse Lautrec, et du placement des miennes."²⁰ [Please let me know if you have taken down the works of my neighbor, Monsieur Toulouse Lautrec, and placed mine there.] Ensor's insistence that Lautrec's work be taken down to make room for his probably angered Maus. As Madame Legrand suggests, perhaps Ensor's enemies at Les XX did profit from his delay and therefore his paintings were not shown at all. Ultimately only Ensor's drawings and engravings were hung at Les XX that year. Ensor later wrote of this incident in 1928 to André de Ridder, "En 1888, devant une cabale fomentée par des pairs jaloux, aujourd'hui hors de combat, je dus retirer tout mon envoi déjà noté au catalogue. . . ."²¹ [In 1888, before a cabal fomented by jealous colleagues today forgotten, I had to withdraw all my works already listed in the catalogue. . . .]

Although Ensor's statement is largely incorrect, there is evidence to show that Les XX did indeed reject one of his works that year. *Le Patriote*, *La Chronique*, *L'Impartial de Gand* all mention that Ensor's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (Illustration 12) was refused for indecency.²² Mecoenas of *La Chronique* stated, "Vous qui y avez introduit ainsi dans votre soi-disant intransigeante et révolutionnaire association des détestables errements des jurys officiels tant bafoués!"²³ [You who have introduced into your so-called intransigent and revolutionary society the very detestable lapses of official juries you scoff at so!] *L'Art Moderne* of 26 February 1888 made one slight reference to this incident when it stated that certain critics announced in advance of Les XX's opening that the *Temptation* would cause a public scandal. With attention drawn to the work, it was withdrawn at the request of the Minister of Fine Arts. According to *L'Art Moderne* these same critics charged that Les XX had dared to institute a jury of admission. To this attack *L'Art Moderne* rather lamely replied, "Tout cela ne vaut pas l'honneur d'une réponse."²⁴

Maus explained some years later that Ensor's works at Les XX caused public outrage.

Les rires éclataient et parfois les bagarres. Impossible d'exposer pareilles peintures. Le parquet ferait une descente! Le gouvernement fermerait l'exposition.²⁵

Laughter broke out and sometimes scuffles. Impossible to exhibit such paintings. The Prosecutor would descend upon us! The government would close the exhibition.

Evidently Maus feared that unless he withdrew the work the government would close the exhibition.

In a letter written in 1928 to André de Ridder, Ensor stated that Les XX tried to disqualify him again from exhibiting. "En 1890, nouvelle cabale. Opposition réactionnaire, et certains pairs méchants votèrent noir. Mon envoi fut accepté à la majorité d'une voix. . . ." ²⁶ [In 1890—new cabal. Reactionary opposition, and certain colleagues voted against me. My works were accepted by a majority of one. . . .] Grégoire Le Roy in a rather imprecise account of this incident supports Ensor's contention. ²⁷ Le Roy claims that Les XX considered expelling Ensor and it was only due to Toorop and to Ensor's own vote that he was not expelled. Paul Haesaerts reports a different version of the incident, stating that it occurred in 1889 and was caused by Achille Chainaye's threats to leave the group if Ensor remained. ²⁸ There are factual errors in both Le Roy's and Haesaert's accounts which call into question the accuracy of this contention. Furthermore there is no documentation at the Archive de l'art contemporain showing that Les XX actually considered expelling Ensor. Not even Ensor stated that Les XX considered his expulsion. However as he suggested to de Ridder, it is quite possible that additional works by him were rejected by Les XX. Maus corroborates this claim when he stated in 1898, "*la plupart des caricatures outrancières d'Ensor furent admises en ce Salon. . . .*" ²⁹ [Italics mine.]

The difficulty Ensor may have encountered at Les XX is clearly shown in his letter to Maus of 4 November 1892. According to Ensor, several Vingtistes tried to persuade him not to exhibit *Les Bons Juges* (Illustration 13) at the 1891 exhibition. Ensor commented "plusieurs des membres me conseillèrent de retirer ce tableau le trouvant mauvais. . . ." ³⁰ Apparently Maus was of the opinion that the painting should be withdrawn. Ensor implored Maus to respect artistic freedom at Les XX: "Laissons donc la liberté à tous. L'artiste avant d'exposer ne se décide pas à la légère. Il a conscience de sa responsabilité et son jugement doit être respecté." ³¹ [Therefore, give liberty to all. The artist does not thoughtlessly exhibit his works. He is conscious of his responsibility, and his judgement must be respected.] With this plea, Ensor was reminding Maus of *L'Art Moderne's* principal credo: "l'artiste . . . doit *se laisser aller à son tempérament.*" ³²

Despite *L'Art Moderne's* assertions that Les XX did not constitute a jury, we have seen that in certain instances it did act very much like a salon jury. It would seem from the evidence provided in the cases of Ensor and Delvin that the submission of works by Vingtistes to their annual exhibition was scrutinized. If Maus considered the work unacceptable, either too radical or too conservative, he did not hesitate to call the group into session for a vote.

Thus although there was no formal selection committee at Les XX, there existed an unwritten code of conformity.

In trying to live up to *L'Art Moderne's* theoretical principles Les XX continuously struggled to balance idealism with pragmatism. By purging its most conservative members, Les XX sought to make its art more avant-garde. This very act, however, violated the libertarian spirit that Les XX claimed to uphold. A similar dilemma was presented by the iconoclastic and provocative art of Ensor. Maus pragmatically withdrew a few of Ensor's works in order to avoid government suppression. While Les XX could be accused of hypocrisy, the striking of a balance between the desire for acceptance and the impulse for unending experimentation was crucial to the group's success.

Political Implications of Les XX's Art

Throughout Les XX's existence a basically hostile press labeled the group as *anarchiste* and attacked Les XX for its stylistic innovations and adherence to *l'art jeune*. Because Edmond Picard's socialist credentials were so indisputable, his close association with Les XX left it tainted in the eyes of the conservative artistic community. In 1888, the orange-colored catalogue was seen as a symbol of rebellion. "Le catalogue est rouge, d'un rouge sang, d'un rouge de combat et de carnage. . . ." ³³

That some critics equated avant-garde art with socialism can be seen in the caricatural illustrations from *Le Patriote Illustré*. ³⁴ (Illustrations 14, 15) Here Meunier's *Puddleur* is ridiculed as a decadent work of art. Seurat's *Young Woman Powdering Herself* is transformed into an old hag powdering her face with "la rouge socialiste." Even Paul Dubois's portrait busts are inexplicably linked with socialism.

That Les XX considered itself anarchistic is reflected in Maus's letter to Verheyden upon his election to Les XX: "On t'acclame membre de la société anarchiste." ³⁵ The label *anarchiste* referred not only to the Vingtistes' avant-garde styles of painting, but also to the political and social philosophy of the group.

In 1886, Picard published in *L'Art Moderne* a three-part article on "L'Art et la Révolution" in which he praised Pierre Kropotkin's *Paroles d'un Révolté* and Jules Vallès's *L'Insurgé*. ³⁶ Ostensibly Picard treated these as literary works but actually he viewed them as models for the artist. Picard declared that poets, instead of taking refuge from contemporary society, should be made aware that "l'heure est venu de tremper la plume dans de l'encre rouge." ³⁷

Picard, like Proudhon, Marx, and Kropotkin, believed in the artist's ability to transform society. This would be accomplished by depicting contemporary society, dissolving the barriers between men, and thereby uniting them in a state of harmony. An integral part of this goal was the international nature of this struggle. Only if artists of all countries united could

the struggle to reform society succeed. Progress toward the inevitable victory was marked by a succession of artistic movements. Picard, in his defense of Impressionism, stated: "Il est le dernier tour de roue de ce vaste engrenage, toujours en mouvement, dont aucune force humaine ne pourrait entraver le fonctionnement, qu'il est aussi puéril d'attaquer qu'absurde de nier."³⁸ [It is the last turn of the wheel in this vast mesh of gears, always moving, which no human force can arrest; it is as silly to attack as it is absurd to deny.] As Marx exhorted the working class, so Picard exhorted the artist.

Ensor's 1885 drawing, the *Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* (Illustration 16), follows Picard's exhortation to the artist to depict his environment. This work contains many banners such as "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité; Vive la Sociale, Amnésie, Le mouvement flamand," all popular slogans of the day. By including "Les XX" and "les Impressionistes belges" alongside these slogans, Ensor explicitly links the artistic struggle with the political.³⁹

The social message of Ensor's work was recognized by contemporary critics. A.J. Wauters of *La Gazette* claimed that the crowd in Ensor's work contained heads "déformées par le travail corporel, convulsionnées par la fatigue de la marche, altérées par la rancune, la vengeance et les appétits. . . ." ⁴⁰ [deformed by physical labor, convulsed by the fatigue of the march, distorted by hatred, vengeance and cravings. . . .] Ensor represented every person "qui veulent améliorer, reformer, renverser, bouleverser, avec ses drapeaux, des étendards, des emblèmes, des symboles, des cartels. . . ." ⁴¹ [who wishes to ameliorate, reform, overthrow, turn upside down, with his flags, standards, emblems, symbols, cartels. . . .]

Despite this example, explicit references to political and social issues are rare among works exhibited at Les XX. Ensor showed *Massacre des Pecheurs à Ostende* in 1889 and *La Belgique au XIXème siècle* in 1891 (Illustration 17). Toorop's *After the Strike* and *Alcoholism* were clearly intended as comments on social issues of the day. Far more typical, however, were the Symbolist works of Khnopff and Redon, Neo-Impressionist works of Van Rysselberghe and Signac, Realist works of Vogels and Van Strydonck, and macabre masks and skeletons of Ensor.

This general absence of overt socialist themes in Les XX's art did not undermine its personal allegiance to the socialist cause. Throughout its existence Les XX's support for the most avant-garde styles of the day, such as Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism, confirmed its anarchistic tendencies. As *L'Art Moderne* made clear, and as the Vingtistes quickly realized, membership in the group itself was a revolutionary act. This may well have had the effect of lessening the pressure on the Vingtistes to depict purely social themes in their art, and allowing them to pursue whatever styles and subject matter they could. As Signac stated, "The anarchist painter is not he who does anarchist painting but he who without caring for money, without desire for recompense, struggles with all his individuality against bourgeois and official

conventions . . . , basing his work on the eternal principles of beauty which are as simple as those of morality."⁴²

With the advent of the Decorative Arts movement, Les XX's socialist leanings became more apparent. For several Vingtistes—especially Van de Velde, Finch, and Lemmen—the writings of William Morris had a major impact on their careers. Morris denounced the evils of the Industrial Revolution and called for a return to craftsmanship that would create an art for all the people and not just an elite. For Morris, the making of beautiful and useful objects would enrich the life of all men. This explicit link between art, morality, politics, and religion inspired several Vingtistes to turn to the Decorative Arts; in the case of Van de Velde, the break with painting was complete.

Both Lemmen and Van de Velde revered Walter Crane, a disciple of Morris. In 1891, Lemmen was the first in Belgium to write an article praising Crane's work.⁴³ Two years later, Van de Velde cited Crane as a model artist who practiced the truth as taught by Kropotkin, "L'art pour se développer doit être relié à l'Industrie par mille degrés intermédiaires, en sorte qu'ils soient pour ainsi dire confondus!"⁴⁴ [In order to progress, Art must be tied to Industry by a thousand intermediate links so that they may be co-mingled!]

In 1891, *L'Art Moderne* published an article entitled "L'Art et Socialisme." Here *L'Art Moderne* came closest to preaching a political doctrine. Speaking of the bourgeoisie it stated, "Malgré sa puissance argentée, et sa puissance armée, elle va s'écrouler, tombant dans les innombrables flots populaires; elle va se dissoudre et disparaître. . . ." ⁴⁵ [In spite of its monied and armed strength, it will topple and, falling into countless popular pieces, dissolve and disappear.] Art will, however, be resurrected and infused into everyday life:

On le verra, redescendant comme autrefois, dans les détails de la vie, embellir l'outil du travailleur, le mobilier des demeures simples, les costumes nationaux. L'assiette, le pot, l'enseigne, la porte, la serrure redeviendront des objets que l'artiste croira digne de l'occuper. . . .⁴⁶

It will be seen as before, reappearing in details of everyday life—embellishing workers' tools, furnishings of simple dwellings, national dress. The plate, pitcher, sign, door, and lock will become worthy objects for the artist. . . .

This is a reference to the Arts and Crafts movement which *L'Art Moderne* believed would break down the differences between the classes and lead to a new social order.

In 1893, when Les XX devoted two exhibition rooms to Decorative Arts, the socialist leader Emil Vandervelde brought sixty members of the Section d'Art to the exhibition.⁴⁷ The Section d'Art, founded in 1891, was the artistic arm of the Maison du Peuple, headquarters of the Parti Ouvrier Belge. The purpose of the Section d'Art was to educate the masses through art, literature,

and music. Instrumental in the founding and running of the Section d'Art were Picard, Maus, Verhaeren, and Khnopff. The link between Les XX, *L'Art Moderne*, and socialism was now made explicit.

The political sympathies of the Vingtistes also made them receptive to Freemasonry ideals. In Belgium, Freemasons were connected with nearly all progressive political and social movements. They favored compulsory education, the betterment of the laboring class, and in 1834, founded the Free University of Brussels.⁴⁸ The progressive character of the Freemasonry movement in Belgium led to the Catholic Church's persecution of the Masons, culminating in the 1850s. For many years thereafter, only liberals and socialists sought admission to the Lodges.⁴⁹

Whether the Vingtistes were actually members of Masonic lodges is difficult to establish.⁵⁰ They were acutely aware of Freemason ideals. Ensor's slogan used in the *Entry of Christ*, "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité," aside from its revolutionary implications, was an important Masonic motto summing up its philosophy: the liberty one retained even after becoming a Mason, the equality of all Masons regardless of political or religious beliefs, and their goal of universality. Les XX, too, believed in the individual freedom of its members and in the universality of its struggle against the conservative bourgeois forces. The parallel between Freemasonry's first article—holding that it "formulates or invokes no dogma"—and Les XX's refusal to adopt rules which might constrain the individual freedom of its members is striking.⁵¹ While this may reflect the influence of Masonic ideals on Les XX, it is more likely that these two societies were both responding to the same anarchistic impulses that prevailed in Belgium in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The implicit and sometimes explicit alliances that Les XX sought outside the art world reflected the sharp social divisions that existed in Belgium at this time. The established order was being challenged by the working class, which had little economic or political power. The violent strikes of the 1880s, the demands for universal suffrage, and the founding of the Parti Ouvrier Belge, were all symptoms of this struggle. That artists often viewed themselves as social outcasts oppressed by the mediocrity of bourgeois taste, is well known.⁵² The goal of overturning the status quo in their own spheres was sufficient to foster a spiritual bond between artists, workers, and Freemasons—groups effectively excluded from power. No doubt Les XX's survival and growth in influence—in contrast to the fate of its avant-garde predecessors the S.L.B.A. and La Chrysalide—were due in part to the simultaneous challenges being mounted against the bourgeois power structure. Les XX's birth was a symptom of the general restlessness of spirit pervading Belgium, but the group's success lay in its ability to identify and promote the avant-garde movements of the day and to galvanize the forces supporting artistic reform.

Internal Dynamics and International Implications

“Cherchons les jeunes, ne vieillissons que le plus tard possible....”

Letter from James Ensor to Octave Maus,
November 1886

Organization of Les XX

The organization of Les XX centered around the office of the secretary. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Les XX rejected L'Essor's form of organization governed by a constitution, a president, and a jury of placement. Les XX viewed its organization as an expression of its anarchistic tendencies and considered its lack of doctrines and rules proof of its avant-gardism.

The secretary, Octave Maus, and a committee of three members who aided him, were responsible for organizing the annual exhibitions. The membership for this committee was to change each year and was selected by lot.¹ For the first year the committee was composed of Khnopff, Lambeaux, and Van Strydonck.² There is no absolute evidence to show if or when the idea of a committee was abandoned. However as Les XX evolved, Octave Maus acquired more power and his influence on Les XX became more extensive.

Maus relied much on the advice of friends and their connections in furthering Les XX's cause (see later in this chapter, *Invités*). He created the position of treasurer and appointed his friend Victor Bernier to the post.³ Bernier's task was to provide Maus with a balance sheet of debits and credits for Les XX, which Maus in turn published.

As the organizer of the exhibitions, Maus would send a standard letter to the invited artists. After several follow-up letters, he made it clear he interpreted their silence as an acceptance. Maus requested the following from the *invités*: the list of works which they intended to show at Les XX (this became their *notice* which was published in the Les XX catalogue), sales prices, and a list of guests whom the *invité* wished to invite to the opening.⁴ Maus would inform each artist of the dates by which the works would reach Brussels

and that the cost of shipping their works by railroad was paid for by Les XX. If sent from Paris, works were to be delivered prepacked to one central location. If the artist chose not to pack his own works there would be a charge for this service.⁵

One of Maus's tasks was to secure exhibition space. Although it was government policy to reserve several rooms for temporary exhibitions sponsored by artistic groups, Maus met with some difficulty in obtaining space for Les XX's second show. For the 1885 exhibition Maus requested permission from Auguste Beernaert, Minister of Fine Arts, to reexhibit in rooms 11 and 12 of the Palais des Beaux-Arts.⁶ At first Maus was denied permission. He printed Beernaert's rejection as well as his own response in *L'Art Moderne*.⁷ Maus claimed that the previous year this denial had been predicted by an opponent of Les XX. Maus was probably referring to Théo Hannon (alias Mecoenas) of *La Chronique*, who as early as 18 February 1884 deplored the government's lending space to the Vingtistes. Hannon claimed the government regretted it had done so and would be more circumspect in the future. Maus declared that if Beernaert persisted in his refusal "il serait inconsciemment un polichinelle dont on tire la ficelle pour réaliser cette prophétie."⁸

In spite of governmental resistance, Maus's request was subsequently honored. In fact he managed to secure for the 1885 exhibition even larger quarters than were provided in 1884. Unfortunately the Les XX archive does not contain additional letters from Beernaert to Maus explaining this change of heart. Whatever the reasons, we may be sure that the political and social contacts of Maus and Picard, as well as the role played by *L'Art Moderne* in publishing Les XX's difficulties, were crucial in obtaining the exhibition space.

Throughout Les XX's existence, conservative critics continued to protest this official, albeit indirect, support given to Les XX. *Le Courrier Belge* of 5 February 1888 wondered how the government could lend space to "une exhibition de mystificateurs qui se moquent du public, de l'art, du bon goût et de bonnes moeurs. . . ." ⁹ The question of granting space to Les XX was even raised in the Belgian parliament. On 28 March 1889 Armand Anspach, the representative from Thuin, demanded that the government cease giving asylum to Les XX. He claimed that, "Le gouvernement accorde les locaux à un groupe de fumistes qui, sera sous le nom de 'Cercle des XX,' organisent des expositions abracadabrantes. . . ." ¹⁰ The practical advantages of obtaining sufficient exhibition space in an easily accessible location evidently outweighed any attacks of hypocrisy on Les XX's part.

The exhibitions were held for one month each year usually during February and March.¹¹ They were open daily from 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. and the entrance fee was fifty centimes. Days on which concerts or lectures were given, the rate increased to two francs.¹² Admission to the opening was five francs unless one received an invitation. Invitations were issued to friends of

the Vingtistes, and the *invités*, to artists, musicians, men of letters, and the press.

In 1886, Les XX began offering an exhibition pass that sold for ten francs (the price was raised to fifteen francs in 1891) and entitled the bearer to admission at any time, including the opening. Beginning in 1888 the pass entitled one to a reserved seat at the concerts and lectures. Passes were purchased from Maus at his home, 27 rue du Berger, Brussels. The exhibition pass was largely a revenue-raising device aimed at friends of Maus and Picard who could afford to make a modest contribution to Les XX. In addition to funds raised at the exhibition, each member of Les XX was assessed a fee of twenty-five francs which was refunded at the close of the show.¹³ Les XX relied on a modest loan from its members, admission receipts, and catalogue sales to finance its exhibitions.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Les XX's method of financing stood in sharp contrast to L'Essor's, which relied on the sale of lottery tickets. The carnival-like atmosphere of L'Essor's exhibitions reflected its overriding commitment to attracting the largest viewing audience and selling as many works as possible. Les XX, however, was committed to revolutionizing art and educating the public. Its devotion to this higher ideal caused Les XX to deemphasize the commercial goal of its exhibitions and create a serious atmosphere for viewing works of art.

In keeping with Les XX's desire to avoid the favoritism often associated with salon exhibitions, placement of works at Les XX was by lot. Once assigned a space, the artist was free to arrange his works as he chose.¹⁴ All the paintings insofar as possible were arranged in one row at eye level so that the works could be examined without fatigue. The names of the artists were displayed either above or below their works. Unlike the practice of the salon, Les XX did not number its pictures in consecutive order. This required the viewer to study the works of art in greater detail to associate the work with its title in the catalogue.

Opening day at Les XX was always packed and critics usually complained that the rooms were so crowded one could only see the backs of people. Attending Les XX's exhibitions became a major social event: "C'est le Tout-Bruxelles artiste, les gens qui connaissent les peintres, qui aiment du Wagner et mettent sur leur guéridon le dernier roman de Paris."¹⁵ *Le Progrès* continued, "Décidément cette exposition particulière devient un événement dans Bruxelles. Un mois à l'avance on en jacasse, on s'en préoccupe, on en dispute. . . ." ¹⁶ [Decidedly, this private exhibition has become an event in Brussels. One month in advance people are chattering about it, preoccupied with it, discussing it. . . .] Charles van Lerberghe, the Symbolist poet, attended the opening on 7 February 1891 and recorded his reaction in his diary: "L'après midi ouverture des XX. Joyeuse impression d'art dans tout ce

bariolage un peu fou mais si beau d'audace, de jeunesse, de nouveauté et dans ce milieu élégant de jolies femmes et d'artistes."¹⁷ [The afternoon opening of Les XX. Joyful impression of art in all its diversity: a bit crazy, but so handsomely bold, youthful and novel—and in an elegant setting of beautiful women and artists.]

Les XX was a success from a financial point of view as well. From the outset, *invités* as well as members sold works at the exhibitions.¹⁸ In addition Les XX averaged over its ten-year period receipts of 4,500 francs per year. The treasurer Bernier made the following apt observation, "Pour une exposition critiquée dès le début et qui était condamnée à sa naissance; 5,000 francs par an, et cela d'une façon continue."¹⁹

Receipts for Les XX rose quickly for the first four years, reflecting interest generated by *L'Art Moderne's* attacks in the press and in the controversial new art, such as Neo-Impressionism, shown at Les XX. Thereafter receipts remained fairly stable, declining somewhat in Les XX's last two years. The relative success and popularity of Les XX can be measured by comparing its paid attendance with that of the Triennial Brussels Salon. From 1884 to 1890, attendance at the Salon declined by forty-three percent from 54,700 to 31,300.²⁰ During the same years, attendance at Les XX increased by forty-five percent from 4,300 to almost 6,300.

L'Art Moderne concluded from these statistics that Les XX had successfully educated the art-viewing public. Since the Salon of 1890 differed little from that of 1884, *L'Art Moderne* claimed that it was "l'oeil du public qui commence à voir clair."²¹ By providing an alternate and exciting exhibition ground, Les XX had diminished the power of the Salon, exposed the public to the most avant-garde art of the day, and still managed to turn a profit.

How Les XX could achieve such results while the Impressionists in Paris could not, tells us something about the differences between the art establishment in France and Belgium and the differences between the organization of the two groups. It is hard to imagine Les XX's success without *L'Art Moderne* and the dedication and social and political contacts of Maus and Picard. These men were in a position to defend the group against attacks in the press and to encourage their wide circle of friends to purchase Les XX's art.

The Impressionists were not so fortunate. They did not have a group of willing patrons from the beginning nor did they have an official periodical to defend them throughout the year. Furthermore, the Impressionists were battling the French Salon—a single, centralized organization in a country where the primacy of Paris and the centralization of decision making was a powerful historical fact. The Belgian Academy was decentralized, with the annual salons alternating between Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent. The pluralism and decentralization of authority in Belgium were a necessity in a

linguistically and culturally divided country. This social structure meant that in Belgium the salon was not the monolithic force it was in France. Thus Les XX's success was also related to a relatively weaker Salon and to a pluralistic tradition that made Belgium a more tolerant society than France.

Selection of Members

Even before the first exhibition of Les XX opened on 2 February 1884, Les XX became Les XIX when Péricle Pantazis died on 27 January 1884. Shortly before his death he sent Maus a list of his works to be included in Les XX.²² They were hung at the exhibition, marked by a crown of crepe.

During the 1884 exhibition two other members, Jef Lambeaux and Piet Verhaert, resigned. Lambeaux officially resigned in a letter to Maus dated 25 February 1884.²³ Unfortunately for scholarship, Lambeaux had discussed his reasons for this action with Maus three days earlier and did not repeat them in his letter. Nonetheless, *L'Art Moderne* does provide us with some insight into Lambeaux's resignation. On 1 February 1885 *L'Art Moderne* commented, undoubtedly referring to Lambeaux, "Nous nous souvenons aussi, hélas! des quelques pusillanimes que l'on parvint à effrayer et qui sortirent des rangs avant la mêlée."²⁴ [We remember also, alas!, several cowards who were scared off and who left the ranks before the fray began.] In a more pointed reference to Lambeaux, *L'Art Moderne* stated that among the artists at Les XX there was a sculptor, of admirable talent, "qui, sous l'impression des craintes que surent lui inspirer les adversaires acharnés de la nouvelle école, déserta..."²⁵ [Who, frightened by the relentless enemies of the new school, deserted it....]

As for Verhaert, he was attacked by two supporters of Les XX: *La Jeune Belgique*²⁶ and *La Chronique des Beaux-Arts*.²⁷ (See Chapter 3.) No doubt sensing the disparity between his conservative works and those of Les XX, Verhaert decided to withdraw. Verhaert may have also resigned as a measure of support for his friend Lambeaux.

Shortly after the close of their first exhibition, Les XX had an election to fill the vacancy left by Pantazis. There was a run-off between Isidore Verheyden and Jan Toorop. Toorop, a member of L'Essor, was twelve years younger than Verheyden and was not well known in Brussels at the time. A letter from Vingtiste Achille Chainaye to Maus reveals that Maus had been lobbying for Verheyden's election. Chainaye confessed that although he originally promised Maus he would support Verheyden, he had to switch his allegiance to Toorop. Toorop, Chainaye felt, "a besoin d'être vengé plus spécialement que Verheyden parce qu'il est plus attaqué, plus mal placé quand il expose aux expositions officielles, plus jeune..."²⁸ [Needs to be avenged particularly more than Verheyden because he is attacked more often and (his works) placed more disadvantageously when he shows at official exhibitions—

and he is younger. . . .] As a compromise Chainaye suggested that Verheyden be invited as head of the *invités*. The irony of the situation occurs to Chainaye when he adds that it is peculiar to be suddenly part of a jury.

Interestingly enough, the very reasons why Chainaye voted for Toorop led Charles Goethals to opt for Verheyden. Although Goethals felt enormous sympathy for Toorop, he was compelled to cast his vote for Verheyden: "Depuis longtemps j'aurai voulu voir Toorop parmi nous où sa place est toute marquée. . . ." ²⁹ [For a long time I have wanted to see Toorop among us. His place is already reserved. . . .] However, speaking of Verheyden, Goethals stated, "Pensez donc . . . un homme arrivé, décoré, médaillé, tableau au musée, etc. . . ." ³⁰ [Imagine that! a decorated, medaled, successful man, with a painting in a museum, etc. . . .] Thus Goethals felt that Verheyden was preferable to Toorop because he would provide an air of respectability for Les XX. On 20 November 1884 Maus informed Verheyden that he had been elected a "membre de la société anarchiste." ³¹ The public announcement appeared in *L'Art Moderne* three days later. ³²

In December another election was held to fill the vacancy created by Verhaert's resignation. This time Toorop ran against TerLinden and won. ³³ Lambeaux had been replaced earlier by another sculptor, Guillaume Charlier.

Simons and Verstraete resigned from Les XX in 1885 after repeated attacks upon their works. ³⁴ Clamors for the ousting of the conservative Vingtistes came from Jacques Dur of *Le National Belge* and Lucien Solvay of *La Gazette*. ³⁵ In fact Solvay called for the resignation of Simons, Verstraete, Delvin, and Vanaise. ³⁶ Referring to Simons, *L'Art Moderne* commented: "Il était visible, d'après ses tableaux exposés, qu'un désaccord absolu existe entre son art et celui des XX." ³⁷ As early as 13 November 1884 Dario de Regoyos revealed his displeasure with fellow Vingtiste Simons. Regoyos, while casting his vote for Verheyden, suggested to Maus, "Vous feriez mieux de foutre à la porte Simons et le remplacer par Toorop. . . ." ³⁸ As for Verstraete, *Le National Belge* offered this commentary, "Verstraete vend très bien; c'est tout ce que nous pouvons dire de lui. . . ." ³⁹

Verstraete responded to these attacks in a letter to *L'Etoile Belge* which was published on 6 March 1885. ⁴⁰ He announced his resignation from Les XX because the group did not protest the harsh criticism leveled at him. As Verstraete observed, his resignation along with Verhaert's and Simons's meant there was no longer an Antwerp contingent at Les XX. This ran counter to Les XX's claims in 1884 to represent the art of the entire country.

Les XX's desire to recruit members throughout Belgium reflected its aim of encouraging artistic production of Belgian artists. However, the artists from Antwerp tended to be conservative, looking to their Flemish past, and were not open to contemporary developments in France and England. With the exception of Henry van de Velde, elected to Les XX in November of 1889, the

Antwerp members of Les XX were an embarrassment to a group which prided itself on its progressive tendencies.

In 1886 the last of the conservatives, Delvin and Vanaise, finally resigned. Their resignations were precipitated by an emergency meeting of the group called by Maus to discuss one of Delvin's paintings. After a vote was taken, one of Delvin's paintings was denied admission.⁴¹ Madeleine Maus suggested that this action was taken because Delvin had exceeded his space limitations.⁴² It is more likely however that the members of Les XX decided to force a resignation from Delvin. In 1885 *L'Art Moderne* said of his works,

Ces oeuvres, de même que les peintures de Simons, détonnent dans le magnifique ensemble des XX. Peut-être est-ce à dessein que les membres du Cercle novateur ont pris parmi eux quelques représentants de l'art de jadis. Ils ont voulu sans doute montrer la distance qui sépare les deux écoles. . . .⁴³

These works, as well as the paintings of Simons, clash among the magnificent ensemble of Les XX. Perhaps it is on purpose that the members of this innovative group have included in their ranks several representatives of old-fashioned art. Undoubtedly, they wish to show the gulf that separates the two schools. . . .

Delvin sent his letter of resignation to Maus on 5 February 1886, stating, "Ne voulant me résoudre à n'exposer qu'une partie de mon envoi à l'exposition des XX, je vous prie de faire retirer *toutes* mes toiles figurant au Salon. . . ." ⁴⁴ [Not wishing to exhibit only a part of my works at Les XX, please withdraw *all* my canvases represented at the exhibition. . . .] Vanaise resigned from Les XX on 6 February declaring, "une tendance unique et absolue s'étant imposée aux XX. . . ." ⁴⁵ The resignations of Delvin and Vanaise completed the conservative purge of Les XX.

The death of Charles Goethals in November 1885 vacated yet another spot within Les XX. It was quickly decided that Henry de Groux, a member of L'Essor since 1884 and son of the Realist painter and S.L.B.A. founder Charles de Groux, would replace Goethals.⁴⁶ However, one of the names under consideration, that of James Whistler, for either of the two remaining vacancies, caused considerable controversy within Les XX.

Whistler, who had previously exhibited at Les XX in 1884 and 1886, was proposed by Willy Finch. In a letter to Maus, Finch stated, "J'ai revu Whistler, qui désire ardemment faire parti des XX."⁴⁷ Finch continued that he had visited Whistler often and that, "C'est un homme sur qui on peut compter."⁴⁸

Finch's enthusiasm for Whistler's candidacy was not shared by Maus. Although he admired Whistler, Maus replied that he could not support Whistler's election: "C'est qu'il *est* étranger et qu'il *habite* à l'étranger."⁴⁹ Maus proposed that the two remaining vacancies be set aside for young Belgian artists, adding "rien de plus stimulant pour leur activité que citer récompense éventuelle d'entrer aux XX."⁵⁰

James Ensor, echoing Maus's concerns, argued that Whistler was already an established artist with a considerable reputation: "Pourquoi admettre Whistler? Sa peinture sent déjà le moisi et le renfermé, il est connu et reconnu, quel art et principe nouveaux peut-il apporter chez nous?"⁵¹ [Why admit Whistler? His painting already smells moldy and musty, he is known and recognized. What new art or principles can he bring us?] In addition Ensor felt that Les XX should only exist for the young artists of the day, "Cherchons les jeunes, ne vieillissons que le plus tard possible. Place à ceux qui cherchent et non à ceux qui ont trouvé."⁵² [Let's seek out the young, and only grow old as late as possible. Make way for those who seek—not for those who have arrived.] Ensor's second reason for denying Whistler membership was nationalistic. "Pourquoi admettre des étrangers? N'y a-t-il plus de jeunes en Belgique? Sommes-nous les derniers jeunes?"⁵³ [Why admit foreigners? Are there no more young artists in Belgium? Are we the last of the young?] Ensor maintained that if an older artist must be admitted to Les XX, why should it not be an older Belgian. He concluded, "Je verrais avec beaucoup de peine les XX perdre leur virginité, leur nationalité et peut-être leur personnalité en tombant dans les griffes des arrivés."⁵⁴ [I would view with much pain Les XX's loss of virginity, nationality and, perhaps, personality by falling into the claws of the established.] Vogels, a close friend of Ensor's, echoed his sentiments by stating that he preferred the candidate to be "le plus belge possible."⁵⁵ Similarly Rodolphe Wytzman voted against Whistler declaring, "Je suis d'avis que notre groupe doit rester exclusivement belge. . . ."⁵⁶

The results of the election were publicly announced in *L'Art Moderne*, 5 December 1886. The Vingtistes in a vote of ten to seven decided to leave the two slots vacant, "afin de les réserver à des jeunes artistes belges dont le mérite se révélerait quelque jour."⁵⁷ [In order to reserve them for young Belgian artists whose merit would come to light someday.]

The controversy over Whistler, which deeply split the group, did not mean that Les XX wanted to found a national school. A national school was inherently anti-avant-garde since it implied that art was a unique product of each country. *L'Art Moderne's* theory of avant-gardism recognized only an art in flux, an art devoted to constant experimentation. It was the commitment to avant-gardism and not nationality that united progressive artists.

However, the Whistler controversy did reflect the group's desire to provide a haven for young Belgian artists who dared to be avant-garde. Les XX was international in theory, but national in membership because its primary mission was to resuscitate art within Belgium. Les XX's election of Rodin in 1889 and Signac in 1891, revealed the group's shift toward internationalism. French art, especially Seurat's, had had the greatest effect on Les XX. Rodin and Signac's elections were open acknowledgment of the group's debt to Paris.

Another aspect of Les XX's rejection of Whistler's candidacy was, according to Madame Legrand, Ensor's fear of Whistler's mounting

ascendancy within Les XX. Already in 1886 artists such as Van Rysselberghe, Khnopff, Finch, and Schlobach were under Whistler's influence. Works such as Van Rysselberghe's *Portrait d'Octave Maus* (Illustration 18), shown at Les XX in 1886, and Khnopff's *Portrait de la mère de l'artiste* (Illustration 19), probably shown in 1888, reveal the impact of Whistler.

Isidore Verheyden on 23 May 1887 resigned for "des raisons d'ordre absolument personnel" and Rodolphe Wytsman also resigned on the same grounds.⁵⁸ Both men however continued to maintain warm relations with Les XX after their resignations. In addition to the vacancies of Wytsman, Verheyden, Delvin, and Vanaise, Achille Chainaye had also resigned. Chainaye had turned to journalism in order to support himself. In 1884 he was writing for *Le Wallon* and in 1885 he wrote for *Le National Belge* under the pseudonym Jacques Champal. In 1886 he became a critic for *La Réforme* and in 1895 became its director. He vigorously objected to the Neo-Impressionist movement within Les XX and from 1890 on wrote negative reviews of the group.

It was not until the fall of 1888 that the five empty places were voted upon. Maus presented the Vingtistes with printed ballots bearing the names of twelve candidates who vied for five empty places: Georges Lemmen, Henry van de Velde, Auguste Rodin, James Whistler, André Collin, Frantz Melchers, Paul Signac, Georges Seurat, Louis-Henry Devillez, Degouve de Nuncques, Paul-Albert Besnard, and Jean-François Raffaëlli. All of these candidates were either Belgians or former *invités* of Les XX. We know that of these, Rodin, Whistler, and Raffaëlli had earlier expressed a desire to become members of Les XX. Balloting took place at the end of October and the beginning of November and three of the five spots were filled by Lemmen, Van de Velde, and Rodin.

Rodin had shown with Les XX in 1884 and 1887 as an *invité*. Maus in a letter to Rodin dated 8 November 1888 announced the sculptor's unanimous election to Les XX. In fact Maus had earlier called upon Rodin in Paris to discuss this election stating, "Je tenais surtout à vous parler d'un projet dont nous avons causé jadis ensemble."⁵⁹ Thus we can assume Maus had at some time contacted all the candidates and that they were all willing to become Vingtistes.

Of the three new recruits, Lemmen had earlier been a member of L'Essor, where he had exhibited from 1884 through 1886. He had shown there along with Toorop and De Groux, who were undoubtedly influential in securing his membership in Les XX. Lemmen's election had been predicted by *La Wallonie* as early as 15 January 1887: "On parle déjà de M. Lemmen comme futur Vingtiste."⁶⁰ Lemmen was overjoyed with his election.⁶¹

As for Van de Velde, his name was proposed as early as 9 December 1886 by Heymans, an artist friend of Maus's.⁶² Following Heymans's suggestion, Van Rysselberghe visited Van de Velde's studio with his friend Emile

Verhaeren. On 1 January 1887, Van Rysselberghe wrote to Maus expressing interest in Van de Velde's work.⁶³ The fact that Van de Velde had been rejected by the Antwerp Salon of 1885 and the Ghent Salon of 1886 served to make him a more attractive candidate. Van de Velde was instrumental in attempting to organize an Antwerp group of artists patterned after Les XX (see later in this chapter, Groups Patterned After Les XX). Although this effort failed, it no doubt enhanced Van de Velde's popularity among the Vingtistes. Maus informed Van de Velde of his unanimous election of 12 November 1888 declaring, "Pas la moindre voix discordante ceux des Vingtistes qui n'avaient pas vu vos oeuvres se sont ralliés à l'opinion que nous leurs avons exprimée."⁶⁴ [Not the least discordant voice—those Vingtistes who had not seen your works rallied around the opinion that we expressed to them.]

In 1890, three candidates were considered for election: William Degouve de Nuncques, Frantz Melchers, and Robert Picard.⁶⁵ Maus's behind the scenes manipulations are revealed in his letter to Rodin of 23 November 1889. Maus sent Rodin the ballot imprinted with the names of the three candidates and suggested that Rodin might want to abstain from voting since he did not know these three artists. However if he is at all inclined to vote, Maus urged Rodin to vote for Robert Picard, the son of Edmond Picard. Melchers and Degouve de Nuncques can wait, Maus continued, since they are young. (In actuality Picard, at age twenty, was younger than either Melchers or Degouve de Nuncques.) Besides, Maus concluded, a place should be left open at Les XX "pour le cas où surgirait un talent exceptionnel."⁶⁶

Maus apparently wrote a similar letter to Van de Velde. Van de Velde replied that he was so enthusiastic about the prospect of seeing Picard's work that he would cast his vote first, and in a complete show of confidence in Maus added "Pourquoi ne décide-tu [sic] pas *seul* en ces occasions. . . ." ⁶⁷ Picard was the only member elected in 1890.

Henri de Groux, who proposed Degouve de Nuncques's name, wrote an irate letter to Maus on 8 December 1889 threatening to resign. De Groux was insulted since not only was Degouve de Nuncques not elected, he was not even invited to the Les XX exhibition.⁶⁸ De Groux, angered by his failure to obtain a place for his friend at Les XX, was further incensed by pointillism at Les XX and by the works of Van Gogh. In a letter incorrectly dated 16 January 1889, (should be 1890), an outraged De Groux writes to Maus,

J'ai jugé, à propos de protester contre l'envahissement aux XX de cette bande d'insipides et grossiers farceurs, et contre notre charlatanesque manie d'exhiber leurs croûtes en guise de réclame. Les tableaux de Monsieur Vincent [sic] Sisley, Dubois-Pillet qui est peut-être un très bel officier, mais certainement le plus mauvais peintre de la création. . . .⁶⁹

I have decided to protest against the invasion at Les XX of this band of insipid and coarse jokers, and against their quackish idiosyncrasy of exhibiting their leftovers for self-aggrandizement. The paintings of Monsieur Vincent [sic], Sisley, Dubois-Pillet (who is perhaps a very fine-looking officer, but certainly the worst painter in creation). . . .

De Groux stated that he did not wish to be in the same room with "le misérable pot de soleils, de Monsieur Vincent ou de tant autre agent provocateur."⁷⁰

On the eve of Les XX's opening, a banquet was held during which an altercation arose between De Groux, Signac, and Lautrec over Van Gogh's works. Talk of a duel ensued and that very evening De Groux was expelled from Les XX.⁷¹ The next day De Groux sent a formal letter of resignation as well as a letter of apology. Maus declared, "J'eus toutes les peines du monde, le lendemain, à amener De Groux à une rétraction."⁷² In his letter of apology De Groux affirmed, "Je déclare n'avoir pas eu l'intention de blesser personnellement Monsieur Signac et Lautrec ni les autres invités des XX...."⁷³

The last election at Les XX took place in 1891 in which Signac and Minne were elected. Minne first exhibited his sculptures at the Ghent Triennial in 1889. Emile Verhaeren praised Minne's work and undoubtedly was responsible for Minne's being invited to exhibit with Les XX in 1890.⁷⁴

Signac had exhibited at Les XX as an *invité* in 1888 and 1890. In 1887 after accompanying Seurat to the Les XX exhibition, Signac wrote to Maus inviting some of the Vingtistes to exhibit in the offices of the Parisian periodical *La Vie Moderne*.⁷⁵ Although this exhibition did not take place, it nonetheless revealed the growing ties between the French and Belgian avant-garde of this time.

During the years 1884 through 1886, the presence of the conservative membership of Les XX was a glaring contradiction to the claims which *L'Art Moderne* made for the group. Artists such as Lambeaux, Verhaert, Verstraete, Delvin, and Vanaise either resigned out of fear of being associated with a radical group or were drummed out by the consistent attacks of *L'Art Moderne* and its friends. That many of the original Vingtistes had not imagined the role which *L'Art Moderne* would play in shaping the group is revealed by Rodolphe Wytsman's letter to Verhaeren: "Et on a été très épaté lors qu'on a voulu nous donner une attitude révolutionnaire. Aucun de nous n'y a jamais songé...."⁷⁶ [And it was a surprise to have a revolutionary stance attributed to us. None of us had thought of that....] Artists who either disapproved of *L'Art Moderne*'s conception of Les XX or were denounced by that periodical had little choice but to resign. Ex-Vingtiste Achille Chainaye was bitter about the role *L'Art Moderne* played in shaping Les XX: "*L'Art Moderne* petit à petit, il a imposé ses volontés aux Vingtistes...."⁷⁷ However, most of the Vingtistes either passively or actively accepted the definition which *L'Art Moderne* gave to Les XX. Other than the five conservatives, no more than two Vingtistes resigned in protest (Lambeaux and Chainaye) and most of the others indicated their confidence in Maus's leadership in their correspondence with him.

Invités

For the historical and ideological reasons already discussed, Les XX always stressed the international nature of its movement. Foreign artists were invited each year to exhibit alongside the Vingtistes.⁷⁸ In 1884 well-known artists like Whistler, Rodin, and Liebermann and the Belgians Artan, Heymans, and Rops were invited. Artists such as these provided the newborn Les XX with a credibility and support it needed to survive. Thus one of the issues confronting Les XX yearly was the selection and securing of *invités* for its exhibitions.

Names of *invités* both Belgian and foreign were proposed and decided upon by the Vingtistes. Vingtistes who were unable to attend the selection meetings could write to Maus with their suggestions. Finch in a letter dated 19 October 1884 proposed that Maus invite several Impressionists to the 1885 exhibition: Degas, Raffaëlli, Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Caillebotte, and Israëls fils.⁷⁹

However, not all the letters Maus received proposed names of candidates. Two letters in particular, from Willy Finch and James Ensor, insisted that Alfred Verwée not be invited since he had been particularly harsh towards Vingtistes as a member of the 1884 Salon jury. Finch stated, "S'il est invité, je refuse absolument d'exposer avec lui; nous sommes maîtres chez nous, pourquoi ne le refusèrions nous pas à notre tour. . . ." ⁸⁰ Verwée, a founding member of the S.L.B.A., was never invited to exhibit at Les XX.

Other Vingtistes had strong preferences as to who should be an *invité*. Théo van Rysselberghe writing to Maus on behalf of Frantz Charlet, Willy Schlobach, and himself requested that Degas be invited to exhibit: "*On pourrait même faire des bassesses pour que ce dernier exposât.*" ⁸¹ Often there were requests from past *invités* to invite friends of theirs. Raffaëlli suggested that since Mary Cassatt could not exhibit at the 1887 show, Maus should invite Berthe Morisot. ⁸² So too Rodin requested that his pupil Mademoiselle Claudel be invited. ⁸³

Maus was always aware that a major problem was securing the acceptance of *invités*. In a letter to Van Strydonck, he wrote, "la question est de savoir maintenant si ces artistes accepteront." ⁸⁴ Some *invités* such as Jules Dalou and Puvis de Chavannes declined Les XX's invitation claiming either they had nothing available to exhibit or were too busy working on other projects. ⁸⁵ Frederic Leighton declined because he was opposed to the Impressionist movement at Les XX and felt that his presence would be "une acte d'adhésion." ⁸⁶ It is doubtful we will ever know all the reasons why certain artists were asked to show at Les XX and why others either declined or accepted invitations. In the latter category is Cézanne who accepted Les XX's invitation to exhibit in 1890. ⁸⁷ Teodor de Wyzewa writing to Maus commented upon the difficulty of securing Cézanne:

Cézanne est une espèce de fou qui est persuadé que sa peinture est de la cochonnerie, et qui ne répondrait pas d'avantage à votre invitation qu'à celle des amateurs qui lui demandent à acheter ou même à voir sa peinture. . . .⁸⁸

Cézanne is a kind of madman who is persuaded that his painting is trash, and who will no more respond to your invitation than to those of amateurs who ask to buy or even see his painting. . . .

One way Maus hoped to increase the acceptance rate of *invités* was to develop a network of contacts (*diverses influences*) who could intercede on behalf of Les XX. The recruitment efforts of Eugène Boch, Teodor de Wyzewa, Van Rysselberghe, Signac, Lautrec, Verhaeren, and Maus helped to foster closer ties between Paris and Brussels and also greatly contributed to the success of Les XX. As early as the 1884 exhibition, Maus was soliciting help of a technical sort from Boch. Maus requested that Boch try to obtain for Les XX a discount price for shipping works between Paris and Brussels.⁸⁹ In 1885, Maus went to Paris and personally invited Monet, Renoir, and Carriès to show with Les XX.⁹⁰ Emile Verhaeren was instrumental in suggesting that Seurat exhibit with Les XX. Teodor de Wyzewa's influence in 1889 was crucial in persuading Renoir, who at first declined to participate. De Wyzewa recounted to Maus that the painter Jacques-Emile Blanche had turned Renoir against Les XX. "Blanche l'avait, paraît-il, excité contre votre exposition, en lui racontant que tout y était sacrifié au système pointelleur. . . ."⁹¹ [It appears Blanche has turned him against your exhibition by telling him that at Les XX everything is devoted to pointillism. . . .]

Maus also had difficulty obtaining Sisley's cooperation. After De Wyzewa refused to intervene (he neither knew Sisley nor approved of his art), Maus sought the aid of Eugène Boch, explaining that Sisley had sent two letters of acceptance before finally declining.⁹² Maus feared that Blanche had again turned an Impressionist *invité* against Les XX by claiming that Neo-Impressionism had completely taken over.⁹³ The fear proved groundless and Sisley showed with Les XX in 1891.

Van Rysselberghe was an especially able agent for Maus. In 1887 he contacted Guillaumin, Helleu, Dubois-Pillet, and Anquetin. In 1889 he sought out Hayet, Signac, Gausson, Van Gogh, and again Dubois-Pillet. Not only did Van Rysselberghe eventually persuade all of these artists to exhibit with Les XX, but he could justifiably claim to have discovered Lautrec whose first exhibition was with Les XX in 1888.⁹⁴ Van Rysselberghe wrote Maus that Lautrec not only had talent but that he would be of use to Les XX since "[il] connaît bien un tas de monde."⁹⁵ When Van Rysselberghe wrote Maus in 1889 to allay fears about obtaining *invités*' support, the close relationship of the correspondents was evident: "T'inquiètes pas, ma vieille, t'inquiètes pas! J'ai l'oeil, toi l'autre. . . ."⁹⁶

During its ten years, 126 *invités* exhibited at Les XX. Fifty-seven *invités* were from France, and of these nine were Neo-Impressionists: Seurat, Dubois-Pillet, H.E. Cross, Luce, C. Pissarro, L. Hayet, C. Angrand, L. Gausson, and H. Petitjean. Also well-represented at Les XX were the Impressionists: Jean-François Raffaëlli, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Federico Zandomenighi, Berthe Morisot, Gustave Caillebotte, and Alfred Sisley. Although Les XX invited relative unknowns such as Lautrec, Van Gogh, Anquetin, Gauguin, and Filliger, the group also invited artists of considerable reputation: Bracquemond, Fantin-Latour, Gervex, and Frémiet. By inviting artists of diverse schools, Les XX broadened its appeal and increased attendance at the exhibitions. Describing his recruitment efforts for the 1887 show, Maus wrote to his artist cousin, Eugène Boch, "Il y en aura pour tous les goûts, des 'serrés,' et des 'lâchés,' des 'impressionnistes' et des 'intentionnistes' et des 'impossibilistes.' . . ." ⁹⁷ [There will be something for every taste: the 'tight' and the 'loose'; the 'impressionists' and the 'intentionists'; and the 'impossibilists.' . . .]

Two important conclusions about the *invités* can be drawn. First, there is an overall similarity in the diversity of artistic styles represented by both the *invités* and the members of Les XX. For instance in 1892, among the Vingtistes, Boch and Vogels represented Impressionism and Realism; Lemmen, Finch, Signac, and Van Rysselberghe represented Neo-Impressionism; Khnopff and Toorop represented Symbolism; and Finch, Lemmen, and Van de Velde represented the Decorative Arts. Among the *invités* that year were Cassatt and C. Meunier representing Impressionism; Luce, Gausson, and a Seurat retrospective representing Neo-Impressionism; Denis and Mellery representing Symbolism; and Horne, Image, Chéret, Lautrec, and Delaherche representing the Decorative Arts. Les XX deliberately invited artists representing the different avant-garde styles of its members. Second, this very diversity of style among the *invités* made Brussels a crucible for artistic ideas. In a relatively short time, through the interaction of the Vingtistes and their *invités*, Brussels became one of the leading artistic capitals of Europe.

Groups Patterned After Les XX

L'Art Moderne considered the dissemination of Vingtiste ideas at home and abroad as one of Les XX's great successes. One of the earliest manifestations of Les XX's growing influence occurred, ironically, in Antwerp. Antwerp, home of the painters Van Dyck, Rubens, and Jordaens, was the bastion of the conservative tradition in Belgium. *L'Art Moderne*, cognizant of this fact, stated "alors qu'à Anvers redan de l'art académique, la bataille est plus chaude encore et la victoire plus difficile à conquérir qu'elle ne l'a été à Bruxelles." ⁹⁸ [While at Antwerp, bastion of academic art, the battle is keener yet and the victory more difficult to win than it had been in Brussels.]

In January 1887, six Antwerp artists, Henry van de Velde, Alexandre Marcette, Maurice Hagemans, Léon Abry, Isidore Meyers, and Florent Crabeels formed L'Art Indépendant. Van de Velde was the driving force behind the exhibition, and Max Elskamp, the young lawyer-poet, its secretary. Van de Velde modeled L'Art Indépendant's exhibitions after Les XX.⁹⁹ Like the Vingtistes, the Indépendants invited Belgian artists to exhibit with them. Many of the Vingtistes such as Ensor, Rops, Vogels, Khnopff, and Van Rysselberghe exhibited with the Indépendants. However, the other *invités*—Léon Frederic, Omer Dierickx, Jules Lagae, Louis Artan, Adrien-Joseph Heymans, Hyppolyte Le Roy, Henri Luyten, Constantin Meunier, Léon Philippet, and Jacques Rosseels—were far more conservative than those usually invited to Les XX and included several members of L'Essor and the even more conservative Antwerp-based group Als Ik Kan.

In addition, L'Art Indépendant did not invite foreign artists to exhibit with them. The only exception was Redon who exhibited some drawings from Picard's personal collection. This was evidently a last-minute decision since Redon's name does not appear in the official catalogue but only in reviews of the show. The fact that L'Art Indépendant was emulating Les XX was clear to contemporaries. Meunier eagerly accepted the challenge to participate in Antwerp and wrote to Elskamp: "Nous défendons le même cause artistique et il est tout naturel que nous donnons la main."¹⁰⁰ The catalogue introduction, written by Camille Lemonnier, stressed the debt of this new group to Les XX. Lemonnier wrote,

[Le nouveau groupe] n'aspire pas à étendre le terrain de la lutte en y apportant des solutions plus radicales; il le décentralise seulement pour faire rayonner d'avantage les vérités que les XX, avant lui, ont affirmées. Son ambition n'excède pas le ferme espoir d'apporter une aide fraternelle à leurs aînés en date, à leurs égaux en vaillance, à leurs amis en apostolat.¹⁰¹

[The new group] does not aspire to enlarge the battlefield by supplying more radical solutions. Rather, it decentralizes the field in order to distribute more widely the truths that Les XX before it had affirmed. Its ambition does not exceed its steadfast hope of giving fraternal aid to its elders, equal in courage, and its fellow missionaries.

Nonetheless, L'Art Indépendant was far more conservative than Les XX with regard to its *invités* and its disinclination to invite foreign artists.

This exhibition was open from 12 March to 15 April 1887 at the Palais de l'Industrie des Arts et du Commerce. Reviews of L'Art Indépendant exhibition were exceedingly harsh. The critic for *Handelsblad* wrote,

L'art indépendant est un art indépendant de science, indépendant de connaissance, indépendant de bon goût, indépendant de noblesse, indépendant en un mot de l'art même.¹⁰²

L'Art Indépendant is an art independent of science, independent of knowledge, independent of good taste, independent of nobility—in a word, independent of art.

In a similar vein, the critic for *Mephisto* termed the exhibition "l'art cochon" and labelled Rops's *Pornocratès* (Illustration 20) as pornographic.¹⁰³ The Société du Palais de l'Industrie demanded the removal of Rops's work. The group's refusal to do so and the hostile reaction to the exhibition led Bourgmester Léopold de Wael to refuse them exhibition space the following year.¹⁰⁴ In the face of this rejection the group was disbanded.

In 1892 another attempt was made by Elskamp and Van de Velde to establish an avant-garde circle in Antwerp. This time the title chosen for the new group was L'Association pour l'art. A new committee was formed consisting of artists Van de Velde and Georges Morren, poet Max Elskamp, and lawyers Charles Dumercy and Georges Sérigiers. The first exhibition was held 29 May to 19 June 1892 at the ancien musée des Beaux-Arts in Antwerp.

This group was patterned even more explicitly after Les XX than was L'Art Indépendant. Like Les XX, L'Association pour l'art held lectures and musical seances in conjunction with its exhibitions and invited both foreign and Belgian artists to exhibit.¹⁰⁵ Many of the Vingtistes such as Finch, Boch, Lemmen, Minne, Van Rysselberghe, Signac, Toorop, and naturally Van de Velde exhibited. In addition works by Anquetin, Bonnard, Chéret, Delaherche, Guys, Camille and Lucien Pissarro, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, Maurits Bauer, Marguérite Holeman, and Van Gogh were shown. A collection of Hiroshige prints was lent to Elskamp for the exhibition.¹⁰⁶ The critical reaction was hostile to the Neo-Impressionist and Symbolist works but there was nothing in this exhibition as sacrilegious as Rops's *Pornocratès* to inflame the establishment and prevent another exhibition from being held the following year.

In May 1893, a second exhibition was held, again at the ancien musée de peinture. Reflecting a similar trend at Les XX, the exhibition of L'Association pour l'art was chiefly devoted to the Decorative Arts. Wallpaper designs by Walter Crane, Lewis Day, J.D. Sedding, C.F.A. Voysey, and W. Black for Jeffrey and Co. were displayed. A tea table by Finch; stained glass of Carot and Thys; Cros's figurines; Lautrec's posters; Van de Velde's embroidery; and Charpentier's pewter ware also were displayed. This time the featured Japanese artist was Utamaro.¹⁰⁷ Shortly after the 1893 exhibition the society disbanded since there were so few visitors to the exhibition. Antwerp's lack of interest in anything other than traditional, academic art was painfully obvious to Elskamp when he wrote to Van de Velde, "la moyenne des entrées ne dépassent pas 13 par jour."¹⁰⁸

Les XIII, an Antwerp group founded in February 1891, based its organization upon Les XX. This group, too, invited foreign and Belgian artists and placed works by lot. *L'Art Moderne* claimed that the organization of this group was "calquée sur celle des XX."¹⁰⁹ Among the thirteen members, two were ex-Vingtistes, Piet Verhaert and Théodore Verstraete.¹¹⁰ In addition Vingtistes Khnopff and Van Strydonck and ex-Vingtiste Vanaise were invited

to Les XIII's first exhibition. However, artists of the group tended to be more conservative than Les XX. The critic for *L'Emancipation* of 2 March 1892 noted that those selected to exhibit with Les XX were "les plus apporteurs de neuf," while at Les XIII there were "les arrivés, les notoires, les influents."¹¹¹

A measure of the growing acceptance of Les XX is evidenced by its invitation to exhibit at the conservative Cercle Artistique in Ghent. After the close of the Les XX exhibition in 1893, most of the Vingtistes exhibited in Ghent during the month of April.

Les XX was a model for groups struggling against officialdom both in Belgium and abroad. *L'Art Moderne* claimed that the Parisian group Les Trente was based upon Les XX.¹¹² This group held its first exhibition at Georges Petit's rue de Sèze galerie on 30 December 1887. Instrumental in Les Trente's founding were Alfred Roll, Paul-Albert Besnard, Jacques-Emile Blanche, and Guillaume van Strydonck. The group was composed of thirty artists who also invited foreign artists to exhibit with them. As with Les XX there was no administrative commission or jury of admission. The placement of the works was arranged by lot and each artist's works were grouped as an ensemble. Vingtistes such as Van Strydonck, Khnopff, Rops, Van Rysselberghe, and Charlier and ex-Vingtiste Verstraete participated.

In Holland Les XX was invited by the Société Panorama of Amsterdam to exhibit from 25 May to 23 June 1889.¹¹³ Toorop and Vogels were selected to work out the logistics of the exhibition. Ultimately Boch, De Groux, De Regoyos, Dubois, Finch, Lemmen, Rops, Schlobach, Toorop, Van Rysselberghe, Van Strydonck and Vogels participated.

Jan Toorop was instrumental in spreading Vingtiste doctrines in Holland. Toorop wanted to organize an exhibition of Les XX at the Kunstkring at the Hague. He finally succeeded in 1892 when works by Finch, Boch, Lautrec, Lemmen, C. Pissarro, Redon, Van Rysselberghe, Signac, Seurat, and Van de Velde were shown. In addition Toorop arranged to have Van de Velde give his talk on the "Peasant in Painting."¹¹⁴ Maus, grateful to Toorop for his efforts, wrote, "Je vois que grâce à toi et aux quelques amis que nous avons là-bas, nos idées se répandent. C'est heureux et encourageant."¹¹⁵

L'Art Moderne also claimed that the formation of Die XI in Berlin in 1893 was based on Les XX.¹¹⁶

While it is likely that the "anarchistic" organization of Les XX appealed to groups such as Les Trente, Les XIII, and Die XI, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of Les XX's influence. Certainly the use of a number as the name for a group—which was rare among art groups before Les XX—implies a certain allegiance. This fact suggests that other groups such as Les Cinq (formed in 1897 in Paris) might also be inspired by Les XX. The precise role which Les XX played in the formation of independent groups merits further investigation.

However, Les XX's legacy was more far-ranging than the immediate groups it spawned. At home the group nurtured a new generation of artists on

concepts of freedom, individuality, and a desire for unceasing experimentation. The power of the Academy and Salon would never be regained. Les XX established Brussels as Belgium's artistic capital and by contrast showed Antwerp to be a conservative bastion closed to modern artistic movements, blindly clinging to its past glory.

Abroad, the message of Les XX was spread to England through Fernand Khnopff and the *Studio*, to Finland through Willy Finch, to Holland through Jan Toorop, to Spain and the *modernista* movement through Dario de Regoyos, and to Germany and Austria through George Minne, Fernand Khnopff, and Henry van de Velde. In the twentieth century Van de Velde's innovative teaching at the Weimar School of Applied Arts established a firm basis for his successor, Walter Gropius and the establishment of the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus adopted the concept of the unity of the arts so dear to Les XX, but more importantly Les XX's legacy is apparent in the individualistic and experimental teaching that thrived at the Bauhaus.

The Artistic Phases of Les XX

"Le monstre qui s'appelle vingtisme."

Journal des Beaux-Arts,
15 February 1886

Throughout Les XX's ten-year existence, *L'Art Moderne* defended Les XX's artistic independence and eclecticism. However many critics were convinced that Les XX represented a "sort of new artistic religion." The *Journal des Beaux-Arts* summed up prevailing opinion about the group with the ominous phrase, "le monstre qui s'appelle vingtisme."¹ This attack led *L'Art Moderne* to state, "Faut-il répéter encore qu'il n'existe pas plus de vingtisme que de Cercle artistique ou de Salon triennal. . . ." ² *L'Art Moderne* denied that Les XX represented any particular school, proclaiming the individuality and freedom of its members. The periodical claimed that the one unifying feature of all Les XX's exhibitors was their rejection of "des formules transmises, de génération en génération par les officines suspectes des académies," [formulas transmitted from generation to generation by the dubious ateliers of the academies] and their embracing of the goal of "la conquête d'un art neuf, fier et libre."³ [The conquest of a new, proud, and free art.]

While it is true that Les XX championed no particular artistic style, it did serve as a hospitable forum for several artistic movements which confirmed the avant-garde principles of novelty, exploration, and discovery. This loose definition of avant-gardism made the Vingtistes receptive to whatever was the latest artistic style. Four principle movements—Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Symbolism, and Decorative Arts—were at different times endorsed by *L'Art Moderne* and each in turn tended to dominate the works shown at Les XX. These were all international styles originating outside of Belgium. The achievement of the Vingtistes lies in their individualistic interpretation and exploration of these artistic movements.

Impressionism

As early as the 1885 exhibition, critics were citing Ensor, Vogels, Finch, and Toorop as the true revolutionaries within Les XX.⁴ These four artists were

often referred to as "tachistes" or "les Impressionnistes," generally implying unfinished or scribbled work. However, beginning in 1886, with the presence of Monet and Renoir at Les XX, the term Impressionist was consistently applied to Ensor and his following.

In a scathing and sarcastic column, Georges Verdavainne of *Fédération Artistique* characterized James Ensor as the "nouveau prophète de la lumière. . . . Lui seul la comprenait, en saïssait toute la puissance, en connaissait tous les efforts prestigieux."⁵ Verdavainne saw Ensor as the ringleader and Finch, Vogels, Toorop, de Regoyos, Schlobach, Charlet, Verheyden, Van Strydonck, and Van Rysselberghe as disciples. Ensor's followers, according to Verdavainne, have unabashedly taken from him

son procédé, ses colorations violentes, son mépris de la forme et des détails. Il existe des tableaux de MM. Finch, Schlobach, Toorop que M. Ensor aurait pu signer non sans plaisir.⁶

his method, his violent colorations, his scorn for form and details. There are paintings by Messieurs Finch, Schlobach, and Toorop that Ensor would happily sign.

Other critics concurred with Verdavainne, declaring that "Aux XX il y a un dieu, Ensor, sur ce dieu l'on a fait un moule et dans ce moule on voudrait couler tous les artistes."⁷ [At Les XX there is a god—Ensor—and upon this god a mould has been made, and in this mould all the artists gladly will be cast.]

Indeed if we compare Toorop's *Woman in White* (Illustration 21) and Van Strydonck's *Woman in an Interior* (Illustration 22) with Ensor's *Afternoon at Ostend* (Illustration 23) we have a very good idea of the similarity in styles. These works depict domestic interiors with one or two female figures as the protagonists. In all three works, light from a window floods the central portion of the room and contrasts with those sections of the painting which are in shadow. The light in all three works creates an impression of quiet reverie and peacefulness. Ensor's heavy use of impasto and indistinctness of form is also employed by Toorop and Van Strydonck.

The critics decried the unfinished look of these and other Impressionist works. The reviewer for *La Gazette* declared that he longed to see a polished work and not merely an embryo.⁸ The *Journal des Beaux-Arts* accused Ensor's group of simply copying Monet and Renoir.⁹ Albert Dutry of the *Impartial de Gand* said that Les XX proclaimed its artistic liberty but this was only "la liberté de mal choisir, de mal dessiner, de mal peindre. . . ."¹⁰ The critic for *L'Indépendance Belge*, outraged by what he saw, called for the dissolution of the society since, "Ils s'excitent mutuellement à rompre avec toutes les règles du savoir et du goût, à s'écarter le plus possible d'une juste interprétation de la nature. . . ."¹¹ [They stir one another to break with all rules of knowledge and taste, to move away as far as possible from an accurate interpretation of nature. . . .] The critic for *La Meuse* was offended and stated "Non dans son ensemble je vous parle en toute franchise, il ne vaut pas les dix sous que l'on

paie à la porte en entrant. . . ."¹² [Frankly, the whole show is not worth the price of admission.] *Le Nord* even claimed that Les XX was "le sanctuaire de l'impressionnisme."¹³

L'Art Moderne responded to these criticisms in an article entitled "l'Impressionnisme."¹⁴ The author asserted that many bourgeois believed that "le Vingtisme représente quelque chose d'abominablement subversif."¹⁵ *L'Art Moderne* declared that the Vingtistes had not formed a school with any one distinct style of manner or representation. However the members did share an ideology of freedom of artistic expression. *L'Art Moderne* saw Impressionism as an inevitable and unalterable phase in the aesthetic evolution of the history of art. Quoting from Raffaëlli's lecture given at Les XX in 1885 *L'Art Moderne* continued,

Ces mots en *isme* . . . sont des cris de ralliement jetés à un moment donné, dans la circulation et qui aident à se reconnaître, à se compter, à s'unir en vue de la défense de l'art. Rien de plus!¹⁶

These "ism" words . . . are rallying cries launched at a given moment into circulation to assist (artists) to recognize one another, to count on each other and to unite in the defense of art. Nothing more!

Despite the common struggle waged by the Belgian and French Impressionists, there was a considerable difference in style between the two groups. *L'Art Moderne* felt that Monet's scientific analysis of the color spectrum enabled him to achieve a high degree of luminosity while the Belgian artists were less scientific and relied on "un sentiment plus raffiné des colorations."¹⁷ However, these artists were not overtly concerned with the depiction of subjects drawn from modern life. Café concerts, dance halls, or circus scenes were not popular motifs for them in part because Brussels was not nearly as lively or as urbane as Paris. Since the Belgians did not seek to capture the instantaneity of the moment, they did not adopt the rapid brushstroke of the French Impressionists. That is not to say that their subject matter ignored the precepts of Realism. Many of the Belgian artists of the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, such as Boulenger, Artan, Pantazis, and Vogels, chose to depict sea and landscapes. As Philippe Roberts-Jones has written,

En Belgique pour beaucoup de peintres, pour les créateurs sans doute les plus authentiques, l'impressionnisme, l'étude des variations de la lumière et de ses effets en tant que tels, ne fut qu'une étape ou un état de passage vers un autre but que l'on nomme généralement l'expressionnisme, alors qu'en France le mouvement fut incontestablement une fin en soi. . . .¹⁸

For many painters in Belgium, and undoubtedly for the most authentic creators, Impressionism—the study of variations of light and its effects—was only a step, a state of transition, towards another end generally called Expressionism; in France the movement was undeniably an end in itself. . . .

The question remains as to why the Belgians were not more attracted to French Impressionism. There are perhaps two important reasons. First, there already existed a Belgian tradition of depicting light and atmospheric effects. The School of Tervuren, led by Boulenger, and the S.L.B.A., as shown in Artan's work, stressed painting from nature and a study of light. Thus Impressionism for the Belgians was not a revolutionary style which had to be explored but rather a variant of a controversial movement with which the artists were already familiar.

Second, for the young Vingtistes there was an understandable inclination to emulate their avant-garde Belgian predecessors. This may have had something to do with a feeling of national pride, but this tendency more likely reflected Les XX's admiration and sympathies for those who had struggled before them. To be sure, French Impressionism had an impact in Belgium, particularly in causing some artists to lighten their palettes, as in Ensor's *Oyster Eater* of 1882 (Illustration 24). But *L'Art Moderne's* entreaty to artists to be open to all that was new—especially styles from abroad—would not be seriously pursued until 1887 when Neo-Impressionism arrived in Brussels. It was at this stage that *L'Art Moderne's* theory of avant-gardism, with its espousal of an open-door policy on art, was adopted by the Vingtistes.

Ensor's influence within Les XX reached its culmination in 1887. In that year the critics and the Vingtistes began to turn their attention to Seurat and Neo-Impressionism. *La Nation* stated, "Il y avait une émeute devant le *Dimanche à la Grande Jatte* de Seurat, et une révolution devant la *Vision d'Ensor*. . . ." ¹⁹ Achille Chainaye writing for *La Réforme* hailed Ensor as "le poteau indicateur' de la peinture flamande régénérée." ²⁰ However, *La Meuse* found Ensor inscrutable, declaring, "Voici M. Ensor, l'Ostendais plus embrouillé, plus incompréhensible que jamais, et qui finira par se distinguer comme caricaturiste." ²¹ Ensor in 1887 was still seen by the critics as an intransigent and important member of the group.

Nonetheless, Ensor sensed his waning influence and was clearly upset by an article written by Verhaeren on Khnopff. ²² In a letter to Maus of 6 September 1886 Ensor congratulated Maus on "la silhouette de Fagerolles. Seulement, Claude n'est pas mort." ²³ As Madame Legrand has pointed out, Ensor is alluding to two characters from Zola's *L'Oeuvre*. ²⁴ In Zola's work Claude is the true genius, misunderstood by society, who fails to achieve success and commits suicide. Fagerolles, Claude's old friend, becomes successful by copying his ideas. Ensor presents himself as Claude and Khnopff as Fagerolles. In a subsequent letter to Maus, Ensor continued. "Claude ne peut envier les succès de Fagarolles. L'avenir décidera et donnera à chacun sa juste place." ²⁵ Legrand suggests that Ensor may never have forgiven Khnopff for creating *En Ecoutant du Schumann* (Illustration 25), a painting somewhat similar to Ensor's *La Musique Russe* (Illustration 26). Finch, commenting obliquely on this conflict, queried Maus,

Pourquoi n'a-t-on pas continué l'article sur Knopff [sic] dans *L'Art Moderne*. J'ai appris qu'on a protesté contre cet article. Je trouve qu'il n'y a que des *ignorants* et des *envieux* qui ont pu faire cela.²⁶

Why hasn't the article on Knopff [sic] been continued in *L'Art Moderne*? I have learned that someone protested against this article. I believe that only ignorant and envious people are capable of that.

This is important evidence of a lessening of Ensor's influence within Les XX.

By 1888, Impressionism at Les XX was no longer seen as a progressive movement. In an article entitled "L'ancien et le nouvel impressionnisme," *L'Art Moderne* stated,

Ces oeuvres audacieuses peut-être aux temps lointains des renouveaux, se fixent presque timides aujourd'hui. Elles s'aveulissent en ces formes lourdes et désagréables.²⁷

These bold works that perhaps long ago were new seem nearly timid today. They are weakened by their heavy and disagreeable forms.

Thus Impressionism, once avant-garde, was now surpassed by the next phase in the evolution of the history of art.

Although many of the Vingtistes quickly adopted Neo-Impressionism, artists like Vogels and Van Strydonck remained attached to Impressionism. Vogels was born in 1836, the oldest of the founding Vingtistes and ten years older than any other member of the group in 1887 except Rops. Really belonging more to the Realist generation of the 1870s, Vogels must have found Neo-Impressionism difficult to assimilate. His discomfort with its pervasiveness at Les XX is indicated by his absence from the group's 1889 and 1891 exhibitions. Van Strydonck was not influenced by the art shown at Les XX since he traveled abroad almost continuously in the late 1880s and 1890s. Although obviously outside the mainstream of Les XX's art and viewed as somewhat passé by *L'Art Moderne*, a form of Belgian Impressionism continued to coexist with Neo-Impressionism at Les XX.

Neo-Impressionism

The largest threat to the supremacy of Ensor's Impressionist style at Les XX was Georges Seurat. "For when Seurat showed at Les XX in 1887 Divisionism spread like a sudden passing epidemic...."²⁸ It was Octave Maus who authored the anonymous article in *L'Art Moderne* entitled "Les Vingtistes Parisiens" which reviewed the 1886 Impressionist exhibition in Paris.²⁹ In this review, Maus referred to Seurat as "ce messie d'un art nouveau" and stated that if the *Grande Jatte* were to be shown in Brussels it would create a scandal: "Il y aurait si elle était exposée, des cas subits d'aliénation mentale et ses apoplexies foudroyantes."³⁰ A postscript appended to this article by Picard urged Maus therefore to exhibit Seurat's work in Brussels.³¹

Seurat and his friend Paul Signac came to Brussels for the opening of Les XX on 2 February 1887. Signac wrote to Pissarro of his impressions of this exhibition,

Je sors éreinté de l'exposition. Une foule énorme, une cohue épouvantable, très bourgeoisement anti-artiste. En somme, un grand succès pour nous: la toile de Seurat était invisible, impossible d'approcher tellement la foule était énorme. La salle d'exposition est une magnifique salle du musée très vaste et d'un éclairage délicieux. . . . Vos toiles font très bien. . . . Le pointillé intrigue les gens et les force à penser; ils devinent qu'il y a quelque chose là-dessous.³²

I left the exhibition done in. An enormous crowd, a dreadful throng, very simply anti-artist. In short, a great success for us. Seurat's canvas was invisible, impossible to approach—that's how enormous the crowd was. The exhibition hall is a magnificent room in the museum—very large, with a delicious light. . . . Your canvases look very good. . . . Pointillism intrigues people and forces them to think; they realize there is something in it.

Fully aware that the *Grande Jatte* was greeted with laughter and scorn in Paris, *L'Art Moderne* tried to prepare the public for its appearance in Brussels.³³ The periodical published on 19 September 1886 an article by Fénéon, *L'Art Moderne's* special correspondent from Paris, who attempted to explain Seurat's scientific principles.³⁴ On 6 February 1887 *L'Art Moderne* reviewed the major principles previously set forth by Fénéon and praised the luminosity Seurat achieved in the *Grande Jatte* through use of this technique.³⁵ In addition *L'Art Moderne* published an excerpt from Zola's *L'Oeuvre*.³⁶ The passage dealt with the incomprehension of an unenlightened crowd before works of avant-garde painters at the Salon des Refusés. By anticipating public outrage *L'Art Moderne* hoped to temper the critics' vehemence and thus sway public opinion.

The Belgian critics greeted the works of Seurat at first with surprising calm. In part this response can be attributed to *L'Art Moderne's* insistence that the *Grande Jatte* would cause a scandal in Brussels. The critics, not wishing to fulfill *L'Art Moderne's* prophecy, managed to restrain their vehemence until the following year.

The critic for *L'Etoile Belge* declared that,

Sans se rendre compte du procédé, sans trop se choquer d'une forme qui donne aux figures l'aspect des joujoux de Nuremberg, le public a senti qu'il y avait là non seulement un effort sérieux, je dirais même consciencieux, à atteindre la vérité absolue, mais un résultat obtenu, une vibration lumineuse solaire du plus grand intérêt.³⁷

Without realizing the procedure, without being too offended by a form which gives the figures the appearance of toys from Nuremberg, the public felt there was a serious effort there: a conscientious effort to attain an absolute truth and an accomplished effect—a luminous solar vibration of the greatest interest.

Similarly the critic for *L'Impartial de Gand*, although believing the *Grande Jatte* resembled a mosaic or tapestry, felt that Seurat attained a

luminosity of which few painters could boast.³⁸ To be sure there were those who dismissed the works as having no merit whatsoever, who ridiculed the dotlike brushstrokes as "pains à cacheter." *La Meuse* stated, "c'est avant tout une fantaisie de fumiste ou un formidable coup de grosse caisse."³⁹ There were those critics too who bemoaned the use of a scientific method, or a recipe, as inimical to the creative spirit. *La Jeune Belgique* claimed that the works of Seurat and Pissarro "sont des expériences et non des tableaux."⁴⁰

On 13 February 1887 *L'Art Moderne* admitted with surprise, "le public commence à comprendre... on se dégoûte de la vieille sauce des peintures académiques."⁴¹ *L'Art Moderne* triumphantly announced that with the 1887 exhibition "L'Art a commencé une ère nouvelle."⁴² *L'Art Moderne* stated that for the moment the style which created the most controversy was that of Neo-Impressionist painters: C. and L. Pissarro, G. Seurat, P. Signac, Albert Dubois-Pillet, and Charles Angrand.⁴³ Having praised Neo-Impressionism, *L'Art Moderne* once again affirmed that Les XX did not endorse any one style,

Jamais, au grand jamais, les XX n'ont songé à constituer un groupe uni par des affinités de vision et de facture... Les XX ne constituent pas une ECOLE. Ce ne sont pas les protagonistes d'une DOCTRINE... ils n'ont pas le MEME TECHNIQUE...⁴⁴

Never, never has Les XX thought of constituting a group unified by affinities of vision and brushstroke... Les XX does not constitute a SCHOOL. They are not protagonists of a DOCTRINE... They do not have the SAME TECHNIQUE...

However there does exist among the Vingtistes, "une commune aspiration vers un art sincère, libre, personnel..."⁴⁵

This sentiment was echoed by Camille Lemonnier, who stated that at Les XX there was a preoccupation with eclecticism. For indeed if the names of Morisot, Pissarro, Seurat, and Raffaëlli attested to their spirit of combativeness, the names Cazin, Renan, Lebourg, Maris, and Thaulow were names which did not evoke controversy. Lemonnier concluded, "Autant de noms, autant de tendances divergentes."⁴⁶ Similarly Verhaeren declared in the Parisian *Revue Indépendante*, "rien d'homogène dans leurs tendances."⁴⁷

Interestingly, Les XX was attacked in 1889 for what the critics considered its lack of faith in any one movement. *Fédération Artistique* objected to the two or three artistic revolutions it claimed Les XX had undergone since its origins.⁴⁸ Similarly Solvay of *Le Soir* saw this as a lack of conviction and sincerity on the part of Les XX.⁴⁹ *Le Globe Illustré* continued the attack, "Ils n'ont ni nationalité, ni principe. Ils ont le talent de la réclame et sont incapable de la justifier..."⁵⁰ However Les XX welcomed Neo-Impressionism merely as one manifestation of *l'art jeune* in the continuous struggle against academic art.

Signac and Dubois-Pillet were the French representatives of Neo-Impressionism at Les XX for 1888. Signac sent twelve works to Les XX, for he felt that the public should see as many Neo-Impressionist paintings as possible in order to comprehend them.

Notre technique est beaucoup plus compréhensible pour le public lorsqu'il a devant les yeux de nombreux exemples de son application à des effets différentes. . . . Devant une exposition complète, le public est forcé, sinon de comprendre, du moins réfléchir. . . .⁵¹

Our technique is much more comprehensible to the public when they have before their eyes numerous examples of its application with different effects. . . . Before a complete exhibition the public is forced, if not to understand, at least to reflect. . . .

Despite Signac's reasoning, the critics did not understand the works of the Neo-Impressionists and they could not be shaken from their belief that Signac and Dubois-Pillet's work were copies of Seurat's. Byron of *Le Patriote* declared

Seurat, le clou de l'an dernier, a fait école et tous sont en train de passer seuratistes, sous prétexte de liberté dans l'art et d'originalité, ils singent platement le prétendu novateur.⁵²

Seurat, the chief attraction last year, has gathered followers, and all are busy becoming Seuratistes under the pretext of liberty and originality in art. They soullessly ape the so-called innovator.

Le Patriote went so far as to demand that the government refuse to accord the Vingtistes the right to exhibit in the museum.

The first Belgian convert to Neo-Impressionism was Willy Finch who was "le premier d'entre les Belges, décidément, s'embrigade parmi les néo-impressionnistes."⁵³ [The first among the Belgians decisively to enroll among the Neo-Impressionists.] Robert Herbert has stated that Finch began his pointillist works in the winter of 1887-1888 after seeing the works of Seurat and Pissarro at Les XX.⁵⁴ However there is some evidence to suggest that Finch's conversion may have taken place earlier. *L'Art Moderne* on 24 July 1887 mentioned that Finch was studying Rood's method of prismatic decomposition adopted by the Neo-Impressionists.⁵⁵ Finch submitted a pointillist drawing for the 1888 catalogue.⁵⁶ (Illustration 27) Although I have not been able to locate the works Finch exhibited in 1888 at Les XX, some clearly were done in the Neo-Impressionist manner. Verhaeren specifically cited *La Campagne à Oudenberg* as one of Finch's essays in Neo-Impressionism. Max Waller, writing in the French periodical *L'Artiste* of March 1888, stated, "M. Welly [sic] Finch est l'un des premiers néophytes belges—j'allais dire *victimes* (par lapsus) du néo-impressionnisme français. . . ."⁵⁷ Finch expressed to Maus the fear that "les yeux peu exercés ne verront pas de différences techniques entre nous et nos amis de Paris,"⁵⁸ [inexperienced eyes will not see the difference in technique between us and our friends in Paris,] and indeed he was generally condemned in 1888 for his pastiche of the French.⁵⁹ *L'Art Moderne* had already tried to dispute this myth by stating that to the untrained eye all the Neo-Impressionists' works looked alike.

At the 1889 exhibition other Vingtistes such as Théo van Rysselberghe, Anna Boch, Van de Velde, and Toorop displayed Neo-Impressionist works.

Van de Velde, newly elected to Les XX in 1888, recalled his first exposure to Neo-Impressionism.

Mis en présence du 'Dimanche à l'île de la Grande Jatte' de Seurat, je m'étais senti bouleversé en proie à un inexprimable émoi et dès ce moment il m'eut été impossible de résister au besoin de m'assimiler au plus vite et le plus consciencieusement que possible les théories, les règles et les principes fondamentaux de la nouvelle technique et de l'expérimenter.⁶⁰

Coming into contact with *Sunday on the Island of the Grande Jatte* by Seurat, I was thrown into disorder and fell prey to an inexpressible agitation. From that moment on it was impossible for me to resist the need to assimilate as quickly and as conscientiously as possible, theories, rules, and fundamental principles of the new technique, and to test its validity.

The reasons behind the receptivity of the Vingtistes to Neo-Impressionism are undoubtedly manifold and complex. Neo-Impressionism was primarily adopted by the Vingtistes because it was synonymous in their minds and to *L'Art Moderne* with avant-gardism. As the latest and clearly the most antiacademic style, Neo-Impressionism had to be adopted in order to battle officialdom.

It undoubtedly also appealed to a young generation of artists in Brussels as it did in Paris because of a devotion to the notion of artistic and scientific progress. For these artists, filled with the theories of Darwin, Comte, Marx, and Henry, the scientific application of a theory of color and line seemed an advance over the empirical principles of Impressionism.

Neo-Impressionism was more likely to appeal to the more versatile and internationally inclined artists such as Van de Velde, Finch, Toorop, Van Rysselberghe, and Lemmen. This was the core group within Les XX that was particularly receptive to new ideas throughout Les XX's existence. Several other Vingtistes, including Boch, Charlet, and Regoyos, flirted with Neo-Impressionism but quickly abandoned it. For Van Rysselberghe and Lemmen, who were fast becoming francophiles, attachment to Neo-Impressionism foreshadowed a disenchantment with Belgium. Van Rysselberghe moved to France permanently in 1898, and Lemmen would have gladly followed if he had had the means. Lemmen became so embittered with his lack of success in Belgium, that he wrote in *L'Art Moderne*, "La prédominance de l'école française contemporaine est incontestable."⁶¹

By 1889, the critics labeled the new school of Neo-Impressionism as "Les Bubonistes." Pointillism was seen as an epidemic which came from Paris and threatened to subvert the true personalities of these artists. *Fédération Artistique* in particular, felt that Van Rysselberghe's conversion to pointillism destroyed his art, "Le pointille tue tout ce qui est en lui d'original et de fort, et lui enlève jusqu'à la passion du beau."⁶² Even the poster for the 1889 exhibition (Illustration 28) executed in the Neo-Impressionist style, probably by Van Rysselberghe, was attacked.⁶³ *La Chronique* of 2 February 1889 stated "le petit

point est à la mode, le pain à cacheter triomphe sur tout la rampe. L'affiche elle-même n'y a pas échappé: La variole l'a abominablement piquetée."⁶⁴ [The dot is in fashion. The wafer triumphs along the entire wall. The poster itself has not escaped attack—smallpox has spotted it abominably.] This motif of a disease having invaded Les XX continued in the 1890s. *Le Patriote* stated "Et les pointillés!—Ecole(!) assurément fondée par un artiste qui avait eu la petite vérole et qui tenait à s'en venger sur le genre humain."⁶⁵ [And the pointillists!—School(!) most certainly founded by an artist who had smallpox and was anxious to avenge himself upon the human race.] *Le Journal de Charleroi* echoed *Le Patriote's* feeling of contamination, "Petit point, infect, bafouillage, vaut rien, rien."⁶⁶ Achille Chainaye, ex-Vingtiste, writing under his pseudonym Champal in *La Réforme* declared, "Le 'pointillisme' que les Vingtistes se sont inoculés en famille s'est incrusté en eux avec la tenaillante opiniâtreté de la lèpre. . . ."⁶⁷ [The pointillism which has infected the entire Vingtist family is embedded in them with the tortured obstinacy of leprosy.]

Meanwhile *L'Art Moderne* expressed its displeasure with the label Neo-Impressionism, stating that the term Impressionist was an unhappy choice to characterize the patient and contemplative art of Seurat and Signac. For *L'Art Moderne* this style was "un art volontaire, lent, fait de calcul et de réflexion, sans emballement, sans virtuosité. . . ."⁶⁸ [A slow, intentional art, composed of calculation and reflection, lacking in spontaneity and virtuosity. . . .] *L'Art Moderne* suggested that the term *luminisme* be substituted for that of Neo-Impressionism.⁶⁹ By using the term Neo-Impressionist, *L'Art Moderne* felt that the emphasis was incorrectly placed on the technique used for achieving the luminosity, "Ce pointillage maudit est l'agent, en effet de cette vibration qui transforme le vide en atmosphère et alchimiste la clarté morte en lumière vivante."⁷⁰ [This cursed pointillism is the agent in effect of this vibration which transforms the void in the atmosphere and limp luminosity into living light.]

For the 1892 show Maus planned a memorial exhibition to honor Seurat. Seurat's mother wrote to Maus on 9 November 1891 saying that she was honored at the prospect of such a tribute to her son. She stated, "Georges a toujours été très satisfait de l'accueil que lui a été fait à Bruxelles."⁷¹ Madame Seurat with the aid of Signac selected works that could be sent to Brussels.⁷² Signac also informed Maus that Seurat's mistress Madeleine Knobloch agreed to lend two works, one of Honfleur and a frame containing approximately fifteen panels, to the exhibition.⁷³ *L'Art Moderne* mourned the loss of Seurat and declared Seurat the "instaurateur du Néo-Impressionnisme."⁷⁴

The death of Seurat coincided with a slackening of interest in Neo-Impressionism by the Vingtistes. Finch, Lemmen, and Van Rysselberghe continued to produce Neo-Impressionist works in the 1890s but their interests were increasingly diverted to the Decorative Arts. By 1894 Van de Velde had given up painting entirely and devoted himself to applied arts and architecture.

In a letter of 27 March 1896 to Camille Pissarro, Van de Velde repudiated Neo-Impressionism. He stated that it prevented him from following his "sensations" and that as a Neo-Impressionist he found neither harmony nor modern life.⁷⁵ Similarly Georges Lemmen expressed his disenchantment with the style in a letter to his good friend Willy Finch on 26 March 1903. Lemmen criticized the method as too restrictive and lauded Seurat as the only one able "to dominate and soften it." Lemmen found the paintings of Cross and Signac as conventional as those by Bouguereau since they were done from a recipe.⁷⁶ Toorop, too, continued painting Neo-Impressionist works in the 1890s but ultimately became more and more absorbed in Symbolism.

Symbolism

Symbolism was a reaction against Realism and Positivism. Symbolists believed that true reality lay behind external appearances. Rather than emphasize the objective and descriptive aspects of the world, Symbolists strove to evoke personal states of feeling. Mallarmé defined the Symbolist interest in evocation as follows: "Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu; le suggérer voilà le rêve."⁷⁷ [To name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the pleasure in a poem, which is meant to be discovered little by little. To suggest—that is the dream.]

Although discussion of Symbolism in Belgium began in 1885 in *La Basoche* and *L'Élan Littéraire* (later to become *La Wallonie*), it did not receive extensive consideration until Jean Moreas's Symbolist manifesto which appeared on 18 September 1886 in the Parisian *Le Figaro*. Like Mallarmé, Moreas defined the essential character of Symbolism as "ne jamais aller jusqu'à la conception de l'Idée en soi."⁷⁸

At first, reaction in Belgium was harsh. *La Jeune Belgique* said the manifesto was "un cas singulier d'aberration artistique, le mépris de la langue, la déformation du verbe, une tendance au charabia dont le simple bon sens fait ravoir."⁷⁹ [A strange case of artistic aberration, scorn of language, deformation of speech—an inclination towards gibberish where simple good sense should be found.] Similarly *L'Art Moderne* found the manifesto composed of "déclarations ténébreuses et d'oeuvres incompréhensibles... et qui nous apparaissent comme des cas de pathologie littéraire."⁸⁰ Given Edmond Picard's belief that art should be a direct reflection of society and thus comprehensible to the greatest number of people, this view is not surprising.

In 1887 the Symbolist poets Emile Verhaeren, Georges Khnopff, and Georges Rodenbach left *La Jeune Belgique* to join the staff of *L'Art Moderne*. These writers won Picard over to the merits of Symbolism and made *L'Art Moderne* a principal defender of the movement. In fact in 1890 Picard gave a

lecture at Les XX praising the Symbolist poetry of Verhaeren, Maeterlinck, and Charles van Lerberghe. In the same year Mallarmé lectured at Les XX on Villiers de l'Isle Adam.

A unique and revealing aspect of Belgian Symbolism is its preoccupation with the theme of silence and isolation. This can best be seen in Khnopff's depictions of *Bruges-la-Morte* and his eerie, solitary portraits of women and in Mellery's disquieting, empty rooms and hallways. As the names of the most important Belgian Symbolists suggest—Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, Rodenbach, Khnopff, Mellery, Degouve de Nuncques, and Minne—literary and artistic Symbolism was dominated by those of Flemish rather than Walloon descent. Even though some of these writers and artists could neither speak nor understand Flemish, they were stimulated by the *mouvement flamand*.

Ever since Belgian independence from Holland in 1830, the Flemish were a silent majority. The identification of the Flemish language with the Dutch oppressors made French the logical language for official government business. Thus the Flemish were not only excluded from the highest levels of authority in their own land, but their language and culture were regarded by some as unpatriotic.

The parliamentary elections of 1884 brought the Catholic party to power and thus gave the *mouvement flamand* an important stimulus. The Liberals had begun to take some steps toward recognizing the Flemish language, but the Catholics were more committed to substantive reforms since many of their supporters were the more conservative Flemish. The resurgence of Flemish language and culture and a search for a lost heritage may have led Khnopff and Rodenbach to treat the theme of *Bruges-la-Morte*, published in 1892, symbolizing a distant and irretrievable Flemish golden age. Khnopff's *Memories* of 1889 (Illustration 29), dealing with the isolation of the individual in society, and Mellery's empty rooms and dark corridors, whether deliberate or not, represent a pictorial manifestation of Flemish consciousness.

For *L'Art Moderne*, the Belgian artist who came closest to expressing literary Symbolism was Fernand Khnopff. Khnopff had studied in Paris and was a great admirer of Gustave Moreau, Burne-Jones, and Rossetti. As early as 1884, Khnopff was illustrating Josephin Péladan's *Le Vice Suprême*. Khnopff exhibited at four of the six Rose + Croix Salons from 1892 through 1897 and collaborated with Péladan on several other literary projects. Péladan and Khnopff's close association lasted throughout their lives and marked Khnopff as a painter of the mystical and spiritual.⁸¹

At the first Les XX exhibition, among the works of Khnopff exhibited was *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (Illustration 30). *La Jeune Belgique* did not fail to notice Moreau's influence and called Khnopff "le plus penseur, le plus analyseur, le plus fouiller des XX."⁸² Khnopff's concern with psychological interpretation and probing beyond the surface of things was already evident.

For Khnopff, Pre-Raphaelite art would have a strong influence on his work. He was a confirmed anglophile and eventually married an English woman. In several works, such as *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* (Illustration 31) (1892) and *Who Shall Deliver Me* (1891) Khnopff used English titles. His penchant for Christina Rossetti's poetry (which inspired *I Lock My Door Upon Myself*) and the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of beauty is recalled in these works. By 1892, Khnopff became a member of the Society of Portrait Painters and lectured at the Cercle des Arts et de la Presse in Brussels on the art of Watts, Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones.⁸³ Other Vingtistes such as Toorop and Schlobach visited England and were also strongly influenced by English art. Because of the strong historical and economic ties between Belgium and Great Britain, it was natural that this close relationship would affect Belgian art.

In 1886, *L'Art Moderne*, in several articles on Khnopff, stressed that his later works were symbolic and "un art de rêve et d'évocation."⁸⁴ We can see the different effects achieved by Khnopff and Ensor by comparing Khnopff's *En Ecoutant du Schumann* of 1883 (Illustration 25) to Ensor's *La Musique Russe* of 1881 (Illustration 26), both shown at Les XX in 1886.

Ensor's work depicts Anna Boch at the piano and Willy Finch as her attentive audience. The central focus is upon the communication between the pianist and the listener. They are in close physical proximity and we feel a psychological rapport between them. Essentially Ensor portrays two people in a comfortable sitting room entertaining themselves with music.

Khnopff, however, focuses not so much on the listener and music as a divertissement, as on the process of listening. For Khnopff music is responsible for elevating the listener to a poetic realm. This is reflected in the pose of the woman who leans forward in her chair with her head resting on her hand. Khnopff uses several devices to draw attention to the woman's ear. First, the ear is placed on the vertical axis which exactly bisects the painting. Second, the thumb of the woman's right hand points directly toward the ear. Finally, the ear is the only highlight on a continuous dark field extending from the top of her head to the floor. The piano is half-hidden in the upper left corner and we see only an abbreviated glimpse of the arm of the performer. The critic for *L'Art Moderne* chastised Khnopff for including the pianist at all. He felt that its omission would have strengthened the symbolic message of the work.⁸⁵

In 1888, *L'Art Moderne* identified a group of painters exhibiting with Les XX who, unlike the Neo-Impressionists, were not interested in seeking and rendering light and color. This contingent, composed of De Groux, Rops, Khnopff, and the *invité* Mellery, was later enlarged with the addition of Robert Picard, Jan Toorop, Georges Minne, and Willy Schlobach.⁸⁶ All these artists tended to rely on literary sources for their works and strove to depict *un état d'âme* as opposed to a faithful reproduction of reality.

This loose definition of Symbolism belies the unity of Symbolist art. Khnopff's painting *Memories* (Illustration 29), exhibited in 1890, and Toorop's painting *Les Rôdeurs* (Illustration 32), exhibited in 1893, are representative of Symbolist works shown at Les XX and reflect the diverse nature of Symbolism in Europe at this time.

Khnopff's painting of his sister Marguerite, shown in various poses is the embodiment of his feminine ideal. She is enveloped in a protective veil of silence and isolation. Her trancelike dream state perhaps explains the lack of communication between herself and her carefully posed counterparts. Each figure underlines the cerebral, aristocratic elegance of the painting. Perhaps Khnopff's closest artistic parallel for his cold eroticism is in Pre-Raphaelite painting.

On the other hand Toorop's feminine ideal is expressed in a mystical language. His Ophelia-like corpse and the wide-eyed innocence of the woman in prayer at the right embody purity. This is in sharp contrast to the nude femme fatale temptress in the background. Toorop's morbid preoccupation with death, symbolized by his resurrected corpses, is expressed in a linear contortion of twisting hands, expressive eyes (note especially the two Hodlerian faces on the left), and a writhing, anthropomorphic vegetation. Toorop's preoccupation with themes of death, fate, morbidity, and the femme fatale were shared by such Symbolists as Rops, Beardsley, Klinger, Munch, and Van Stuck. Thus Khnopff and Toorop both succeed in executing Symbolist masterpieces but do so by drawing on different aspects of the International Symbolist movement.

Although James Ensor today is often linked with Symbolism, his contemporaries did not associate him with Symbolism. "M.J. Ensor, ce grand coloriste, continue à se fourvoyer dans le genre macabre; pourquoi ne pas mettre cette belle palette au service d'idées moins carnavalesques."⁸⁷ [Monsieur J. Ensor, the greatest colorist, continues to go astray in the macabre genre. Why doesn't he put this handsome palette at the service of less carnivalesque ideas?] Critics viewed Ensor as a grotesque caricaturist who combined an intense feeling for color with the macabre to produce an expressive, emotional art quite different from the cool, cerebral evocation of the Symbolists.

A diverse and international assortment of Symbolists were invited to exhibit with Les XX as *invités*. They included: Ford Madox Brown and Burne-Jones from England; Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, Paul Gauguin, and Maurice Denis from France; Max Klinger from Germany; and Thorn-Prikker from Holland.⁸⁸ In 1892, the prevalence of Symbolism at Les XX led Emile Verhaeren to write,

Déjà les années précédentes, des tendances vers la littérature s'affirmaient chez certains peintres aux XX. Aujourd'hui; elles se sont généralisées au point qu'elles y dominent. Au reste, depuis cinq ans, dans tous les arts, mais surtout en peinture, l'idéalisme a reconquis une place énorme, qu'il s'appelle symbolisme, intellectualisme ou ésotérisme.⁸⁹

In previous years, literary tendencies were already detected in certain Vingtistes. Today they are so prevalent as to dominate. Moreover, for the past five years (in all the arts—but especially in painting), Idealism has regained an enormous position—whether it be called Symbolism, Intellectualism or Esotericism.

Decorative Arts

Discontent with the social and artistic conditions in Belgium gave impetus to the growth of the Decorative Arts movement. The Parti Ouvrier Belge, formed in 1885, recognized the importance of art in its goal to achieve social equality. However the party did not officially develop a program for achieving this end. Instead it was content to turn to aestheticians, like Verhaeren, Maus, and Picard, who came ironically from the very middle class the Parti Ouvrier Belge considered its enemy. For these men the Decorative Arts were the epitome of an art which would belong to all the people. (See also Chapter 4, Political Implications of Les XX's Art.) The artist by concerning himself with the most common objects could infuse beauty into everyday life and thus raise the standard of culture of all men.

Despite the zeal which several Vingtistes, especially Van de Velde, Finch, and Lemmen showed for the Decorative Arts, this utopian goal was never fulfilled. What made it unattainable was the lack of cooperation between the artist-designer and the industrialist who could manufacture products in sufficient quantities to make them affordable for the working class. Van de Velde's locks, Lemmen's wallpaper, Finch's pottery could have been mass-produced but weren't. Instead the objects designed by the artists became viewed as finished works of art. When Lemmen's rugs were finally executed, they were put on sale not in Brussels department stores but at La Libre Esthétique. The Decorative Arts simply became another artistic medium which the enlightened art-buying public collected.

Beginning in 1891 the Decorative Arts became a major focus of exhibitions at Les XX. To the 1891 show Willy Finch sent ceramic panels along with several of his paintings and drawings;⁹⁰ Lemmen designed the cover for the exhibition catalogues of 1891 and 1892 (Illustrations 33, 34); Chéret, whose work had been seen at an international exhibition of posters in August at the Musée du Nord, sent a series of posters to Les XX;⁹¹ and Gauguin sent two bas-reliefs and three vases. Walter Crane agreed to exhibit two pastels and gave permission to exhibit his children's books which Lemmen owned. Lemmen paid homage to Crane in a two-part article in *L'Art Moderne*, asserting that Crane's work was as important as that of Burne-Jones, Watts, Leighton, and Whistler.

In 1892 even greater prominence was given to the Decorative Arts at Les XX. Delaherche, whose work had been exhibited in 1889 at the Champ de Mars in their ceramic section along with that of Gallé and Chaplet, accepted Les XX's invitation. Emile Gallé was also invited but declined to exhibit.

Selwyn Image displayed drawings for his stained glass and embroidery; Herbert Horne showed frontispieces for books; and Toulouse-Lautrec exhibited several posters. As for the Vingtistes, Finch displayed more of his ceramic tiles, and Van de Velde showed a project for an embroidery.

In 1893 two entire rooms were reserved for the Decorative Arts. Van de Velde, influenced by Gauguin's painting of *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* shown at Les XX in 1889, exhibited the embroidery for his *La Veillée des Anges*. This year Van de Velde wrote an article in *L'Art Moderne* entitled "Artistic Wall Papers" in which he praised the work of Crane.⁹² Willy Finch exhibited a tea table, and Anna Boch a screen that complimented one she owned by Emile Bernard.⁹³ Delaherche reappeared at Les XX with his plates (Illustration 35).

The interest in Decorative Arts continued at La Libre Esthétique on a greater scale. In 1894 Gustave Serrurier-Bovy prepared an entire study for this exhibition. He created a room, with wallpaper, draperies, and furniture and even installed a false window. In addition the posters of Lautrec, Chéret, and Grasset were shown; tapestries by Maillol; William Morris's Kelmscott Press books; spoons and cups of Charles Ashbee; and Beardsley's illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*.

Brussels, through Les XX and La Libre Esthétique, became an important center for the exhibition and dissemination of the Decorative Arts. Before the 1880s Belgium often looked to France for its artistic inspiration. It is a fitting tribute to Les XX and La Libre Esthétique that by the 1890s the situation had changed drastically. The Parisian *Revue des Arts Décoratifs* in 1897, fearful of being overwhelmed by English and Belgian importations, urged its artists:

Soyons Français! . . . N'est-ce pas le moment de jeter cet appel aux artistes au public, alors que après quelques années de servitude à l'art anglais et à ses dérivés, une invasion d'art belge est tentée. . . .⁹⁴

Let's remain French! . . . Is it not the moment to appeal to artists, when, after several years of servitude to English art and its derivatives, an invasion of Belgian art is being attempted. . . .

Epilogue: Dissolution of Les XX

“Songez à l’heure de la mort!”

Henry Van de Velde in
Floréal, 1 April 1893

It is difficult to ascertain exactly when Maus conceived the notion of disbanding Les XX and forming its successor, *La Libre Esthétique*. We do know that Maus considered the tenth annual exhibition of Les XX in 1893 as an important event.¹ Distressed at the prospect of Toorop’s not exhibiting, Maus wrote, “Il me semble que cette abstention est extrêmement fâcheuse, surtout en présence des rumeurs qui circulent à Bruxelles au sujet de la désagrégation de notre Cercle.”² [It seems to me that this abstention is extremely distressing—especially in light of rumors making the rounds in Brussels about the disbanding of our group.] Maus encouraged Toorop to participate for the general good of Les XX in trying to make the tenth Salon even more interesting than the preceding exhibition. Evidently Maus saw this exhibition as the culmination of Les XX’s struggle.

A laudatory article by Verhaeren in *La Nation* of 26 February 1893 provides the first public suggestion that Les XX should disband. “L’influence des XX a été tellement profonde et triomphante que demain, ils pourraient cesser de former un ensemble, sans grand dam, puisque leur but semble atteint.”³ [The influence of Les XX has been so profound and successful that tomorrow it could cease to exist, without great harm—its goal seems already attained.]

Van de Velde echoed Verhaeren’s sentiments in an article on Les XX in April 1893. He urged his fellow Vingtistes, “Songez à l’heure de la mort!”⁴ Van de Velde too felt that Les XX’s goal had been attained and that the group should disband at the peak of its success rather than risk becoming outdated.

On 9 April 1893 *L’Art Moderne* published a compilation of all artists, lecturers, and musicians who had participated in Les XX’s annual salons.⁵ Interestingly, no mention is made of Les XX’s future. The entire emphasis is on Les XX’s accomplishments. Maus probably had decided by this time that this was to be the last Les XX exhibition. In Les XX’s place Maus envisaged a new

group supervised by an organizing committee composed of critics and patrons of the arts rather than artists. This committee under Maus's leadership would organize annual exhibitions and select artists to exhibit. Maus most likely shared this idea first with Théo van Rysselberghe who endorsed Maus's suggestion primarily because he felt that "les artistes sont... peu faits pour s'associer et monter des 'affaires.'" ⁶ [Artists are... ill-equipped for such partnerships and for conducting "business."]

The first public announcement of this new group appeared on 16 July 1893 in *L'Art Moderne* in an article entitled "Pro Arte."⁷ This new group would reject all formulas and pastiche in art and would assure the independence of the artist by dedicating itself to an art "évolutif et progressif." The first exhibition would open in Brussels in the winter of 1894. The steering committee would exclude artists and be solely composed of aestheticians, men of letters, and collectors. This group, never mentioned by name, is characterized as an inevitable expansion of Les XX.

On 24 September 1893 *L'Art Moderne* announced the name of the new group: La Libre Esthétique.⁸ On 29 October 1893 the group's program was set forth in *L'Art Moderne*. Its aim was to

donner à l'art indépendant la place que désormais il a le droit d'occuper, en offrant aux artistes nationaux et étrangers qui le pratiquent l'occasion de se manifester publiquement en Belgique dans les meilleures conditions possible.⁹

give to independent art the place it henceforth should occupy by offering to national and foreign artists the opportunity to exhibit publicly in Belgium under the best possible conditions.

Aesthetically La Libre Esthétique would devote an important place to the Decorative Arts and had but one rule: to support "l'art neuf dans toutes ses expressions."¹⁰ It would be organized by 100 members from all parts of Belgium who would each contribute a sum of twenty francs. None of these supporters would be artists because La Libre Esthétique "veut, en effet, éviter les fâcheuses conséquences des rivalités d'écoles et l'esprit exclusif des groupements."¹¹ [Wants to, in effect, avoid the unfortunate consequences of rivalries and tendencies towards group exclusivity.]

Although Maus had conceived of dissolving Les XX at least as early as July 1893, the question was not put to vote until November 1893, several months after *L'Art Moderne* called for the formation of a new artistic group. Paul Dubois, Fernand Khnopff, Robert Picard, Henry van de Velde, Théo van Rysselberghe, Maus, and Bernier voted for the dissolution. Finch, Charlier, and Lemmen abstained. On 9 November 1893 Maus sent letters to those Vingtistes who were not present at the sessions and requested their votes.¹² The final count was twelve affirmatives (including Maus and Bernier), three abstentions, six members not responding, and only one negative vote—that of

James Ensor.¹³ Ensor complained bitterly that he had not even received notification of the two meetings held to discuss the dissolution.

The dissolution of Les XX was brought about by a variety of forces, but foremost among them was Maus's personal desire. Although Maus had come to dominate and control the group's decision-making process, he still had to contend with petty squabbles among the artists. Maus later described Les XX as the "période anarchiste," in which "les exposants se chamaillaient entre eux."¹⁴ Maus's wish to shed these distractions and also to have his leadership of the group formally recognized led him to propose a restructured exhibition society leaving him in full control.

This proposal was, however, a natural consequence of Les XX's increasing dependence on Maus. The group had so often deferred to Maus in selecting members and *invités* that it was capable only of endorsing his decisions. This reflected not so much the artists' uncertainty about their place in society, but a recognition of what was practical and effective. The avant-garde in France did not have such a model, leading them to insist on artists' control over their own societies and exhibitions.

The group's decision to disband was not only an expression of its complete trust in Maus, but reflected the members' overriding dedication to the ideal of avant-gardism. The crux of this ideal was a commitment to be adaptable, to take risks, and to avoid becoming outdated. This philosophy of innovation and change prompted many Vingtistes to support La Libre Esthétique as a way of remaining avant-garde. Dario de Regoyos wrote Maus,

Lors qu'une société d'art intransigeant marche aussi bien que les XX pendant dix années, il est bien douloureux de voter pour la dissolution de la société. Mais le peur que *cela se gâte* me fait voter pour comme cela le souvenir en sera plus beau.¹⁵

When an intransigent art society works as well as Les XX has over a ten-year period, it's indeed very sad to vote for its dissolution. But the fear that it would deteriorate makes me vote affirmatively; this way the memory will be the more beautiful.

External pressures on Les XX also contributed to its dissolution. From the beginning critics had charged that Les XX was too small and acted much like a private club. Maus saw that by opening up Les XX to many more participants, he could challenge the weakened Salon system more directly. Compared to the thirty-two artists that exhibited at Les XX in 1893, eighty-five artists exhibited at La Libre Esthétique in 1894. Only by enlarging the exhibition could Maus attempt to replace the Salon and not simply offer an alternative outlet.

From 1894 to 1914, La Libre Esthétique continued to devote itself to the avant-garde cause. Heavy emphasis was placed on the Decorative Arts and artists such as Gallé, Daum, Chaplet, Maillol, Cros, Morris, Voysey, Image, Crane, Combaz, Horta, and Van de Velde exhibited. Despite their

commitment to a "free aesthetic," the once-revolutionary figures became established and the tradition of inviting the young and unknown from abroad tended to decline. Cubism and Futurism never appeared at La Libre Esthétique and the artistic resurgence in Germany was almost totally ignored. Van Rysselberghe's comment on Picasso's blue period symbolized La Libre Esthétique's inability to recognize innovation: "C'est franchement vilain et inintéressant."¹⁶ The annual exhibitions were no longer showcases of avant-gardism but tributes to the past. Maus honored deceased artists such as Cross, Carrière, Van der Stappen, Lautrec, Vogels, and Regoyos and organized retrospectives of Impressionism and landscape painting. No doubt La Libre Esthétique's autocratic organization had something to do with its ossification and inability to serve as a forum for the avant-garde. It was merely a weak echo of the vitality that had characterized Les XX.

Appendix A

The Members of Les XX

The membership dates in parentheses indicate the first year the artist exhibited as a member of Les XX and the last year the artist was a member of Les XX, whether or not the artist exhibited that year.

The dates following the parenthesis indicate the years the artist actually exhibited at Les XX.

- Boch, Anna (member 1886-1893), 1886-1893
*Chainaye, Achille (member 1884-1888), 1884-1886
*Charlet, Frantz (member 1884-1893), 1884-1887, 1889
Charlier, Guillaume (member 1885-1893), 1885-1891, 1893
*Delvin, Jean (member 1884-1886), 1884-1885
*Dubois, Paul (member 1884-1893), 1884-1893
*Ensor, James (member 1884-1893), 1884-1893
*Finch, Willy (member 1884-1893), 1884-1888, 1890-1893
*Goethals, Charles (member 1884-1885), 1884-1885, 1886 (posthumous)
Groux, Henry de (member 1887-1890), 1887-1889
*Khnopff, Fernand (member 1884-1893), 1884-1886, 1888, 1890-1892
*Lambeaux, Jef (member 1884), 1884
Lemmen, Georges (member 1889-1893), 1889-1893
Minne, George (member 1891-1893), 1890-1892
*Pantazis, Périclès (member 1884), 1884 (posthumous)
Picard, Robert (member 1890-1893), 1890
*Regoyos, Dario de (member 1884-1893), 1884-1890, 1892-1893
Rodin, Auguste (member 1889-1893), 1884, 1887, 1889-1890, 1893
Rops, Félicien (member 1886-1893), 1884, 1886-1889, 1893
*Rysselberghe, Théo van (member 1884-1893), 1884-1887, 1889-1893
*Schlobach, Willy (member 1884-1893), 1884-1890
Signac, Paul (member 1891-1893), 1888, 1890-1893
*Simons, Frans (member 1884-1885), 1884-1885
*Strydonck, Guillaume van (member 1884-1893), 1884-1893
Toorop, Jan (member 1885-1893), 1885-1893
*Vanaise, Guillaume (member 1884-1886), 1884, 1886
Velde, Henry van de (member 1889-1893), 1889-1893
*Verhaert, Piet (member 1884), 1884
Verheyden, Isidore (member 1885-1887), 1884-1887
*Verstraete, Théodore (member 1884-1885), 1884-1885
*Vogels, Guillaume (member 1884-1893), 1884-1888, 1890, 1892-1893
*Wytsman, Rodolphe (member 1884-1887), 1884-1887

* Founding member of Les XX.

Appendix B

Artists Invited to Les XX

Code to Nationality of Artists:

A	United States
B	Belgium
D	Denmark
F	France
G	Germany
GB	Great Britain
H	Holland
I	Italy
N	Norway
S	Sweden
SW	Switzerland

F	Angrand, Charles, 1891
F	Anquetin, Louis, 1888
B	Artan de Saint-Martin, Louis, 1884, 1887
F	Baffier, Jean, 1891
F	Bartholomé, Albert, 1892
H	Bauer, Marius, 1891
S	Bergh, Sven Richard, 1884
F	Bernard, Emile 1893
F	Besnard, Charlotte Gabrielle, 1888
F	Besnard, Paul Albert, 1886, 1889, 1893
F	Blanche, Jacques-Emile, 1888
B	Boch, Eugène, 1890
F	Bracquemond, Félix, 1885, 1889
B	Braekeleer, Henry De, 1887
H	Breitner, George Hendrik, 1886
SW	Breslau, Marie Louise, 1885
GB	Brown, Ford Madox, 1893
F	Caillebotte, Gustave, 1888
F	Carriès, Jean-Joseph-Marie, 1886
F	Cassatt, Mary, 1892
F	Cazin, Jean-Charles, 1885
F	Cazin, Marie, 1887
F	Cézanne, Paul, 1890
F	Chaplain, Jules-Clément, 1888
F	Charpentier, Alexandre, 1890, 1893

- A Chase, William Merritt, 1884
 F Chéret, Jules, 1891
 GB Crane, Walter, 1891
 F Cross, César Isidore Henri, 1888, 1893
 F Cross, Henri Edmond, 1889, 1893
 B Danse, Auguste, 1886
 B Degouve de Nuncques, William, 1893
 F Delaherche, Auguste, 1892, 1893
 F Denis, Maurice, 1892
 F Desboutin, Marcellin, 1889
 B Devillez, Louis-Henry, 1885
 B Doudelet, Charles, 1893
 F Dubois-Pillet, Albert, 1888, 1890
 F Fantin-Latour, Ignace Henri, 1885
 F Filliger, Charles, 1891
 GB Fisher, Mark, 1885
 B Frederic, Léon, 1893
 F Frémiet, Emmanuel, 1889
 F Gaillard, Claude Ferdinand, 1886
 B Gaspar, Jean, 1893
 F Gauguin, Paul, 1889, 1891
 F Gausson, Léo, 1892
 F Gervex, Henri, 1884
 H Gogh, Vincent van, 1890, 1891 (memorial)
 F Guérard, Henri, 1886
 F Guérard-Gonzalès, Jeanne, 1888
 F Guillaumin, Jean-Baptiste-Armand, 1888, 1891
 F Hayet, Louis, 1890
 F Helleu, Paul César, 1888
 B Hermans, Charles, 1886
 B Heymans, Adrien-Joseph, 1884
 B Holeman, Marguerite, 1893
 GB Horne, Herbert, 1892
 GB Hornel, Edward Atkinson, 1893
 GB Image, Selwyn, 1892
 F Injalbert, Jean-Antoine, 1884
 H Israels, Jozef, 1884
 F Jacquemin, Jeanne, 1893
 G Klinger, Max, 1889
 N Kölsto, Fredrik, 1886
 N Krohg, Christian, 1886
 D Kröyer, Peter Severin, 1885
 F Lanson, Alfred, 1885
 S Larsson, Carl, 1891
 F Lebourg, Albert, 1887
 B Le Nain, Louis, 1885
 G Liebermann, Max, 1884
 F Luce, Maximilien, 1889, 1892
 H Maarel, Marinus van der, 1887
 I Mancini, Antonio, 1885
 H Maris, Jacob, 1884

- H Maris, Matthijs, 1887
 H Maris, Willem, 1887
 H Mauve, Anton, 1884
 B Mellery, Xavier, 1885, 1888, 1890, 1892
 H Mesdag, Hendrik Willem, 1885
 B Meunier, Constantin, 1885, 1887, 1889, 1892
 B Meunier, Karl, 1893
 I Michetti, Francesco-Paulo, 1885
 F Monet, Claude, 1886, 1889
 GB Montalba, Clara, 1886
 F Monticelli, Adolphe, 1886
 F Moreau-Nélaton, Etienne, 1889
 F Morisot, Berthe, 1887
 G Oberländer, Adam Adolf, 1891
 F Petitjean, Hippolyte, 1893
 F Pissarro, Camille, 1887, 1889, 1891
 F Pissarro, Lucien, 1890, 1892
 F Raffaëlli, Jean-François, 1885, 1887
 F Redon, Odilon, 1886, 1890
 F Renan, Ary, 1887
 F Renoir, Pierre-Auguste, 1886, 1890
 F Roty, Louis Oscar, 1884, 1886, 1890
 A Sargent, John Singer, 1884
 I Segantini, Giovanni, 1890
 F Serret, Charles, 1892
 F Seurat, Georges, 1887, 1889, 1891, 1892 (memorial)
 GB Sickert, Walter, 1887
 F Sisley, Alfred, 1891
 B Smits, Eugène, 1887, 1891
 B Speekaert, Léopold, 1886
 B Stappen, Charles van der, 1884, 1888, 1891
 GB Steer, Philip Wilson, 1889, 1891, 1893
 B Stobbaerts, Jan, 1884
 H Storm van S'Gravensande, Charles, 1890
 GB Stott, William (of Oldham), 1884, 1889
 GB Swan, John, 1885
 B TerLinden, Felix, 1885
 N Thaulow, Fritz, 1887
 H Tholen, Willem Bastiaan, 1889
 H Thorn Prikker, Johan, 1893
 GB Thornley, Georges-William, 1890
 F Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri de, 1888, 1890, 1892, 1893
 G Uhde, Fritz von, 1885
 B Verhaeren, Alfred, 1887
 H Verster, Floris, 1891
 B Vigne, Paul de, 1884, 1889
 B Vinçotte, Thomas, 1884
 A Whistler, James Abbott McNeill, 1884, 1886, 1888
 I Zandomenighi, Federico, 1886
 H Zilcken, Charles-Louis Philippe, 1887

Four additional artists who were later elected members first exhibited with Les XX as *invités*:
 Minne, Rodin, Rops, and Signac.

The following artists were listed in the Les XX catalogue but did not show in these years:

- Besnard, Paul Albert, 1891
- Chase, William Merritt, 1886
- Forain, Jean-Louis, 1888
- Israels, Isaac, 1886
- Sisley, Alfred, 1890
- Ulrich, Charles Frederic, 1885

Notes

Introduction

1. Scholars such as John Rewald in *Post-Impressionism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962), Françoise Cachin in *Paul Signac* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1971), and Sven Lövgren in *The Genesis of Modernism* (Stockholm: University of Upsala, 1959), treat Les XX in this cursory manner.
2. Francine-Claire Legrand, *Le Groupe des XX et son temps* (Brussels: Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1962). Madeleine Octave Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art 1884-1914*, (Brussels: l'Oiseau Bleu, 1926).
3. Susan Marie Canning, "A History and Critical Review of the Salons of 'Les Vingt', 1884-1893" (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1980).
4. Francine-Claire Legrand, "Les Lettres de James Ensor à Octave Maus," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1966); Marie-Jeanne Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Théo Van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1966); Marie-Jeanne Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Paul Signac à Octave Maus," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1969); Phil Mertens, "De brieven van Jan Toorop aan Octave Maus," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1969).
5. *Belgian Art 1880-1914*, The Brooklyn Museum, 1980. See the article by Jane Block, "Les XX: Forum of the Avant-Garde," pp. 17-40.
6. Robert Herbert, *Neo-Impressionism* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1968); Jean Sutter, *The Neo-Impressionists* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1970).
7. Eugenia Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) and Donald Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).
8. Emile Verhaeren, "La lutte pour l'art," *Le National Belge*, 10 February 1884.

Chapter 1

1. Preceding the formation of the S.L.B.A. two private studios—the Academy of St. Luke and the atelier of Jean Portaels—provided alternatives to the Academy's instruction. St. Luke's collapsed in 1850, was resuscitated in 1853, and finally expired in 1863. Among its most loyal members were Charles Hermans, Félicien Rops, Louis Dubois, Louis Artan, and Jules Raeymaekers. An equally important source of inspiration for artists was the reestablishment in 1858 of the atelier of François-Joseph Navez by his son-in-law, Jean Portaels.

2. The date 1868 seems to be accepted by Oscar Roelandts, author of the principal study on the S.L.B.A., with the precautionary note that undoubtedly a long period of gestation preceded the formation. Oscar Roelandts, *Etude sur la Société libre des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles*, Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Beaux-Arts, Mémoires, Vol. IV (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1935), pp. 4-6. For further discussion about the founding of the S.L.B.A. see Paul Lambotte, *Les Peintres de Portraits* (Brussels: G. Van Oest & Cie., 1913), p. 55; A.-J. Wauters, *Catalogue officiel de l'Exposition rétrospective de l'Art belge* (Brussels: G. Van Oest & Cie., 1905), p. 43; *Les Maîtres de la Société libre des Beaux-Arts* (Brussels: Société des Grandes Retrospectives, 1932), pp. 15, 17.
3. This document is now in the collection of the Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (hereafter referred to as M.R.B.A.B.), Archives de l'art contemporain (hereafter referred to as A.A.C.), Fonds Van Camp, 3220. See also Marie-Jeanne Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Quelques Maîtres de la 'Société Libre des Beaux-Arts' dans les Archives de l'art contemporain," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1964): 11-26. Among the editors of *L'Art Libre* only one was actually an artist and a member of the S.L.B.A.—Louis Dubois. Dubois (1830-1880) wrote his articles under the pseudonym Hout, the Flemish translation of his French name.
4. "Notre Programme," *L'Art Libre* (1 January 1872): 17.
5. Roelandts, p. 50, quoting Karl Sturr, *La Chronique*, December 1868.
6. Camille Lemonnier, "Pour Servir de Préface au Salon de 1872," *L'Art Libre* (1 August 1872): 241.
7. Roelandts, pp. 67-68, quoting a letter published in *Comoedia*, 17 July 1923.
8. Camille Lemonnier, *L'Ecole belge de Peinture (1830-1905)* (Brussels: G. Van Oest & Cie., 1906), p. 123.
9. Gustave Lagye, "La Chrysalide," *La Gazette*, 9 November 1876, mentions the existence of a catalogue. Although there was a catalogue for the 1876 show, there is no mention in the press of a catalogue for the exhibition of 1878. In Victor Reding's, "La Chrysalide," *La Fédération Artistique* of 14 May 1881, p. 245, we learn that there was no official catalogue for this exhibition. However neither the Bibliothèque Royale nor the Bibliothèque du Musée in Brussels possesses either the 1876 or the 1878 catalogue.
10. Théo Hannon, "Le Cercle de la Chrysalide," *L'Artiste* (12 November 1876): 367. Hannon, a member of La Chrysalide also wrote a series of articles in *L'Artiste* under the pseudonym Marc Véry.
11. Camille Lemonnier, "Correspondance de Belgique," *Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité* (11 November 1876): 299-301.
12. Jacques, "La Chrysalide," *La Chronique*, 12 November 1876.
13. "La Chrysalide," *L'Artiste* (28 January 1877): 25.
14. "La Chrysalide," *L'Etoile Belge*, 1 December 1876.
15. Jules Destrée, "Feu 'La Chrysalide'," *L'Art Moderne* (10 December 1899): 413.
16. Victor Reding, "La Chrysalide," *Fédération Artistique* (14 May 1881): 245.
17. *L'Essor: Règlement et liste des membres*, 2 November 1883, p. 5. Article I states that the name change took place on 28 November 1879. The name was changed because it implied an adherence to academic principles.

18. *L'Essor Catalogue*, XVème exposition, Brussels, 1891.
19. "Nouvelles à la Main," *L'Artiste* (24 December 1876): 420.
20. "Exposition du Lucas Huys," *Fédération Artistique* (2 February 1877): 337.
21. Ibid.
22. "Petite Chronique," *La Chronique*, 21 January 1877.
23. "Les Faits Divers," *La Gazette*, 19 January 1877.
24. *L'Etoile Belge*, 14 January 1878.
25. *L'Etoile Belge*, 24 January 1880.
26. Théo Hannon [Marc Véry], "Exposition du Cercle d'élèves et anciens élèves des Académies des Beaux-Arts," *L'Artiste* (14 January 1877): 10.
27. Théo Hannon [Marc Véry], "Deuxième exposition annuelle du cercle d'élèves et d'anciens élèves des Académies des Beaux-Arts," *L'Artiste* (27 January 1878): 25.
28. Lucien Solvay, "Les Jeunes," *La Gazette*, 22 February 1881.
29. Emile Verhaeren, "Exposition l'Union des Arts," *Journal des Beaux-Arts et de la Littérature* (28 February 1882): 27.
30. "Exposition de l'Essor," *L'Art Moderne* (6 March 1881): 5.
31. Ibid.
32. Théo Hannon [Marc Véry], "Exposition du Cercle d'élèves et anciens élèves des Académies des Beaux-Arts," *L'Artiste* (14 January 1877): 10.
33. "Sixième Exposition Annuelle de l'Essor," *L'Art Moderne* (15 January 1882): 20.
34. Emile Verhaeren, "Exposition annuelle de l'Essor," *Journal des Beaux-Arts et de la Littérature* (15 January 1882): 3.
35. "Septième exposition de l'Essor," *L'Art Moderne* (28 January 1883): 29.
36. Un Jeune, "Exposition du Cercle l'Essor," *Fédération Artistique* (13 January 1883): 93.

Chapter 2

1. Andrew Jackson Matthews, *La Wallonie 1886-92: The Symbolist Movement in Belgium* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947), p. 12.
2. *La Wallonie* was dismissed by *La Jeune Belgique* as nothing more than "le supplément mensuel de *L'Art Moderne*." Matthews, p. 57.
3. Brussels, Musée de la littérature, Bibliothèque royale. Van Lerberghe's Journal of 1891, entry between 7 February and 5 March 1891, p. 24.
4. For further details on Picard's accomplishments, see: François Vermeulen, *Edmond Picard et le réveil des lettres belges, 1881-1888*, Académie Royale de Langue et de Littérature françaises de Belgique, Mémoires, vol. IX (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1935); Alex Pasquier, *Edmond Picard* (Brussels: Office de Publicité, 1945); Albert Licart, *L'Oeuvre d'Edmond Picard* (Brussels: La Revue Nationale, 1937); *Biographie Nationale*, 1968, s.v. "Picard, Edmond," by René Warlomont.
5. Pasquier, p. 23.

6. For information on Maus's interest in music, see Albert van der Linden, *Octave Maus et la Vie musicale belge 1875-1914*, Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Beaux-Arts, Mémoires, vol. VI, no. 2 (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1950). For additional biographic material see the book by Maus's wife, Madeleine Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art, 1884-1914* (Brussels: l'Oiseau Bleu, 1926); M. Biermé, "Octave Maus," *La Libre Critique* (5 March 1899): 94-95; A. Guislain, "Octave Maus," *Le Soir*, 4 November 1961; A. Guislain, "En parlant d'Octave Maus avec Albert van der Linden," *Le Soir*, 4 June 1966.
7. Gustave Lagye, "L'Art Jeune," *Fédération Artistique* (1 March 1884): 153-57. See also, Lagye, "L'Art Jeune," *Fédération Artistique* (23 February 1884): 146-48.
8. [Edmond Picard], "L'Art Jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (10 February 1884): 42.
9. [Edmond Picard], "Nos ennemis," *L'Art Moderne* (23 March 1884): 100, quoting from Wilhelm, "Nos ennemis," *L'Art Libre* (15 January 1872): 33-34.
10. Edmond Picard, "L'Art Jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (9 March 1884): 74-75, quoting from Léon Dommartin, "Profession de foi," *L'Art Libre*, 15 December 1871.
11. Edmond Picard, "L'Art Jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (17 February 1884): 51.
12. Francine-Claire Legrand, *Le Groupe des XX et son temps* (Brussels: Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1962), p. 17.
13. John David Farmer, *Ensor* (New York: George Braziller, 1976), p. 20, was probably misled by Legrand's use of the word "désintégration" when he says, "In fact, 1883 was the final year for *L'Essor*, and in October the formation of *Le Groupe des Vingt* in Brussels was announced."
14. "La Ville," *La Gazette*, 1 January 1883.
15. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (7 October 1883): 321. *L'Essor* was not the first society in Europe to group the works of each artist together. The Impressionists did so at their second exhibition in 1876 and Sir Coutts Lindsay's Grosvenor Gallery in London did so in 1877.
16. "La Ville," *La Gazette*, 18 January 1883; "Bulletin Artistique et Littéraire," *La Chronique*, 17 January 1883; "Concert de l'Essor," *L'Art Moderne* (21 January 1883): 20.
17. Les XX held three concerts in 1884. The second was held on 25 February, the third on 1 March, the day before the closing of the exhibition.
18. "Chronique Générale," *Fédération Artistique* (28 April 1883): 230.
19. Charlet states that there were "16 or 17" artists who met to form Les XX (see Chapter 3, n. 23). However, only 11 founding members had previously exhibited with *L'Essor*.
20. *L'Essor: Règlement et Liste des Membres*, Brussels, 2 November 1883.
21. *Ibid.*, Article 14, pp. 7-8. See also X, "La Prochaine Exposition de *L'Essor*," *Fédération Artistique* (16 December 1882): 62.
22. Jules Du Jardin, *L'Art Flamand*, 6 vols. (Brussels: Arthur Boitte, 1900), 6:26.
23. Quoted in Madeleine Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art*, p. 24, n.1.
24. "Momento," *La Jeune Belgique* (1882-1883): 474.
25. Camille Lemonnier, "Correspondance de Belgique," *La Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité* (5 January 1884): 2-3.
26. "L'Essor's VIIIème exposition annuelle," *L'Art Moderne* (13 January 1884): 12.

Chapter 3

1. Victor Reding, "Le Salon," *Fédération Artistique* (18 October 1884): 421.
2. Emile Verhaeren, "Le Salon de 1884," *La Jeune Belgique* (September 1884): 472-87.
3. Octave Maus, "La Lanterne Magique," *Revue de belles-lettres* (Neuchâtel: Imprimerie centrale, 1927), p. 206.
4. Madeleine Maus, p. 16.
5. Octave Maus, "La Lanterne Magique," p. 206.
6. Bruce Laughton, "The British and American Contribution to Les XX," *Apollo* 69 (November 1967): 372.
7. All the Les XX documents cited henceforth from the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique (M.R.B.A.B.) come from the Les XX archive, Donation Albert Vanderlinden, and form part of the Archive de l'art contemporain (A.A.C.). Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., Donation Albert Vanderlinden, A.A.C., Finch to Charlet, 4623, 25 September 1883.
8. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (7 October 1883): 321.
9. This contradicts Legrand's quotation in *Le Groupe des XX et son temps*, p. 18, that Les XX proposed to exhibit yearly from 13 February to 13 March.
10. This is a reference to exhibitions held at George Petit's Parisian gallery on the rue de Sèze. Petit's gallery opened in 1882 holding annual international exhibitions. See John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism, 1 4th ed. rev.* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), *passim*; "Concours et expositions," *La Chronique des Arts et de La Curiosité* (25 March 1882): 89-90; "Exposition internationale de peinture à Paris," *L'Art Moderne* (25 June 1882): 206-7.
11. As we have seen in Chapter 2, works at L'Essor were grouped individually by artist instead of being dispersed throughout the exhibition.
12. Franz Courtens (1854-1943) never, in fact, became a member of Les XX nor did he participate in any of the exhibitions as an *invité*. Only eighteen artists are listed here. *L'Art Moderne* of 14 October 1883 in an addendum explains that the names of Pantazis and Vogels were accidentally omitted. Frans Simons later replaced Courtens, thereby becoming the twentieth Vingtiste.
13. "La Ville," *La Gazette*, 8 October 1883.
14. "La Ville," *La Gazette*, 21 October 1883.
15. Legrand, *Le Groupe des XX et son temps*, p. 17.
16. "La Ville," *La Gazette*, 21 October 1883.
17. Georges-Marie Matthijs, *Julien Dillens*, Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Beaux-Arts, Mémoires, vol. VIII, no. 3 (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1955), pp. 92-93.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
20. Brussels, Archives du Royaume de Belgique, *Archives de l'art belge*, Charlet to Du Jardin, Fonds Du Jardin 774a. See also Jules Du Jardin, *L'Art Flamand*, 6 vols. (Brussels: Arthur Boitte, 1900), 6:51-52.

21. Léon Herbo (1850-1907) was a founding member of L'Essor and was perhaps its most academic painter.
22. Brussels, Archives du Royaume de Belgique, *Archives de l'art belge*, Charlet to Du Jardin 774a. Charlet's version of what occurred is generally corroborated by the 21 October 1883 account in *La Gazette*. However there are some problems with Charlet's recollection. While he may well have been named secretary of this new group, it is very doubtful that from the moment of its inception the founders decided that it would last only ten years. This was Maus's idea and was voted upon by the Vingtistes in November 1893. The inclusion of Toorop at the original meeting of the formation of Les XX is untenable since Toorop exhibited with L'Essor for the first time only in 1884 and did not become a member of Les XX until 1885. Also Charlet's omission of the fact that the group first asked Solvay to become secretary before they asked Maus casts some doubt on the completeness of this account.
23. In an interview with Pierre Mommen, the son of Félix Mommen who supplied paints and ateliers to several Vingtistes, I was told that Charlet was indeed the first secretary of Les XX. Pierre Mommen's source for this remark was Frantz Charlet's daughter, Jane. In addition, an article in *Le Soir*, 4 June 1966, "En parlant d'Octave Maus avec Albert Van der Linden," by Albert Guislain, confirms this sequence of events, p. 5.
24. Brussels, Archives du Royaume de Belgique, *Archives de l'art belge*, Charlet to Du Jardin, Fonds Du Jardin 774a.
25. Lucien Solvay, *Une Vie de Journaliste* (Brussels: Office de Publicité, 1934), p. 109.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
27. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Document, 28 October 1883.
28. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Eugène Boch, Fonds Bouquelle, 3900, 1 November 1883.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Van Strydonck, 7249, 1 November 1883.
33. "Les Vingt," *L'Art Moderne* (11 November 1883): 361.
34. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Schlimm to Maus, 7250, 20 November 1883.
35. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Schlimm to Maus, 4619, 5 December 1883.
36. We know from Xavier Mellery's letter (Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., 4630) to Maus that Maus wrote to Mellery the day after Les XX was granted exhibition space.
37. The earliest reply to Maus's invitation is from Jozef Israels dated 9 December 1883. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., 4624.
38. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Rops to Maus, 4638, 29 December 1883.
39. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Document, 4609. This list was the definitive list for 1884. The twenty names listed were: A. Chainaye, F. Charlet, J. Delvin, P. Dubois, James Ensor, W. Finch, Ch. Goethals, Fernand Khnopff, J. Lambeaux, P. Pantazis, Dario de Regoyos, W. Schlobach, F. Simons, G. Vanaise, Théo van Rysselberghe, G. van Strydonck, Piet Verhaert, Th. Verstraete, G. Vogels, R. Wytzman. However only eleven signatures are affixed to the document since not all the members could attend the meeting. Charlet and Van Rysselberghe

were in Morocco. See Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., 4639; Dario de Regoyos was in Irun, Spain, see Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., 4634.

40. Léon L., *La Belgique*, 4 February 1884; Gomme Gutte, "Nouvelles des Arts," *Nouvelles du Jour*, 5 February 1884.
41. "L'exposition des Vingt," *La Gazette*, 3 February 1884.
42. Ibid., see also Gomme Gutte, *Les Nouvelles du Jour*, 5 February 1884.
43. [Edmond Picard], "L'Art Jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (10 February 1884): 41-43.
44. Ibid., p. 41.
45. Ibid., p. 42.
46. Ibid., p. 43.
47. Ibid., p. 41.
48. "Arts, Sciences et Littérature," *L'Indépendance Belge*, 16 February 1884. "Petite Chronique," *La Chronique*, 18 February 1884.
49. Edmond Picard, "L'Art Jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (10 February 1884): 41.
50. Ibid., p. 42.
51. Ibid.
52. "Chronique," *L'Echo de Bruxelles*, 3 February 1884.
53. Emile Verhaeren, "La lutte pour l'art," *Le National Belge*, 10 February 1884.
54. Théo Hannon [Mecoenas], "L'exposition des XX," *La Chronique*, 10 February 1884.
55. Georges Eekhoud, "Chronique Bruxelloise," *La Chronique des Beaux-Arts* (10 February 1884): 44.
56. Lucien Solvay, "Les Vingt," *La Gazette*, 11 February 1884.
57. A.D., "Nos Mardis," *L'Impartial de Gand*, 12 February 1884.
58. Philalèthe, "Lettre Provinciale, La Néo-Peinture et Les XX," *La Paix* (Brussels), 16 February 1884.
59. "Chronique Artistique," *Le Journal de Charleroi*, 16 February 1884.
60. Yves Didier, "La lutte pour l'art," *Le National Belge*, 14 February 1884.
61. Ibid.
62. [Edmond Picard], "L'Art Jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (17 February 1884): 49.
63. Ibid.
64. Edmond Picard, "L'Art Jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (9 March 1884): 73.
65. Lucien Solvay, "Les Vingt," *La Gazette*, 11 February 1884.
66. Y.Z. "Les Vingt," *L'Echo de Bruxelles*, 18 February 1884.
67. Lucien Solvay, "Les Vingt," *La Gazette*, 11 February 1884.
68. J.B. Willems, "Courrier de Belgique," *Le Courrier de l'Art* (22 February 1884): 94.
69. Ibid.

70. Byron, "Exposition des Vingt," *Le Patriote*, 19 February 1884.
71. J.B. Willems, *Le Courrier de l'Art* (22 February 1884): 94.
72. Madeleine Maus, p. 25.
73. Gustave Lagye, "L'Art Jeune," *Fédération Artistique* (23 February 1884): 145.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-48.
77. For the battle between *L'Art Moderne* and *Fédération Artistique*, see: *Fédération Artistique*, 23 February and 1, 8, 22, and 29 March 1884; *L'Art Moderne*: 2, 9, and 16 March 1884.
78. Emile Verhaeren, "Exposition des XX," *La Jeune Belgique* (15 February 1884): 200.
79. *Ibid.*
80. Georges Eekhoud, "Chronique Bruxelloise," *Chronique des Beaux-Arts* (17 February 1884): 53.
81. Théodore Verstraete, "Chronique Artistique," *La Jeune Belgique* (21 February 1884): 247-48.
82. Emile Verhaeren, "Exposition des XX," *La Jeune Belgique* (15 February 1884): 200.
83. Georges Eekhoud, *Chronique des Beaux-Arts* (17 February 1884): 54.
84. Emile Verhaeren, "Exposition des XX," *La Jeune Belgique* (15 February 1884): 200.
85. Georges Eekhoud, *Chronique des Beaux-Arts* (17 February 1884): 53.
86. Isidore van Cleef, "L'Exposition des XX à Bruxelles," *Revue Artistique* (15 March 1884): 319.
87. F.B., "L'Exposition des XX," *Société Nouvelle* (1884-1885): 261.
88. Lucien Solvay, "Les Vingt," *La Gazette*, 11 February 1884.
89. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (4 May 1884): 150.

Chapter 4

1. "Notre Programme," *L'Art Moderne* (6 March 1881): 2.
2. "Le jeune mouvement littéraire," *L'Art Moderne* (10 June 1883): 181; (1 July 1883): 205-8; (15 July 1883): 221-25; (29 July 1883): 237-40.
3. "Le jeune mouvement littéraire," *L'Art Moderne* (15 July 1883): 222.
4. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Finch to Maus, 4691, December 1884.
5. See Delvin's letter to Octave Maus, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., 4680, 20 December 1884.
6. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Vote on lecture series, 4658, 7 December 1884.
7. *Ibid.* Surprisingly enough the moderates Wytsman and Van Rysselberghe also voted for the abolition of the lecture series.
8. H. Vigoureux, "Les XX," *L'Etudiant*, 5 February 1885.
9. See also: J.N., "L'Exposition des XX," *Le Nord*, 2 February 1885; Y.Z., "Les Vingt," *L'Echo de Bruxelles*, 8 February 1885; Camille Lemonnier, "Correspondance de Belgique," *Chronique des Arts et de la curiosité*, 21 March 1885, pp. 93-94.

10. [Edmond Picard], "L'Art jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (10 February 1884): 41.
11. [Edmond Picard], "Les Vingt," *L'Art Moderne* (15 February 1885): 50.
12. Dubois and Van Strydonck each won a scholarship of 12,000 F. for a three-year period.
13. Une Parisienne, "Tablettes Mondaines," *Le Patriote*, 3 February 1885. See also: "Les Vingt," *L'Echo de Bruxelles*, 8 February 1885; "L'Exposition de XX," *Flandre Libérale*, 5 February 1885.
14. This is in contrast to the Paris Indépendants formed after Les XX in 1884, which did not set limits on the number of exhibitors.
15. Grégoire Le Roy, *James Ensor* (Brussels: G. Van Oest & Cie., 1922), p. 35.
16. Théo Hannon, "Les XX," *Le Rapide*, 5 February 1888; "L'Exposition des XX," *L'Emancipation*, 3 February 1888.
17. "L'Exposition des XX," *Journal de Bruxelles*, 10 February 1888.
18. "Chez les XX," *La Chronique*, 10 February 1888.
19. Francine-Claire Legrand, "Ensor, les XX et la peinture française," *Médecine de France* (August 1962): 25. See also: Francine-Claire Legrand and G. Ollinger-Zinque, *Ensor, cet inconnu* (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1971), p. 44.
20. Francine-Claire Legrand, "Les lettres de James Ensor à Octave Maus," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1966): 33.
21. James Ensor, *Lettres à André de Ridder* (Antwerp: Librarie des Arts, 1960), p. 61. Letter of 30 September 1928.
22. "Arts, Sciences et Lettres," *Le Patriote*, 14 February 1888; Théo Hannon [Mecoenas], "Le Salon des Vingt," *La Chronique*, 20 February 1888; "Nos Mardis," *L'Impartial de Gand*, 21 February 1888.
23. Théo Hannon [Mecoenas], "Le Salon des Vingt," *La Chronique*, 20 February 1888.
24. "Depuis Cinq Ans," *L'Art Moderne*, 26 February 1888, p. 66. There is also reference in *Le Patriote* of 14 February 1888 and *La Chronique* of 10 February 1888 that Les XX refused the works of two French *invités*: Caillebotte's *Homme au Bain*, and Anquetin's *Toile de Fond pour Guignol*. Both works are listed in the 1888 catalogue.
25. Octave Maus, "James Ensor," *La Plume*, 1899, p. 33.
26. Ensor, *Lettres à André de Ridder*, p. 61.
27. Le Roy, *James Ensor*, p. 35.
28. Paul Haesaerts, *James Ensor* (Brussels: Meddens, 1973), p. 70. Achille Chainaye had not exhibited with Les XX in 1887 or 1888 although his name is listed in the catalogues for these years. He was replaced by Rodin in 1889. Chainaye had turned to journalism as a means of earning his livelihood. Haesaerts's assertion that Chainaye demanded Ensor's expulsion is improbable for several reasons. Chainaye in his columns praised Ensor's works shown at Les XX on 6 February 1887 and 4 March 1888 in *La Réforme*. In the first review he referred to Ensor as "le poteau indicateur" de la peinture flamande régénérée." Chainaye's harsh reviews of Les XX began in 1890. He objected not to Ensor but to the Neo-Impressionist takeover at Les XX. (See *La Réforme*, 20 January 1890). Aside from the complimentary reviews of Ensor's work, Ensor wrote to Chainaye in 1905 [private collection, Ghent] asking him to join the Vie et Lumière section of the forthcoming Libre Esthétique show. It is doubtful Ensor would have made such a request if Chainaye had indeed been the instigator of a plot to expel Ensor.

29. Maus, "James Ensor," p. 33.
30. Legrand, "Les Lettres de James Ensor à Octave Maus," p. 39. 4 November 1892.
31. Ibid.
32. [Edmond Picard], "L'Art Jeune," *L'Art Moderne* (17 February 1884): 50.
33. "Chronique de la Ville," *L'Etoile Belge*, 5 February 1888.
34. "Exposition des XX," *Le Patriote Illustré*, 21 February 1892.
35. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Verheyden, 7248. Postmarked 20 November 1884.
36. Edmond Picard, "L'Art et la Révolution," *L'Art Moderne* (18 July 1886): 225-27; (25 July 1886): 233-36; (1 August 1886): 241-44.
37. Ibid., p. 225.
38. "L'Impressionnisme," *L'Art Moderne* (21 February 1886): 57.
39. The placard of *Amnistie* in Ensor's work refers to the workers' uprisings in 1885 and 1886 protesting social evils. Workers' strikes in Liège came to a head on 18 March 1886. The government came down hard on the rebellion and the workers. Harsh sentences were meted out. Prosocialist newspapers pleaded for amnesty for these strikers. *La Réforme* of 17 March 1887 tried to justify the violence, "Combien de malheureux inconscients que les larmes de leurs enfants affamés ont poussés à la révolte, ont été condamnés à dix, quinze, voire même vingt ans d'emprisonnement!" *La Réforme* pleaded for conciliation between the classes and announced that a national meeting for amnesty would be held on 20 March 1887. *La Société Nouvelle* (June 1887, p. 537) claimed that the political and economic strikes by the workers were held to accomplish universal suffrage. According to the reviewer the strikes revealed the immense malaise of the proletariat, "Il y a deux nations dans la nation, celle qui possède richesse, droits et pouvoirs et celle qui n'a rien."
40. A.-J. Wauters, "Aux XX," *La Gazette*, 10 February 1887.
41. Ibid.
42. MS by Signac, in the Signac Collection, ca. 1900, quoted in Eugenia Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 190, n. 38.
43. Georges Lemmen, "Walter Crane," *L'Art Moderne* (1 March 1891): 67-69; 15 March 1891, pp. 83-86.
44. Henry van de Velde, "Les XX," *Floréal* (1 April 1893): 53.
45. "L'Art et Socialisme," *L'Art Moderne* (30 August 1891): 276.
46. Ibid.
47. Emile Vandervelde was a professor of political science at the Free University of Brussels. He was a founder of the Parti Ouvrier Belge. On the founding of the Section d'Art of the Maison du Peuple see: "L'Art à la Maison du Peuple," *L'Art Moderne* (15 November 1891): 365-66.
48. Goblet d'Alviella, "A University of Masonic Origin," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, 22 (1909): 224.
49. Robert Freke Gould, *Gould's History of Free Masonry Throughout the World*, edited by Dudley Wright, 3rd ed., 6 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 3:261.
50. Regarding Ensor, Frank Edebeau, Curator of the Museum Voor Schone Kunsten, Ostend, in a letter to Jean-Luc De Paepe, Archivist at the Palais des Académies, Brussels, of 23

February 1978, confirmed that Ensor never joined a lodge in Ostend, but asserted that it was quite possible he had joined one in Brussels. We do know that Rops was a Freemason as was Picard's father. See *Biographie Nationale*, s.v. "Rops, Félicien," by Maurice Kunel. Alex Pasquier, *Edmond Picard* (Brussels: Office de Publicité, 1945), p. 3.

51. Goblet d'Alviella, Count, "Fifty Years of Masonic Life in Belgium 1870-1920," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorium*, 33 (1920): 4. Whether by accident or design in the anti-Masonic Belgian newspaper *Le Tirailleur*, the Freemason's symbol of a square and compass is made to look uncannily like the double X of the Les XX insignia. See for example 29 April 1888. The relationship between Freemasonry and the avant-garde movements throughout Europe bears further investigation.
52. Eugenia Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform*, pp. 40-54.

Chapter 5

1. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (7 October 1883): 321.
2. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Van Strydonck, 7249, 1 November 1883.
3. Bernier held this post in 1884, for his name appeared on the Les XX poster of that year. Bernier is first mentioned in *L'Art Moderne* on 22 March 1885: 95, on the occasion of the *Vingtistes* presenting him and Maus with two portfolios of drawings in recognition of service rendered to Les XX. It is not until 1887 that Bernier's name appears in the Les XX catalogue. Bernier was a high-level functionary in the Government.
4. No commission fee was charged at Les XX when a sale occurred.
5. Signac, distrustful of this service, preferred to send his own crates to Brussels and to unpack his crates personally as well. He therefore paid for the transport of his paintings. See M.J. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Paul Signac à Octave Maus," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, (1969): 63-64.
6. Auguste Beernaert was a conservative politician who came to power with the Catholic party in 1884.
7. "Les XX et le Ministère des Beaux-Arts," *L'Art Moderne* (28 September 1884): 317-18.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
9. "Arts, Sciences et Lettres," *Le Courrier Belge*, 5 February 1888.
10. "Chambre des Représentants," *Journal de Gand*, 29 March 1889. See also: "Doctrinaires et Artistes," *L'Art Moderne* (31 March 1889): 101.
11. The dates of Les XX's exhibitions in Brussels are: 2 February-2 March 1884; 1 February-3 March 1885, 6 February-14 March 1886; 5 February-6 March 1887; 4 February-4 March 1888; 2 February-5 March 1889; 18 January-23 February 1890; 7 February-8 March 1891; 6 February-6 March 1892; 18 February-26 March 1893. The group also exhibited in Amsterdam from 25 May-23 June 1889 and in Ghent from 2 April to 17 April 1893.
12. However the price from 1885 through 1887 was one franc.
13. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Victor Bernier to Octave Maus, 4773, 9 March 1887.
14. "Les Vingt," *L'Art Moderne* (11 November 1883): 361.
15. Georges Rodenbach, "Tête de Vingtistes," *Le Progrès*, 10 February 1887.
16. *Ibid.*; *L'Art Moderne* proclaimed le Salon des XX as "L'événement artistique de l'hiver." (13 February 1887): 49.

17. From the unpublished Journal of Charles van Lerberghe, 7 February 1891, p. 213. Brussels, Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Royale.
18. Many of these artists were the most revolutionary: Ensor, Gauguin, Seurat, Luce, Toorop. See "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (10 March 1889): 79.
19. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Bernier to Octave Maus, 6789, 30 March 1893.
20. "Le Salon Défunt," *L'Art Moderne* (23 November 1890): 369.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
22. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Pantazis to Maus, 4631, 14 January 1884.
23. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Lambeaux to Maus, 4627, 25 February 1884.
24. "L'Art Jeune et Les XX," *L'Art Moderne* (1 February 1885): 34.
25. "Les Palinodards." *L'Art Moderne* (22 February 1885): 61.
26. Emile Verhaeren, "Exposition des XX," *La Jeune Belgique* (15 February 1884): 200.
27. Georges Eekhoud, "Chronique Bruxelloise," *La Chronique des Beaux-Arts* (17 February 1884): 54.
28. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Chainaye to Maus, 4676, undated letter, probably November 1884.
29. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Goethals to Maus, 4693, undated.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Verheyden, 7248, 20 November 1884.
32. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (23 November 1884): 382.
33. Other names proposed by Vingtistes on their election ballots were: Anna Boch, Constantin Meunier, Emile Claus, and Léon Abry.
34. Later in 1885, Anna Boch and Félicien Rops were elected to replace Simons and Verstraete.
35. Jacques Dur, "Les XX chez eux," *Le National Belge*, 16 February 1885.
36. Lucien Solvay, "L'exposition des XX," *La Gazette*, 16 February 1885. Solvay must be referring to Vanaise's work shown at Les XX in 1884 for he did not exhibit at Les XX in 1885.
37. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (1 March 1885): 71.
38. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Regoyos to Maus, 4708, 13 November 1884.
39. Dur, "Les XX chez eux," *Le National Belge*, February, 1885.
40. "Chronique de la Ville," *L'Etoile Belge*, 6 March 1885.
41. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Delvin, 4731, February 1886.
42. Madeleine Maus, *Trente Années de Lutte pour l'art*, p. 40.
43. "Les Vingt," *L'Art Moderne* (8 February 1885): 43.
44. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Delvin to Maus, 4732, 5 February 1886.
45. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Vanaise to Maus, 4759, 6 February 1886.

46. De Groux was officially accepted 28 November 1886. See M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to De Groux, 4782. The announcement of his election and his letter of acceptance were published in *L'Art Moderne* (5 December 1886): 390.
47. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Finch to Maus, 4786, 17 November 1886.
48. Ibid. In addition to Whistler, Finch also recommended two Englishmen: Walter Sickert and Waldo Story. Sickert exhibited with Les XX in 1887. However, Story never showed at Les XX.
49. Glasgow, Glasgow University Library, Maus to Finch, B.P. II 11/101, 21 November 1886.
50. Ibid.
51. Legrand, "Les Lettres de James Ensor à Octave Maus," p. 26. Letter dated November 1886.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Vogels to Maus, 4829, 25 November 1886.
56. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Wytsman to Maus, 4830, n.d.
57. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (5 December 1886): 390
58. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Verheyden to Maus, 5071; Wytsman's letter of resignation is undated, 5079.
59. Paris, Musée Rodin, Rodin Archives, Maus to Rodin, 8 November 1888.
60. "Petite Chronique," *La Wallonie* (15 January 1887): 69.
61. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Lemmen to Maus, 5266, 13 November 1888. Lemmen wrote to Maus on 19 January 1889 discussing his *envoi* to the 1889 exhibition: "Je crois que mon père mourra, après m'avoir préalablement flanqué à la porte, s'il voit mon exposition des XX. . . ." 5243.
62. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Heymans to Maus, 4733, 9 December 1886.
63. Marie-Jeanne Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1966): 63. Van de Velde in fact so much wanted to show with Les XX that on 27 February 1888 (5070), he wrote Maus for permission to exhibit four or five of his works for the few remaining days of the exhibition. Van de Velde felt that exhibiting with the Vingtistes would be an invaluable learning experience and added, "J'ai tant désir de faire bataille avec Eux, puisque c'est le seul encouragement et l'honneur que je puis attendre."
64. Brussels, Musée de la Littérature, Van de Velde Archives, Bibliothèque Royale, F.S. 57B. Van de Velde replied thanking Maus and the Vingtistes for his nomination and stated that his election to Les XX was "le seul honneur que j'ambitionnais." Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., 5247.
65. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., election ballot, 5311.
66. Paris, Musée Rodin, Rodin Archive, Maus to Rodin, 23 November 1889.
67. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Van de Velde to Maus, 5334, November 1889.

68. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., De Groux to Maus, 5309, 8 December 1889.
69. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., De Groux to Maus, 5307, 16 January 1890.
70. Ibid.
71. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C. The following affirmative votes are recorded: Lemmen's vote (5340), Van Rysselberghe (5342), Charlier (5337), Toorop and Dubois (5336), Van de Velde (5345), Khnopff (5339), Van Strydonck (5344), Schlobach (5343), R. Picard (5341), and Finch (5338).
72. Octave Maus, "La Lanterne Magique," *Revue de Belles Lettres* 25 (1927): 211.
73. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., De Groux to Maus, 5347, 19 January 1889, should read 1890.
74. Emile Verhaeren, "Salon de Gand," *L'Art Moderne* (15 September 1889): 292.
75. Marie-Jeanne Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Paul Signac à Octave Maus," *Bulletin des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1969): 59.
76. Jean Warmoes, "Les XX et la Littérature," *Cahiers Henry Van de Velde* 7 (1966): 25.
77. Achille Chainaye [Champal], "Chez les XX," *La Réforme*, 18 February 1891.
78. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (7 October 1883): 321.
79. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Finch to Maus, 4690, 19 October 1884.
80. Both letters are in the Archives de l'art contemporain. Ensor's is dated October 1884, 4684; Finch's letter is dated 19 October 1884, 4690. The Belgian *invités* to Les XX for 1885 were: Mellery, Meunier, TerLinden, Devillez, and Le Nain.
81. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," p. 60. Degas never exhibited at Les XX.
82. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Raffaëlli to Maus, 4802. Cassatt's refusal is dated 4 December 1886, 4778. Cassatt finally exhibited at Les XX in 1892. Morisot exhibited with Les XX in 1887. Her acceptance letter is dated 28 November 1886, 4797.
83. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Rodin to Maus, 5349. Maus replied that it was too late to invite Mlle. Claudel since *invités* had already been selected. Paris, Musée Rodin, Rodin Archives, 23 December 1889.
84. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Van Strydonck, Fonds Van Strydonck, 33, 26 November 1887.
85. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Dalou's refusal, 4730, and Puvis's refusal, 4679.
86. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Leighton to Maus, 5716, 11 November 1890.
87. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Cézanne to Maus, 5273, 27 November 1889.
88. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., De Wyzewa to Maus, 5356, n.d.
89. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., Maus to Eugène Boch, 3901, 11 January 1884.
90. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Théo van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," p. 60.
91. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., De Wyzewa to Maus, 5356, n.d.
92. Ibid.

93. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Boch, 3919, January 1890. However, as Sisley explained, it was his dealer Georges Petit who refused to lend his works to the Les XX show, 5300, 23 January 1890.
94. Van Rysselberghe spent the summer of 1887 visiting Eugène Boch in Paris. It was undoubtedly Boch who introduced Théo van Rysselberghe to Toulouse-Lautrec. Lautrec and Boch had been fellow students at the atelier Cormon in Paris.
95. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," p. 65.
96. Ibid., p. 70.
97. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Eugène Boch, 3914, 29 December 1886.
98. "Le Vingtisme à Anvers," *L'Art Moderne* (20 March 1887): 89.
99. For Van de Velde's account of the formation of this group see: Brussels, Musée de la Littérature, Van de Velde Archives, Bibliothèque royale, *Récit de ma Vie*, F.S. X4, p. 39. See also: "Max Elskamp et l'Esthétique fin de siècle," M. Christian Berg, *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Langue et Littérature Française*, 47 (1969 no. 2), pp. 132-55.
100. Brussels, Musée de la Littérature, Archives de l'Art Indépendant, M.L. II, 87, 12 February 1887.
101. Catalogue of L'Art Indépendant, Brussels: Imprimerie Veuve Monnom, 1887, p. IV.
102. "L'Art Indépendant," *L'Art Moderne* (20 March 1887): 91. *L'Art Moderne* is quoting from *Handelsblad* of 20-21 March 1887, p. 241.
103. "L'Art Cochon," *Mephisto*, 26 March 1887.
104. Abry's response to Elskamp sums up L'Art Indépendant's position, "il est de toute impossibilité d'admettre le retract d'une oeuvre quelconque. Les Rops particulièrement qu'à mon avis ne justifient aucunement la trompette d'injures que notre braves bourgeois ont soulevée. . . ." Brussels, Musée de la Littérature, Archives de l'Art Indépendant, M.L. 1887.
105. A concert of Russian and French music was held on 12 June 1892. Maus was a participant in this concert.
106. E. Michotte's collection of Hiroshige was lent to Elskamp. See Musée de la Littérature, Archives de l'Association pour l'art, Bibliothèque royale, letters of 17 and 22 May 1892.
107. This time the Japanese prints were lent by Samuel Bing who had held in 1889 an exhibition of Japanese art at the Cercle Artistique et Littéraire in Brussels.
108. Brussels, Musée de la Littérature, Archives de l'association pour l'art, Bibliothèque royale, May 1892.
109. "Salon des XIII," *L'Art Moderne* (8 March 1891): 79.
110. The members of Les XIII were: Emile Claus, Edouard de Jans, Henri Luyten, Charles Mertens, Leo van Aken, Louis van Engelen, Piet Verhaert, Théodore Verstraete, Henri de Smeth, Edgard Farasyn, Franz Hens, and Romain Looymans.
111. E.V., "L'Exposition des XIII à Anvers," *L'Emancipation*, 2 March 1892.
112. "Les Trentistes Parisiens," *L'Art Moderne* (16 January 1887): 23. Jacques-Emile Blanche strongly disagreed with this characterization of Les Trente. Blanche in a letter to Maus (5024) denied that his group was a copy of Les XX and rejected the title Trentistes. Blanche

- suggested instead the title, "An Exhibition of paintings, drawings and sculpture by 30 French and Foreign artists."
113. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Panorama Society, 5269, 5 May 1889. Maus clearly states his conditions for exhibiting in Amsterdam.
114. Van de Velde had previously given this talk at the Jeune Barreau in Antwerp and in Brussels at Les XX and the Cercle Artistique et Littéraire in March 1891. The text of *Du Paysan en peinture* was published by L'Avenir Social, 1892.
115. Hague Royal Library, Toorop Archive, Maus to Toorop, T.C. C134, 4 January 1892.
116. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (29 October 1893): 351.

Chapter 6

1. "Les XX," *Journal des Beaux-Arts* (15 February 1886): 21.
2. "A Propos du Salon des XX: L'Impressionnisme," *L'Art Moderne* (21 February 1886): 58.
3. Ibid.
4. Y.Z., "Les Vingt," *L'Echo de Bruxelles*, 8 February 1885; Lucien Solvay, "L'Exposition des XX," *La Gazette*, 10 February 1885.
5. Georges Verdavainne, "L'exposition des XX," *Fédération Artistique* (13 February 1886): 123.
6. Ibid., p. 124.
7. "Aux XX," *L'Impartial de Gand*, 9 February 1886.
8. A.-J. Wauters, "Aux XX," *La Gazette*, 14 March 1886. For a similar point of view see also "L'exposition des XX," *L'Indépendance Belge*, 25 February 1886.
9. "Les XX," *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, 15 February 1886, p. 21.
10. A.D., "Nos Mardis," *L'Impartial de Gand*, 23 February 1886.
11. "L'Exposition des XX," *L'Indépendance Belge*, 25 February 1886.
12. "La Vie à Bruxelles," *La Meuse*, 11 February 1886.
13. "Exposition du cercle des XX," *Le Nord*, 13 February 1886.
14. "A propos du Salon des XX: L'Impressionnisme," *L'Art Moderne* (21 February 1886): 57-59.
15. Ibid., p. 58.
16. Ibid.
17. "A propos du Salon des XX: L'Impressionnisme," *L'Art Moderne* (28 February 1886): 66.
18. Philippe Roberts-Jones, *Du Réalisme au Surréalisme* (Brussels: Laconti, 1971), p. 38.
19. "Aux XX," *La Nation*, 6 February 1887.
20. Achille Chainaye, "Le Salon des XX," *La Réforme*, 6 February 1887.
21. "Les XX," *La Meuse*, 12 February 1887.
22. [Emile Verhaeren], "Fernand Khnopff," *L'Art Moderne* (5 September 1886): 280-81, and (12 September 1886): 289-90, and (10 October 1886): 321-23. In a letter from Maus to Finch

- of 21 November 1886 (Glasgow University Library), Maus identifies Verhaeren as the author.
23. Legrand, "Les Lettres de James Ensor à Octave Maus," p. 24.
 24. Ibid., p. 24, n.1.
 25. Ibid., 13 September 1886.
 26. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Finch to Maus, 4786, 17 November 1886.
 27. "L'ancien et le nouvel impressionnisme," *L'Art Moderne* (5 February 1888): 42.
 28. Francine-Claire Legrand, "Fernand Khnopff—Perfect Symbolist," *Apollo* 85 (April 1967): 280.
 29. [Octave Maus], "Les Vingtistes Parisiens," *L'Art Moderne* (27 June 1886): 201-4. See Emile Verhaeren, "Les XX," *La Société Nouvelle*, 1891.
 30. Ibid., p. 204.
 31. In fact by the time Seurat did exhibit his seven works at Les XX in 1887, the *Coin d'un Bassin d'Honfleur* was owned by Verhaeren. At the Les XX exhibition Verhaeren bought an additional work *L'Hospice et Le Phare d'Honfleur*. Henry van Cutsem, a rich amateur and patron of Vingtiste Guillaume Charlier, bought *La Grève du Bas Butin*.
 32. Henri Dorra and John Rewald, *Seurat* (Paris: Les Beaux-Arts, 1959), p. LVIII.
 33. Verhaeren recalled that the first painting he saw of Seurat's was the *Grande Jatte*, "Pas un instant je ne doutai de la sincérité entière et de la profonde innovation qui se prouvaient là, patentes, devant moi. J'en parlai à des artistes. . . . On me rabroua avec les rires et des moqueries." *Société Nouvelle*, 1891, p. 430.
 34. Félix Fénéon, "L'Impressionnisme aux Tuileries," *L'Art Moderne* (19 September 1886): 300-302.
 35. "La Grande Jatte," *L'Art Moderne* (6 February 1887): 43-44.
 36. "Ouverture du Salon des XX," *L'Art Moderne* (30 January 1887): 37-38.
 37. Max Sulzberger, "Aux XX," *L'Etoile Belge*, 9 February 1887.
 38. A.D., "L'Exposition des XX," *L'Impartial de Gand*, 10 February 1887.
 39. "Les XX," *La Meuse*, 12 February 1887.
 40. Jules Destrée, "L'exposition des XX," *La Jeune Belgique* (5 March 1887): 131. For additional criticism see A.-J. Wauters, "Aux XX," *La Gazette*, 28 February-1 March 1887; Théo Hannon (Mecoenas), "Les Apporteurs de Neuf," *La Chronique*, 27 February 1887.
 41. "L'Exposition des XX," *L'Art Moderne* (13 February 1887): 50.
 42. Ibid., p. 51.
 43. "Le 'Vingtisme'," *L'Art Moderne* (20 February 1887): 57-59.
 44. Ibid., pp. 58-59.
 45. Ibid., p. 59.
 46. Camille Lemonnier, "Le Salon des XX," *La Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité* (5 March 1887): 76.
 47. Emile Verhaeren, "Salon des XX," *Revue Indépendante* (March 1887): 367.

48. Georges Verdavainne, "L'Exposition des XX," *Fédération Artistique* (9 February 1889): 123.
49. Lucien Solvay, "Les XX," *Le Soir*, 15 February 1889.
50. Demo, "Chronique Artistique," *Le Globe Illustré*, 24 February 1889, p. 326.
51. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Paul Signac à Octave Maus," p. 62.
52. Byron, "Salon des XX," *Le Patriote*, 5 February 1888.
53. "Le Salon des XX: L'ancien et le nouvel impressionnisme," *L'Art Moderne* (5 February 1888): 42.
54. Robert Herbert, *Neo-Impressionism* (New York: Solomon Guggenheim Foundation, 1968), p. 162.
55. "Petite Chronique," *L'Art Moderne* (24 July 1887): 239.
56. The 1888 catalogue was a facsimile edition of drawings submitted by the exhibitors.
57. Max Waller, "Le Salon des XX," *L'Artiste* (March 1888): 176.
58. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Finch to Maus, 5044, 6 January 1888.
59. "L'Exposition des XX," *L'Emancipation*, 5 February 1888.
60. Brussels, Musée de la Littérature, Archives Van de Velde, Bibliothèque royale, *Récit de ma Vie*, F.S. X4, p. 36.
61. Georges Lemmen, "Propos d'Actualité," *L'Art Moderne* (6 March 1904): 75.
62. "L'Exposition des XX," *Fédération Artistique* (26 January 1890): 163.
63. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," p. 69.
64. "Chronique Artistique," *La Chronique*, 2 February 1889.
65. Maître Claude, "Les XX," *Le Patriote* (22 January 1890): 3.
66. M., "7ème Exposition annuelle des XX au musée moderne à Bruxelles," *Le Journal de Charleroi*, 30 January 1890.
67. Achille Chainaye, [Champal], "Chez les XX," *La Réforme*, 11 February 1891.
68. "Aux XX," *L'Art Moderne* (3 February 1889): 34.
69. "L'Art Japonais et le Néo-Impressionnisme," *L'Art Moderne* (17 February 1889): 50.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
71. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Madame Seurat to Maus, 6285, 9 November 1891.
72. Madame Seurat would not lend Seurat's *Baignade* and the *Grande Jatte*. 6294.
73. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Signac to Maus, 6294, probably November 1891. These works are listed in the 1892 catalogue as no. 1, *douze esquisses*, and no. 15, *Printemps à la Grande Jatte*. These works were sold at Les XX for 1,000 francs. See Inv. 6293. *L'Art Moderne* on 13 March 1892, p. 83 identified the buyers as Jean de Greef who bought *douze esquisses*, and Anna Boch, *Vingtiste*, who bought the *Grande Jatte*.
74. "Ouverture du Salon des XX," *L'Art Moderne* (7 February 1892): 41.
75. Brussels, Musée de la Littérature, Van de Velde Archives, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Camille Pissarro to Van de Velde, F.S. 641, 27 March 1896.

76. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Lemmen to Finch, 21809/6-7, 26 March 1903.
77. Francine-Claire Legrand, *Le Symbolisme en Belgique* (Brussels: Laconti, 1971), p. 8.
78. Jean Moréas, "Le Symbolisme," *Le Figaro*, 18 September 1886.
79. "Chronique Littéraire," *La Jeune Belgique* (October 1886): 435.
80. "Le Symbolisme," *L'Art Moderne* (3 October 1886): 314.
81. This admiration for Péladan shared by Khnopff and other Vingtistes was not shared by Théo van Rysselberghe. Théo in a letter to Maus expressed his opinion of Péladan calling him, "ce crapuleux personnage." On the Rose + Croix exhibition, Van Rysselberghe had this to report to Maus, "Rose + Croix! Oh que j'aurais voulu que tu visses cela, à distance, cela peut paraître réceler quelque chose; Mais vu de près, c'est absolument infâme—Rien n'est écoeurant comme le réclanisme du Péladan et des affreux chevelus ses compères. . . ." Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Théo van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," p. 76.
82. "Les XX," *La Jeune Belgique* (1884): 201.
83. See *L'Art Moderne*, 13 March 1892, "Conférence de M. Fernand Khnopff," 84-85; *Nouvelles du Jour*, 29 February 1892.
84. [Emile Verhaeren], "Fernand Khnopff," *L'Art Moderne* (10 October 1886): 322.
85. Verhaeren, "Fernand Khnopff," *L'Art Moderne* (12 September): 290.
86. Toorop moved away from his Neo-Impressionist phase in 1892 and 1893, exhibiting Symbolist works at Les XX. In 1892 he met Péladan who along with Maeterlinck had a profound impact upon his work. Works such as *Les Rôdeurs*, *La Marieé*, *O Grave Where Is Thy Victory* are examples of Toorop's Symbolist phase. Minne's sculptures shown at Les XX in 1890 were much discussed. The critic for *La Société Nouvelle*, p. 117, remarked of the *Mother crying over her dead Child*: "Il faut être vraiment poète pour imaginer des êtres aussi symboliques et aussi pénétrés de passion humaine." *La Revue Blanche* stated that Minne's sculpture "font songer à des Odilon Redon, traduites en plâtre." Minne's drawing executed for the majority of Robert Picard was shown at Les XX in 1892. The critic for *L'Artiste*, p. 277, March 1892, identified Minne's sources as the Symbolist poet Maeterlinck and stated, "et l'on pourrait dire que M. Georges Minne est un Maeterlinck 'plastique'." Schlobach traveled to London in 1887 and exhibited Symbolist works at Les XX in 1889 and 1890. The influence of Péladan was seen in his series entitled *Hantises*. *L'Eventail* stated that Schlobach "reste empêtré dans le magisme, le péladantisme, le fantastique voulu." (2 March 1890, p. 3).
87. Eugène George, "Aux XX," *L'Impartial Bruxellois*, 15 February 1891.
88. Burne-Jones, Puvis de Chavannes, and Moreau, although invited to exhibit at Les XX, declined to do so.
89. Emile Verhaeren, "Les XX," *La Nation*, 15 February 1892.
90. Anna Boch was responsible for introducing Finch to the Boch ceramic factory at La Louvière. Finch was living in La Louvière from 24 April 1892 to 30 January 1893. Finch was the first to apply Neo-Impressionist color theory to ceramics.
91. In fact, Chéret wrote to Maus offering to arrange for an art critic to lecture on the posters at Les XX. However the lecture did not occur. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Chéret to Maus, 5703, 15 February 1891.
92. Henry van de Velde, "Artistic Wall Papers," *L'Art Moderne* (18 June 1893): 193-95; (25 June 1893): 202-4.

93. Bernard was invited to exhibit at Les XX but declined since his tapestries were unfinished and he considered his work too immature. He hoped his upcoming trip to Italy would have a powerful effect upon his work, 6769. The commission for the screen Anna owned was obtained through her brother Eugène. Manuscripts, Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, 6972, 20 July 1891.
94. Ch. Genuys, "A propos de l'Art nouveau: Soyons Français!," 17 *Revue des Arts Décoratifs* (1897): 1.

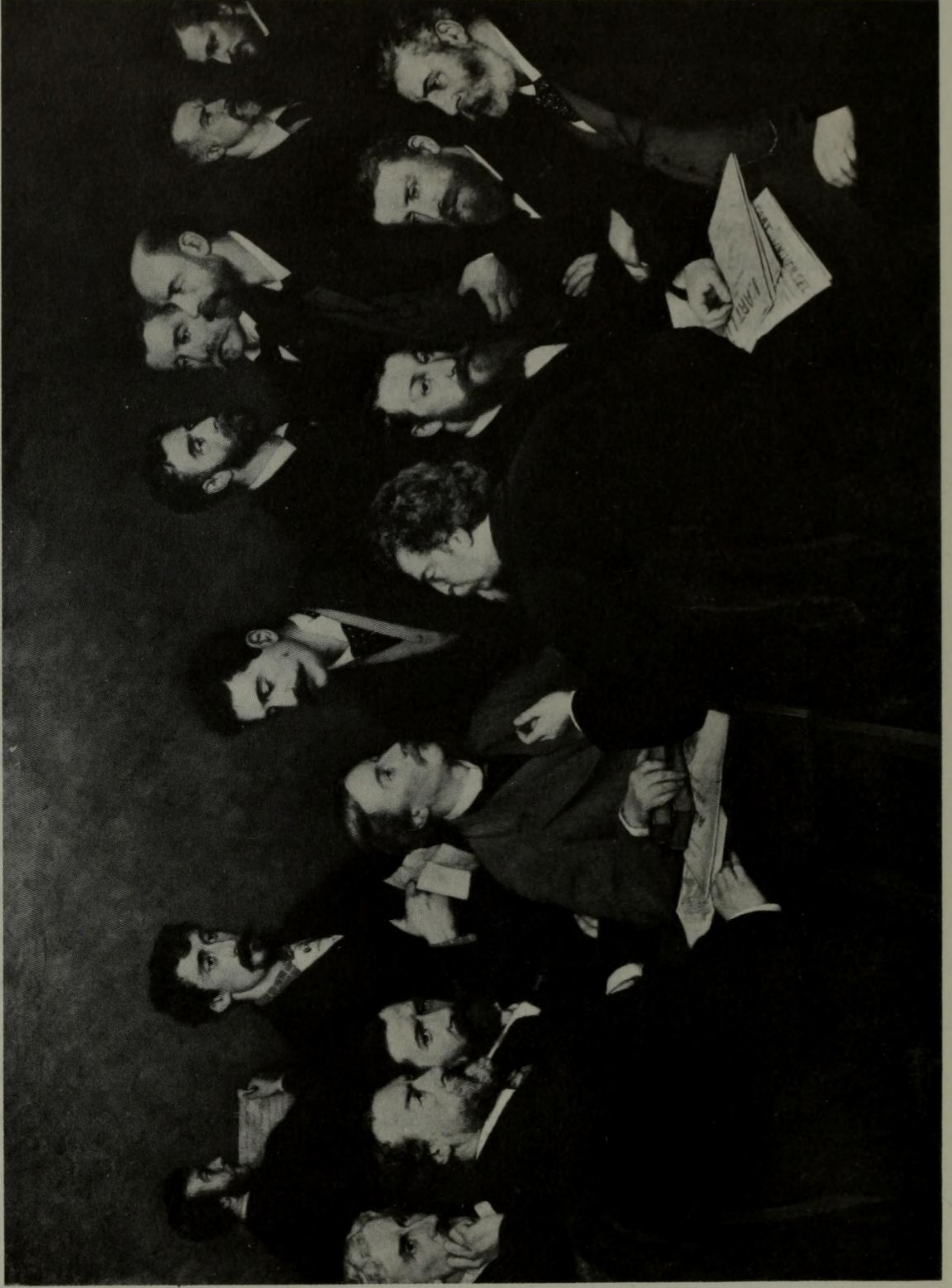
Chapter 7

1. Sometime probably late in October of 1892 Maus wrote to the membership informing them that the idea of having a retrospective exhibition was rejected at the last meeting. This project was vetoed since it was felt it presented, "des difficultés pratiques trop considérables et ne devant amener qu'un résultat artistique discutable." (A.A.C., 6305) Instead the members of Les XX would publish an album of drawings which could be put on sale the first day of the exhibition. Maus exhorted all the Vingtistes to contribute to this publishing effort and stressed the necessity of membership participation at this tenth Salon.
2. Hague Royal Library, T.C. C134, 1 February 1893.
3. Emile Verhaeren, "Les XX," *La Nation*, 26 February 1893.
4. Henry van de Velde, "Les XX," *Floréal* (1 April 1893): 51.
5. "Les XX: Dix Années de Campagne," *L'Art Moderne* (9 April 1893): 115-17.
6. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," p. 77. Maus also consulted Signac before many of the other Vingtistes. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Paul Signac à Octave Maus," p. 74.
7. "Pro Arte," *L'Art Moderne* (16 July 1893): 225-26.
8. "Un Bon Mouvement," *L'Art Moderne* (24 September 1893): 309-10.
9. "La Libre Esthétique," *L'Art Moderne* (29 October 1893): 345.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Maus to Vingtistes, 6303, 9 November 1893.
13. Legrand, "Les Lettres de James Ensor à Octave Maus," p. 41.
14. Maus, "La Lanterne Magique," p. 210.
15. Brussels, M.R.B.A.B., A.A.C., Regoyos to Maus, 6748, 12 November 1893.
16. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, "Les Lettres de Théo van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus," p. 93.

Illustrations

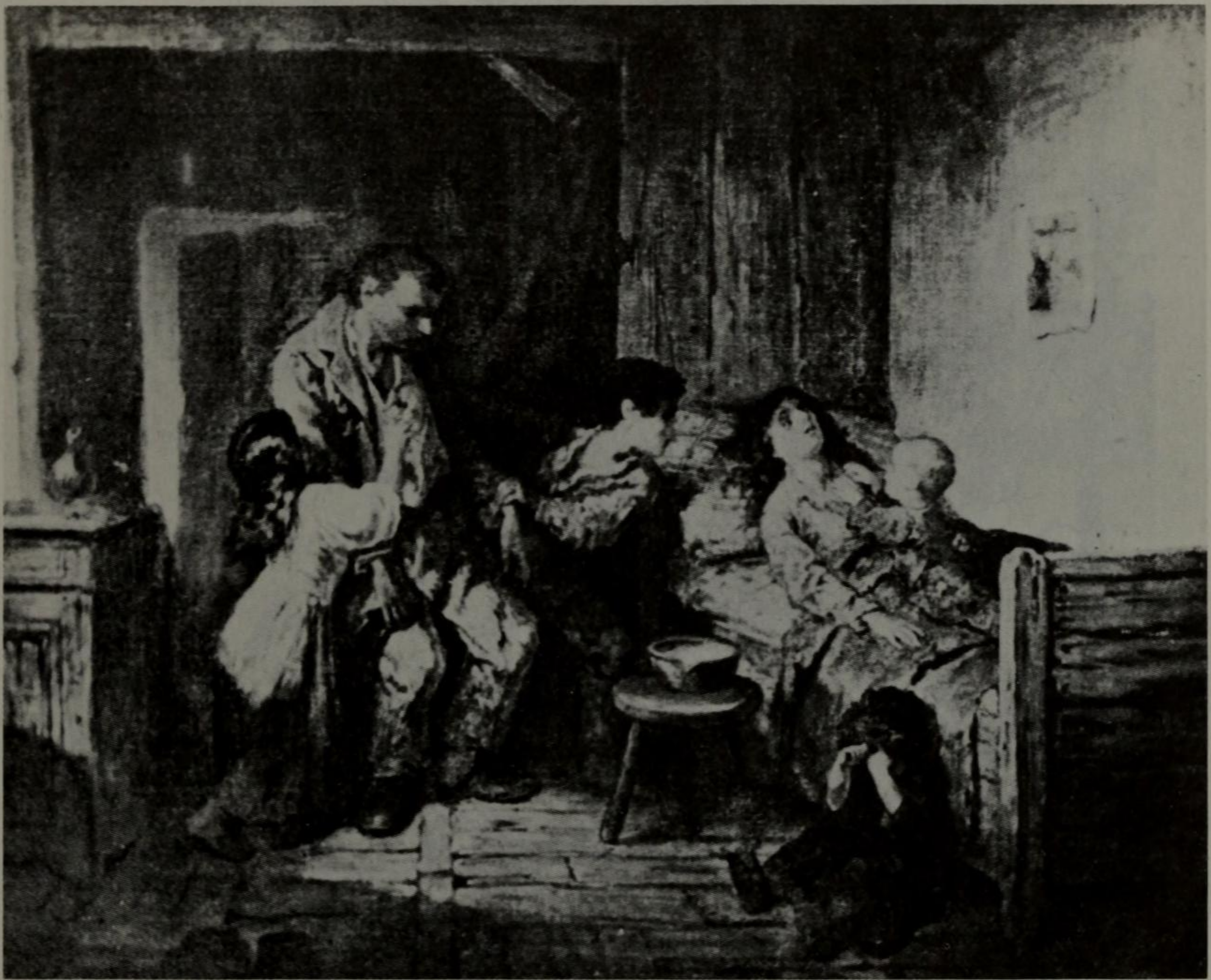
112 x 100 mm. Color
Black and white
112 x 100 mm. Color
Black and white

1. Edmond Lambrichts, *Portraits des Membres de la Société Libre des Beaux-Arts*, ca. 1875, Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique. Oil on canvas, 175 x 236. (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



1. Histoire Royal, inventeur de la Chaux-de-foie, 1850.
Bureau National des Beaux-Arts, Cabinet des Dessins, Paris.
144 x 110 (sans bordure)

2. Charles de Groux, *L'Ivrogne*, ca. 1852, Brussels, M.R.B.A.B.
Oil on canvas, 68 x 80



3. Félicien Rops, *Invitation to La Chrysalide opening*, 1876,
Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Cabinet des Estampes. Etching,
144 x 126.5. (photo: Bibliothèque Royale)



Les membres du cercle
« La Chrysalide » vous prient
de vouloir bien assister Samedi
prochain 4 courant, à 9 heures du soir,
à l'ouverture de l'exposition qu'ils
ont organisée dans leur local rue
Can Lousken 18.

Bruxelles le 3 Novembre 1876

4. Hippolyte Boulenger, *La Messe de Saint-Hubert*, ca. 1870,
Brussels: M.R.B.A.B. Oil on canvas, 114 x 133.5



5. Léon Herbo, *Psyché*, 1882, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tournai (Belgique). Oil on canvas, 141 x 70



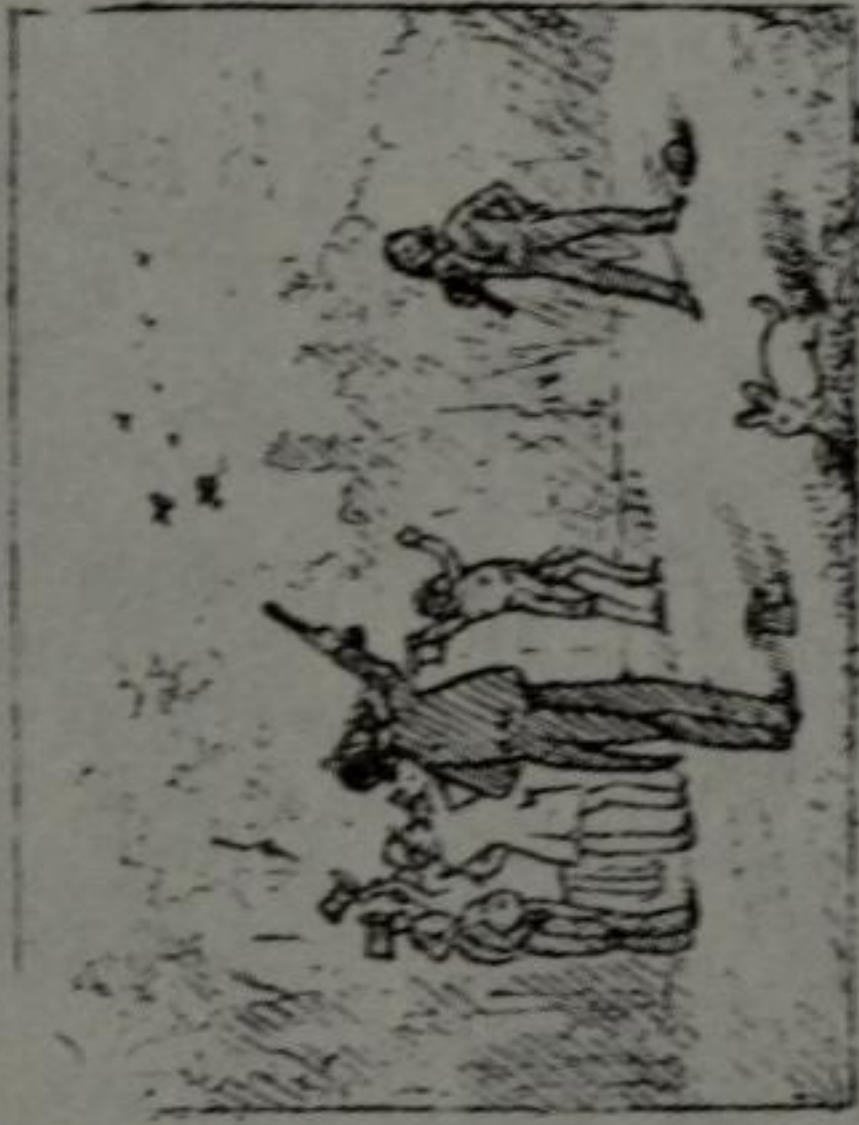
UN DUEL LITTÉRAIRE



Jeune Belgique
reçoit Art Moderne



Art Moderne
reçoit Jeune Belgique



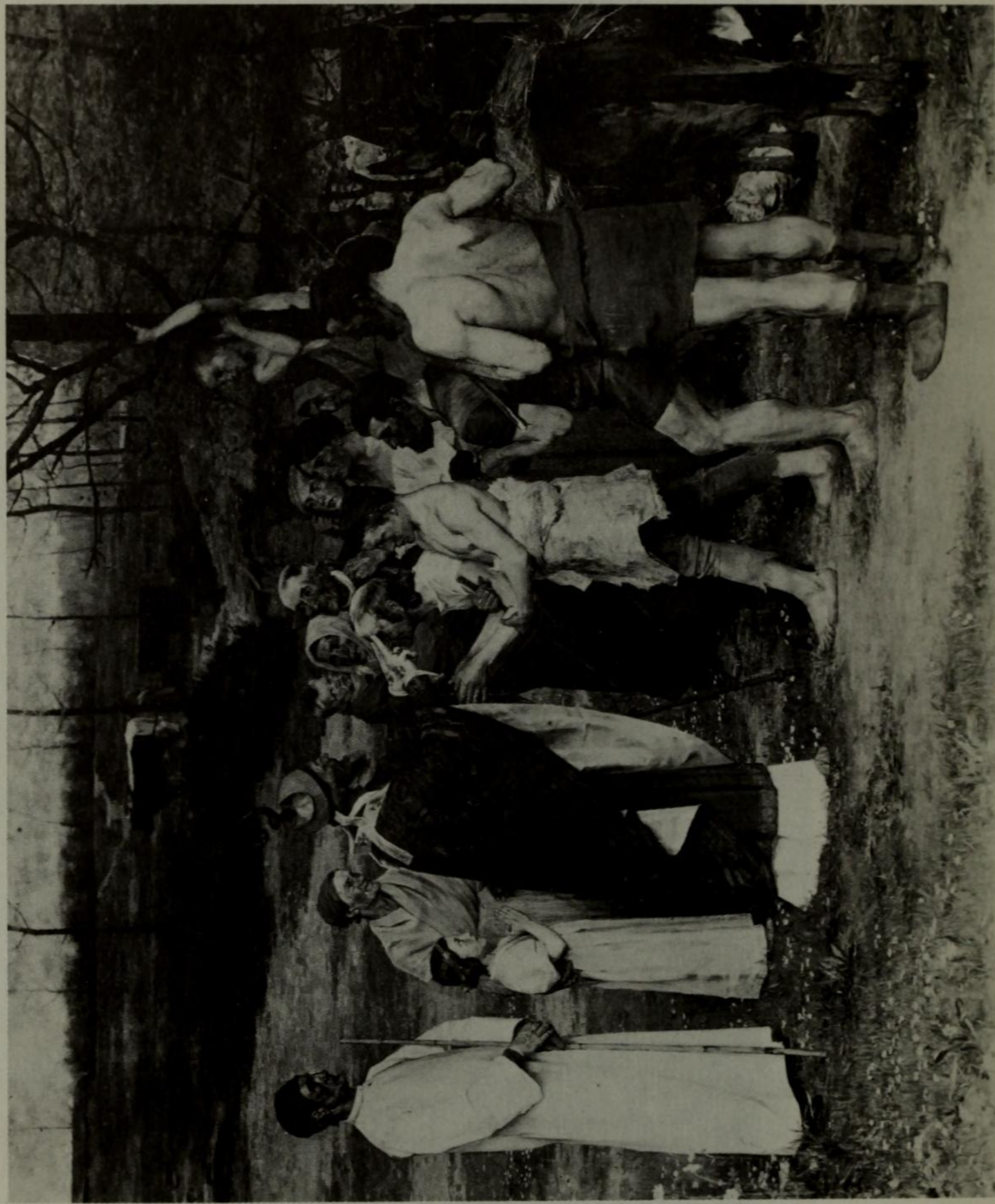
Attrape, moineau piérot

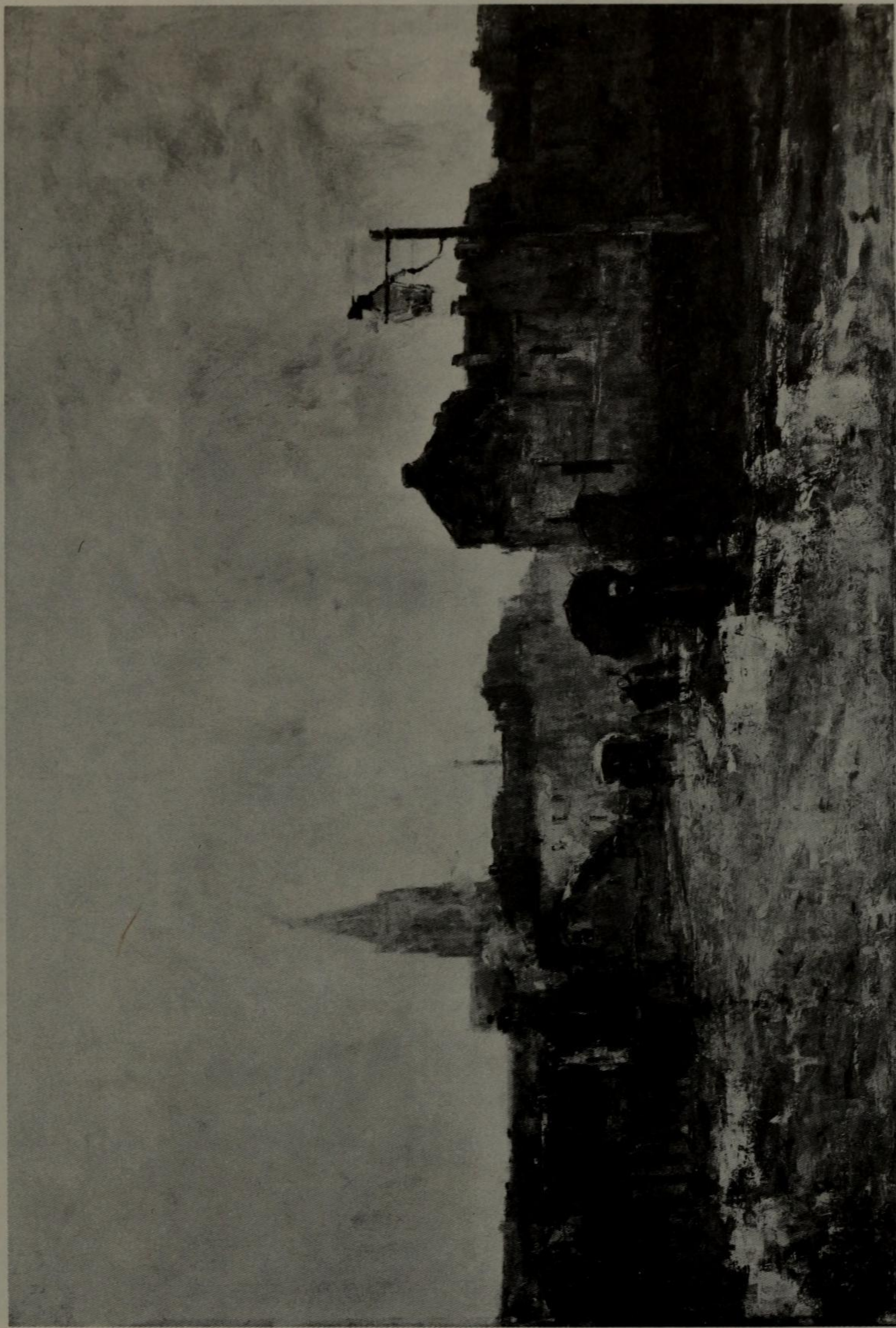


L'ennemi est satisfait

6. "Un Duel Littéraire." *Le Patriote Illustré*, 1 November 1885, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale (photo: Bibliothèque Royale)

7. Gustave Vanaise, *Saint Liévin en Flandres*, ca. 1883, Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Oil, 296 x 355 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)





8. Guillaume Vogels, *Ixelles Matinée Pluvieuse*, ca. 1883, Brussels, M.R.B.A.B. Oil on canvas, 104 x 152 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)

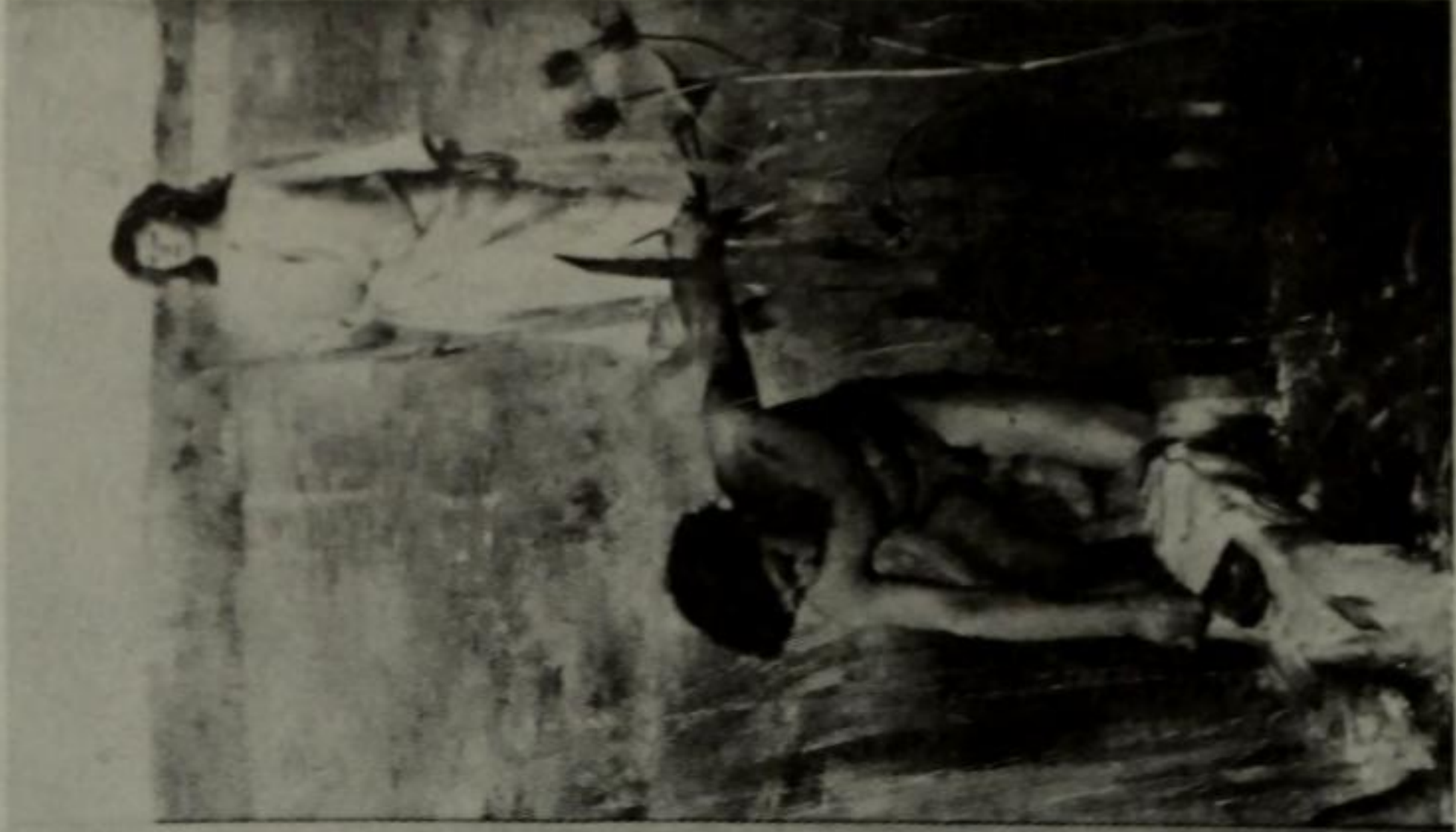
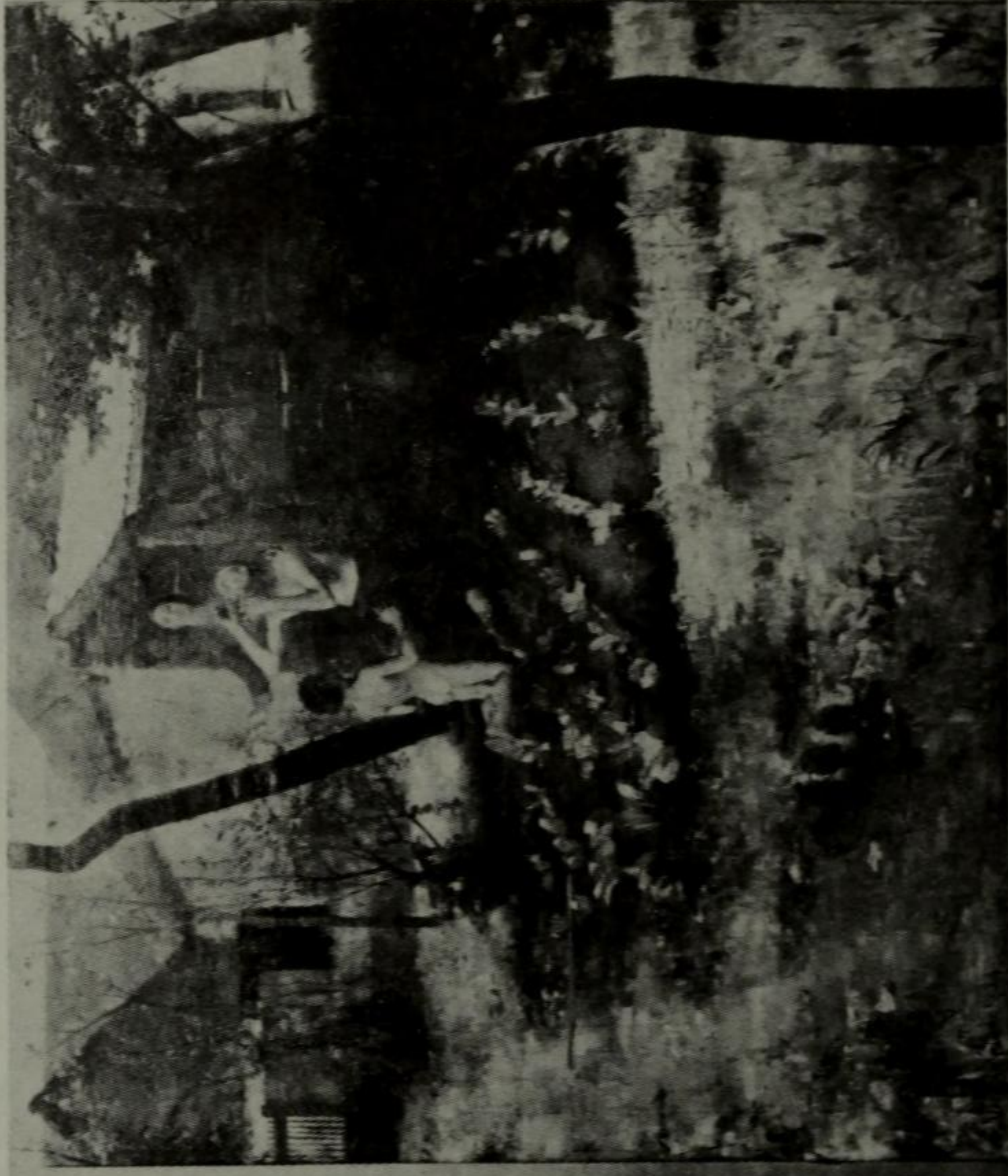
9. James Ensor, *Les Masques Scandalisés*, 1883, Brussels, M.R.B.A.B. Oil on canvas, 135 x 112 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



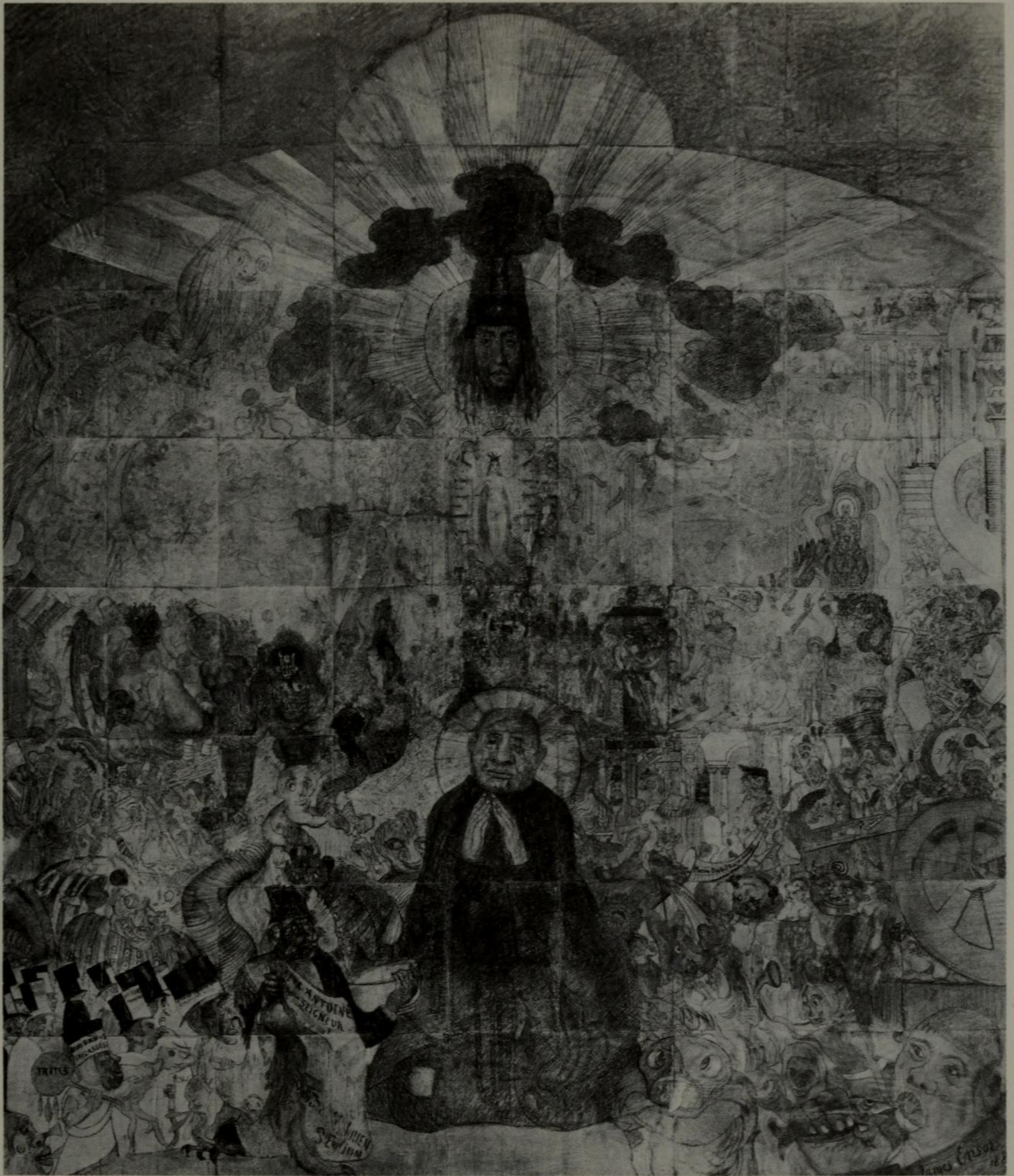
10. Félicien Rops, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Cabinet des Estampes. Mixed media, 73.8 x 54.3 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



11. Guillaume van Strydonck, *Tobias Triptych*, 1884, Bruges, Groeninge Museum. Oil, 174 x 400 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



12. James Ensor, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, 1887, Kappelen, Private Collection. Pencil on paper, 170 x 150 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



13. James Ensor, *Les Bons Juges*, 1891, Brussels, Private Collection. Oil on panel, 38 x 46



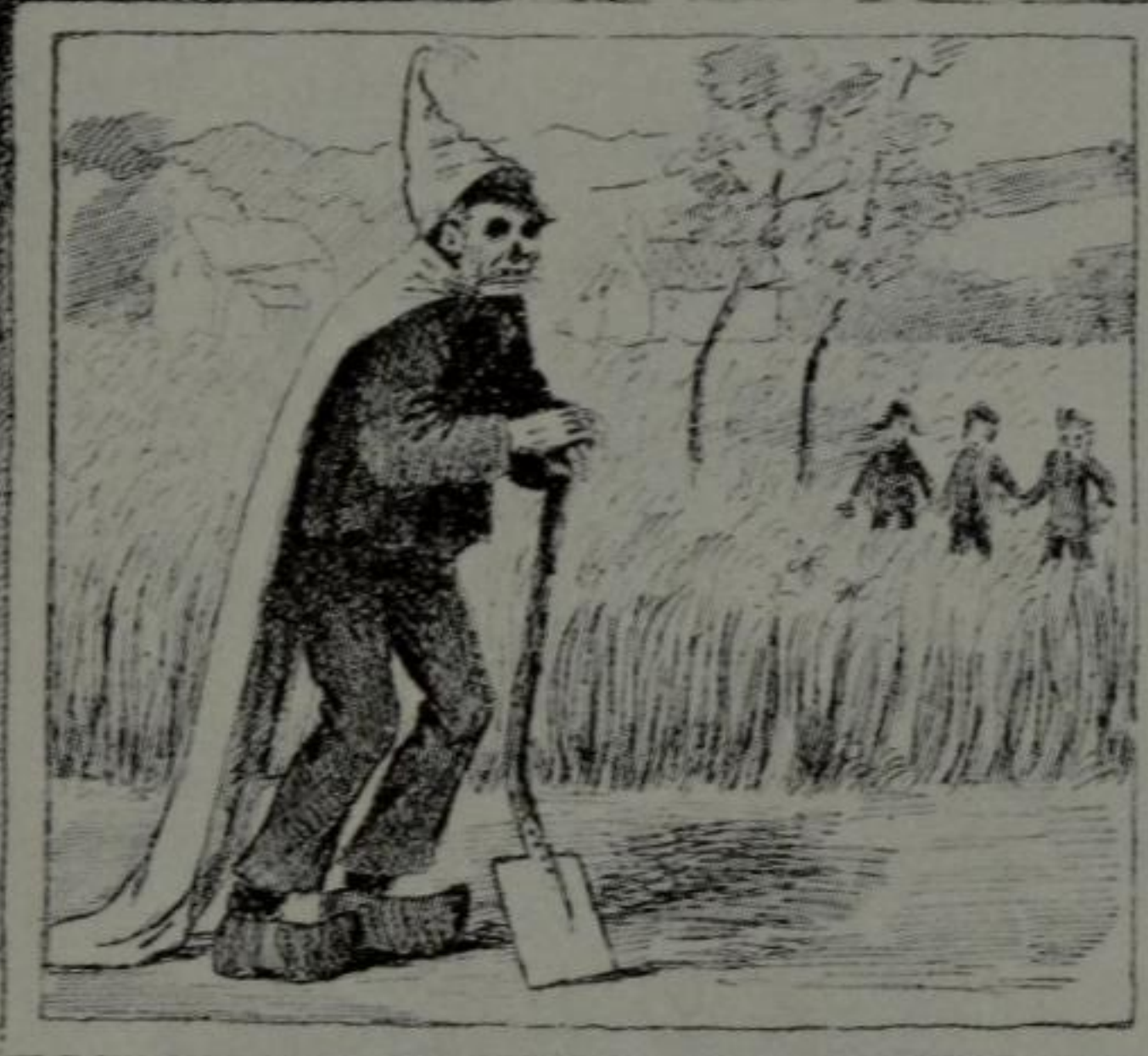
14. "L'art décadent à l'exposition des XX," *Le Patriote Illustré*, 10 March 1889, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale (photo: Bibliothèque Royale)



SANTORACH Collection d'escapées d'Occie



STEEP. Ombres chinoises d'horizontaux admirant l'horizon.



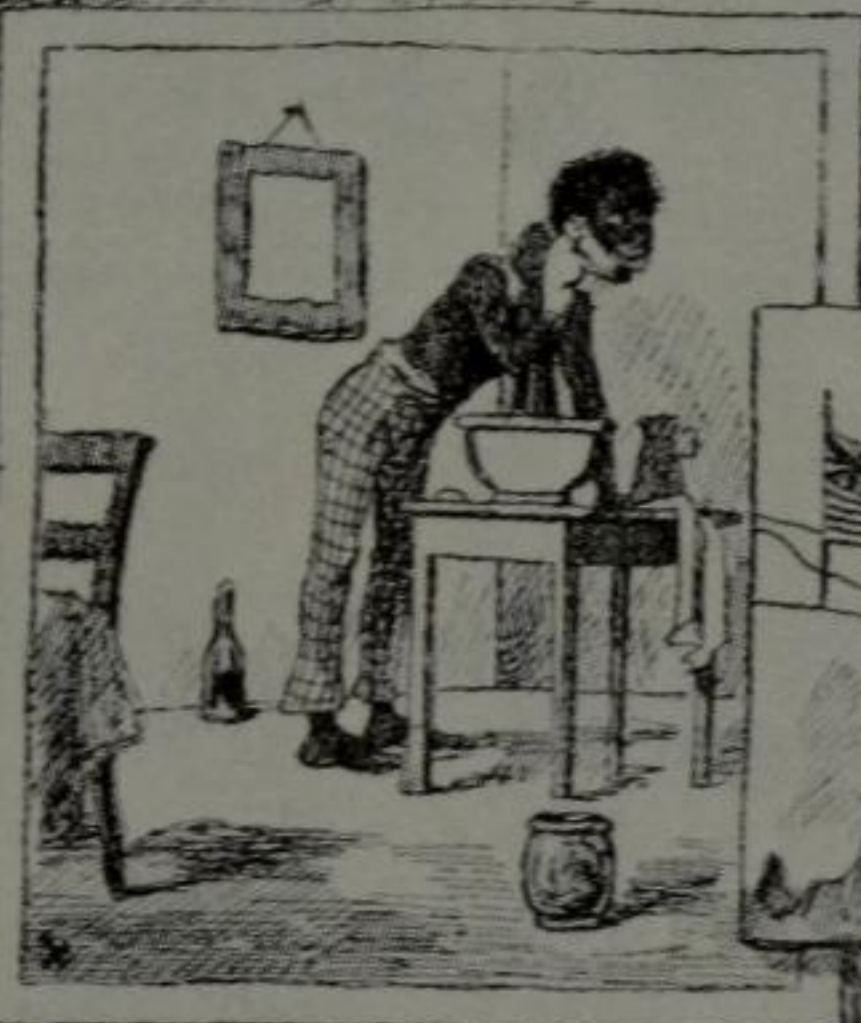
VAN STRYDONCK. Un vieux revenant... de l'exposition triennale.



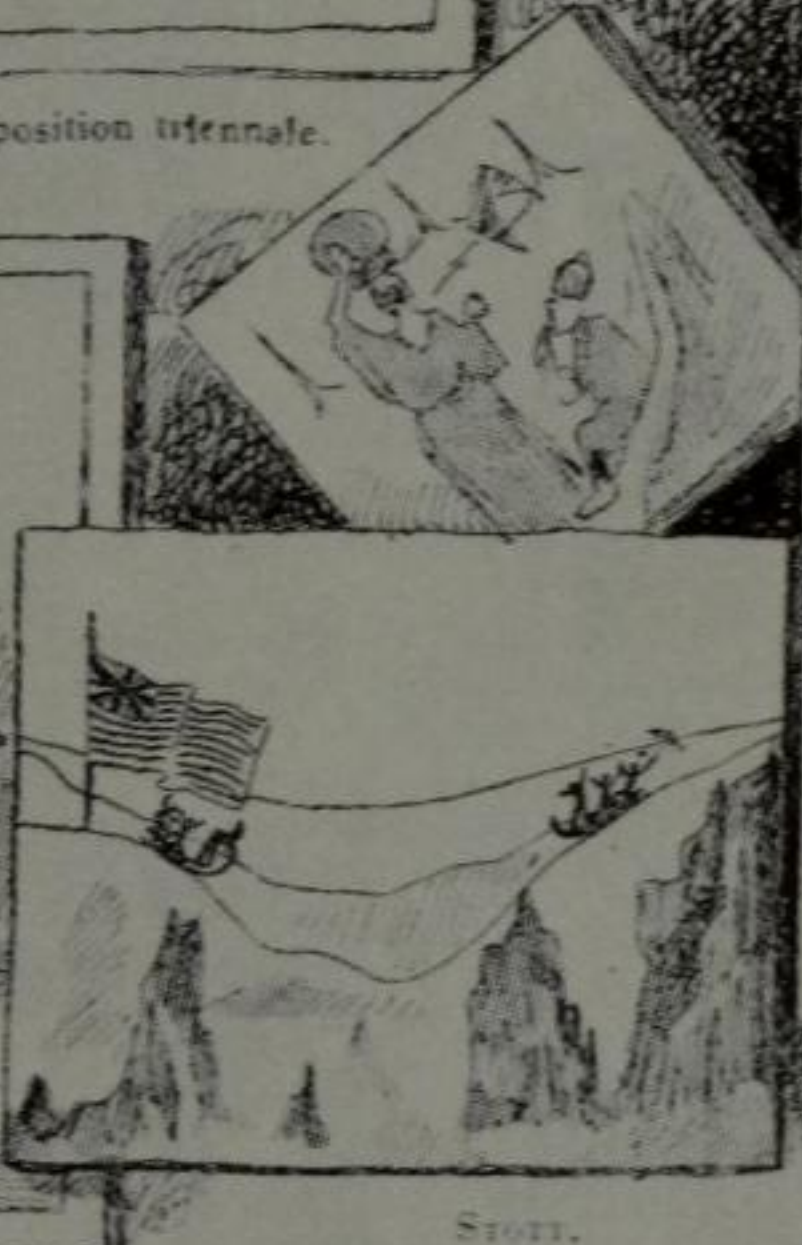
TEOSER. « En r'venant de la noce. »



MEUNIER. Pudleur enkylosé, habitué de toutes les expositions.



C. MONET. Merveilleux effet du savon à la glycérine sur un naturel du Congo.



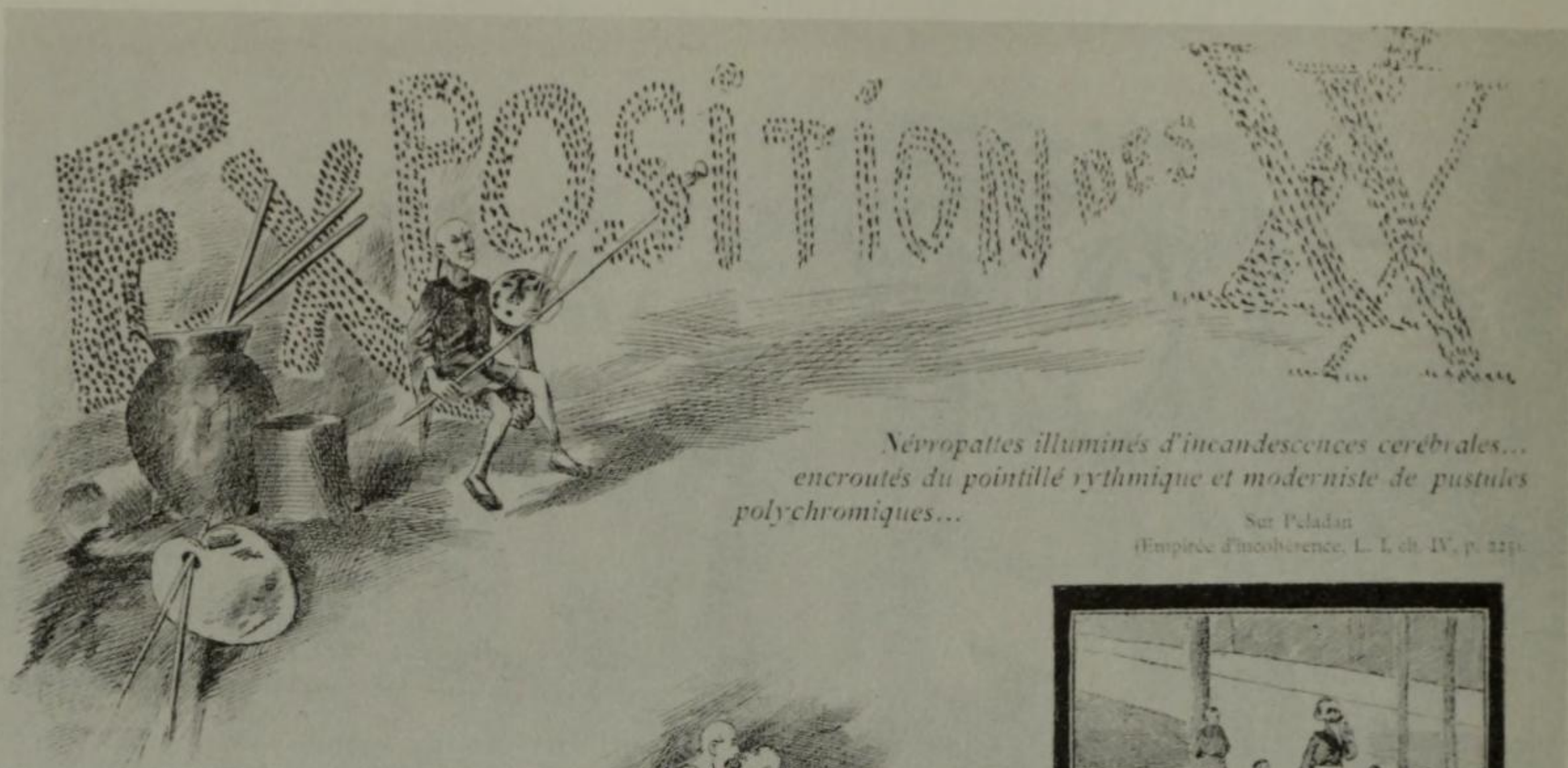
STOTT. Montagnes russes.



H. VAN DE VILLE. Portrait d'un jeune homme de bonne famille, physiquement agréable....

L'art décadent à l'exposition des XX.

15. "Exposition des XX," *Le Patriote Illustré*, 21 February 1892,
Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale (photo: Bibliothèque Royale)



JAN TOOROP
« Portrait de ma femme, mon cheval et
mon cochon. »



CONSTANTIN MEUNIER
Asphyxie réciproque, Suicide fin-de-siècle.



AUG. BARTHOLOME
Section d'une école moderne:
Cours de danse pour culs-de-jatte.



JAMES ENSOR
(Croquis d'outre-tombe)
Sur les bords du Styx: « Un peu de feu,
S. V. P. »



GEORGES LEMMEN
Concert africain
Braboucomie... nègre sur « crânophones » (instrument
dernier genre, dont la matière première est fournie par
les explorateurs belges.)



JAN TOOROP
Deux influencés escappés du lazaret de St-Gilles.



GEORGES LEMMEN
M^{lle} Gicogne
Jeune fille aux amygdales gonflées
par suite d'une tentative de pendaison.



GEORGES SEURAT
M^{lle} Doctrine, dite la mère La Ruine.
Elle essaye vainement de peindre son visage.
Pour repaire les yeux l'illuminé du regard.

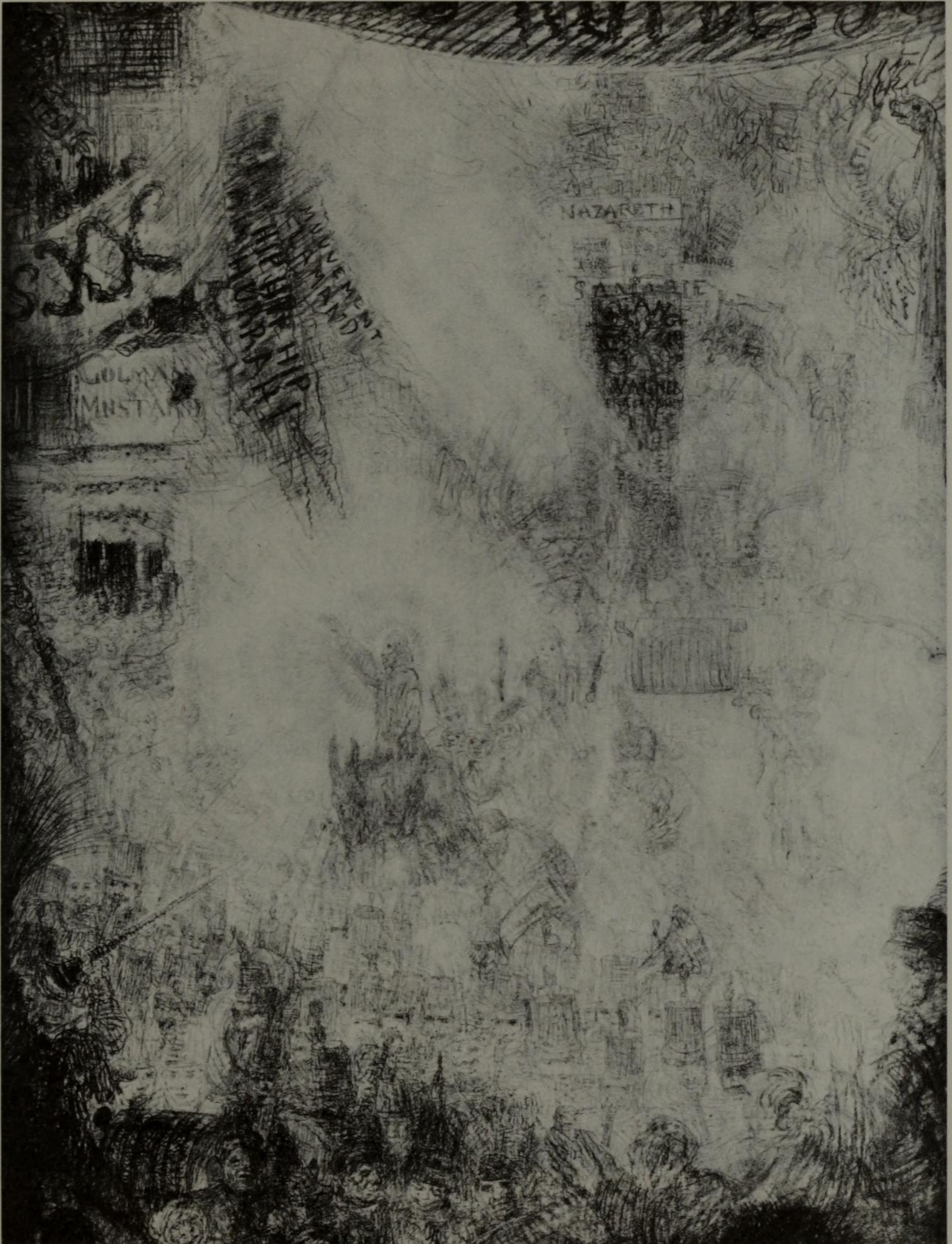


PAUL DE BOIS
Sculpture symboliste: Socialisme
ou la Méduse politique.

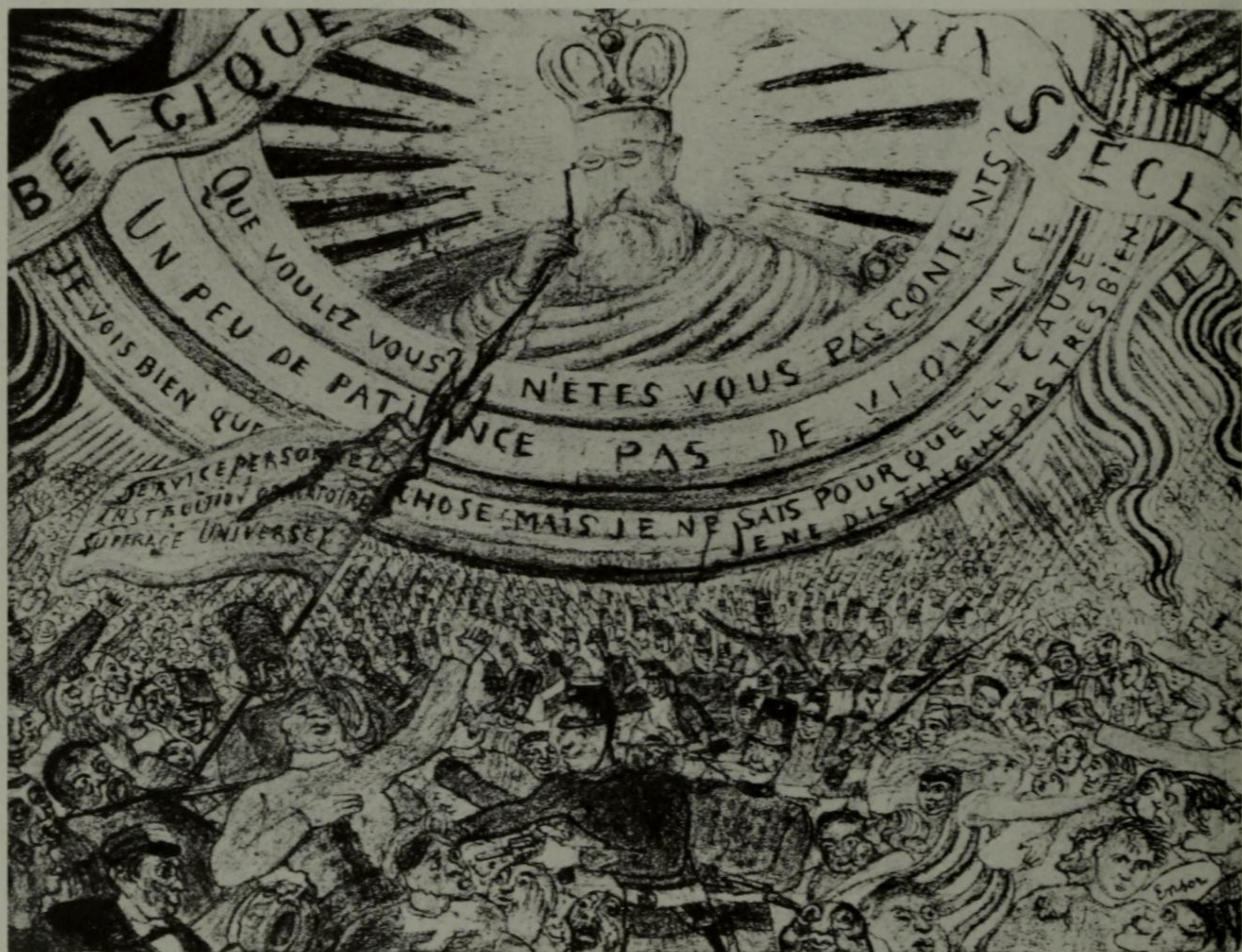


AUGUSTE DELAHERGHE
Pots de conserves libérales.

16. James Ensor, *L'Entrée du Christ à Jerusalem* (detail), 1885, Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Charcoal and conté crayon on paper mounted on canvas, 207 x 152 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



17. James Ensor, *La Belgique au XIXème siècle*, 1889, Brussels, La Bibliothèque Royale, Cabinet des Estampes. Pencil on prepared panel, 16.1 x 21.5 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



18. Théo van Rysselberghe, *Portrait d'Octave Maus*, 1885, Brussels, M.R.B.A.B. Oil on Canvas, 98 x 75.5 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



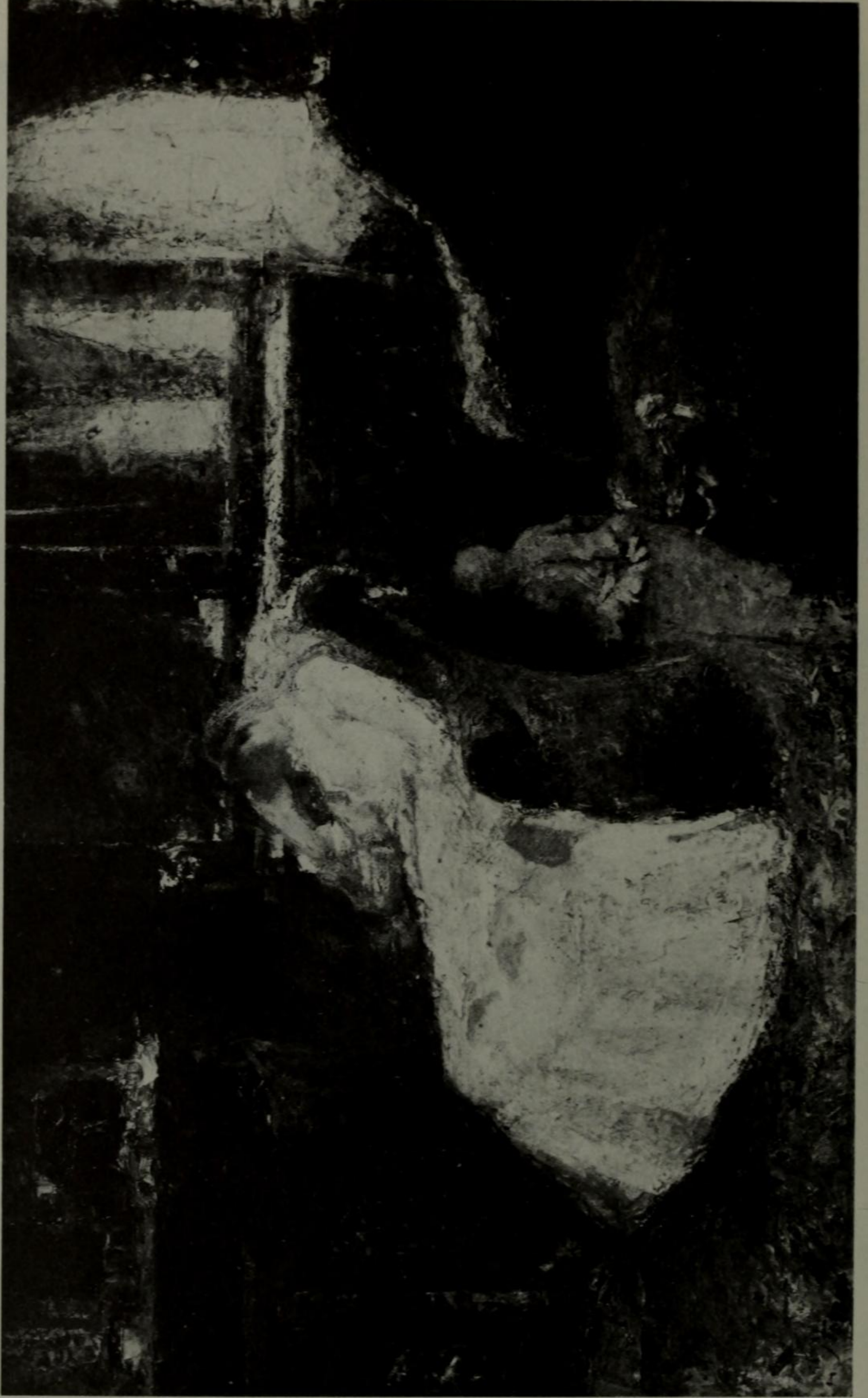
19. Fernand Khnopff, *Portrait de la mère de l'artiste*, 1882, Liège, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Oil on canvas, 28 x 36.5 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



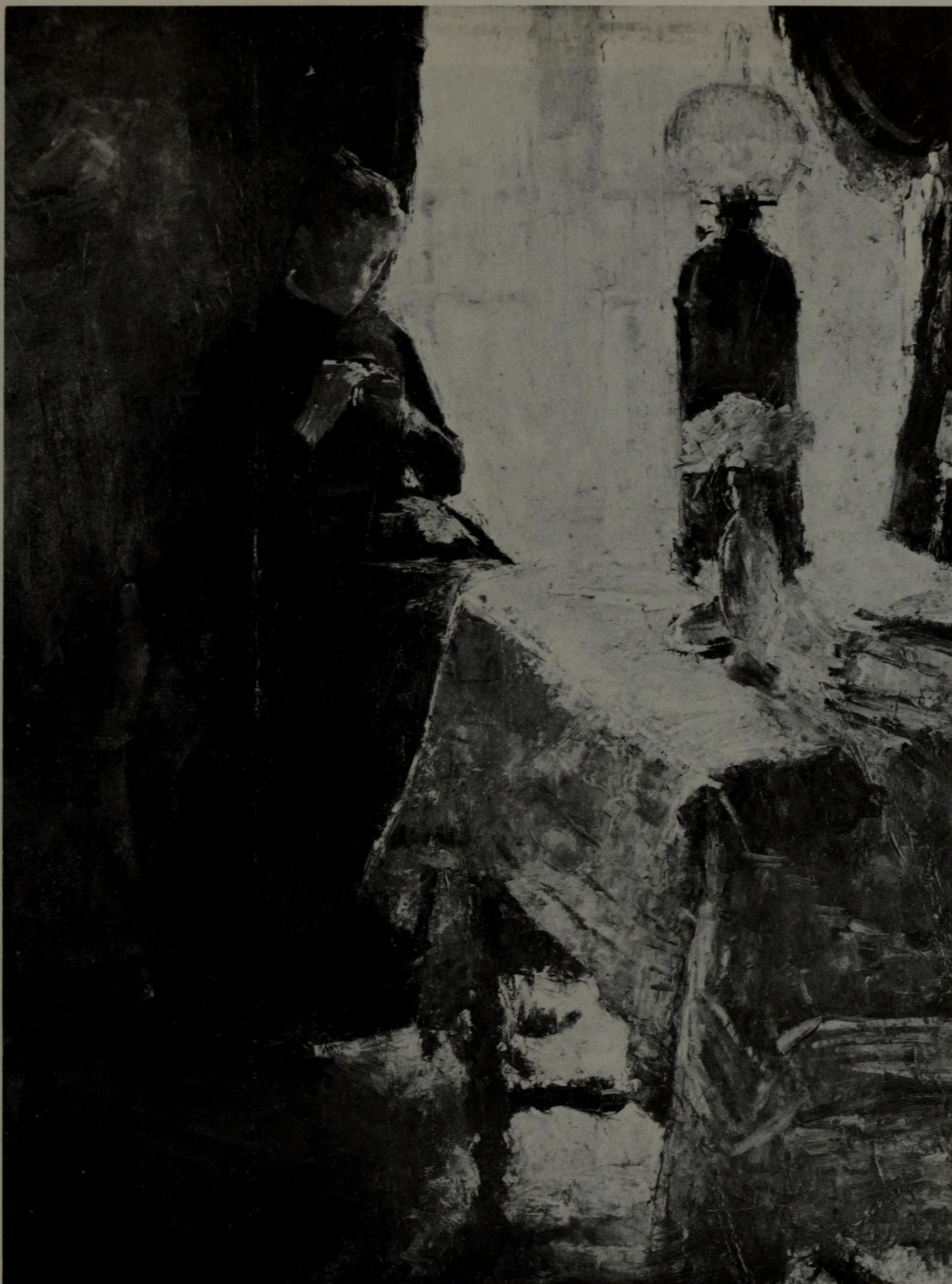
20. Félicien Rops, *Pornocratès*, 1878, Brussels, Collection Marcel Mabile. Etching and aquatint, 69 x 45



21. Jan Toorop, *La Dame en Blanc*, ca. 1885, Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Oil on board, 43 x 71 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



22. Guillaume van Strydonck, *Femme dans un Intérieur*, ca. 1885, Ixelles, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Oil on canvas, 105 x 76 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



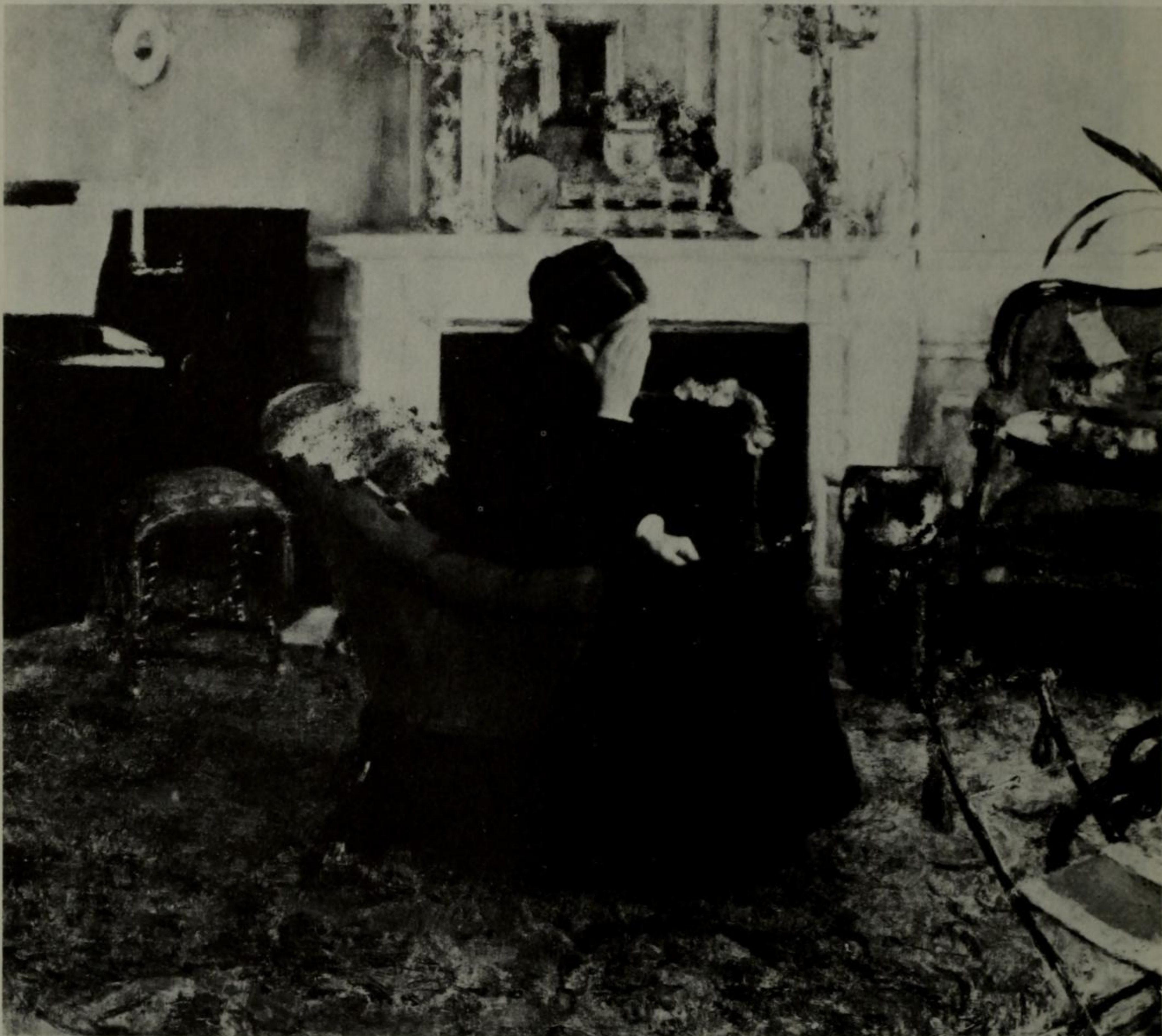
23. James Ensor, *L'Après-Midi à Ostende*, 1881, Antwerp,
Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Oil, 207 x 150
(photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



24. James Ensor, *La Mangeuse d'Huitres*, 1882, Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Oil, 207 x 150 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



25. Fernand Khnopff, *En Écoutant du Schumann*, 1883, Brussels, M.R.B.A.B. Oil on canvas, 101.5 x 116.5 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



26. James Ensor, *La Musique Russe*, 1881, Brussels, M.R.B.A.B.
Oil on canvas, 133 x 110 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



27. Willy Finch, *Entry for the 1888 Les XX Catalogue*. Pen and ink on paper

A. W. Finch

Mariakerke par Ostende

1. La campagne à Oudenbourg.
 2. Seven Arches à Ipswich (Suffolk)
 3. La mer à Felixstowe (Suffolk)
 4. La lune au Crispacule
 5. L'Eglise de Sproughton (Suffolk)
dessin à la plume.
6. 7 x 8 Eaux-fortes.



28. Théo van Rysselberghe, *Poster for the 1889 Les XX Exhibition*,
Brussels, Archives de l'art contemporain. 24 x 14 (photo:
Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)

ANCIEN MUSÉE DE PEINTURE

1889. SIXIÈME
EXPOSITION

ANNUELLE :



OUVERTURE 2 FEVRIER

CLÔTURE 3 MARS

Artistes invités : Vingtistes :

MM. Albert BESNARD
BRACQUEMOND
Henri CROSS
Marcellin DESBOUTIN
Paul DE VIGNE
Emmanuel FRÉMIET
Paul GAUGUIN
Max KLINGER
Maximilien LUCE
Constantin MEUNIER
Claude MONET
MOREAU-NÉLATON
Camille PISSARRO
Georges SEURAT
P.-Wilson STEER
William STOTT
W.-B. THOLEN

M^{lle} Anna BOCH
MM. F. CHARLET
G. CHARLIER
Henry DE GROUX
Paul DU BOIS
James ENSOR
A.-W. FINCH
Fernand KHNOFFF
Georges LEMMEN
Dario DE REGOYOS
RODIN
Félicien ROPS
Willy SCHLOBACH
Jan TOOROP
Henry VAN DE VELDE
Théo VAN RYSELBERGHE
G.-S. VAN STRYDONCK
G. VOGELS

DE 10 A 5 HEURES

PRIX D'ENTRÉE | A L'OUVERTURE ET AUX MATINÉES : 2 FRANCS
LES AUTRES JOURS : 50 CENTIMES

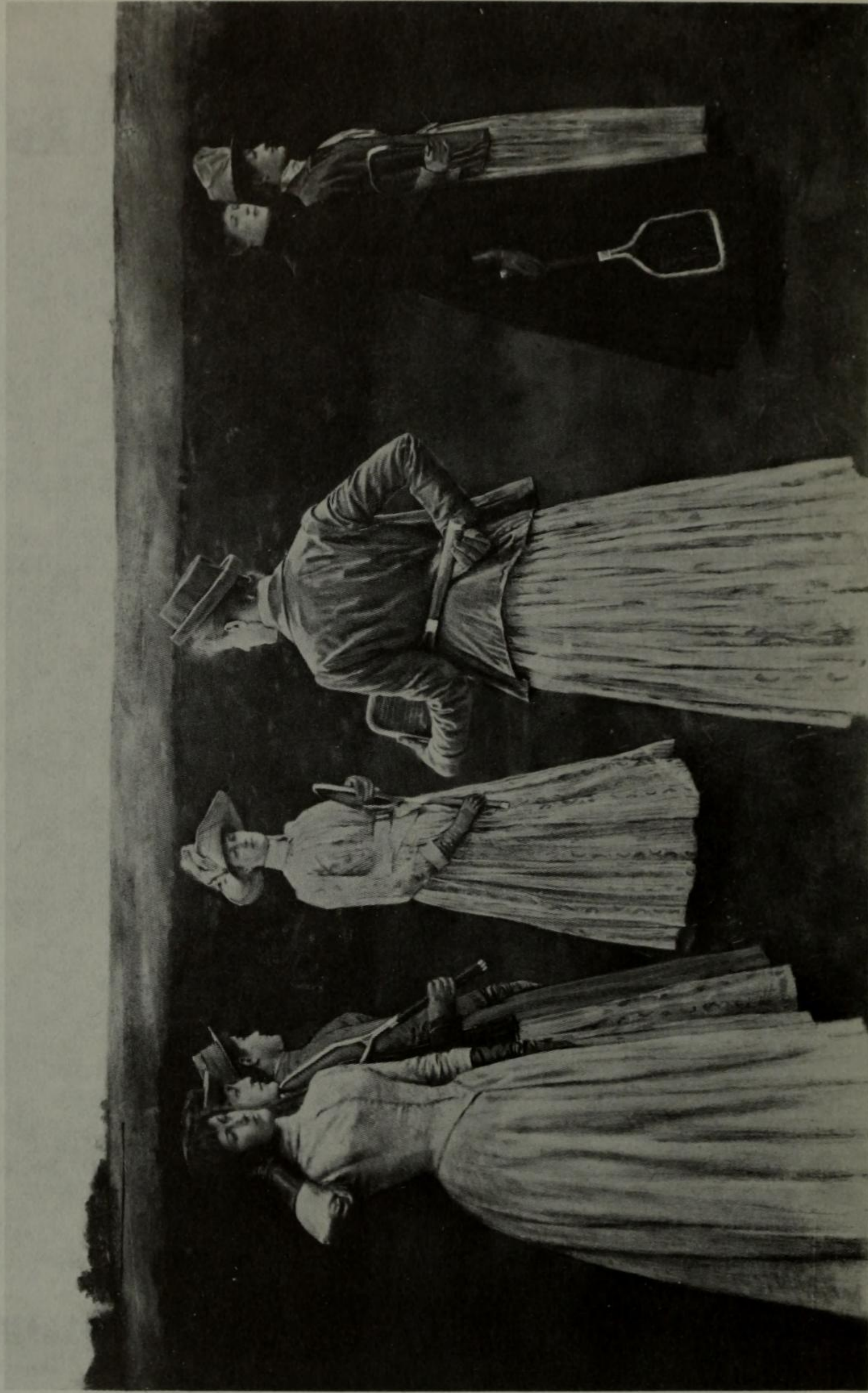
CARTES PERMANENTES : 10 FRANCS

MATINÉES MUSICALES — CONFÉRENCES LITTÉRAIRES

Le Secrétaire,
Oscar HAUS

Le Trésorier,
Victor BERNIER

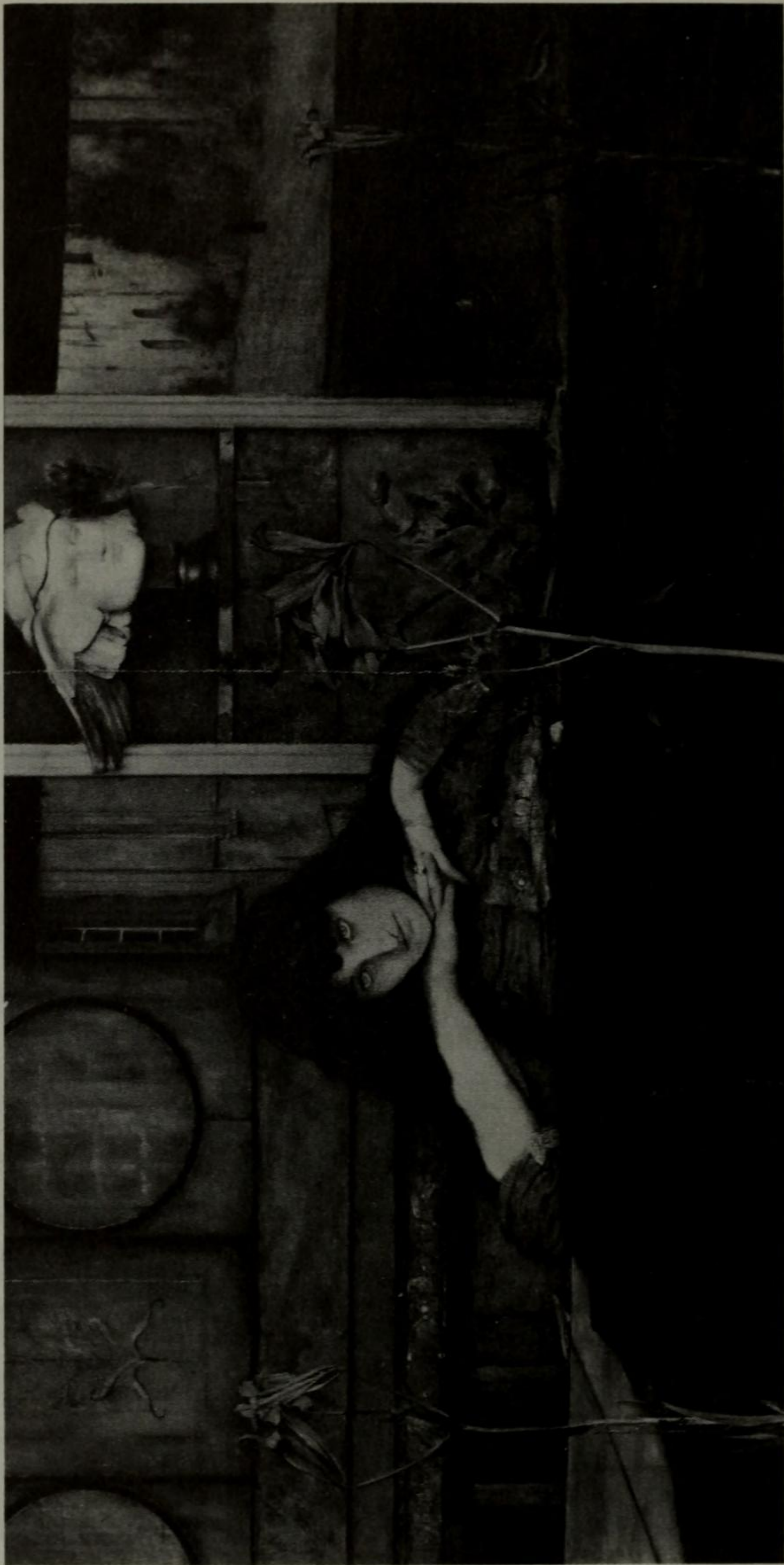
29. Fernand Khnopff, *Memories*, 1889, Brussels, M.R.B.A.B. Pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 127 x 200 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



30. Fernand Khnopff, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, 1883,
Brussels: Anne-Marie Gillion Crowet. Oil on paper, 85 x 85
(photo: Dulière)



31. Fernand Khnopff, *I Lock My Door Upon Myself*, 1891,
Munich, Bayerische Staats des Gemäldesammlungen, Neue
Pinakothek. Oil on canvas, 72 x 140 (photo: München, Neue
Pinakothek Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen)





32. Jan Toorop, *Les Rôdeurs*, 1889-1892, Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller. Chalk, pastel, and ink on board, 65 x 76 (photo: Collection Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Holland)

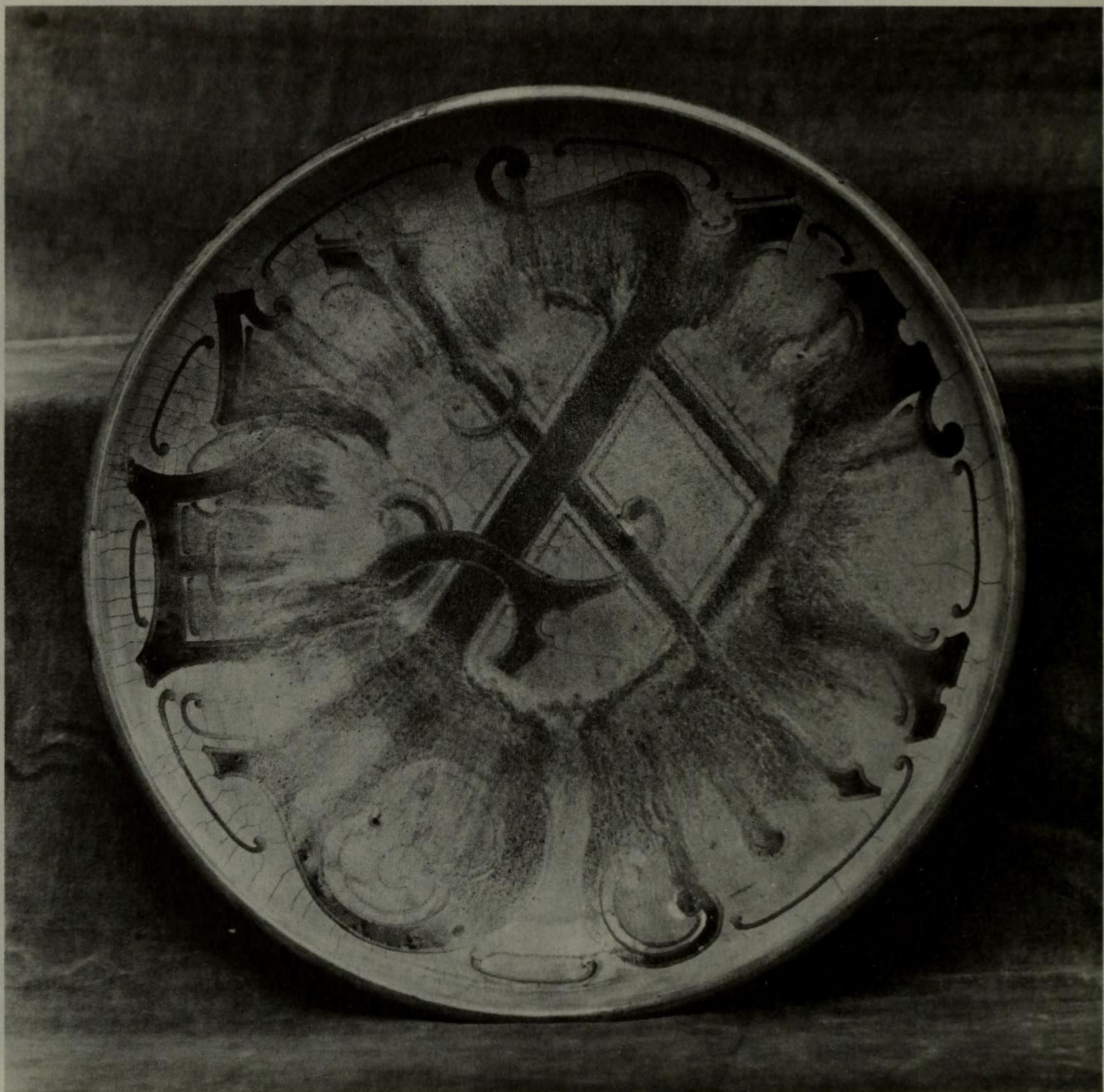
33. Georges Lemmen, 1891 *Les XX Catalogue Cover*, Brussels, Archives de l'art contemporain. 14.5 x 14.2 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



34. Georges Lemmen, 1892 *Les XX Catalogue Cover*, Brussels, Archives de l'art contemporain. 16 x 18.3 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



35. Auguste Delaherche, *Plat en Grès Flambé*, bearing the Les XX monogram, ca. 1892, Brussels, Collection Willy Dubois. Diameter, 48 (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Bruxelles)



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The bibliography is divided into five sections: newspaper articles, periodical literature, books, exhibition catalogues, and archives. Three of these sections, newspapers, periodicals, and exhibition catalogues, are divided chronologically into pre-1918 and post-1918 sections. The date 1918 was chosen because publications before this date are contemporary with Les XX and its avant-garde predecessors and successors. Publications written after 1918 are essentially historical articles dealing with avant-garde artistic groups, literary and artistic personalities, and the milieu in which these groups and individuals flourished.

Within the newspaper and periodical categories, articles are arranged by author (unsigned articles appearing first), then alphabetically by publication and chronologically.

Books are divided into six categories: reference works; correspondence, journals, and memoirs; general studies on art; general studies on Belgian art; general studies on related fields; and monographs on artists.

Exhibition catalogues are arranged in chronological order.

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Archives

Antwerp: Centrum voor de studie van het vlaamse cultuurleven.

22, Minderbroedersstraat
2000 Antwerp

This archive is arranged by person and is the principal archive for all aspects of Flemish culture in Belgium. A printed book catalogue lists the holdings of the collection. The archive contains dossiers on many of the Vingtistes; however, much of the information consists of press clippings.

Brussels: Archives générales du Royaume. Archives de l'art belge.

2, rue de Ruysbroek
1000 Brussels

The archives de l'art belge is a separate archive contained within the Archives Générales du Royaume. An inventory for this collection exists at the Archives de l'art contemporain and is arranged by artist. Not all of the documents in this archive are catalogued and available for consultation. This archive contains letters from Edmond Picard and Jules du Jardin to several of the Vingtistes.

Brussels: Bibliothèque royale, Musée de la littérature.

4, Boulevard de l'Empereur
1000 Brussels

The Musée de la littérature is a self-contained archive in the Bibliothèque royale. It holds many valuable collections which deal with the interrelationship of art and literature such as: Henry van de Velde and Emile Verhaeren correspondence, the archives of l'art indépendant, and Charles van Lerberghe's journals. There is an extensive annotated public catalogue arranged by author, title, and subject.

Brussels: Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique.
Archives de l'art contemporain.

9, rue du Musée
1000 Brussels

The Archives de l'art contemporain is the principal archive in Brussels devoted to Belgian art. It is arranged primarily by donor and is cross-referenced by artists in the catalogue. It contains over 500 letters dealing with Les XX's history and organization as well as catalogues and press clippings. The archive for La Libre Esthétique is also housed here. In addition there is an immense documentation (both literary and visual) on nearly all modern Belgian artists.

Glasgow: Glasgow University Library. Whistler archive.

Hillhead Street
Glasgow G128QE

This is the main repository of Whistler documentation and contains several letters between Maus and Whistler.

Hague: Koninklijke Bibliotheek. Toorop archive.

34, Langue Voorhout
The Hague

The Toorop archive is an extensive collection of letters dealing with the artist's life and work. It also contains his correspondence with Octave Maus and Georges Lemmen.

Paris: Musée Rodin. Rodin archive.

77, rue Varenne
75007 Paris

The Rodin archive contains letters and press clippings dealing with Rodin's oeuvre. Of particular interest were those dealing with his exhibitions at Les XX and his correspondence with Julien Dillens and Octave Maus.

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