Composing the Decorative:
Maurice Denis, Music, and the Search for French Cultural Tradition



Rachel E. Coombes
St John's College
Faculty of History
University of Oxford

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of D.Phil. in History of Art

Trinity Term 2022

ABSTRACT

Composing the Decorative:
Maurice Denis, Music, and the Search for French Cultural Tradition

Rachel Coombes
St John's College
D.Phil. in History of Art
Trinity Term 2022

This project focuses on the decorative work of the painter Maurice Denis (1870 – 1943), who is perhaps best known for his involvement with the Nabis, a group of young painters culturally prominent in the Paris of the early 1890s. Much work remains to be done on assessing the wider significance both of his turn-of-the-century 'conversion' to classicism, and of his increasingly earnest determination to revitalize sacred art in France. Therefore my thesis concentrates primarily on the artist's post-Nabi decorative work, and how it was not only shaped by, but also helped to strengthen, classicising and religious tendencies within French art, as well as associated conservative ideological currents within French culture more broadly. The thesis considers how Denis's life-long commitment to establishing an artistic doctrine, a 'French order', rooted in a tradition both Catholic and classical, entered into cultural debates stimulated by the consequences of such events as the Dreyfus Affair (1894 – 1906), the Separation of the Church and the State in 1905 and the First World War. Denis himself was well aware that decorative commissions (both public and domestic) were frequently understood as reflecting contemporary social values. I argue that an examination of Denis's links to his musical contemporaries (principally the composer Vincent d'Indy and the pupils of César Franck), who themselves were active in these debates on matters of cultural identity, reveals much about the significance of his art and of the wider character of a renascent cultural nationalism in early twentieth-century France. By seeing his work as drawn into the ambit of France's musical world, we will, I hope, go some way towards understanding Denis's importance in the more general context of the period's ideology and aesthetics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements iii

List of abbreviations iv

Introduction 1

Ch. 1: Leading 'French energies towards a new order': the painter as theorist 25

'[A] confession and a plea': the scope and context of *Théories* 27

The search for 'equivalence' and harmony 34

'[T]he right to lyricism': decoration and arabesque 46

A *'singulier mélange'* of Plotinus and Schopenhauer 54

Consecrating a *fumoir: La Légende de Saint Hubert* 60

Finding 'constraint' in the laws of tradition 69

Ch. 2: Parallel religious visions: musical and visual traces of medieval re-invention 80

'They were Catholics because they were Frenchmen' 84

The *primitif* and the reawakening of religious sentiment 95

'Art is the sanctification of nature' 103

Gregorian chant and the Schola Cantorum 113

The Ateliers d'Art Sacré 123

Ch. 3: Classical chimeras and the contesting of *latinité* 136

France: *Terre Latine*? 140

'They say that a classical renaissance has begun' 144

L'Âge d'Or: visions of time transcended 160

Italophilia and the lure of Fiesole 168

Humanist Renaissance[s] 177

Coda: the *franckistes* 185

Ch. 4: Bodies in motion: Denis and gesture 194

'A thousand singers praise you': Maillol and *L'Histoire de Psyché* 197

Denis and Isadora Duncan: wave forms 210

Greek dance: rhythmical marks, rhythmical movements 216

Music and dance at Paris's 'monument to the modern era' 228

Allegorizing music: *L'Histoire de la musique* 237

Postlude: *Parsifal* and Frenchness 244

Ch. 5: Ritual and decoration in the church and the theatre 250

La Chapelle du 'Prieuré': a local sanctuary 254

'Émouver, consoler, faire prier': theological journeys around the space 265

The Beatitudes: music, and the material embodiment Franciscan piety 275

La Légende de Saint-Christophe : an 'opera of ideas' 282

'*Trop d'or, trop d'or!*': the Palais Garnier 289

The sanctification of the operatic stage 300

Conclusion 312

List of illustrations 328

Bibliography 341

Illustrations PDFs in zip file

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was supported by a St John's RCUK Scholarship. My research has been greatly assisted by travel grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and St John's College, and by financial support from the Faculty of History, University of Oxford. The University's Humanities Covid-19 Scholarship Extension Fund allowed me to continue my research into a fourth year, following significant disruption to my research-trip plans as a result of the pandemic. I am grateful also to have been offered a Santander Academic Travel Award for a trip to Russia, an opportunity which Covid-19 regrettably prevented me from taking up.

I would like to thank Alastair Wright for his invaluable guidance throughout the course of the project, and for his more general advice during my time as a doctoral student. The direction of my research has been influenced by the generous counsel of staff members within the History of Art department. I am grateful also to Catherine Whistler, who has supported me as my Academic Advisor. I owe much to college friends and to the cohort of D.Phil. art historians who have helped make the time spent on the project enjoyable, and particularly to Aleksandra Rutkowska, whose friendship I greatly appreciate. I wish to offer special thanks to both my brother Timothy and to Yonatan Fruchter for all their moral support. Finally, without the encouragement and love of my parents, this project would not have been possible.

I wish to express my gratitude to the following people at the musée departmental Maurice Denis, who have been generous with their assistance, and attentive to my archival requests: Gabrielle Montarnal, Fabienne Stahl, Clémence Gaboriau and Marie-Claire Rodriguez. I am grateful to the artist's granddaughter Claire Denis, with whom I had several informative discussions. My thanks also go to Guy Selva (of the Blanche Selva archives), Anne Eichner-Emmanuel (of the Maurice Emmanuel archives), Jean de Préval and Jacques Mauguin (of the Saint-Germain-en-Laye archives), Sylvain Pinta (at the musée de l'Oise) and the d'Indy scholar Gilles Saint-Arroman, who have taken time to share their knowledge with me. I should like to thank the members of staff at the Bibliothèque National and other French archives and libraries for their assistance with research queries.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Bibliothèque nationale de France	BnF
Musée departmental Maurice Denis archives	MMD
Centre de documentation du musée départemental Maurice Denis	CD
Maison Bourdelle	MB
Musée des Arts Décoratifs	MAD

INTRODUCTION

'You, Sir, have produced a magnificent synthesis that I would gladly name The Redemption.'[1] These words, addressed to the artist Maurice Denis (1870-1943), were spoken at the formal unveiling (*inauguration*) of the first of Denis's religious commissions on Sunday 9 July 1899. The work in question, *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix et la glorification du sacrifice de la messe*, had just been installed in the apse of the chapel in the Collège Sainte-Croix in the Parisian suburb of Le Vésinet **[Figure 1]**. Father Jamet, the local priest charged with the responsibility of the ceremonial address, was fulsome in his praise of the ensemble in its character as apologia. His alternative title for the work, 'The Redemption', meaning deliverance from sin, is a reference to the significance of the Holy Cross as a sign of Christian salvation. But he could have been alluding to more than just the work's symbolic meaning. His words seem to imply an understanding of the very design of the polyptych — which is so constructed as to incorporate the chapel's altar into its decorative realm — as a witness to the potentially redemptive power of art. Jamet continued: 'This painting is a prayer, it is an act of pious adoration'.[2]

Jamet's term 'synthesis' could be understood to refer to the thematic unification that Denis achieves between the altar in the real space of the chapel

---

[1] 'Vous, Monsieur, vous avez fait une synthèse magnifique que je nommerais volontiers La Rédemption'. 'Allocution, Prononcée par le R. P. Jamet à l'inauguration des peintures de M. Maurice Denis dans la chapelle de l'École Sainte-Croix du Vésinet', *Annales de l'Association de Saint-Joseph*, 30/12 (February 1900), p. 358. Consulted at the Centre de documentation du musée départemental Maurice Denis (henceforth abbreviated to 'CD'). *L'exaltation de la sainteCroix* dossier.

[2] 'Ce tableau est une prière, c'est un acte d'adoration pieuse'. Jamet, 'Allocution', p. 358.

and the painted scene on the apse wall. Within the decorative ensemble, two choristers and two angel figures, standing on either side, appear to venerate the physical altar **[Figure 2]**. The warm illumination of the front of their surplices, which can be noted in the preparatory painting, is perhaps the symbolic objectification of a 'divine' light emanating from the altar itself. The absolute centrality of the altar's physical presence to the painter's original conception is apparent from a preparatory drawing of the work**,** in which its firmly delineated outline serves as the focal point of the design **[Figure. 3]**. It is clear that the entire design was envisaged to harmonize with the chapel's architecture: Denis made use of the wide arched cornice to represent an expansive sky-scape in which winged angels support the weight of the Cross. The two false columns of the chapel are integrated into the pergolas depicted on the wall: the desired effect is one of visual continuity between the built interior and a verdant idyll beyond.[3] The construction as a whole — this 'logic of sight' of the spatial continuum – is strongly reminiscent of Italian Renaissance altarpieces.[4] Denis's pencil sketch illustrates his well-defined linear perspectival construction of this fictive 'outdoor' space. In the two largest panels **[Figures 4a and b]**, we can see how the orthogonals of the tiled flooring emphasize the extension of space: the effect is such that the real chapel altar stands on the threshold of interior and 'exterior'. The Holy Cross on the

[3] The vines which cling to the classical columns and the field of wheat which expands backwards have symbolic Eucharistic importance.

[4] 'Logic of sight' is John Shearman's term, used by Stephen Miller in *The Word made Visible in the Painted Image: Perspective, Proportion, Witness and Threshold in Italian Renaissance Painting* (Newcastle, 2016), p. 8.

apse wall has the impression of hanging directly above the altar, in a liminal realm.

Several commentators remarked on the visual continuity achieved between painting, built environment and devotional practices in the chapel: the sculptor Abel Fabre remarked that '[t]he decor goes with the life that circulates around it and from which it is borrowed'.[5] The art critic Paul Jamot elaborated on Fabre's observation, claiming that the decorative ensemble was 'made for the eyes and souls of the young students', offering them 'their own spiritualized, sanctified image.'[6] The chapel was attached to a school run by the Congregation of the Holy Cross, and the involvement of youth within the sacramental rite of the Eucharist is emphasized by the four choir boys nearest the altar. They hold scores of the Gregorian chant *Vexilla Regis Prodeunt*, a Latin hymn associated specifically with Vespers on The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.[7] A close examination of the scores indicates the care with which the artist has accurately represented the neumatic notation of chant.[8]

The *inauguration* in 1899 was a ceremonial affair, in which the life of the Catholic ritual 'circulated' (to use Fabre's term) around Denis's monumental murals. An account of the event in the *Annales de l'Association de Saint-Joseph* reads: 'It was within the heart of the church service ... listening to the liturgical

---

[5] 'Le décor va avec la vie qui circule autour et lui est emprunté.' Abel Fabre, 'Maurice Denis', *Le Mois littéraire et pittoresque,* 174 (June 1913), p. 499.

[6] 'faite pour les yeux et les âmes des jeunes collégiens, elle leur offrait … leur propre image spiritualisée, sanctifiée, sous les espèces des enfants de chœur …' P. Jamot, *Maurice Denis: texte de Paul Jamot* (Paris, 1945), p. 15.

[7] The chant has been identified by Paul Alfassa, 'Peintures de Sainte-Croix du Vésinet', *Les Musées de France*, vol 2 (Paris, 1912), pp. 12-14.

[8] Denis uses the square notes known as 'neumes', and the stave consists of four rather than five lines, in keeping with medieval notation traditions.

songs, while the incense and prayers were ascending, that we could really understand how much this work … befitted Catholic feeling and ceremony.'[9] The event was well-attended (Father Jamet confessed in his speech to being 'rather intimidated' by the audience of 'legislators, elders, learned artists'), and by all accounts, the occasion promised the commencement of a new phase of religious commissions for Denis.[10] But four years later the chapel was decommissioned and the ensemble dismantled, as a direct result of zealous Republican anti-clericalism.[11] Since the passing of the Law of Associations in 1901 (a measure directed against religious congregations), hostility towards Catholics, under the leadership of Émile Combes, had reached a level comparable to the days of the Revolution. The fate of this first religious commission registers the interplay between deeply-felt artistic impulses and far-reaching political dispute that is an underlying theme of this thesis. The evidence provided by the ensemble itself of Denis's attention to the orchestrating of a decorative environment offers an appropriate way to begin my consideration of his work.

Maurice Denis is perhaps best known today for his involvement with the Nabis, a group of young painters from the Académie Julian who became well-

[9] 'C'est au milieu d'une cérémonie du culte ... en écoutant les chants liturgiques, tandis que montaient l'encens et la prière, que nous avons pu comprendre vraiment combien une œuvre … se trouvait adéquate aux pompes en même temps qu'au sentiment catholique.' A. M. 'Chronique', *Annales de l'Association de Saint-Joseph*, 30, 12 (February 1900), n.p. CD: *L'exaltation de la sainte-Croix* dossier.

[10] Jamet, 'Allocution', p. 358.

[11] They were subsequently displayed at the 1911 Exposition internationale de l'art chrétien moderne.

known in Paris during the early 1890s.[12] These artists adopted an anti-Impressionist stance and embraced Symbolist-derived theories of correspondences between colour and line, and emotional responses. The Denis specialist Jean-Paul Bouillon has argued for the need to move beyond the widely held assumption that the artist's cultural importance stems chiefly from this early, self-consciously experimental period.[13] Yet much work remains to be done on assessing the wider significance both of his turn-of-the-century 'conversion' to classicism, and of his increasingly earnest determination to revitalize sacred art in France. My thesis therefore concentrates primarily on the artist's post-Nabi decorative work, and the way in which it was not only shaped by, but also helped to strengthen, a set of classicizing and religious tendencies within French art, and an associated set of conservative ideological currents within the wider culture of France. How did Denis's life-long commitment to establishing an artistic doctrine, a 'French order', rooted in a tradition both Catholic and classical, enter into wider socio-political debates?[14]

The conservative intellectual milieu in which Denis moved was represented by the congregation in attendance at the Le Vésinet *inauguration*. Guests included the writer and politician Baron Denys Cochin (a strong defender of Catholic educational liberties), his brother Henry Cochin (a specialist in Renaissance literature), the journalist and poet Adrien Mithouard, who co-

---

[12] The pursuits of the 1890s generation have been well documented in art historical narratives. See for example Claire Frèches-Thory and Antoine Terrasse (eds), *The Nabis: Bonnard, Vuillard, and Their Circle,* trans. M. Pardoe (Paris, 1991); Patricia Eckert Boyer and Elizabeth Prelinger (eds), *The Nabis and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1988).

[13] Jean-Paul Bouillon, 'Situation de Denis', in *Maurice Denis 1870-1943*, exhib. cat., Musée des beaux-arts, Lyon, 1994-5 (Ghent, 1994), p. 15.

[14] Maurice Denis, 'Réponse à l'enquête sur l'orientation de la peinture moderne', *La Revue du temps présent*, 1/6 (2 June 1911), p. 569.

founded the journal *L'Occident* in 1901, and the painter Henri Lerolle, one of Denis's earliest supporters.[15] In his memoir *Henri Lerolle et ses amis*, Denis credited the hospitable cultural milieu of Lerolle's regular salons with awakening his life-long interest in collaboration and interaction between the arts. Lerolle's piano, Denis wrote nostalgically, 'becomes on certain days … a magical instrument through which passes the soul of Beethoven and Chopin'.[16] Music was prominent within Denis's intellectual circle. Mithouard was a keen violinist, and the Cochin brothers were close childhood friends of the composer Vincent d'Indy.[17] A political climate increasingly hostile to institutional Catholicism lent urgency to these cultural alliances, as like-minded religious painters, writers and musicians sought mutually strengthening cultural bonds.

Denis's inclusion of precise musical detail in the ensemble for the Le Vésinet chapel indicates not only his familiarity with the conventions of religious chant notation, but also his appreciation of the centrality of music to religious ritual. In this thesis I shall argue that an examination of Denis's connection to France's musical world will yield a fuller picture both of the significance of his art and of the character of a general renascent cultural nationalism in early twentieth-century France. My analysis will centre on Denis's close relationship with certain French musicians at the time, who were, like Denis, active participants in wider cultural debates over the nature of national identity and tradition. This aspect of Denis's work is largely unexplored.

---

[15] A. M. 'Chronique', n.p. CD: *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix* dossier.

[16] 'ce même piano qui devenait à certains jours,…un instrument féerique où passait l'âme de Beethoven et de Chopin'. M. Denis, *Henri Lerolle et ses amis, suivi de quelques lettres d'amis* (Paris, 1932), p. 8.

[17] Myriam Chimènes, 'Vincent d'Indy dans la société parisienne', in M. Schwartz (ed.), *Vincent d'Indy et son temps* (Sprimont, 2006), p. 80.

'Who's Afraid of Maurice Denis?'

'Qui a peur de Maurice Denis?' runs the title of a 2006 article in the French journal *Art Absolument* discussing two concurrent exhibitions of the artist's work, one at the musée d'Orsay, and the other at the musée départemental Maurice Denis in Saint-Germain-en-Laye.[18] The article takes up the question of the general reluctance to take seriously the painter's mature work – a tendency which the author claims is somewhat redressed in the two exhibitions. Clearly, the d'Orsay exhibition indicates that Denis is not in danger of being 'forgotten', at least in France; Jean-Paul Bouillon and more recently Fabienne Stahl have done much to bring to light his prolific career. Bouillon in particular (who edited the catalogue for the d'Orsay exhibition) has revealed complexities of Denis's artistic character in his Symbolist beginnings and in his development towards classicism. But this research has yet to be fully assimilated within wider important (and themselves neglected) narratives about the culture of the period**.** The multiplicity of artistic currents at the turn of the century has tended to obscure the art-historical view of Denis's post-Nabi painting, which can best be understood in the context of a largely non-canonical body of art. This now-neglected work was significant primarily by virtue of its rootedness within the specific concerns of its day. Its relegation to the category of the 'reactionary' has resulted in an aversion to thinking 'outwardly' in terms of his work's relevance to the socio-political discourse of the Third Republic.

Denis's conservative mode of thought, and the ideological convictions of his intellectual milieu were broadly representative of those dismayed by the

[18] Emmanuel Daydé, 'Qui a peur de Maurice Denis?', *Art Absolument*, 19 (Winter 2006/7), pp. 36-44.

aggressive laicisation pursued by the Republican government (which culminated in the Separation of the Church and the State in 1905). After all, Catholicism was a central component of France's pre-Revolutionary identity, infusing the country's social fabric at all levels. Its spirit seemed to reawaken in times of turmoil, as crystallized in François-René de Chateaubriand's famous apologia for Catholicism *Génie du christianisme* (1802), a Romantic affirmation of the supremacy of Christianity, which he had found embodied in the religious monuments destroyed during the Revolution.[19] The fallout from the Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906) served also to stimulate forms of nationalism, some of which were particularly aggressive. Scholars such as Michael Marrus and Albert Lindemann have demonstrated the groundswell of anti-Semitism that lay at the root of much anti-Dreyfus sentiment.[20] The writer Maurice Barrès, whom we shall meet in Chapter 3, stated that the Affair was 'nothing but a pretext' for the struggle over more important issues.[21] For Barrès, such issues were largely grounded in anxieties founded upon ethnic nationalism. But a much less defined cultural divide opened between supporters and detractors in the Affair, a divide which was often transposed onto an aesthetic plane.[22] Denis never publicly espoused any anti-Semitic sentiments, but the Affair nevertheless provoked strong emotion and sentimental cultural nostalgia, as a journal entry from 1909 attests: 'I cannot read or explain [to Noële, his

---

[19] Katherine Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes* (Berkeley and London, 1998), p. 4.

[20] See Michael Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation. A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Oxford, 1971); Albert Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank) 1894-1915* (Cambridge, 1991).

[21] Quoted in Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation,* p. 188.

[22] In *Le Tourment de l'Unité* (Paris, 1901), Adrien Mithouard makes a distinctive between the 'harmonieux' and the 'expressifs' – see discussion in Chapter 3.

daughter] without tears anything that touches the old France, stories, legends, *chansons de geste* etc. Is it the Affair that has exposed this fibre in me?'[23] Some years later, anti-Germanic feeling stirred up by the War provoked Denis once again to assert France's cultural 'exceptionalism'. In an open letter published in *L'Opinion* in 1916, co-written with Vincent d'Indy (among others), Denis constrasted France's *civilisation occidentale* with Germany's 'lack of true culture'.[24]

Denis's status as a 'reactionary' stems in part from adverse judgements about the intrinsic character of his works as being 'slick, sentimental and over-demonstrably pious'.[25] His *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix* ensemble for Le Vésinet certainly does not give us much cause to argue against such a judgement. But this thesis seeks to understand in greater depth the motivations behind his curious – and somewhat troubling – artistic idiom. These motivations were themselves symptomatic of wider cultural concerns, to do with the perceived threat that artistic 'individualism', posed to the integrity of France's national identity. The painter's commitment to the preservation of what he considered to be the central pillars of France's cultural tradition – its Catholic faith and its Greco-Latin heritage – engendered productive tension that he tried to resolve 'synthetically' throughout his career. Father Jamet's remark on the 'magnificent

---

[23] 'Je ne peux lui lire ou lui expliquer sans larmes rien de ce qui touche à l'ancienne France, histoires, légendes, chansons de geste, etc. Est-ce que l'Affaire qui a mis à nu chez moi cette fibre?' M. Denis, *Journal II, 1905-1920*, 30 January 1909, (Paris, 1957), p. 111. Denis's *Journals* were published in 3 volumes (vol.I, 1884-1904; vol.II, 1905-1920; vol.III, 1921-1943) (Paris, 1957-1959). Many entries have no precise date.

[24] 'manque de vraie culture'. Collective letter by Alfred Croiset, M.A. Aulard, Vincent d'Indy, Maurice Denis, Gabriel Trarieux, Émile Verhaeren and Paul Claudel to Scott Mowrer. Published as 'Les Deux Cultures' in *L'Opinion*, 9/34 (19 August 1916), p. 155.

[25] Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France 1889-1900* (New Haven and London, 2004), p. 118.

synthesis' in the Le Vésinet paintings might be understood in these terms, as a reference to the coalescence of two impulses: 'your painting goes back through the Byzantine style to the Ancient Greek,' Jamet claimed, later in his speech.[26] His locating of the work within this imagined chain of ancient artistic models reflected Denis's concern with self-insertion into tradition. It was also an accurate reflection of Denis's long-standing loyalty to the affective power of early religious art's hieraticism, and of his new-found admiration for classical statuary, following a trip to Rome with André Gide in 1898.

A diary entry from October that year (written during his preparation for the Le Vésinet decoration), indicates the painter's dawning realization of the hold that classical art was beginning to take on his work:

> I was seduced by the curious coincidence between the symmetrical folds of my altar boys' surplices (*cotta*) and the folds of the tunics of archaic Greeks: it's weird that the fabrics used for church vestments give an effect similar to what old sculptors used to ennoble their drapes. … This was a way for me to give my sketches from nature an architectural twist, and to better establish the solid enchantment of surfaces and lines. And this is how I came to look for the beautiful things of Greek archaic art ... [27]

This stylistic fusion within an idiom distinctively 'modern' in its attention to the decorative surface, invites understanding in the light of the many art

---

[26] 'Votre peinture … remonte en traversant le style byzantin jusqu'a l'Antique grec'. Jamet, 'Allocution', p. 360.

[27] 'J'ai été séduit par la coïncidence curieuse entre les plis symétriques de mes *cotta* d'enfants de chœur, et les plis des tuniques d'archaïques grecs. C'est au moins bizarre que les mêmes étoffes soient encore employées pour produire, dans les cérémonies d'église, un effet que les vieux sculpteurs employaient à ennoblir leurs draperies. Ca a été pour moi un moyen de donner à mes croquis d'après nature une tournure architecturale, et d'y mieux établir le solide enchevêtrement des surfaces et des lignes. Et c'st ainsi que j'ai été amené à rechercher les belles choses de l'art archaïque grec…' Denis, *Journal I*, October 1898, pp. 147-8.

historical attempts to disrupt the assumption of trudging linearity in artistic 'progress'. Georges Didi-Huberman has decried the 'taming' of artworks that inevitably comes with placing them in an objective chronological framework (in the tradition of, say, Panofsky). 'No longer imaginable as an unbroken river, where accruals are carried from up- to downstream, tradition should … be conceived as a tense dialectic, a drama that unfolds between the river's flow and its whirling eddies …'[28] While the scope of this thesis allows for a consideration of Denis's work only within the bounds of his immediate historical circumstances, we should do well to remember that the tension between 'modernity' and 'tradition' as embodied in his work has wider implications for the field of art history.[29]

Two recent studies, published during the later stages of the preparation of this thesis, have done much to enrich our sense of the cultural prominence of 'traditionalist' mentalities in France at the turn of the century.[30] The appearance of these publications confirmed my own strong sense that, despite the proliferation of literature on *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth century French culture, the ideology of 'traditionalism' is a topic in need of serious consideration.[31] Neil McWilliam's *The Aesthetics of Reaction: Tradition, Faith,*

---

[28] Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of impure Time', *Common Knowledge*, 9/2 (2003), p. 276.

[29] See Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (eds), *Compelling Visuality, The Work of Art in and out of History* (Minneapolis, 2003) for an interesting discussion of this aspect of the discipline.

[30] Neil McWilliam, *The Aesthetics of Reaction: Tradition, Faith, Identity and the Visual Arts in France 1900-1914* (Turnhout, 2021) and Richard Thomson, *The Presence of the Past in French Art* (New Haven and London, 2021).

[31] The body of literature on the conservative nationalism of artists associated with the political Right is outweighed by scholarship which considers the 'anarchism' of the neo-impressionists such as Camille Pissarro and Paul Signac, such as Martha Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism and*

Identity and the Visual Arts in France 1900–1914 is an ambitious attempt to overcome the 'flattening' of issues to do with cultural nationalism of the period. He shows how artists' works were positioned by critics in relation to certain ideological principles, and how these works were central to conservative groups' 'evaluation of contemporary culture as a barometer of national vitality'. McWilliam pays particularly close attention to three figures whose attitudes might be said to be representative of the 'array of competing ideological positions within conservative intellectual circles of the time': the critic and poet Joachim Gasquet, the painter Émile Bernard, and Maurice Denis.[32] Given the sheer volume and breadth of critical writings employed in his account, there is little space for detailed visual analysis. This thesis, by focusing on a small number of Denis's decorative works, allows space for a more extended study of the works themselves.

In *The Presence of the Past in French Art, 1870–1905,* Richard Thomson continues his long-standing endeavour to 'rehabilitate' neglected artists of the Third Republic, primarily in the years leading up to the new century.[33] His work complements that of such scholars as Miriam Levin and Pierre Vaisse, who have examined the major decorative programmes commissioned by the Third Republic.[34] Thomson's focus is on the sustained cultural interest in classicism, the Rubensian, and the *quattrocento* – and he recognizes the

---

the Spaces of the Avant-garde (Chicago and London, 1996), and Robyn Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-siècle France* (Aldershot, 2007).

[32] McWilliam, *Aesthetics of Reaction*, p. 9.

[33] See Thomson, *The Troubled Republic;* and *Art of the Actual: Naturalism and Style in Early Third Republic France, 1880-1900* (New Haven and London, 2012).

[34] Miriam Levin, *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth Century France* (London, 1986); Pierre Vaisse, *La Troisième République et les Peintres* (Paris, 1995).

importance of Denis's work as manifestations of the first and last of these. Thomson is primarily concerned with artworks that in some measure substantiated the socio-political ideals of a Republican élite. But his consideration of the assignment to the Republican cause of works that evince attachment to certain historical models offers proof of the ideological malleability of these models. The work of Puvis de Chavannes (discussed in detail by Thomson) presents a clear example of this. Jennifer Shaw was among the first scholars to demonstrate how this artist's work was deplored by certain conservatives as demonstrative of a Republican 'positivistic secularism', and yet lauded by others as the very embodiment of France's noble, classical lineage.[35] Denis belonged firmly in the latter faction. As I shall show, Puvis remained a consistent inspiration throughout his career, and Denis was sometimes acclaimed by critics as the heir to that nineteenth century decorative painter.[36]

'I am convinced', stated Puvis de Chavannes, 'that the best organized idea, that is to say the simplest and the clearest, is also, necessarily, the most decorative and the most beautiful.'[37] I would argue that such a statement offered Denis a doctrine by which to pursue his own decorative endeavours. My own consideration of Denis takes as a starting point the assumption (addressed by both McWilliam and Thomson) that social order was believed, by Republicans and conservatives alike, to be founded upon the discipline of

---

[35] Jennifer Shaw, *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (New Haven and London, 2002), p. 127.
[36] Georges Le Brun, 'Maurice Denis: Les Chapelles de Vésinet', *L'Art Moderne*, 9 (January 1904), p. 66.
[37] Quoted in M. Werth, *The Joys of Life: The Idyllic in French Art circa 1900* (Berkeley, 2002), p. 32.

tradition. But this study makes a further claim, by arguing that Denis's own sense of tradition was reinforced by his involvement with elements of Paris's musical milieu. It also demonstrates how his attachment to a decorative visual idiom itself derived from his appreciation of the relevance of musical metaphor to art.

'M. Maurice Denis est né décorateur'[38]

Scholarly attention to manifestations of a 'decorative' aesthetic at the turn of the century in France is broad-ranging: Nancy Troy's *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* is a usefully compendious work that demonstrates the necessity of thinking beyond the long-established dichotomy of the 'decorative arts' and those fine arts which pertain to the decorative.[39] Denis gets little mention, beyond a collaboration with Henry Van der Velde on the decoration of a child's bedroom for Siegfried Bing's Maison de l'Art Nouveau in 1895. This work (inspired by Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*) is also discussed by Katherine Kuenzli in *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle,* and by Deborah Silverman in her seminal work on Art Nouveau.[40] The relatively large amount of scholarly attention paid to this particular work is symptomatic of

[38] Paul Jamot, 'Le Théâtre de Champs-Élysées', 2nd part, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, (May 1913), p. 292.

[39] Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*, (New Haven, 1991).

[40] Katherine Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Farnham, 2010); Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley and London, 1989).

the general understanding of Denis as an artist whose art historical 'usefulness' lies in these early interactions with members of 'avant-garde' artistic circles.

Important research carried out by Gloria Groom and Nicholas Watkins has considered in depth the pictorial ideal of painting as 'decoration' in the work of the Nabis.[41] An exhibition at the musée du Luxembourg in 2019, *Les Nabis et le décor*, celebrated this band of young artists as 'true pioneers of modern décor'.[42] There undoubtedly was a fresh force behind the Nabis' recognition of the aesthetic value of wall decoration and their desire to 'restore to architecture a pre-eminent place in art which it had lost'.[43] But clearly (as Nicholas Watkins has described) these artists were heavily indebted to a decorative tradition that stretched back centuries.[44] Denis became more and more dedicated to the continuation of such a tradition after the turn of the century, as I shall show. The scholarly attention to Denis's 'decorative' aesthetic has been largely confined to his early years, a circumstance not helped by the reductive understanding of his famous dictum from 1890: 'Remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a plane surface covered with paint in a certain arrangement'.[45] This phrase is

---

[41] See Nicholas Watkins 'The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic' and Gloria Groom, 'Coming of Age: Patrons and Projects', in Gloria Groom, *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930,* exhib. cat. The Art Institute of Chicago (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 1-28 and pp. 31-57.

[42] Exhibition leaflet for 'Les Nabis et le décor', musée du Luxembourg, 13 March-30 June 2019. https://museeduluxembourg.fr/sites/luxembourg/files/Guide_Visite_NABIS_GB.pdf. Last accessed 21 September 2022.

[43] Charles Chassé, *Le Mouvement symboliste dans l'art du XIX siècle* (Paris, 1947), p. 116.

[44] Watkins, 'The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic'.

[45] 'Se rappeler qu'un tableau — avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote — et essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées'. [Pierre Louis] 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme, *Art et critique*, 2/65 (23 August 1890), pp. 540-2. Reprinted (together with second part 2/66 (30 August 1890), pp.

often quoted as a maxim within the narrative of modernism illustratively heralding the birth of non-representational art. But this interpretation pays no heed to the context of the utterance. Denis was saying nothing original: Giorgio Vasari made a comparable remark in his *Maniera* as did the art critic Charles Blanc in *Grammaire des arts du dessin*.[46] Far from constituting a 'new' definition of painting, these words point explicitly to the importance of a long-established artistic theory: that the subject matter of the work as represented is inseparable from the affective properties of the forms and colours in which it was depicted. Even during his lifetime, Denis would come to lament the fact that his phrase had been taken up as some sort of radical proclamation.

This thesis seeks to broaden our view of the significance of decoration for Denis, by placing stylistic questions within a wider cultural and social context. The critic Camille Mauclair's assertion that 'the great decorators are those who feel most acutely the logic of their land and the customs of their nation' is one that Denis would have taken particularly seriously.[47] The painter's growing belief that his art should fulfil a moral and spiritual duty inclined him towards

---

556-8) in M. Denis, *Théories, 1890-1910 : du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique,* 4th edn (Paris, 1920) (pp. 1-13), p. 1. Hereafter, references to essays reprinted in *Théories* cite page numbers in 4th edn. Available as pdf online: https://archive.org/details/theories1890191000deni/page/n283/mode/2up.

[46] Vasari states: 'A painting is a plane surface—be it a wood panel, a piece of canvas, or a wall—covered with spots of colors disposed around an outline which, because its curves have been well designed, circumscribes the figure.' Quoted in Etienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality,* 2nd edn. (Princeton, 1968), p. 104. See also Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l'art. Corpus des œuvres de philosophie en langue française* (Paris, 1985), pp. 452-3. Charles Blanc begins his book with: 'Painting is the art of expressing all the conceptions of the soul, by means of all the realities of nature; represented upon a smooth surface by their forms and colours'. *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, trans. K. Doggett, (London, 1867*),* p. 1.

[47] ' … les grands décoratifs sont ceux qui sentent le plus vivement la logique de leur terroir et les mœurs de leur nation.' Camille Mauclair, 'La réforme de l'art décoratif en France', *La Nouvelle Revue,* 98 (15 February 1896), p. 728.

producing work which would adorn the spaces and environments — both public and private — of daily life. The 1899 Le Vésinet ensemble was the first of a considerable number of public religious and secular commissions that he received during his lifetime.

Three months after the publication of his essay 'La Réforme de l'Art Décoratif en France', from which the quotation above is drawn, Mauclair wrote to Denis enthusiastically requesting to see his most recent decoration, a commission for a ceiling in the composer Ernest Chausson's Parisian home.[48] As a domestic commission, this work, *Le Temps des lilas ou le Printemps* (the title paid homage to Chausson's setting of Maurice Bouchor's poem of that title) was a far cry from the civic art for which Mauclair called.[49] 'To find the … *style of the people* it is necessary entirely to surpass individual taste' proclaims Mauclair: but for Denis, the surpassing of artistic individuality through an intersubjectively appreciable decorative style mattered just as much to his work for private patrons (most of whom shared his conservative attitudes).[50]

Denis the *mélomane*

The connection between an appreciation of music and a decorative visual idiom is nowhere more apparent than in *Les Harpistes* (1893)**,** one of a dozen wallpaper designs by Denis that were never commercially produced **[Figure 5]**. The sinuous arabesques suggest waves of melody resounding from the plucked

[48] Mauclair, letter to Denis (5 May 1896). Musée départmental Maurice Denis archives (henceforth abbreviated to MMD) [Ms 7804].
[49] Denis produced two other decorations for Chausson: *Avril* (1894) and *La Famille Chausson* (1899).
[50] 'Pour trouver … *le style d'un peuple* il faut dépasser infiniment le goût individuel'. Mauclair, 'La Réforme', p. 729. (Emphasis original.)

harp strings. A product of his Nabi years (it featured in the 2019 exhibition *Les Nabis et le décor*), the design also pays homage to the musical milieu in which he was closely involved during those years. Lerolle's salon, described by Denis as 'neither bohemian nor academic', included the composers Claude Debussy, Vincent d'Indy and Ernest Chausson.[51] D'Indy and Chausson were at the heart of a circle of musicians known as the *bande à Franck* (or the *franckistes*), so called because of their devotion to sustaining the legacy of the composer César Franck. D'Indy in particular was, like Denis, outspokenly concerned with restoring to centrality the purportedly 'French' qualities of order and clarity which he found embodied in the work of Franck. Musical salons hosted by Chausson also provided Denis with some of his most intimate experiences of artistic communality. In 1893, for example, Denis was the only painter present during an evening which featured the first performance of scene 1 from Debussy's *Pélléas et Mélisande.*[52] Several painted sketches of musicians and musical gatherings attest to Denis's presence at these events **[Figure 6]**. Denis continued to associate with d'Indy and his musical circle over the following decades. Many of his close musical friends are represented in his cover design for *Album Pour Enfants Petits et Grands* (a compilation published in 1905 of works by d'Indy and his musical friends) **[Figure 7]**. D'Indy looms in the foreground, the pianist Blanche Selva sits at the piano, while her pages are

[51] 'ces réunions intimes … ni bohèmes ni académiciens'. Denis, *Lerolle et ses amis*, p. 4.
[52] See Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond 'Maurice Denis and Music', exhib. cat. *Maurice Denis: Earthly Paradise 1870-1943* (Paris, 2006), pp. 286-9; Gerard Vaughan, 'Maurice Denis and the Sense of Music', *Oxford Art Journal*, 7/1, (1984), pp. 38-48.

turned by the composer Réné de Castéra, who commissioned the illustration.[53] Denis also found a close knit musical circle on his doorstep in his home town of Saint-Germain-en-Laye – one which was committed to the revival of sacred chant. The recognition of comparable aesthetic movements across art forms engendered the sense of a coherent conservative cultural vision within these social groups.

Denis's relationship with musicians has been acknowledged but little explored. Delphine Grivel's *Maurice Denis et la Musique* is the most comprehensive study, but it is a largely biographical account that does little to assess the wider significance of these relationships.[54] Brief discussions of Denis's *mélomanie* have also appeared in the work of Gerard Vaughan and Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, while the painter's particularly rich body of correspondence with Chausson has been the subject of a study by Thérèse Barruel.[55] With the exception of Vaughan's brief article 'Maurice Denis and the Sense of Music', these studies exist entirely apart from the small but growing body of scholarship on the interaction between music and art around 1900 (and beyond).[56] This is partly because such work has tended to focus on the self-conscious pursuit of experimentation and innovation (including the movement towards 'abstraction'): Simon Shaw-Miller's *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* is a prominent example of this rather teleological

[53] Anne de Beaupuy, Claude Gay, Damien Top (eds), *René de Castéra (1873-1955), un compositeur landais au cœur de la musique française,* (Paris, 2004).
[54] Delphine Grivel, *Maurice Denis et la musique* (Lyon, 2011).
[55] Thérèse Barruel, 'Maurice Denis et Ernest Chausson: Correspondance inédite et catalogues des oeuvres de Denis ayant appartenu à Chausson', *Revue de l'art*, 98 (1992), pp.66-76; Vaughan, 'Maurice Denis and the Sense of Music'; Jumeau–Lafond, 'Maurice Denis and Music'.
[56] The publication of the *Routledge Companion to Music and Visual Culture* (London, 2014), co-edited by the musicologist Tim Shephard and the art historian Anne Leonard testifies to this.

approach.[57] Literature on the 'cult' of *wagnérisme* and Baudelairean 'synaesthesia' has done much to show how the high culture of the *fin-de-siècle* was pervaded by musical sensibility and a propensity to be enthralled by the experience of immersion in the auditory environment of music.[58] The 'parallel functioning' of forms, as with the 'arabesque' in music and the visual arts, has received some attention, and the work of Gurminder Bhogal informs my own thought in this thesis.[59] But developments grounded in responsiveness to 'parallel functioning' have been neglected, apart from those leading to 'avant-garde' abstraction in the twentieth century. Denis's growing preoccupation with large-scale decorative commissions realized in a 'classicizing' pictorial idiom grew alongside his sensitivity to music in the early decades of the twentieth century. The 'traditionalist' aesthetic and cultural politics of Denis's musical friends such as Vincent d'Indy have been investigated by musicologists including Jann Pasler, Jane Fulcher and Stephen Huebner; but Denis's involvement within this alternative milieu has received scant attention from an interdisciplinary point of view.[60]

---

[57] See Simon Shaw-Miller, *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* (New Haven, 2000). Other examples include Peter Vergo, *The Music of Painting: Music, Modernism and the Visual Arts from the Romantics to John Cage* (London, 2010); Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago and London, 2000).

[58] Richard Leppert, in *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley, 1993), casts his net more widely, considering the immersive music experience from the 17th century onwards.

[59] James Leggio speaks of the 'fruitful tension' between the urge to unify art forms and the urge to separate them, arguing that it is more productive to recognize 'parallel function'. James Leggio, *Music and Modern Art,* (London, 2002), xviiii; Gurminder Bhogal, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music and Art in Paris* (New York, 2013). Also see A. Leonard (ed.), *Arabesque without End* (London, 2021).

[60] Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley, 2009); Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford, 1998); Stephen Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de siècle* (Oxford, 2006).

Chapter summaries

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to Denis's most prominent body of critical essays, collated as *Théories 1890-1910: du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique.*[61] The painter, as is well recognized, was unusual in channelling as much energy into his theoretical writing as into his art, doing so partly to vindicate his own aesthetic programme. But the strands of thought developed in *Théories* deserve much greater consideration than they have received in relation to the flux of aesthetic and philosophical ideas at the turn of the century. Musical analogies were employed as a means of conceptualizing the formal energy of the Nabis' cultivation of decorative 'flatness'. But, I shall argue here, these analogies are also applicable to the classical visual idiom that the painter developed towards the end of the century. This is particularly so if one considers his large mural commissions, the aesthetic response to which often relied on comprehension of their rhythmic and harmonic force. The chapter considers the painter's first large-scale decorative series *La Légende de Saint Hubert* (1897). The significance of this work as a project produced on the cusp of his move towards classicism has not received sufficient recognition and will serve as a useful point of reference in later chapters. This chapter does not deal explicitly with cultural politics in the manner of my later chapters, but it sets up an aesthetic framework for the discussion of music-art relations which continues throughout the thesis.

In the early twentieth century, composers such as d'Indy and Charles Bordes made great efforts to restore the practices of sacred music at the centre of

[61] See footnote 45 above for full details.

French culture, as part of their broader nationalist motivations. How did those endeavours inform Denis's own ambitions to establish a definitively 'modern' renewal of religious art?' This is the concern of my second chapter, in which I shall consider the attempts of Denis and of these musicians to make relevant the Christian spirit of the Middle Ages (as they perceived it) to the modern age in analogous ways. How might we understand one of Denis's earliest (and oft-repeated) dictums, 'Art is the sanctification of nature', as a central connective thread to France's religious musical world?[62] A consideration of Denis's book illustrations will be instructive here, as alternative manifestations of his commitment to a religious decorative aesthetic. I shall discuss the comparable missions of d'Indy's Schola Cantorum (founded in 1894) and Denis's Ateliers d'Art Sacré (established in 1919), establishments set up to nurture a new generation of musicians and artists committed to uniting the religious with the aesthetic experience.

The establishment of a 'classical' aesthetic in Denis's painting has been traced in Denis scholarship to his formative experiences in Italy, from 1898 onwards. But my third chapter, which will take as its starting point his decorative scheme *Terre Latine* (1907) for the home of the opera director Jacques Rouché, seeks to contextualize these formal innovations as part of larger concerns with French identity. A growing respect for Florentine humanism, arising from his visits to Tuscany with the composer Chausson, stimulated an imaginative response in the painter that seems to align itself with a vision of France quite distinct from the *mediterranéisme* of certain nationalist factions. A

[62] 'L'Art est la sanctification de la nature'. Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories*, p. 12.

work such as Denis's *L'Âge d'Or* (1912), on the other hand, supports a reading in terms of the more militant nationalistic strain promoted by Charles Maurras's political movement Action Française. The stylistic 'system of subordination' which underpinned Denis's classicism was, I shall argue, paralleled in the musical endeavours of the so-called *franckistes*.[63] These musicians sought formal organisation and clarity of a kind that was conceptualized as being particularly 'French'. This analysis will help us to understand better the place of Denis's work within the broader context of emergent forms of conservative nationalism in France during this period.

Chapter 4 argues that the choreography of gesture – and its association with the embodied experience of music – was central to Denis's efforts to produce a decorative synthesis, and one of the clearest manifestations of his ideologically-driven return to the classical past as a source for modern expression. I shall discuss his admiration for the corporeal 'harmony' and solidity of the sculptor Aristide Maillol's female nudes, and their influence on his 1908 decorative series *L'Histoire de Psyché*. Denis was also familiar with contemporary theories on the vocabulary of Greek dance, as established in the composer Maurice Emmanuel's *Essai Sur L'Orchestique grecque: étude de ses mouvements d'après les monuments figurés* (1895).[64] This body of scholarship had a profound influence on choreography in early 20th century France, principally through the innovations of the dancer Isadora Duncan. Denis made numerous sketches of

---

[63] 'un système de subordination'. Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome, ou la méthode classique', *Le Spectateur catholique,* IV (July-December 1898), pp. 197-209. Reprinted in *Théories* (pp. 44-56), p. 47; Denis, *Journal I*, October 1904, p. 224.

[64] Maurice Emmanuel, *The Antique Greek Dance after Sculptured and Painted Figures*, trans. H.J. Beauley (London, 1916). First published Paris, 1895.

her poses, many of which found a place in his music-inspired decorative paintings. Of particular significance for this discussion will be his decorations for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1913**.** The series *L'Histoire de la musique* for the theatre's cupola reminds us of the painter's immersion within the country's musical world, depicting as it does a narrative of music's development indebted to d'Indy's precise historical model.

The potentially restorative power of the religious ceremony – and the church interior as a 'sanctuary' – might be understood as comparable to the experience of theatrical (or operatic) performance. This was especially so during periods of heightened cultural anxiety, as in the wake of the First World War. In Chapter 5, I suggest that the spaces of the theatre and the church both have the potential to become sites of *symbolic* meaning, and that Denis's decorative arrangements were central to the generation of that meaning. I shall consider Denis's renovation of his private chapel in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a project begun in 1915 and completed in 1928. He understood the chapel as a place of sanctuary, and it represents his most personal and thorough vision of a complete religious decoration. I shall then investigate Denis's contributions (set designs and costumes) to d'Indy's opera *La Légende de Saint-Christophe* (1920), which was described by several critics as a kind of 'sonic cathedral'. I shall consider the aptness of Denis's artistic language to d'Indy's ideal of a socially cathartic spiritual drama. This chapter also returns to ideas explored in the first chapter about Denis's sensitivity to the powerful expressive capacity of decorative form, considering its particular affective power within religious and secular spaces.

CHAPTER 1

Leading 'French energies towards a new order': the painter as theorist[1]

During the first twenty years of his career, Denis sought to reconcile what might seem inconsistent or even opposing artistic aspirations, and to integrate these with corresponding theories, sometimes contradictory and often esoteric. The evolution of his thought under the pressure of these concerns is recorded in the compilation of articles entitled *Théories 1890-1910: du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* (first published in 1912). In this chapter, I attempt to separate some of the intertwined strands of Denis's thinking from the complexity of *Théories*. These strands of thought reveal continuity between his apparently short-lived 'Symbolist' phase and his later classicism. Although this evolution might well be considered latent in Denis's artistic character, it also involved a response to wider socio-political and cultural `pressures in the Third Republic impinging on French artistic circles. Since *Théories* includes most of his published work from 1890 to 1909, it will be considered in the context of — and as arising from — the agitated flux of philosophical thought, artistic initiatives and discussion, which was characteristic of cultural life at the turn of the century.

Denis's prominence as a theorist has led to his artistic work (besides that produced during his Nabi period) being treated either as secondary material illustrating his theoretical thought, or as something quite unconnected with his writing. It should not be necessary to state that his painting and his words are

[1] 'entraine vers un ordre nouveau [la culture et] les énergies françaises'. Denis, 'Preface', *Théories,* p. v.

intimately connected, often as mutually reinforcing statements of his thinking. But one needs to remain alert to instances of contradiction and ambiguity within his writing. As he openly acknowledged, many of the essays brought together in *Théories* were the fruit of youthful exploration, rather than explications of a fully-formed creed. By finding some consistent lines of thought running through the essays, we can better understand the significance of the principles that moved him.

Following a brief outline of the essays in *Théories* in their cultural context, I shall focus on four relevant themes that run through its thirty-three texts. These were united in their propensity to promote a countervailing force to the dominance of simplistically 'naturalistic' representation. First I shall consider the related notions of 'equivalence' and of subjective and objective 'harmony'. The importance of 'decorative' form, described in terms heavily reliant on musical metaphor, is a second important strand of thought. Thirdly, I emphasize the vague neoplatonism that informed this decorative ideal. I shall consider the relevance of these themes to his decorative series *La Légende de Saint Hubert* (1897), which was painted after the years of intense creative stimulation among the Nabis, and shortly before his 'conversion' to classicism. But, I argue, the work's stylistic idiom already anticipates the painter's espousal of the broadly 'classical', displaying the compatibility of Symbolism with the 'laws' of the classical tradition, which will be my fourth theme. By the end of the chapter, we should have a sense of Denis as an artist driven by a set of visual *instincts* that changed little during his career, and which were not in themselves particularly unusual — either in the sense of being 'reactionary' or

'pioneering'. What is exceptional, however, is the level of self consciousness which Denis brought to the construal of his doctrines and aspirations as belonging to an artistic *standpoint*. His efforts to crystallize a doctrine were all in the service of his self-perception as a herald of a 'modernized' traditionalism.

'[A] confession and a plea': the scope and context of *Théories*[2]

A decade after the publication of *Théories*, Denis published a second compilation of lecture scripts and articles under the title *Nouvelles Théorie*s *sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré, 1914-1921,* which focuses more on the place of religious art in contemporary French society.[3] These texts will be important for later chapters, but can only be fully appreciated in the light of the preceding essay collection. This first compilation testifies to the struggles in his youth to determine his own direction, and the earliest essays of the 1890s betray a certain diffidence. The first two were published under pseudonyms, and any reference to his own work was made in the third person, as if he were reluctant to ally himself too early with the audacious experiments of a generation who had yet to gain firm critical acceptance. By 1895, one finds instances of his quoting his own famous dictum, still at a critical distance: 'The painters which I'm speaking of thought that ... a canvas was essentially *a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order*'.[4] It was only from 1896 onwards that he

[2] [U]ne confession et un plaidoyer'. Ibid. p. 1.
[3] M. Denis, *Nouvelles Théories sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré, 1914-1921* (Paris, 1922).
[4] 'Les peintres dont je parle pensaient … [qu'] un tableau était essentiellement ....' Denis, 'A propos de l'exposition d'A. Séguin', *La Plume,* 141 (1 March 1895), p. 118-9. Reprinted in *Théories,* (pp. 20-4), p. *22.*

openly claimed the phrase as his own, with a slight adjustment to the wording: '... I said, agreeing in this with all true lovers of painting, that a beautiful painting is before all else a flat surface covered with beautiful colours assembled in rhythmic forms'.[5]

In the preface to the 1913 (3rd) edition, Denis acknowledged the gaucheness and contradictory nature of some of the ideas laid out in the collected articles, while boldly claiming that the collection functions to elucidate the origins and progress of an artistic evolution 'parallel to the great doctrinal movement which leads the cultural and French energies towards a new order'.[6] A preface for the 1920 edition (published two years before the publication of *Nouvelles Théories*) is similarly poised between a tone of humility and one of great self-confidence: he referred to the text as 'a kind of classic work', while acknowledging also the weaknesses in the vocabulary of a *jeune critique*.[7] He was also able to admit that his famous motto was misunderstood by many as advancing a doctrine of 'abstraction', and acknowledged that he had created for himself further 'responsibilities' as a direct result of the popularity of *Théories.* One cannot but feel that this burden of self-assumed responsibility, an integral aspect of the artist's psyche, corresponded to his drive to produce public decorative works with moralizing functions.

The movement towards a 'new order' that Denis – in typically declamatory fashion – identified as parallel to a new 'great doctrinal movement' is, of

[5] 'j'ai dit, d'accord en cela avec tous les vrais amateurs de peinture, qu'un beau tableau est avant tout une surface plane recouverte de belles couleurs assemblées dans des formes rythmiques…'. Denis, 'Notes sur la peinture religieuse', *L'Art et la vie,* 54 (October 1896), pp. 644-54. Reprinted in *Théories* (pp. 30-44), p. 42.
[6] 'parallèle à ce grand mouvement doctrinal…' Denis, 'Préface', *Théories*, p. v.
[7] 'à une sorte de livre classique'. 'Préface de la Deuxième Edition', *Théories,* p. viii.

course, a reference to the move (in simplified terms) from Impressionism to 'synthetism' (often used interchangeably with 'Symbolism') and subsequently towards a rigorous classicism. That his personal evolution was bound up with wider cultural currents is reflected in the changing nature of the journals in which these articles were originally published. His first, perhaps best known, article 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' (1890) appeared initially in the 'petite revue' *Art et Critique,* which ran from 1889 to 1892.[8] This short-lived review typified the undogmatic outlook of the many small artistic journals of the time, which championed both Symbolist poetry and realist theatre. But, as Thomas Carter has pointed out, it was in fact so minor that it escaped the attention of the extremely comprehensive *Les petites revues: essai de bibliographie,* published by the Symbolist poet Rémy de Gourmont in 1900.[9] In the 1895 *Théories* essay 'À propos de l'Exposition d'Armand Séguin', Denis lamented the fact that 'literary newcomers' (by which he probably means critics) were not familiar with the 'fanaticism' of the 'small defunct magazines' in circulation in recent years (*Art et Critique* perhaps being one).[10] This essay on Séguin was originally published in *La Plume,* an established bi-monthly review (1889—1914) which

[8] Richard and Belinda Thomson have indicated the 'careerist circumstances' that may have lain behind this first article. He rarely used the term 'néo-traditionnisme' after the article's publication, even referring to the title as 'bizarre' in the *Théories* preface of the 1920 edition– perhaps this was an attempt to distance himself from his self-assured youthful verve. Nevertheless, it might still serve as a useful designation for Denis's ambitions, and is at least an apt term for the project of the Nabis. R. and B. Thomson, 'Maurice Denis, "Définition du néo-traditionnisme" and anti-naturalism (1890)', *The Burlington Magazine*, 15/1309 (April 2012), p. 265.

[9] Thomas Carter, 'Les Petites Revues and the Embattled Periodical: Art et Critique (1889-1892)', *The French Review*, 46/3 (February, 1973), p. 478; Remy de Gourmont, *Les Petites Revues* (Paris, 1900).

[10] 'les nouveaux venus en littérature ignorent le fanatisme des petites revues défuntes'. Denis, 'À Propos de l'exposition d'A. Séguin', *Théories,* p. 22.

championed the Symbolist movement, and became an outlet for those who had originally made their ideas felt within the lively culture associated with the by-then defunct magazines to which Denis referred.[11]

Denis came to recognize that his initial experiments with the Nabis were stimulated by an unstable amalgamation of idealist aesthetics, anti-materialist philosophy, and scientific interests in sensory perception.[12] Indeed, the eclecticism of aesthetic theory was a defining feature of the period. It would be futile to seek to reduce it into clearly-defined schools of thought. The diversity and quantity of small reviews seems to reflect this. It was perhaps the case, as Pamela Genova argues, that 'the framework of the aesthetic review' served as a primary structure to 'lend coherence' to figures from diverse cultural positions.[13] The dissemination of ideas drawn from varied philosophical and aesthetic traditions was advanced through 'interdisciplinary' discussions facilitated in cafés and private salons — and such discussions were themselves encouraged by the publication of commentaries in contemporary journals.[14] The critic Jules Christophe described such a gathering: the regular assembly at the Café le Panier Fleuri in the mid-1880s included the 'psychobiophysicist' Charles Henry, Édouard Dujardin (founder of the *Revue Wagnerienne*), the Symbolist poet and critic Gustave Kahn, and Téodor de Wyzewa (a prominent

---

[11] These included *Le Symboliste* (1886), *La Revue Wagnérienne* (1885-88), *La Vogue* (1886).

[12] Denis, 'Le symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *La Revue des Jeunes,* 18/21 (4 February 1918), pp. 518-37. Reprinted in *Nouvelles Théories*, (pp. 168-93), p. 171-72.

[13] Pamela Genova, 'A Collective Experiment in Literary Journalism: The Case of the *Revue Wagnérienne'* in S. A. Whidden (ed.), *Models of Collaboration in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Farnham, 2013) p. 138. Some journals did not boast clear political affiliations, including *Les Arts de la Vie* (founded by the poet Gabriel Mourey) and *L'Ermitage* (in which Denis only published during the two years that his friend the Symbolist Rémy de Gourmont was at its helm).

[14] For example, *La Revue Wagnérienne* (1885-7) and *La Revue Blanche* (1889-1903).

Wagnerian critic).[15] The significance of the particular nexus of ideas associated with these figures should become clearer in the course of this chapter.

By 1895, Denis believed that he had recognized a set of unifying ambitions among the quite radically contrasting experiments of the Nabis, the neo-Impressionists and even the more 'mystical' Symbolist artists such as Odilon Redon. He wrote in 1895: 'It is necessary to see the triumph of their ideas. The theories are not completely useless and vain; it is necessary to esteem something else than the effort which they show: there is a Truth'.[16] The vague gesture towards neoplatonism suggested by the capitalization of 'Truth', employed with little immediate clarifying context, is typical of the author; and the intellectual depth of such observations is hard to assess. The more such words become used as rhetorical hooks on which to hang rather nebulous theoretical propositions, the more their signification becomes obscured.

Denis's assertion of a commonality of endeavour (the seeking after 'Truth') among these artistic groups stemmed from a general recognition of artistic solidarity against the 'corrupting' influence of 'naturalism'. 'In all decadent times', Denis asserts, 'the visual arts are stripped of their leaves through literary affectations and the negations of naturalism'.[17] He claimed that the wider public were unable to appreciate the 'parallel influence' of the Nabi

---

[15] Jules Christophe, 'Symbolisme', *La Cravache* 395 (16 June 1888), p. 377. Also José Arguëlles, *Charles Henry and the formation of a psychophysical aesthetic* (Chicago, 1972), p. 103.

[16] 'Et puis il convient de se réjouir, en tout cas, de voir triompher leurs idées. Les théories ne sont pas tout à fait inutiles ni vaines; il en faut estimer autre chose que l'effort qu'elles manifestent: il y a une Vérité.' 'Préface de la IXe exposition des peintres, impressionistes et symbolistes chez le Barc de Boutteville' (April-May 1895), pp. 25-9. Reprinted in *Théories*, (pp. 25-9), p. 26.

[17] 'Dans toutes les décadences, les arts plastiques s'effeuillent en affectations littéraires, et en négations naturalistes.' 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 9.

Émile Bernard's mysticism and the scientific research of Seurat'.[18] Both artists, Denis believed, were seeking to counter the purportedly corrosive spirit of Republican 'decadence'. For those who could afford it, a retreat into a small, close-knit artistic circle offered a chance to withdraw from the commercial art world and rediscover a mutual sense of artistic sincerity.[19]

By 1895, Denis was already writing about the Nabis' endeavours as a phenomenon of the past: the gradual erosion of Symbolism's dominance coincided with the shrinking in number of these small independent publications. At the same time, Denis's ever-closer associations with more 'conservative' figures drew him into the ambit of politically right-of-centre journals appearing at the end of the century. Most of his articles written after 1902 were published in *L'Occident*, a conservative organ founded in late 1901 by the poet and political essayist Adrien Mithouard. Denis added a footnote to a 1904 article for its re-publication in *Théories*, which expressed his admiration for 'a review which has resituated the arts and literature within an atmosphere of tradition, and which has already had a profound influence on contemporary thought'.[20] Mithouard promoted a 'specifically Western ideal' in *L'Occident* that accorded with Denis's concern for the preservation of France's Catholic

[18] 'l'influence parallèle.' Ibid., p. 22.

[19] This is how we might understand the formation of the Nabis, brought together in support of Paul Sérusier's 'dream, for the future, of a purified fraternity made up only of convinced artists who are enamoured of goodness and beauty'. Quoted in Frèches-Thory and Terrasse, *The Nabis*, p. 24.

[20] 'une revue qui a replacé les arts et les lettres dans l'atmosphère de la tradition, et qui a déjà exercé une si profonde influence sur la pensée contemporaine.' Denis, 'Un chef-d'œuvre inconnu de la peinture française au XVe siècle', *L'Occident*, 31 (June 1904), pp. 261-6. Reprinted in *Théories*, (pp. 128-32), p. 128.

heritage (to be discussed in later chapters).[21] By 1909, the year in which *L'Occident* published his article 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au classicisme', Denis was firm in his own 'occidentalism', finding support for his belief in French cultural tradition in the rising nationalism of politicians such as Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès. But even in this article – which became his synoptic finale to *Théories* – he reiterated the importance of the experiments of his own generation, claiming that the purpose of his essay was to clarify a natural development from the 'fermentation' of the 1890s towards classicism.[22]

Denis's repeated condemnation of the nineteenth-century obsession with 'literary' painting aligned him as closely with conservative figures associated with *L'Occident* as it did with his Symbolist-orientated youthful companions.[23] We might cite the Catholic critic Ferdinand Brunetière as being among the most prominent opponents of naturalism.[24] In an essay of 1891 entitled 'Le Symbolisme Contemporain', he proclaimed naturalism's bankruptcy and his distaste for Zola's 'unhealthy' infatuation with the urban.[25] Brunetière suggested that if art's value was no longer to imitate nature, perhaps it might emulate the conditions of architecture or music, which had their own internal laws and means that had nothing to do with 'translating the real'.[26] Brunetière's

---

[21] Michael Marlais, *Conservative Echoes in Fin-de-Siècle Parisian Art Criticism* (University Park, PA, 1992), p. 217.

[22] Denis, 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au Classicisme', *L'Occident,* 90 (May 1909), pp. 187-202. Reprinted in *Théories,* (pp. 262-78), p. 263.

[23] By 'literary' Denis seems to have meant what might now be called 'anecdotal' or 'merely illustrative', for him applicable, perhaps, to 'decadent' kinds of history painting or the worst of contemporaneous Salon exhibits.

[24] According to Elton Hocking, *Ferdinand Brunetière: The evolution of a critic* (Madison, 1936), p. 25.

[25] F. Brunetière, 'Le Symbolisme Contemporain', *Revue des deux mondes* 104, (April 1891), p. 683.

[26] Ibid., p. 683.

text was a decisive call for his contemporaries to pursue a visual and poetic language based on the supremacy of the symbol, in place of the naturalists' 'mania for mimesis' (to use Allison Morehead's phrase).[27] The journalist and critic Octave Mirbeau made a comparable assertion on behalf of artists when he stated that 'naturalism is the suppression of art … that the source of all emotion, all beauty, all life, is not on the surface of beings and things, but resides in the depths.'[28] Such a statement could just as well have been made by Denis several decades later, and demonstrates the compatibility with his earlier thought of central principles informing his 'classical' turn. This assertion that the illusory surface of things experienced in the natural world masks a deeper beauty and emotion was a central philosophical thread running through Denis's *Théories*. It is also the declaration of an outlook which, as Brunetière suggested, might draw on music as a source of inspiration.

The search for 'equivalence' and harmony

Numerous allusions to the importance of 'harmony' appear in *Théories*. In the first place this was a matter of attitude rather than of any specific formal features. Central to Symbolist thought was the notion of 'equivalences', understood to involve harmony between the emotion bound up with the artist's vision and the visual form in which it is embodied: 'The symbolist point of view is that we should consider the work of art as the equivalent of a

[27] Allison Morehead, 'Defending Deformation: Maurice Denis's Positivist Modernism', *Art History* 38/5 (2015), p. 3.

[28] 'le naturalisme est la suppression de l'art … que la source de toute émotion, de toute beauté, de toute vie, n'est pas à la surface des êtres et des choses, et qu'elle réside dans les profondeurs …' Octave Mirbeau, 'Paul Gauguin', *L'Écho de Paris,* (16 February 1891), p. 1.

sensation received', wrote Denis.[29] This statement, which implies that the art of painting is to be understood as the embodiment of one's subjective response to nature, might seem entirely compatible with the general understanding of Impressionism.[30] But Denis and fellow 'synthetist' painters and critics, such as Albert Aurier, would claim that Impressionism's subjective vision of nature was limited to the facile registration of a purely sensory response to one's surroundings.[31]

Denis's 'theory of equivalences', and in particular his appreciation of Gauguin's deeply personal transcriptions of experience conformed to the account of painterly *synthétisme* by Albert Aurier in his important essay 'Le *Symbolisme* en peinture — Paul Gauguin' of 1891.[32] In that essay Aurier provided one of the principal 'manifestos' of Symbolism in the plastic arts. He elaborated upon Gauguin's own understanding of the painter's task in exploiting the capabilities of form, line and colour to embody most directly the artist's understanding of his 'subjective' response to sensations experienced in contemplation of the external world. The objective of distilling the experience of nature through exercise of the artist's imagination was expressed in similar terms by Symbolist literary critics some years earlier, usually in terms of 'synthesis'. For Gustave Kahn, who understood the goal of 'synthesis' in terms of the Mallarméan power of the 'symbol', the symbol *was* a 'living and

---

[29] 'Le point de vue symboliste veut que nous considérions l'œuvre d'art comme l'équivalent d'une sensation reçue'. Denis, 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh', *Théories,* p. 275.

[30] See R. Shiff, *Cezanne and the End of Impressionism* (London, 1984).

[31] Émile Bernard also discusses this in [Francis Lepeseur], 'Les maladies actuelles de la peinture', *La Rénovation Esthétique* (September 1905), pp. 257-62.

[32] Aurier, 'Le *Symbolisme* en peinture: Paul Gauguin', *Mercure de France*, (March 1891), pp. 155-65. Denis sets out his admiration for Gauguin in 'L'Influence de Paul Gauguin', *L'Occident*, 23 (October 1903), pp. 160-4. Reprinted in *Théories*, (pp. 166-72).

embellished synthesis' of word, emotion and poetic idea.[33] Maeterlinck described the process generating the symbol, or 'plastic sign', even more clearly: 'the notion of the symbol … goes from the concrete to the abstract, from "what is seen, heard, felt, tasted, and sensed to the evocation of the idea."'[34] Denis credits these poets for transforming the concept of synthesis into that of Symbolism.[35]

There was, for Denis, more to this Symbolist theory of equivalences than the 'instinctive' rendering of feeling on the canvas: 'We were looking for equivalents, but equivalents in beauty!' he exclaimed in 'L'Influence de Paul Gauguin'.[36] Here, the idea of 'objective' harmony comes into play, a balancing force necessary to temper 'subjective' expression. 'We should *represent* [my italics] our emotions though harmonious forms and colours', Denis urged his readers.[37] A harmonious interplay of shapes and tones on the canvas was of paramount importance to Denis, particularly as he learnt to appreciate the 'beauty' of the laws of the classical tradition. Yet even in 1890, his deeply felt dissatisfaction with the nineteenth century cult of the individual (as manifested in naturalism) led him towards the pursuit of what he described as *objectively* pleasing forms. In the context of criticizing Zola's notion of 'artistic

---

[33] 'le symbole était une synthèse vivante et ornée'. Gustave Kahn, *Symbolistes et Décadents* (Paris, 1902) p. 52.

[34] Quoted in Rosina Neginsky (ed.), *Symbolism, Its Origins and Its Consequences,* (Newcastle, 2010), p. 10.

[35] 'Le Synthétisme, qui devint par le contact avec les poètes le Symbolisme'. Denis, 'Cézanne', *L'Occident*, 7/70 (September 1907), pp. 118-133. Reprinted in *Théories,* (pp. 224-61), p. 253.

[36] 'Nous cherchions des équivalents, mais des équivalents en beauté! 'L'Influence de Paul Gauguin', p. 169.

[37] 'reproduire nos émotions et nos rêves en les représentant par des formes et couleurs harmonieuse.' 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh', *Théories,* p. 271.

temperament' in 1890, he suggested that artists must determine the worth of their sensations 'from the standpoint of beauty.'[38]

These words echo the ideals of Paul Signac, who remained a close friend of Denis throughout his career.[39] Signac summed up the neo-Impressionist movement in terms of 'the will to create the beautiful'.[40] As Robyn Roslak has demonstrated, 'aesthetic harmony' was at the centre of their doctrine. Despite their differing priorities, Denis himself was influenced by the neo-Impressionists' frequent usage of the term in relation to their colour theories, and their search for 'objectively' beautiful formal designs, as were his fellow Nabis. In a journal entry from 1890, Denis's fellow Nabi, Vuillard, leant heavily on his understanding of the research that interested Seurat, writing: 'The word harmony means nothing but science, knowledge of relationships and colours … '[41] It is interesting to note that the critic Félix Fénéon, responding to a presentation of works by the neo-Impressionists and the Nabis at the 7th exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants in 1891, wrote of Seurat and Signac as if it were they whose work was most in accord with Denis's famous

[38] 'au point de vue de la beauté.' 'Definition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 2.
[39] Their friendship is clear from the correspondence held in the MMD archives. For example, he writes to Denis in 'Je pense souvent à la belle décoration du Vésinet!'. Signac, letter to Denis (1902). MMD [Ms 12187].
[40] 'la volonté de créer du beau'. Quoted in Anne Dymond, 'A Politicized Pastoral: Signac and the Cultural Geography of Mediterranean France', *The Art Bulletin,* 85/2 (June 2003), p. 364.
[41] Édouard Vuillard, Journal, 31 August 1890, quoted in Guy Cogeval, *Vuillard: Post-Impressionist Master* (New Haven CT, 2003), p. 25. Émile Bernard underlines the centrality of the concept of 'harmony' in the plastic arts when he remarks: 'Harmony is the gift of analogy, of affinity, of penetration; it is, in a word, the gift of vision'. Quoted in Naomi Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom: The Thought and Art of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin* (London, 1998), p. 25.

quasi-formalist statement about painting being 'essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order'.[42]

In relation to harmony, analogies with music abound in visual rhetoric and are by no means unique to this period.[43] Straightforward parallels can be drawn between the elements of music and those of painting. Tones in painting are higher or lower according to luminosity rather as musical tones are higher or lower according to pitch. The *colour* of a 'tone' in painting has an equivalent in the timbre of an instrument sounding a musical tone, often, in fact, referred to as 'colour'. The virtual movement of a line or visual pathway in a painting may be considered equivalent to the equally virtual movement of a melody. We might think of a comment made by John Ruskin (whose influence was felt in France during the latter part of the 19th century): 'the arrangement of colours and lines is an art analogous to the composition of music'.[44]

Such observations took on a level of earnestness among painters in Denis's circle, in large part because of the neo-Impressionists' endeavours. Denis acknowledged their indebtedness to the psycho-physiological research of the theorist Charles Henry.[45] Henry, the 'leading French spokesman' for 'late-

---

[42] 'Ces peintres réalisent la definition établie par Pierre-Louis Denis lui-même : 'Un tableau …'. Fénéon, 'Artistes Indépendants', *Le Chat Noir,* 479 (21 March 1891) p.1716.

[43] Bellori, de Piles, Diderot, Le Bron and Baudelaire are just a few examples. See George Mras, 'Ut Pictura Musica: A Study of Delacroix's Paragone', *The Art Bulletin,* 45/ 3 (September, 1963), p. 269.

[44] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* vol.II (New York, 1873). Accessed online, Hathi Trust Digital Library, 2020 version, p. 179. First published in 1853. A French translation by Mathilde Crémieux was published in 1906. On Ruskin's influence on French artistic culture, see Richard Macksey, 'Proust on the Margins of Ruskin', in J.D. Hunt and F.M. Holland (eds), *The Ruskin Polygon,* (Manchester, 1982), pp. 172-91. One might think also of Delacroix, whose references to 'harmony' abound in his journals. 'Harmony of line, of effect, and of colour is also a quality, or a union of the most precious qualities,' he wrote in 1851. Eugène Delacroix, *The journal of Eugène Delacroix* trans. Walter Pach (New York, 1980), p. 252.

[45] Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 3.

nineteenth-century scientific transcendentalism', understood aesthetics in terms of 'the seeking out and implementation of those rhythms which will enhance life and expand consciousness', and described both harmony and rhythm as 'a fundamental life function'.[46] In his *Introduction to a Scientific Aesthetics,* he posited a complex play of associations between sound, colour and line principally using a numerical method which emphasized a Pythagorean basis for artistic construction.[47] 'Rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace', wrote Plato in *The Republic.*[48] In his identification of artistic 'laws', Henry drew upon Pythagorean number theory which accounted for music's arithmetic proportions (and thus, according to Plato, aligned it with the cosmic spheres). The affective properties of music, as discussed by the ancient Greeks, had fascinated artists and musicians for centuries. (Perhaps the most prominent endeavour to align the two art forms in terms of Greek musical theory was made by Poussin).[49]

Charles Henry's vague formulations held sway over the neo-Impressionists, and also influenced the aesthetic outlook of the Synthetists with their interest in relating the laws of sensation to the appreciation of art. According to Sven

---

[46] Joshua Taylor in *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 532; quoted in Arguëlles, *Charles Henry*, p. 8.

[47] Charles Henry, 'Introduction to a Scientific Aesthetics', *Art in Translation,* 10/2, p. 202. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17561310.2018.1480447. Translated by Naomi Polonsky. First published as 'Introduction à une esthétique scientifique,' *La Revue contemporaine* (2 August 1885), pp. 441–69,

[48] Quoted in Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom*, p. 34.

[49] Poussin attempted to directly associate pictorial subject, structure and gesture with the Renaissance theory of modes, as set out by the Italian sixteenth-century musical theorist Gioseffo Zarlino. Hector Reyes, 'The Rhetorical Frame of Poussin's Theory of the Modes', *Intellectual History Review* 19 (2009), pp. 287–302.

Loevgren, the content of Gauguin's letters to Émile Schuffenecker in 1885 read like an 'echo' of Henry's lectures.[50] Henry also strongly influenced Sérusier's search for an empirical basis for the 'correspondences' between the sensual and the spiritual'.[51] Although Denis ultimately came to find fault with Seurat's over-reliance on 'pseudo-science', he emphatically defended the principle of a rational, methodical approach.[52] In a 1907 appraisal of the work of the neo-Impressionist Henri-Edmond Cross, Denis noted the advantage that the painter had over other 'young innovators' because of his considerable grasp of science, which led him to 'imagine equivalent harmonies, and to establish, through the logic of his means, the Style of pure colour.'[53] This ambivalence towards the role that 'science' had to play within painting is perhaps explained by a remark made in the essay 'Le Soleil' (1906): 'Seurat and Signac's efforts prepared an evolution by scientifically fixing principles and theory. They were reformers who saved orthodoxy.'[54] In other words, it was a certain *ésprit* that Denis admired in the neo-Impressionists: faithfulness to a set of doctrines that might temper any tendency towards individualistic indulgence. This conviction led

---

[50] S. Loevgren, *The Genesis of Modernism: Seurat, Gauguin, Van Gogh & French Symbolism in the 1880's,* rev. edn (New York, 1983), p. 93.

[51] See Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 32.

[52] 'des théories pseudo-scientifiques'. Denis, 'La peinture', *L'Hermitage,* 5 (15 May 1905), pp. 31-20. Reprinted as 'La réaction nationaliste', *Théories* (pp.187-98), p. 196. The following year, he remarked on 'une douceur de nuances incomparables, supérieurement harmonisés, composés selon des rythmes parfaits dans le plus strict équilibre.' Denis, 'La peinture', *L'Hermitage,* 12 (15 December 1906), pp. 321-6, Reprinted as 'Le Soleil', *Théories,* (pp. 218-24), p. 219.

[53] 'des harmonies équivalentes, et d'instituer, avec la logique de ses moyens, le Style de la couleur pure.' 'Préface à l'exposition Henri-Edmond Cross', Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 22 April-8 May, 1907. Reprinted as 'Henri-Edmond Cross', *Théories* (pp.157-9), p. 159.

[54] 'L'effort de Seurat et de Signac fut donc d'en préparer l'évolution en fixant scientifiquement les principes et la théorie. Ce furent des réformateurs qui sauvaient l'orthodoxie'. 'Le Soleil', *Théories,* p. 219.

him to claim that the synthetists were entirely without metaphysics, relying instead on 'the most strictly scientific of efforts,' through deference 'to the laws of harmony that ruled the relationships between colours, forms and lines.'[55]

Applicable both to the relationships between colours on the canvas and to those between musical tones, 'harmony' was perhaps the most natural concept to exercise in seeking to understand the affinity between the two art forms. Denis particularly admired the exactitude with which neo-Impressionists such as Cross employed visual formulations analogous to musical harmony. He understood this to be compatible in a general sense with the aspirations of the Nabis.[56] In the paintings of Cross he found 'clean dissonance, around which everything sings and vibrates in the warmest harmonies'.[57] It is clear that the predilection for thinking and writing about art in musical terms had a decisive influence on his painting. In his memoir *Henry Lerolle et ses amis* he recalls the importance attached to the synthesis of emotional expression and the decorative arrangement of line and colour*:* 'The canvas tended to become music and a state of the soul', he claimed, before stating that the entire generation of the 1890s owed its innovations to such ideas, as advanced by theorists including Henry.[58]

---

[55] 'la tentative d'art la plus strictement scientifique.' 'Les Arts à Rome ou la méthode classique', *Théories,* p. 51; 'soumettre aux lois d'harmonie qui régissent les rapports des couleurs, les agencements des lignes'. 'Notes sur la Peinture Religieuse', *Théories,* p. 33.

[56] James Kearns notes that the 'scientific' symbolism that formed the basis for Seurat's neo-Impressionism was also present in the writings of Aurier: 'Although Aurier attacked the 'sterility' of Seurat's system, he nevertheless saw it as confirmation of his own Neoplatonist theory of art'. James Kearns, *Symbolist Landscapes, The Place of Painting in the Poetry and Criticism of Mallarmé and His Circle* (London, 1989), p. 50.

[57] 'nette dissonance, autour de quoi tout chante et tout vibre dans les plus chaudes harmonies.' 'Henri-Edmond Cross', *Théories,* p. 157.

[58] 'Le tableau tendait à devenir une musique et un état d'âme.' Denis, *Lerolle et ses amis*, p. 20.

The reliance on musical analogies in writing of this time was recognized by Édouard Dujardin (co-founder of *La Revue wagnérienne*). In an article for *La Mercure* in 1908, he described the end of the nineteenth century as being a time haunted by 'musical preoccupations': 'I would almost say that one lived at this time in a musical atmosphere'.[59] The enthrallment at this time to the ideal of unity between the arts, as promoted by the cult of French 'Wagnerism', is well understood, and Denis's social involvement in a cultural milieu responsive to such thought has been explored by Vaughan and Grivel.[60] *Wagnérisme* was strengthened by the rather vague notions inspired by Charles Baudelaire's theories of artistic synthesis, famously expressed in his sonnet 'Correspondances', published in 1857.[61] Baudelaire, who has been much acclaimed for inspiring an interest in 'synaesthesia', stated, in the context of a discussion about Wagner's *Tannhaüser* and its reception in Paris, that it would be truly surprising were sound *not* to suggest colour' or that 'colours *did not* evoke the idea of a melody'.[62] It seems clear that the vogue for emphasizing a *rapprochement* between music and art among Denis's peers owed something to Baudelaire.[63] Gauguin's frequent comparisons between his own 'arrangements

---

[59] 'Je dirais presque qu'on y vivait dans une atmosphère musicale.' Édouard Dujardin, 'Le Mouvement Symboliste et la musique', *Le Mercure de France,* 72 (March, 1908), p. 7.

[60] Studies in convergences between art and music (for example by Peter Vergo and Simon Shaw-Miller) have typically focused on *wagnérisme* at the turn of the 20th century.

[61] Baudelaire, 'Correspondances' in *Fleurs du mal* (Paris, 1857). Vaughan summarizes Baudelaire's relevance to the Symbolist generation, while locating Baudelaire's ideas in the context of Eugène Delacroix's notion of the 'music of the canvas'.'Maurice Denis and the Sense of Music', p. 38.

[62] 'ce qui serait vraiment suprenant, c'est que le son *ne pût pas* suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs *ne pussent pas* donner l'idée d'une mélodie'. Charles Baudelaire, *Richard Wagner et Tannhauser à Paris* (Paris, 1861), p. 14.

[63] Once again, Delacroix might be included here as an important precursor. Denis quotes from Delacroix's journal at times during *Théories,* for example in 'Notes sur la Peinture Religieuse', p. 35.

of colours and lines' and music, are well known.[64] But the work of Denis and the synthetists, while being inspired by an aspiration to 'musicality' of form, displays an awareness of the intrinsic qualities – and limits – of paint. Baudelairean 'synaesthetic' correspondences should not therefore be understood as being equivalent to Denis's synthetist doctrine of 'correspondences', concerned as the latter was with the emotional resonance of the visual. 'Nouveau! Mais pas de tout!' exclaimed Gauguin in response to a journalist's comment on the novelty of thinking 'musically' about painting.[65] For Gauguin (and Denis), the 'mysterious affinities' between an artist's thoughts and the formal arrangements of line (a formulation which prompted musical analogies) was inherent to the artistic process. What seemed to be novel, however, was their willingness to pursue this natural condition of painting to expressive extremes. No doubt this was encouraged by particularly close affiliations with musicians.

It was at Lerolle's music-centred soirées that Denis met the composer Vincent d'Indy, who was to become a close ally of his, and whose significance will become apparent in later chapters. D'Indy was acutely sensitive to analogies between music and art. In his treatise *Cours de Composition Musicale* D'Indy himself made an explicit analogy between tonal expression in music and painting, qualifying his ideas with a phrase borrowed from Denis:

> [Instrumentation] is, in short, the application to music of the painters' 'Art of Values'. A great contemporary artist [Denis] said that 'there are two kinds of values: the relationships of tone or light, and the relations

[64] See his interview with Eugène Tardieu, 'M. Paul Gauguin', *Echo de Paris*, 4003 (13 May 1895), p. 2.
[65] 'affinités mystérieuses'. Ibid.

> of hues or colours'. The musician can say with just as much reason that there are two kinds of values in music: the relations of tone or light ... and the timbre ratios (simple or composite) which correspond to the colours and are the proper object of the Instrumentation.[66]

In a letter to d'Indy's daughter (to whom Denis became particularly close) dated 1906, Denis intimated his dissatisfaction with his own manipulation of colour: having succumbed to 'the fantasies of impressionism and the most exasperated chromaticism', he regretted having allowed his work to become 'strongly tainted with *debussysme*.'[67] The term 'Debussysme' was used frequently in the years up until 1920s by critics to reinforce a vastly oversimplified characterization of Debussy's music as lacking in form and structure.[68] The term pointed to the composer's predilection for harmonic innovations (such as whole-tone scales and parallel progressions), novel orchestral techniques (harp glissandi and muted brass), which contributed to the production of an indistinct, hazy sound world – analogous, it was held, to the apparently imprecise daubs of the Impressionists.[69] The music critic Louis

---

[66] '[Instrumentation], en définitive, l'application à la Musique de « l'Art des Valeurs » des peintres. Un grand artiste contemporain a dit qu' « il y a deux sortes de valeurs: les rapports de ton ou de lumière, et les rapports de teintes ou de couleurs » Le musicien peut dire avec tout autant de raison qu'il y a pareillement en Musique deux sortes de valeurs: les rapports de ton ou de lumière … et les rapports de timbres (simples ou composites) qui correspondent aux couleurs et font l'objet propre de l'Instrumentation.' Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de Composition Musicale,* vol. II part II, Auguste Serieyx (ed.) (Paris, 1933), p. 49. Published in three volumes, his *Cours* were a vast compendium of musical analysis and historical studies based on his lectures and teachings. Henceforth referred to as *Cours.*

[67] 'aux fantaisies de l'impressionnisme et du chromatisme le plus exaspéré'. 'elles sont fort entachées de debussysme'. Denis, letter to Berthe de la Laurencie, (25 November 1906). MMD [Ms 4638].

[68] Although hailed as the leader of a new musical school, Debussy was extremely reluctant to consider himself as such. See Deidre Donnellon, 'Debussy as musician and critic', in J. Cross and S. Trezise (eds), *Cambridge Companion to Debussy* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 43-61.

[69] Many composers who admired Debussy made a distinction between Debussy and *debussyisme,* admiring the composer. See Marianne Wheeldon, 'Anti-Debussyism and the

Laloy, in particular, was fond of the term *debussysme*, and of making analogies with the visual arts.[70] In his 1910 article 'Claude Debussy et le debussysme', he wrote: 'It [Debussy's music] is a music that obeys no precepts, only the laws of sensation: a purely auditory music, as Impressionist painting is entirely visual.'[71] Denis was not, in fact, averse to Debussy's music. In 1923, he gave a speech at the unveiling of a commemorative plaque at Debussy's birth place (Saint-Germain-en-Laye), in which he described the composer as 'the most wonderful representative of the … Symbolist aesthetic'.[72] Clearly the artist's involvement in 'interdisciplinary' circles encouraged the use of the term *debussysme* as metaphorical 'shorthand' for an indistinct suggestiveness comparable to Symbolist poetry. Indeed, use of the term made an implicit contrast with what was sometimes referred to as *dindysme*, characterized by systematic harmonic organization and a desire to prioritize formulas of the classical tradition of Haydn and Beethoven (as we shall see in Chapter 3).[73]

Formation of French Neoclassicism', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 70/2 (2017), pp. 433–74.

[70] See Alexandra Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics: Sound, Affect, and the Experience of Modernism* (Oxford, 2019), p. 260.

[71] 'C'est une musique qui n'obéit à nul précepte, mais aux seules lois de la sensation : une musique purement auditive, comme la peinture impressioniste est toute visuelle'. Louis Laloy, 'Claude Debussy et le debussysme', *S.I.M*, 6/8-9 (August-September 1910), p. 510.

[72] 'le plus glorieux représentant de … l'esthétique symbolistes'. 'Quoted in Anne Dayez (ed.), *Maurice Denis*, exhib. cat., Orangerie des Tuileries 3 June-31 August 1971 (Paris: Ministère d'État. Affaires culturelles, 1970), p. 87.

[73] For example, see André Coeuroy, 'La Musique: bilan de saison et d'époque', *La Revue Universelle* (15 September 1925), p. 754.

'[T]he right to lyricism': decoration and arabesque[74]

An insistence on musical analogies was inextricable, in Denis's mind, from the inherently decorative nature of painting. '[T]he young', he claimed in 1895, 'were especially concerned to define the laws of decoration and the laws of expression'.[75] It has often been proposed that expressiveness and decorativeness are intrinsically connected. A well-known example is a passage in Roger Fry's introduction to his English translation of Denis's 1907 essay, 'Cézanne'. Fry sums up what he recognized as a 'new courage to attempt in painting that direct expression of imagined states of consciousness which has for long been relegated to music and poetry' – courage which was manifested in a 'new conception of art, in which the decorative elements preponderate at the expense of the representative'.[76] There is an obvious fallacy in this observation: the decorative was not harnessed at the 'expense' of representation, but rather as a means of expressing the artist's intuitive response to that which was represented. For the Nabis and their like-minded peers, subject matter never ceased to be of the utmost importance. That this was pre-eminently true of Denis is confirmed by his continual return to specific themes that held symbolic importance for him. Denis was not advocating non-representational art. He made clear his views on the dangers of succumbing to 'abstraction' years later in a disparaging commentary on Matisse and his

[74] 'il nous donnait droit au lyrisme'. Denis, 'L'Influence de Paul Gauguin', *Théories,* p. 169.
[75] 'les jeunes … se préoccupèrent tout spécialement de définir les lois du décor et les lois de l'expression'. 'À propos de l'exposition d'Armand Séguin', *Théories*, p. 22.
[76] 'Introductory Note to Maurice Denis's "Cézanne"', reprinted in Christopher Reed (ed.), *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago, 1996), p. 76). First published 1910.

'artificiality' in 1905.[77] But Fry's main point, that these artists understood there to be a direct association between inner states of mind and a self-consciously decorative mode of expression, was at the heart of the Nabi doctrine and had wider implications for the ways in which many artists, including Denis, understood the parallel with music.

Denis insisted on the need for the 'eternal laws' of decoration (*déformation objective*) to stabilize the natural influence of the artist's temperament (*déformation subjective*). By 'deformation', Denis meant not only an 'expressive device of distortion', but, I would argue, also a particular quality of decorativeness.[78] For example, Denis encourages the artist to state 'until the point of deformation' the curvature of a beautiful shoulder, exaggerating the initial impressions when 'translating them plastically'.[79] This instruction could be understood also as a practical example of the painterly 'lyricism' that Gauguin encouraged, as a means of liberating the Nabis from the enslavement to naturalism. An equilibrium, or continual flux, between subjective and objective forces was, according to Denis, the only natural means for the transposition of sensations (subjective) into 'Beauty' (objective).[80]

We might be reminded of Brunetière's observation that, if art was no longer to imitate nature, it should imitate architecture or music, art forms which have

---

[77] Denis, 'Le peinture', *L'Hermitage,* 11, (15 November 1905), pp. 309-19. Reprinted as 'De Gauguin, de Whistler et de l'excès de Théories', in *Théories,* (pp.199-210), p. 207. On Denis's response to Matisse, see Alastair Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Oxford, 2004).

[78] Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism,* p. 37.

[79] 'affirmer jusqu'à la déformation la courbure d'une belle épaule'. 'L'Influence de Gauguin', *Théories,* p. 164.

[80] 'Ce fut leur vertu: ils transposaient leurs sensations en Beauté'. 'À propos de l'exposition d'A. Séguin', *Théories,* p. 23.

their own internal laws.[81] In a similar vein, Denis claimed that 'even the frieze of the Parthenon — even, and most of all, a great sonata by Beethoven' has value in terms of the expressive capacities of their lines. His observation, made in 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', that the 'blue arabesques' of the *Mona Lisa* 'accompany an insistent and caressing rhythm, an orange motif, like the seduction of violins in the *Tannhaüser* Overture', is distinctly Baudelairean.[82] Although such language may appear fanciful in itself, we might note the significance of the term 'arabesque' in Denis's thought. More than a decade after this remark the artist comments on Whistler's lack of concern for formal exactitude, appealing instead to Gauguin's manipulation of 'the power of the arabesque', which had the capacity to 'restore the worship of drawing.'[83] Whistler is sometimes thought of as the 'musical' painter *par excellence* of this period, largely because of the musical titles of his paintings — but Denis's adverse criticism was elicited by the painter's 'sluggish and inexpressive physiognomies'.[84]

Denis frequently exploited what he believed to be the intrinsically expressive capacity of the curvilinear contour in his early paintings — for example *Arabesque poétique* (1892) **[Figure 8]**, commissioned for the home of his close friend the painter Henri Lerolle. It continued to be a prominent stylistic feature in his later decorative works, as Chapter 4 will show. For Aurier the

---

[81] Hocking, *Ferdinand Brunetière*, p. 25.

[82] 'Les arabesques bleues … accompagnement d'un rythme envahissant et caresseur, du motif orangé, comme la séduction des violons dans l'ouverture de Tannhaûser.' 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories*, p. 13.

[83] 'la puissance de l'arabesque, y restaurer le culte du Dessin'. 'De Gauguin, de Whistler', *Théories*, p. 201.

[84] 'ces physionomies veules et inexpressives.' Ibid.

arabesque form was itself a symbol, and the artist who knew how to use it could become, he claimed, 'an algebraist of Ideas ... [whose] ideographic writing [is] reminiscent of the hieroglyphic texts of the obelisks of Ancient Egypt.'[85] Denis's interest in the primacy of rhythmic gestures and the notion of the 'arabesque' was in keeping with the language of art criticism of this time.[86] Fénéon's paean to Paul Signac, for example in *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui* is permeated by references to Signac's use of the 'arabesque', together with a detailed discussion of his 'mélange optique'.[87] In 1901 Debussy elaborated upon his lifelong fascination with the musical arabesque in an article for *La Revue Blanche,* noting that the 'Primitive' composers (Palestrina, Vittoria, Orlando di Lasso), made extensive use of the 'divine' arabesque — echoing very closely Denis's point, articulated numerous times, that the arabesque was the root of all art.[88]

A persuasive analogy can be made between the path of the 'arabesque' within a painting, and the temporal unfolding of a melodic line. Theodor Adorno challenges the view that there is a fundamental disparity between painting and music in respect of the intrinsically 'spatial' characteristic of the one, and the intrinsic 'temporality' of the other. He argues for there being a kind of temporality in painting, since we can never comprehend all parts or

---

[85] Aurier, 'Le *Symbolisme* en peinture', as quoted in Bhogal, *Details of Consequence*, p. 73.
[86] B. & R. Thomson, 'Maurice Denis's "Définition du néo-traditionnisme"', p. 263.
[87] Félix Féneon, 'Signac', *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui,* 373 (1890). Reprinted in J.U. Halperin, (ed.), *Félix Fénéon, Œuvres plus que complètes*, vol II (Geneva, 1970), pp, 174-179.
[88] Claude Debussy, 'Compte-rendu du Concert Colonne du vendredi saint', *La Revue blanche* (1 May 1901). Reprinted in Claude Debussy, *Monsieur croche et autres écrits* (Paris, 1987), pp. 34-5.

aspects of a work simultaneously.[89] This is all the more evident in the case of large-scale decorative artworks where one is required to confront the depicted scene in a physically more active way. The arabesque itself could be understood as embodied movement, experienced in 'virtual' time quite distinct from the clock time that governs musical performance. Musical movement can obviously only be 'virtual' in nature, and it is in the 'virtual' space of the imagination that linear and melodic forces, rises and falls, and rhythms are experienced. According to Denis, the gestural initiative of the arabesque was the first step towards artistic creation – the first decorative *déformation* brought forth by the artist's emotional response to the world. Denis's proclamation: 'in the beginning, the pure arabesque, as little *trompe-l'oeil* as possible', prefigured Alois Riegl's more widely-known appreciation of the 'arabesque' as foundational to the language of architectural decoration.[90]

In her study of the 'arabesque', Bhogal refers to the 'oscillation between meaning and non-meaning' that characterizes its painterly usage.[91] She alludes, presumably, to the tendency among the synthetists to consider colour harmony and line as *semi*-autonomously emotionally expressive. This idea has its own history and was of central importance in the work of Charles Henry, as we have seen. Henry was particularly interested in the music critic Edouard Hanslick's conception of the arabesque, and quoted the following passage as an example of the independently expressive capacity of music: 'The way in which

---

[89] Theodor Ardono and Susan Gillespie, 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting', *The Musical Quarterly*, 79/1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 66-79.

[90] See Alois Riegl, *Problems of style: foundations for a history of ornament,* ed. D. Castriota (Princeton, NJ, 2018). First published 1893; 'A l'origine, l'arabesque pure, aussi peu trompe-l'œil que possible.' Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 7.

[91] Bhogal, *Details of Consequence,* p. 76.

music is able to offer beautiful forms without taking a fixed sentiment as its subject finds an analogy and striking example in a certain branch of ornamental sculpture: the arabesque.'[92] 'The more complex the curves, the more beautiful they are', wrote Henry, following Hanslick.[93] Hanslick's influential text *On the Beautiful in Music* promoted a kind of Romantic musical idealism which encouraged the idea that music should retain its 'absoluteness' through freedom from the burden of extra-musical meaning, its beauty being derivable only from its internal formation of 'tonally moving forms'.[94] This was the aesthetic paradigm of nineteenth-century German musical culture, and would have been familiar to the French in translation (Hanslick's text was translated as *Du Beau dans La Musique* by Charles Bannelier in 1877.) Marsha Morton rightly points out that, despite Hanslick's insistence on the medium-specificity of musical construction, his writing is replete with persuasive metaphors that associate music with painting.[95] Hanslick's proposition that music derives its beauty from very particular relationships between its constituent parts, without recourse to an external referent, was of obvious appeal to those artists most committed to painting's decorative aspect and most resistant to reducing it to its mimetic aspect, as narrowly understood.

Denis's involvement in a distinctly musical milieu during the 1890s led him to engage directly with the potentialities of the musical arabesque, through

---

[92] Quoted in Henry, 'Introduction to a Scientific Aesthetics', p. 213.
[93] Quoted in Arguëlles, *Charles Henry,* p. 91.
[94] Quoted in Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington, IN, 2005), p. 26. See Edouard Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music* trans. Gustav Cohen, ed. M. Weitz (Indianapolis, 1957). First published in German 1854 and in English 1891.
[95] See Marsha L. Morton, '"From the Other Side": An Introduction', in M. Morton and P. Schmunk (eds), *The arts entwined: music and painting in the nineteenth century* (London, 2000), p.10.

commissions to decorate musical scores.[96] It was his close friend Bonnard, however, who earned himself the title of 'inventor of beautiful arabesques'.[97] Bonnard's modest design for his brother-in-law Claude Terrasse's *Minuet* (1892) demonstrates the manipulation of sinuous arabesques to convey movement and gesture **[Figure 9]**. The distortion of the dancers' limbs suggest a multiplicity of gestural movements, and the triplication of a dancing pair, providing a network of receding visual echoes, evokes the triple-time metre of the minuet dance. Unfortunately for Bonnard, the design was rejected by Terrasse's publisher, but was instead bought by Roger Marx to illustrate an article published in *La Revue Encyclopedique*, entitled 'Les Symbolistes', by Aurier himself. Here Aurier consolidated his understanding of synthetist ideals: 'With symbol and synthesis as fundamental dogmas, that is to say the expression of ideas and the aesthetic and logical simplification of forms, it is at an art of decoration, at an art of monumental frescoes, rather than at easel painting, that the artists of this school should have arrived if they had had the material possibility of doing so.'[98] It was to 'monumental' decorations that Denis would increasingly turn, but not before far smaller-scale experimentations with curvilinear forms.

---

[96] See Mary Chapin, 'Music *chez soi'*, in M.W. Chapin and H.L. Brown (eds), *Private Lives: Home and Family in the Art of the Nabis* (New Haven and London, 2021), pp. 143-187.

[97] Francis Jourdain named him this. Quoted in Clément Dessy, 'Staging and Writing the Arabesque: The Aesthetics of Line in Nabi Painting and Avant-Garde Theatre in the Late Nineteenth Century', in Claire Moran (ed.), *The Art of Theatre: Word, Image and Performance in France and Belgium, c. 1830-1910* (Oxford, 2013), p. 310.

[98] 'Avec, comme dogmes fondamentaux, le symbole et la synthèse, c'est-à-dire l'expression des idées et la simplification esthétique et logique des formes, c'est à un art de décoration, à un art de fresques monumentales, plutôt qu'à la peinture de chevalet, que devaient, en effet, aboutir, s'ils en eussent eu la possibilité matérielle, les artistes de cette école'. Aurier, 'Les Symbolistes', *Revue Encyclopedique,* 2/1(1 April 1892), p. 484.

In the background of an early painting by Denis, *Marthe au Piano ou Le menuet de la Princesse Maleine* (1891), a score featuring Denis's frontispiece to a composition based on Maeterlinck's play *La Princesse Maleine* bears witness to Denis's collaboration with the composer Pierre Hermant **[Figure 10]**.[99] Considered an honorary member of the Nabis, Hermant has been largely forgotten today, but was influential as a composer and as a music critic for *La Revue Blanche*.[100] The physical score for Hermant's minuet is lost today, but the frontispiece was among several that Denis designed for the composer's work. *Marthe au Piano,* a testament to the artist's fondness for Marthe Meurier (they married in 1893) and to her own musical prowess, demonstrates particularly well the decorative 'lyrical' aesthetic fostered by the Nabis and promoted within the criticism of their most enthusiastic supporter, Aurier. The curved delineations of Marthe's apron are echoed by the sinuous pathway in the illustration on the frontispiece resting behind her; the letter 'M', demarcated in red, is repeated in the motif of the two figures on the upper left-hand side of the score. The ribbon of the path seems to correspond to the rippling melodic line emerging from the piano. The female figure with the outstretched arms on the score illustration appears to be reaching towards the space of the domestic setting, as if to signify the spread of the piano's resonance into the intimate surroundings. Denis also designed the cover sheet for André Rossignol's setting of the poem *Apparition* (1894) by Mallarmé **[Figure 11]**. It has a fluid,

[99] The composer's letters to Denis are housed in the MMD. E.g. Hermant, letter to Denis (1899), MMD [Ms 5512], in which he writes 'ce sera certainement grâce à vous que je serai joué … à la nationale'.

[100] According to Vaughan, 'Maurice Denis and the Sense of Music', p 41. Hermant attended the Lycée Concordet with Denis, along with Vuillard, Roussel and Thadée Natanson.

rhythmical construction that prioritizes delicate gesture and the surface echoing of forms over convincing structure. The depiction of a wraith-like woman in flowing white garbs situated within the countryside relates to the subject of Mallarmé's poem, which describes the vision, crystallized in the writer's memory, of a first encounter with a lover. (Mallarmé had written it with his fiancée Marie in mind.) The presence of smaller angelic figures is also a feature of Denis's better-known cover-sheet illustration, for Debussy's *La Damoiselle élue,* which exemplifies what the German art critic, Julius Maier-Graefe, once described as Denis's 'ornamental style ... combined with ... grace, the harmony of which produced the purest music' **[Figure 12]**.[101]

A 'singulier mélange' of Plotinus and Schopenhauer[102]

Denis's model of 'subjective' and 'objective' *déformation* might seem basic and almost unrefined. But perhaps its significance becomes clearer when we understand it as in some measure a response to the rich context of theoretical speculation surrounding him, such as those by Henry, as roughly sketched above. But other philosophical ideas were 'in the air'. Denis was undoubtedly encouraged in his pursuit of the decorative by Aurier, whose championing of Gauguin informed his own admiration of Denis. No wonder, Denis writes, that

[101] Quoted by Jenny Anger, 'Modernism at Home', in Deborah Johnson, and David Ogawa (eds.), *Seeing and Beyond: Essays on Eighteenth- to Twenty-first Century Art in Honour of Kermit S. Champa* (New York, 2005), p. 226. *La Damoiselle élue* was performed in 1894 in Brussels within an exhibition of works by Renoir, Gauguin, Sisley, Pissarro, Signac and Denis in Brussels.

[102] 'Nous faisions un singulier mélange de Plotin, d'Edgar Poe, de Baudelaire et de Schopenhauer'. Denis, 'Le symbolisme et l'Art religieux moderne', *Nouvelles Théories,* p. 172.

Aurier 'called insistently for the return of' the wall surface for Gauguin's use.[103] 'Decoration' was a natural result of the artist's seeking 'plastic' equivalents to his own subjective understanding of nature ('decorative art properly told ... is nothing other than a manifestation of art that is at once subjective, synthetic, symbolist and ideational [*idéiste*]', Aurier writes).[104] Denis's exalting of religious Byzantine art as truly 'Symbolist' was based largely on an appreciation of its intrinsically decorative qualities: a certain depth of emotion could be derived from 'the sufficiency of … lines and colours to explain themselves as being beautiful only'.[105] The implication of there being a profundity to the decorative surface that is resonant, or symbolic of, some deeper universal reality is a notion that aligns itself naturally with the idea of aesthetic transcendence through the use of symbolic form derived from the neoplatonic metaphysics of the 'Idea'. Mark Cheetham rightly points out that Aurier's invoking of the Platonic Idea was a 'reflection, not a source, of pervasive neoplatonic thinking in literary and artistic circles' – circles in which Denis was deeply involved, partly through his friendship with Sérusier.[106]

---

[103] 'celui pour qui Aurier réclamait autrefois et si impérieusement, des murs!' 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh', *Théories,* p. 270.

[104] 'la peinture décorative proprement dite … n'est rien d'autre qu'une manifestation d'art à la fois subjectif, synthétique, symboliste et idéiste' Aurier, 'Le *Symbolisme* en Peinture', *Œuvres Posthumes,* p. 216.

[105] Denis discussed Byzantine art in 'Notes sur la Peinture Religieuse', *Théories,* p. 37; 'la profondeur de notre émotion vient de la suffisance de ces lignes et de ces couleurs à s'expliquer elles-mêmes, comme seulement belles et divines de beauté.' 'Definition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 9.

[106] Mark Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 13.

Denis gave particular credit to Sérusier for the circulation of neoplatonic thoughts ('beauty is the visible form of truth').[107] The area of Platonic thought in which the 'Idea' is central proposes that the world consists of a hierarchy of existences, and that our phenomenological experience is merely the 'shadow' of an eternal, unchanging truth not subject to time or change, to which we do not have direct access. Neoplatonism takes many forms and, in the culture of this time, was 'in the air' rather than accepted as crystallized in a definite intellectual shape. As the Symbolist poet Jean Moréas wrote in 1886, 'Symbolist poetry seeks to clothe the Idea in a tangible form'.[108] Symbolist painters conceived of artistic language as composed of hieroglyphs, 'the coded symbol[s] of an idea that the artist-genius could decipher for others'.[109] Ernst Gombrich's essay 'Icones Symbolicae' illustrates the centrality of the 'symbol as revelation' to the neoplatonist doctrine: nature might be understood as a 'hieroglyph' of inner truth – 'the strange happenings in nature's kingdom yield up a kernel of divine teaching'.[110]

The platonic elements in the philosophy of Schopenhauer in particular were a major influence on the Symbolists. As Doss-Davezac remarks, '[Schopenhauer's idealism] seemed to them to be closer to a theory of art than

---

[107] Denis refers to the discussions arising from their Lycée education. Denis 'L'Influence de Paul Gauguin, *Théories,* p.166. 'la beauté est la forme visible de la vérité.' Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories,* p. 55.

[108] 'La poésie symbolique cherche: 'à vétir l'Idée d'une forme sensible.' Jean Moréas, 'Manifeste du Symbolisme', *Le Figaro, Supplément littéraire,* (18 September 1886), pp. 150-151.

[109] Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley, 2009), p. 47.

[110] E.H. Gombrich, 'Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11 (1948), p. 168.

to a philosophy proper'.[111] It is in Schopenhauerian terms that we can best understand Aurier's theorizing, which articulated a Symbolist belief in art's ability to transcend the merely empirical by revealing the underlying reality known *subjectively*.[112]

Schopenhauer believed that aesthetic contemplation grants respite from the treadmill of practical life in thrall to desires, passions and appetites, from enslavement to our individual wills — particular manifestations of the 'Will', which he understood to be the inner reality of existence itself. This release can free us from the fetters of utilitarian concepts to permit the transcendence of mere empirical perception, which diverts us from apprehending the reality of the Will's 'objectifications' as Platonic Ideas. In practical life, we fail to sustain our attention on what is before us, for its own sake, and limit our perceptions to what fulfils or frustrates the needs of practical life. It could well be thought that the more a representational painting is merely 'illusionistic' the more we might be inclined *merely* to bring its contents under the concepts by which our daily existence is governed. On the other hand, the more the painting's configuration enhances its surface – the more 'decorative' it is – the less temptation there is for the viewer simply to 'look through' that surface and reduce perception of the painting's contents to those features relevant to the quotidian demands of practical life. The spectator, moreover, apprehends,

---

[111] Shehira Doss-Davezac, 'Schopenhauer according to the Symbolists', in D. Jacquette (ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts* (Cambridge, 1996), p 254.

[112] The philosopher's magnum opus, *The World as Will and Representation* was not published in France until 1888. But Theodule Ribot's 1874 commentary *La Philosophie de Schopenhauer* was a popular source of ideas among Symbolist critics. See Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics,* p. 45. For Schopenhauer's text in English, *The World as Will and Representation,* see Vols 1 & 2, translated by E. Payne (New York, 1966 & 1967).

through this decorative '*déformation',* the subjective response of the artist, who, by escaping the domination of the *individual* will, confronts the truth of the (Platonic) 'Idea', which is beyond the contingent particularities of empirical phenomena.[113]

Among the most significant aspects of Schopenhauer's thought was its high valuation of music, and the metaphysical status which he attributed to it, as the direct embodiment of 'the Will'.[114] This tenet of Schopenhauerian thought was celebrated in the domestic circles that Denis frequented in the 1890s – the Symbolist interest in revealing 'the mysterious centres of thought' (to borrow Gauguin's words) was closely allied to the enigmatic capacity of music to utter the ineffable as made explicit in Schopenhauer's theorizing.[115] The idea that art's aesthetic value was such that a 'transcendental emotivity' could be awakened in the viewer – beyond the mere replication of quotidian concerns, was central to Aurier's thesis, as developed in his article 'Le Symbolisme en peinture'.[116]

On several occasions Denis describes Symbolist paintings in vaguely Platonic terms as being the 'sign of the idea'; elsewhere he claims that, if art is

---

[113] For a more in-depth discussion of Schopenhauer, see Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth, 1963) and Michael Podro, *The Manifold in Perception* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 92-110.

[114] The Wagnerian theorist Téodor de Wyzewa, co-founder (and co-editor 1884-6) of *La Revue Wagnérienne,* propagated Schopenhauer's claim that 'a musical visual art could exist because it can bypass the intellect altogether, as music did', through the spontaneous affective power of form and line.' Quoted in Morton, '"From the Other Side"', p. 16.

[115] Quoted in Gloria Groom, *Gauguin: Artist as Alchemist* (New Haven, 2017), p. 27.

[116] 'émotivité transcendentale' is a phrase used by Aurier, quoted in Loevgren, *The Genesis of Modernism,* p. 154.

'a sign of the idea', it 'cannot *but* be idealistic'.[117] His use of the phrase as determinative of 'idealistic' art may well have been indebted to Aurier, whose term *idéiste* formed part of his definition of painterly Symbolism in the 1891 article cited earlier. This art, Aurier claimed, was to be 'ideational, for its unique ideal will be the expression of the Idea', and 'Symbolistic, for it expresses this Idea by means of forms'.[118] 'Ideational' rather than 'idealistic' as a translation matches Aurier's use of *idéiste* rather than *idéaliste,* thus avoiding confusion with the meaning of 'ideal' in its commoner application: Aurier thought that *academic* idealism as usually understood was merely a form of realism in disguise.[119] Here Denis and Aurier were also in agreement, as is testified by Denis's remark on a typical academic idealist's shallow response to a still life by Chardin. He claimed that an 'idealist' of this kind 'refuses to see the melodious line, the admirable tonality … sure signs of a harmonious soul attentive to revealing the intimate laws of the Beauty of the World.'[120] This 'idealist', in other words, is distracted by the painting's convincing naturalism, 'looks through' the picture's surface at its contents, as if they were really there, and disregards the nature of the painting's construction. I do not suggest that Denis investigated the specifically Platonic connotations of the 'Idea' with great

---

[117]'ils ont substitué à la nature un aspect de leur imagination, c'est-à-dire le signe d'une idée'. Denis, 'Notes sur la Peinture Réligieuse', *Théories,* p. 41. 'Langage de l'homme, signe de l'idée, l'art ne peut pas ne pas être idéaliste'. 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au classicisme', *Théories,* p. 268.

[118] 'Idéiste', puisque son idéal unique sera l'expression de l'Idée'. Aurier, 'Le Symbolisme en Peinture', p. 215.

[119] See Juliet Simpson, 'Symbolist *Aesthetics* and the *Decorative* Image/Text', *French Forum* 25/ 2 (May 2000), p. 187.

[120] 'il se refuse à en percevoir la ligne mélodieuse, l'admirable tonalité … signes certains d'une âme harmonieuse, attentive à dégager … les lois intimes de la Beauté du Monde.' Denis, 'Notes sur la Peinture Religieuse', *Théories*, p. 42.

intellectual rigor, but discussions between the Nabis on such topics surely stimulated his search for the expression of the *au-delà*.[121] Denis's continual wariness about the dangers presented by excessively individualistic, subjective artistic interpretations (as represented, he believed, by the vagaries of the Impressionists), as well as his religious conviction, may have drawn him towards such a philosophical system. The extent to which his decorative idiom was integral to the evocation of intimations of an *au-delà* can be seen in a work such as *La Légende de Saint Hubert.*

Consecrating a *fumoir: La Légende de Saint Hubert*

This early decorative series was commissioned in 1895 for the *fumoir* (smoking room) in the private Parisian home of the Baron Denys Cochin, whom Denis had met through Henri Lerolle's circle of friends **[Figures 13-19]**.[122] The seven-panel decoration demonstrates the painter's efforts to embody in decorative form emotional responses to the experience of hunting, within the overall context of religious devotion. The legend tells of an ordinary sinner named Hubert, who encounters an apparition of a crucifix between the horns of a stag, while out hunting. This experience prompts him to repent of his former sinfulness and devote himself to God. Baron Cochin, a keen huntsman, wanted to be surrounded in his domestic milieu by scenes depicting his own favourite pastime. But, as a spiritual man, he harboured a view of the sport as promising

[121] Patricia Matthews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago, 1999), p. 8.

[122] It is apt that, for a period of several months in 1906, Cochin's study functioned as a chapel, following the closure of the Archbishop of Paris's chapel (as a result of the official separation of Church and State in 1905). See Agnès Delannoy, Marianne Barbey, J-P Bouillon et al, *Maurice Denis: La Légende de Saint-Hubert, 1896-1897* (Paris, 2004), p. 20.

a kind of transfigurative experience, as allegorized in the legend. Gloria Groom suggests that these panels testify to Denis's own admiration for medieval tapestries, which themselves often treated the theme of the hunt as an allegory of 'the process involved in spiritual quest'.[123] The personal significance of this work for the patron is strengthened by Denis's inclusion of portraits of members of the Cochin family themselves.[124]

Despite their narrative purpose, these panels were to be just as much 'felt' as 'read'. There is a clear and potent union of theme and visual character in the series: Adrien Mithouard remarked on the way in which the legend 'unfolds in a lyrical stream of light'.[125] The 'legibility' of the allegorical theme is enhanced by the sensuous quality of its decorative articulation. Cochin, indeed, reportedly commissioned the series of panels from Denis in the belief that the young painter was sensitive to the way in which contour and colour could convey an intimation of something beyond their material appearance.[126] He recognized his own spiritual intuitions as embodied in Denis's evocative paintings, remarking on the 'spiritual state' embodied in the finished ensemble. He continued, describing how, on looking at the panels, the sensation of becoming lost within the inner experience – without the intrusion of the material external environment — mimicked the feeling that came over him during the hunt. The decorative painter Albert Besnard (who had also produced designs for Cochin) was particularly impressed on seeing the work

---

[123] Groom, *Beyond the Easel,* p. 51.

[124] The Baron and his wife are depicted at the far left of *Le défaut* **[Figure 17]**, while the whole of the Baron's close family are shown in religious garb in *L'Arrivée à l'Hermitage* **[Figure 19]**.

[125] '… se déroule dans un lyrique ruissellement de lumières'. Adrien Mithouard, 'Maurice Denis', *Art et décoration*, XXII (July 1907), p. 8.

[126] Denys Cochin, letter to Denis (n.d.). MMD [Ms 2400].

in situ: 'there is in it ... a freedom that you have not always shown ... don't get too philosophical, I see that nature dominates you more than I thought and I am very happy to have seen that in you.'[127] Besnard's qualified praise suggests that he believed Denis to have previously sacrificed artistic sincerity to theoretical preoccupations.

Denis's decisions regarding the layout of the decorative scheme were attuned to the sensuous effect of the canvases' dominance of this domestic environment. The ensemble would have virtually covered the whole wall of the narrow, high-vaulted space of the Baron's *fumoir*. Denis's initial ideas for the ensemble can be found in rough notebook sketches **[Figure 20]**. On the right-hand page is an attempt to define the central panel motifs: this sketch indicates the position of the ceiling decoration 'Les Sonneurs du ciel' **[Figure 21]**. (The sketch on the left is an imagining of the effect of the narrative inscribed onto a soup tureen, which Cochin had requested.) Denis also designed a stained glass window, 'Le chemin de la vie' **[Figure 22]**, which was installed in 1895. It provided a particularly apposite accompaniment to the series, with its symbolic allusion to life's 'spiritual journey'.[128] The window was situated directly opposite the central 'Le Miracle' panel **[Figure 16]** in the rectangular space of the *fumoir,* allowing the stream of light from outside to draw attention to this most thematically important of the panels, literally

---

[127] See Thomson, *The Troubled Republic*, p. 133.
'il y a là dedans … une liberté que vous n'avez pas toujours montrée … ne faites pas trop de philosophie, je vois que la nature vous domine plus que je ne croyais et je suis bien heureux d'avoir vu cela en vous'. Albert Besnard, letter to Denis (5 May 1898). MMD [Ms 876].

[128] On the fashion for stained glass ('vitromania') as an interior design accoutrement among the wealthy at this time, see Laura Morowitz, 'Anti-Semitism, Medievalism and the Art of the Fin-de-Siècle', *Oxford Art Journal*, 20/1 (1997), pp. 35-49.

illuminating the glowing crucifix on the canvas. The window's theme could be understood as a depiction of the voyage of discovery made by St Hubert himself in the legend, as allegorized within the context of 'the hunt'. The linear arabesque of the pathway is the most visually prominent attribute of the design, snaking through the dense flora, and reinforcing the twists in the symbolic 'path of life'. Two women dressed in blue in the right corner appear to be embarking on this winding journey. We might note its resemblance to the motif in the cover design for Hermant's score 'quoted' by the artist in *Marthe au piano* **[Figure 9]**.

Denis's efforts at integrating each aspect of the ensemble relies in part on the extension of curvilinear forms across the various decorative elements. The vertical momentum of the tree trunks in 'Le Miracle' would have drawn one's eyes upwards to the celestial vision of 'Les Sonneurs du Ciel' **[Figure 21]**, in which the foliage of one of the branches extends to join a small cloud, setting up a meandering arabesque of large interconnected forms (the clouds and horn players) that directs one's attention to the opposite side of the room. The airborne, horn-playing angels in the sky seem to communicate with the trio of horn players 'on the earth'. This setting up of celestial counterparts was to become a recurring motif of the artist, as we shall see in later works such as *Terre Latine.* A letter from Auguste Cochin on behalf of his father reveals the patron's appreciation of this particular aspect of the design, likening it to the call and response between members of the hunting party: 'Nothing could be

more beautiful than these six angels responding to each other in heaven and on earth.'[129]

The art historian Marianne Barbey has described the Cochin panels as 'a symphonic variation on the glory of the forest, enriched by the pious and Christian symbolism of the trees, the 'living pillars ... '.[130] Her description of the trees as 'living pillars' is a reference to a line in Baudelaire's 'Correspondances'. The relevant passage reads: 'Nature is a temple in which living pillars / Sometimes let fall confused words / Man passes there, through forests of symbols...'[131] This enigmatic account of immersion in the unfathomable mysteries of life is expressed symbolically through the metaphor of the forest. In June of 1891, Denis employed a comparable metaphor about his experience as an artist: 'The Nabi is alone in the deserted forest. He orders the leaves to reflect the rhythm of his feelings …'[132] This statement alludes to the process of decorative *déformation* discussed earlier, and summed up in his statement: 'The great art that we call decorative ... what is it if not the distortion of vulgar sensations – of natural objects – into sacred, hermetic, and imposing icons?'[133] This statement reminds us of the aspiration at the heart of Symbolism to signify the subjectively perceived 'Idea' through symbolic forms: a system of aesthetic

---

[129] 'On ne pouvait rien concevoir de plus joli que ces six anges qui se répondent au ciel et sur terre…' Auguste Cochin, letter to Denis (n.d.). MMD [Ms 2372].

[130] Marianne Barbey, 'L'Histoire d'une création' in Delannoy (ed.), *Maurice Denis: La Légende de Saint-Hubert,* p. 21.

[131] 'La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers / Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles /L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles**.'** Baudelaire, 'Correspondances'.

[132] 'Le nabi s'esseule dans la forêt déserte. Il commande aux feuilles de s'enrythmer selon ses désires …' Denis, *Journal I*, 30 June 1891, p. 85.

[133] 'Le grand art, qu'on appelle décoratif … qu'est-ce? sinon le travestissement des sensations vulgaires — des objets naturels, — en icônes sacrées, hermétiques, imposante'. Denis, Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 12.

archetypes capable of conveying the essence of things, rather than mere representations of the empirical world. This statement follows his assertion that 'All the great painters, unconsciously or not, have asserted themselves as symbolists: they have not made a duplicate of the thing seen, they have substituted for nature an aspect of their imagination, that is, the sign of an idea'.[134] The recurrence in Denis's early works of symbolic forest 'paths of life' suggests a 'hieroglyphic' treatment of them, consonant with neoplatonic ideas.[135] *Paysage aux arbres verts* (1893) is a particularly germane example, with its symbolically resonant 'living pillars' **[Figure 23]**. His iconographic interest in winding forest paths at this point in his career points to the way in which the symbolic importance of the subject matter might be reinforced through decorative means, and specifically through the contour of the arabesque.

The highly organised picture plane of the Cochin panels is consistent with Denis's commitment to the expressive capacity of decorative form. By the deliberative distortion of subject matter the sense of depth is curtailed, so that it does not counteract or distract from the flatness of the wall which it decorates. The eye is instead drawn to the patterns of horizontal and vertical axes of the trees and the ground contours, which criss-cross the design, interrupted at times by the undulating curves of the forest floor. A fluid rhythmical potency is particularly apparent in 'Le bien-aller' **[Figure 15]** and 'Le défaut' **[Figure 17]**, both of which sacrifice the depiction of deep space in favour of an upwards

---

[134] 'Tous les grands peintres, inconsciemment ou non, se sont affirmés symbolistes : ils n'ont pas fait un double de la chose vue, ils ont substitué à la nature un aspect de leur imagination, c'est-à-dire le signe d'une idée.' 'Notes sur la peinture religieuses', *Théories,* p. 41.
[135] Dessy, 'Staging and Writing the Arabesque', p. 308.

emphasis across the canvas, echoing the winding progress made by the hunt through the wooded landscape. By contrast, the 'visual tempo' in 'La chasse infernale' **[Figure 18]** is greatly increased by the horizontal emphasis of its contours.[136] Even the branches of the middle-ground tree augment this impulse, by counteracting the vertical drive of the trunk itself and echoing the arched silhouettes of the galloping horses. The final panel, 'L'Arrivée à l'Hermitage' **[Figure 19]**, falls naturally into two contrasting areas: on the right, the hieratic shapes of the serenely poised Cochin family seem figuratively removed from the ongoing turmoil of those still involved in the hunt – a turmoil transposed into the chaotic patterns of the treetops in the near-distance. The way in which such formal regulation imbues the subject matter of these panels with expressive content might be understood in terms of a decorative 'musicality'.

If, in his insistence on decorative surface, Denis succeeds in realizing the symbolistic *état d'esprit* that Cochin desired, this success should be considered in light of his simultaneous discovery of the importance of the classical tradition, following a recent trip to Italy (to be discussed further in Chapter 3). It seems that the artist had some difficulty in uniting his artistic impulses. He wrote to the composer Chausson's wife on October 10, 1897, complaining of becoming 'very tired' of the panels, and being preoccupied with a desire to improve his methods.[137] Paul Jamot assessed the work — albeit in 1924, with the power of hindsight — as indicative of Denis's new tendency towards a

[136] Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism,* p. 122.
[137] Denis, letter to Mme Chausson (10 October 1897), cited in *Journal I,* p. 123.

more classical style, a tendency he attributes to Denis's first trip to Italy.[138] What led Jamot to this conclusion? The most obvious stylistic influence on the decorative and hieratic manipulation of form in these panels is that of early Renaissance artists, including Benizzo Gozzoli, assistant to Fra Angelico.[139] An extant collection of postcards from these artists in Denis's possession, collected during his first trip to Italy in 1895, suggests a direct influence, particularly in connection with Gozzoli's *Adoration of the Magi.*[140] The figure in clerical garb in 'L'Arrivée à l'Hermitage' **[Figure 19]** bears some resemblance to the figure at bottom left in Fra Angelico's *Coronation of the Virgin* commissioned for the Santa Maria Nuova hospital in Florence. The imaginatively fluid contortions of certain animal forms (such as the stag in 'Le Miracle' **[Figure 16]** is suggestive of Piero di Cosimo, while the level of quasi-naturalist detail in the tree trunks and the folds of the garments (particularly in 'L'Arrivée') indicate a move towards the classicism of Andrea del Sarto, whose work Denis would also have seen during his Italian trip.[141]

But rather than trying to trace exact sources of inspiration in an over-analytic fashion, it might be better to understand the decorative qualities of this work in terms of a coalescence of vaguer impulses that the artist would continue attempting to synthesize even while his admiration for the classical grew. The ensemble seems to be a paradigmatic demonstration of his synthetist interest in the decoratively 'flattened' surface of tapestries. It bears stylistic comparison to

---

[138] Paul Jamot, 'Maurice Denis', *Revue de Paris,* 16 (15 August 1924), p. 913.
[139] Thomson 'The Presence of the Past', p. 182.
[140] MMD [C.P.C 1036].
[141] Denis owned a postcard of del Sarto's decorations for the Chiostro della Scalzo in Florence. MMD [C.P.C 1100].

earlier work such as *Légende de chivalerie* (several versions of which exist, including an oil painting that was bought by Baron Cochin himself) **[Figure 24].** Painted in imitation of a medieval tapestry and set within the landscape of Denis's favoured Breton region Perros-Guirec, its character and tonal range are comparable to *La Légende.* But *La Légende* also shares features with the slightly later *Jeu de Volant* (1900) whose style seems in harmony with its more 'classical' subject matter **[Figure 25]**. A dense sylvan environment is recast in this painting (a decorative work commissioned by the collector Étienne Moreau-Nélaton) as a verdant idyll populated by nymph-like women reclining or playing badminton**.** It seems that, in both paintings, Denis has been concerned, through decorative *déformation* (or perhaps decorative 'reimagining'), to bring out the qualities imminent in the forest setting that are most appropriate to the subject. While the trees in *La Légende* suggest the sensation of a complex interlacing network of trunks requiring careful navigation, those of *Jeu de Volant* are so arranged as to as to 'shelter' the figures. It is quite likely, despite their contrasting characters, that the arboreal setting of both was derived from sketches made in the large forest just outside his hometown of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

The decorative painter Albert Besnard was correct in his remark to Denis that 'commissions are good in that they force the artist to develop'.[142] The necessity for decorative cohesion across a number of large canvases produced a new challenge for Denis, which his classical 'revelation' in Rome in 1898 was to help solve. We might think of his scrupulous attention in *La Légende* to the

[142] 'les commandes vont cela du bon qu'elles obligent l'artiste à se développer'. Albert Besnard, letter to Denis (5 May 1898). MMD [Ms 876].

formal organization of the plane as indicative of a nascent classical tendency, as well as a schematization of his Symbolist-derived ideas. Turning to the fourth theme of *Théories* – the artist's deference to the classical tradition (and to those painters whose work he felt best adapted the classical idiom for the modern viewer: Puvis de Chavannes, Cézanne, Maillol) – we shall see how his concern with a balance of subjective and objective *déformation* found natural resolution in a form of classicism.

Finding 'constraint' in the laws of tradition[143]

Denis's awakening to the 'profound charm of the eternal City [Rome]' is generally recognized as stemming from time spent in the city with the poet André Gide, whose growing fascination with Poussin's work paralleled Denis's own discovery of classical order and form.[144] In a letter to Gide dated 8 May 1898 Denis talked of the continuing excitement that their trip stimulated in him.[145] But he came to frame his Italian 'awakening' in broader, less personal terms. Several passages in *Théories* suggest his belief in the predetermination of his classical conversion, as if it were an innate part of any (great) painter's development. Writing to his friend Vuillard from Rome, the artist remarks that

---

[143] 'le besoin d'une contrainte'. Denis, 'Enquête sur la Séparation des Beaux-Arts et de l'État', *Les Arts de la vie,* 10 (October 1904), pp. 211-4. Reprinted in *Théories*, (pp. 179-82), p. 180.

[144] 'le charme profound, véritablement mystérieux de la Ville éternelle'. 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories,* p. 45. See Carol Kaplan, 'En quête de l'Arcadie : Gide lecteur de Poussin', *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide,* 25/116 (October 1997), pp. 425-438. See also Gerard Vaughan, 'André Gide and Maurice Denis "Le Voyage d'Urien"', *Print Quarterly*, 1/3 (September 1984), pp. 173-187; Carol Kaplan, 'Peindre le portrait d'Alissa: Gide en train de «lire» Amour de Maurice Denis', *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide,* 38/166 (April 2010), pp. 189-204.

[145] 'l'excitation de nos promenades de Rome a duré. Je continue de prôner votre sagesse auprès de mes amis, et de leur vanter vos méthodes travail.' (8 May 1898). Reprinted in *Correspondance 1892-1945 André Gide – Maurice Denis,* ed. P. Masson and C. Schäfer (Paris, 2006), p. 131.

he is 'beginning to understand Raphael now, and this is … a noteworthy phase in a painter's life.'[146] Raphael, himself, the painter claimed later, achieved greatness only because of his ability to profit 'from all that had come before him, from Fra Angelico as well as Michelangelo'.[147]

In a damning article on *le péril nationaliste,* the poet Camille Mauclair, before his own 'conversion' to classicism shortly before the First World War, asserted that 'This generation has grown afraid of its own daring … Its love of Ingres is merely the … excuse, for an ultimate need to retrogress.'[148] Denis's rebuttal was firm, underlining the inexorable nature of the reaction: 'No doubt many of us have discovered Rome, the sacred land of classicism, according to pure cosmopolitans like Goethe and Gide. But here, Raphael and his French disciples Poussin and Ingres were simply occupying the place already prepared in our docile minds for the examples of the past.'[149]

This statement implies the painter's own self-insertion into a continuum of artists (belonging to the classical tradition) who had themselves been 'converted' by their experience in the city.[150] Ingres, that 'grand professor of the century', had gone to Rome to consolidate his understanding of artistic

---

[146] 'Je commence à comprendre Raphaël, et … c'est une étape notable dans la vie d'un peintre.' Denis, letter to Vuillard (15 February 1898). Reprinted in *Journal I,* p. 133.
[147] 'Raphaël a profité de tout ce qui avait été fait avant lui, de Fra Angelico comme de Michel-Ange.' *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie*, (Paris, 1933), p. 29.
[148] Camille Mauclair, 'La réaction nationaliste en art et l'ignorance de l'homme de lettres', *La revue,* 14 (15 January 1905), p. 174. Quoted in Richard Shiff, 'Ingemination' in Paul Druro (ed), *Theorizing Imitation in the Visual Arts, Global Contexts* (Chichester, 2016), p. 175.
[149] 'Sans doute plusieurs de nous ont découvert Rome, la terre sacrée du classicisme, au dire de purs cosmopolites comme Goethe et comme Gide. Mais ici, Raphaël et ses disciples français Poussin et Ingres ne faisaient que prendre une place dès longtemps préparée dans notre esprit docile aux exemples du passé'. 'La réaction nationaliste', *Théories,* p. 190.
[150] Ibid., p. 192.

'method' and discipline.[151] Denis devoted an article in *L'Occident* (1902) to the merits of Ingres's discipleship. Here he maintained that Ingres's pupils had been stimulated by the same *méditations* on the city that had so recently preoccupied him.[152] In later writings (*Charmes et leçons de l'Italie* (1933) and a lecture 'Les Nouvelles Directions de l'Art Chrétien' (1919)), he elaborated on the weight of the decorative tradition witnessed in Rome, the 'conservatoire of aesthetics and techniques'.[153] It was only in Rome, Denis would say, that Raphael could have been inspired to produce his Apostolic Palace decorations.[154] The weight of the classical tradition as embodied in Roman culture prevented the artist, when in Rome, from attempting to capture quotidian impressions: 'I do not know of a place that is more at the opposite extreme from Impressionism,' he wrote to Vuillard.[155] It might be tempting to understand his four depictions of the Medici Villa fountain at different times of day, in the rather basic terms of an 'Impressionistic' fascination with the changing play of light **[Figure 26]**.[156] But it would be equally plausible to consider them as a homage to Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, whose own

---

[151] 'le grand professeur du siècle'. Denis, 'Les Élèves d'Ingres', *L'Occident,* II/8,9,10 (July, August, September 1902) (pp. 23-44, 77-94, 142-58). Reprinted in *Théories,* (pp. 89-127), p. 90.

[152] 'Les méditations sur la méthode classique où nous incita le séjour de Rome, eux aussi les ont faites et nous les referons avec eux'. Ibid. p. 89.

[153] 'le conservatoire des esthétiques et des techniques.' Denis, *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie*, p. 35.

[154] Denis, 'Les Nouvelles Directions de l'Art Chrétien', *La Revue des Jeunes* (4 February 1919), pp. 117-44. Reprinted in *Les Nouvelles Théories,* (pp. 194-244), p. 230.

[155] 'Je ne connais pas de milieu qui me semble plus l'antipode de l'impressionisme', Denis, letter to Vuillard (15 February 1898). Cited in *Journal I*, p. 134. The 'Rome' section of his *Carnets de Voyage en Italie 1921-1922* (Paris, 1925) indicates that the artist was busy producing watercolour sketches of the city.

[156] They were painted in 1904, 1928, 1931 and 1934.

painting of the water feature he was particularly fond of — and whose work Denis cited often alongside the classical 'duo' Claude Lorrain and Poussin.[157]

Most of the essays in *Théories* — from 'Les Arts à Rome' (first published in 1898) onwards — express the *necessity* of a reappraisal of classicism. Bemoaning the insufficiency of state art education (the Academy des Beaux Arts), Denis claimed that his generation (citing Émile Bernard and Gauguin), were constantly in need of turning to 'the experience of the Masters, to interrogate the Past', in order to build a path out of Republican-sanctioned naturalism and the tendency towards individualism among the avant-garde.[158] In 1904 an enquiry entitled 'Enquête sur la Séparation des Beaux-Arts et de l'Etat' was commissioned by Gabriel Mourey, the editor of *Les Arts de la Vie*.[159] Mourey, who was close to Denis, was passionately committed to the idea of the decorative arts as having a social vocation and a cultural usefulness, in the vein of the Arts and Crafts movement in England. 'There is no longer a national Art, there is no longer teaching, it is anarchy. We are reclaiming a Tradition', Denis proclaimed in his own response to the enquiry, which was later included in *Théories*.[160] Sharing Mourey's hostility towards the lack of strict instruction provided by the state-funded École des Beaux-Arts, Denis railed against the strictures placed on contemporary artistic expression thanks to the

---

[157] See Denis, 'Enquête sur la Séparation, *Théories,* p. 181; 'la vasque de Corot devant la Villa Médicis me semble une chose très bien'. Denis, letter to Mme Chausson (27 January 1898), cited in *Journal I,* p. 125.

[158] 'invoquer l'expérience des Maîtres, d'interroger le Passé.' Denis, 'Enquête sur la Séparation, *Théories,* p. 180.

[159] Among those called upon to respond to the enquiry were d'Indy, Mauclair, Georges Desvallières and Signac.

[160] 'Il n'y a plus d'Art national, il n'y a plus d'enseignement, c'est l'anarchie. On réclame une Tradition.' 'Enquête sur la Séparation', *Théories,* 179.

selectiveness of State funds. He noted particularly that Vincent d'Indy's music school the Schola Cantorum (discussed in the following chapter) was not eligible for state subsidies.[161] A few years later Denis expressed his concerns over two emergent tendencies in the French art world: on the one hand, the mediocre 'recipes of pure craft' fostered by the artist Claudio Castelucho, and on the other, the delighting in theory at the expense of material practice encouraged by Matisse.[162] The essay in which he makes this observation is a critique of the latest exhibition of the Salon des Indépendants. The Salon's lack of a jury was, according to Denis, responsible for an unhealthy democratizing of art which advanced a harmful cult of personality and a ceaseless desire to be original among the most amateur of painters.[163] Denis quotes Baudelaire, writing in 1846, to reinforce his own expressions of frustration at the state of contemporary art: 'Monkeys are the republicans of art, and the present state of painting is the result of an anarchic freedom which glorifies the individual.'[164] The influential figure of Matisse, he claimed, was a victim, rather than a proponent, of visual 'anarchy'. He admired Matisse's eagerness to submit himself to the search for a system by which to render his sensations intelligible. But, he claims, the painter's obsession with the schematization of every last visual 'fact' leads ultimately to a sense of artificiality. Matisse would do better, he decides, to rely more on sensibility and instinct, and 'accept, without too

---

[161] Ibid, p. 182.

[162] 'des recettes de pur métier'. See Denis, 'Sur l'exposition des Indépendants. *La Grande Revue* (10 April 1908). Reprinted as 'Liberté épuisante et stérile', *Théories,* (pp. 225-34), p. 232. Matisse taught at the private Académie Matisse in Paris from 1907, while Castelucho was among the first group of Professors at the Montparnassian Académie de la Grande Chaumière from 1905.

[163] Denis, 'Liberté épuisante et stérile', *Théories*, p. 230.

[164] '« Les singes sont les républicains de l'art, et l'état actuel de la peinture est le résultat d'une liberté anarchique qui glorifie l'individu.»' Ibid., p. 228.

many scruples', much of the experience of the past. He adds: '[t]he recourse to tradition is our best safeguard against the dizziness of reasoning, against the excess of theories'.[165] There is some irony here in that, as we have seen, Denis saw epistemic value in the neo-Impressionist's 'attempts at scientific regulation', which relied on rather systematic theorizing.[166] Artistic theories were a means of re-establishing 'discipline; no one more than Seurat sought to impose constraints on himself', as Denis wrote.[167] The very title of his essay compilation (and the subsequent *Nouvelles Théories*) suggests that he found value in the term as a gesture towards discipline and methodical reflection.

This artistic 'instinct' for restraint, which also governed Denis's insistence on 'objective' *déformation,* found full expression in the classical idiom. Central to his formulation of classicism was the notion of artistic 'sacrifice': art requires 'penitence [and] an effort of the spirit' to overcome the 'tyranny of the senses'.[168] 'Sacrifice', he claimed, was also an entailment of the classical ideal of synthesis: 'Synthesizing … means … to prioritize: submit each painting to a single rhythm, to a dominant, to sacrifice, to subordinate – to generalize'.[169] This formulation was inspired by his conversations with Gide, whose phrase 'style is a system of subordinations' he jotted down in an 1898 journal entry.[170]

---

[165] 'accepter, sans trop de scrupules, beaucoup de l'expérience du passé. Le recours à la tradition est notre meilleure sauvegarde contre les vertiges du raisonnement, contre l'excès des théories. 'De Gauguin, de Whistler, *Théories,* pp. 208-9.

[166] une réglementation scientifique. Denis, 'Le Soleil', *Théories,* p. 221.

[167] 'rétablir une discipline; nul plus que Seurat n'a cherché à s'imposer une contrainte'. 'La Réaction Nationaliste', *Théories,* p. 196.

[168] d'une pénitence, d'un effort de l'esprit contre la facilité de l'imagination, la tyrannie des sens.' Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories,* p. 48.

[169] 'Synthétiser … c'est en somme, hiérarchiser … soumettre chaque tableau à un seul rythme, à une dominante, sacrifier, subordonner, — généraliser.' Denis, 'Cézanne', *Théories,* p. 245.

[170] 'Le style système de subordinations, dit Gide'. Denis, *Journal I,* January 1898, p. 129.

The individual temperament, they both believed, was eternally in counterpoint with a desire to extract from wider artistic experience a universality that might conform to the verities of artistic tradition ('the laws of unity and balance, which are eternal').[171] The notion of 'submitting' a work to a dominant rhythm — an arabesque, for example — is commensurate with the decorative imperatives of the Nabis. Gilles Genty has claimed that Denis's evolution towards a clear syntax and vocabulary of symbolic elements was an 'echo' of the 'notion of symbolism as defined by Aurier'.[172] I would go further, and suggest that Denis was simply adapting his established procedure of synthesis between the subjective and objective to fit a specifically classical idiom.

In an essay for *L'Occident* on Cézanne, written in 1907 following a visit to the painter in Aix-en-Provence in the previous year (of his death), Denis invoked this familar terminology in explaining the classicism of Cézanne.[173] His writings on that subject were especially influential, and it is to Denis that we owe the 'Poussin of Impressionism' soubriquet.[174] He saw in the artist a source of support for his own theories, describing him as a 'spontaneous classicist', and believed his art to represent both the zenith of the classical tradition and the consequence of the 'crisis of liberty and illumination which has rejuvenated

---

[171] 'les lois d'unité et d'équilibre, qui sont éternelles'. Denis, 'Le Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, 1901', *La Dépêche de Toulouse,* (22 & 28 April, 6 May, 1901). Reprinted in *Théories,* (pp. 77-89), p. 60.

[172] Gilles Genty, 'Maurice Denis après 1900, "le bonheur classique"', in *Maurice Denis 1870 – 1943* (Ghent, 1994), p. 51.

[173] For pertinent discussions of Cézanne's work see Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* and Theodore Reff, 'Cézanne and Poussin', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23/ 1-2 (January-June, 1960), pp. 150-174.

[174] Denis, Cézanne', *Théories,* p. 260.

modern art'.[175] In the essay Denis compares a typical still life by Cézanne with one by Manet and one by Gauguin. He argues that Manet's painting invites us to see merely a direct translation of a personal artistic sensation (he quotes Zola, claiming that the painter 'imitates nature "as seen through his temperament"'). In comparison, Gauguin's attempt strikes one as being overwhelmingly decorative – 'hieratic even'.[176] In front of Cézanne's still life, on the other hand, the viewer cannot decide if the painting is an imitation or an interpretation, nor can one keep at the front of one's mind either the subjectivity of the artist, or the object represented. Instead the two are entirely inseparable, as a result of the equilibrium between 'subject and object'. This, he claims, is the nature of Cézanne's classicism. It is hard to take such oversimplifications seriously – what does Denis really mean by referring to the difficulty in deciding whether a work is an imitation or an interpretation? The aim of the essay seems to be to reinforce his long-standing argument that great art – call it symbolist or classical – is the result of a *synthesis* of apparently contrasting forces.

An impulsion to synthesize two apparent artistic extremes is the basis for Denis's admiration for the sculptor Aristide Maillol, to whom he dedicated an article in *L'Occident* in 1905.[177] Maillol was a peripheral member of the Nabis, and was encouraged by Gauguin to pursue the decorative arts, leading him to take up tapestry design. In the essay Denis praises the artist's initial preoccupation with form as exemplified by the 'magical arabesques' of his

[175] 'si spontanément classique! … la crise de liberté et de lumière qui a rajeuni l'art moderne.' Ibid.
[176] 'hieratique même'. Ibid., p. 247.
[177] Maillol will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

tapestries.[178] Throughout the text, Denis refers to Maillol's *gaucherie* as a positive attribute indicating sincerity of expression, in much the same way as he uses the word to praise Gauguin's experiments, in 'L'Influence de Paul Gauguin'. Indeed he credits Bernard and Gauguin with awakening Maillol's sense of 'Style'.[179] Denis found the classical ideal of 'sacrifice' to be entirely congruous with the sculptor's intuitive *gaucherie*.[180] Maillol seems to be the artist who, for Denis, most effectively reconciled classical Greece and thirteenth century Christianity: 'beauty' and *gaucherie* (a term which will be examined further in the following chapter). Thus the sculptor acquires the epithet of the 'Classical Primitive', approaching nature both with directness worthy of the simplicity associated with the art of the Middle Ages, while appreciating the architectonic conception of the human body in a manner that owed much to the 'nobility' of the Greeks.

But the work of the nineteenth-century decorative painter Puvis de Chavannes perhaps exerted the strongest direct influence on Denis's classicism.[181] His debt to his predecessor is indicated by the alternative title given to *Jeu de Volant* **[Figure 25]**. He labels it *Le Bois Sacré,* surely an allusion to Puvis's *Le Bois sacré cher aux arts et aux Muses* **[Figure 27]**. Puvis's painting was, in Denis's mind, 'Symbolist' in its systematic application of the classical

---

[178] 'prestigieuses arabesques'. Denis, 'Aristide Maillol', *L'Occident,* 48 (November 1905), pp. 241-9. Reprinted in *Théories,* (pp. 235-54), p. 239.

[179] Denis 'L'Influence de Gauguin', *Théories,* p. 227.

[180] 'Son art est, je l'ai montré, un art de formules, mais c'est son instinct qui les crée.' Ibid., p. 242.

[181] As Jennifer Shaw has shown, Puvis's work was at the centre of *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic debates, being co-opted by all parties within the debate, not least the State itself, which exploited the literary content of his decorations to project fantasies of the French nationhood. See Shaw, *Dream States*. Puvis completed three versions of *Le Bois sacré* – I refer here to the original commission for the entry staircase of the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon.

method. Denis invokes the example of Puvis throughout the essays in *Théories*, quoting on several occasions the painter's own comparison of the artistic process to the slow 'digesting' of the senses. Ideas arrive in a state of entanglement, according to Puvis; the artist has to 'roll them around' until they can be elucidated and expressed with exactitude.[182] Denis views this almost as a scientific procedure, contrasting this desirably slow, rational process of composing a picture with 'the capricious, erratic and jerky work that makes up our lives'.[183] This concern with self-control and restraint is intimately connected with the painter's appreciation of artistic creation as a devotional practice. He maintained in 'Les Arts à Rome' that, for the logic of its effort and the greatness of its results, the classical tradition is 'in some way parallel to the religious tradition'.[184] Its moral and psychological integrity provided a necessary foundation for the modern painter — particularly a painter concerned with public decorative projects. A spiritual ideal embodied in Puvis's work was widely recognized: the critic Alphonse Germain grandiosely opined in *L'Ermitage*: 'The worship of Beauty returns with Puvis as a Christian comes back to God'.[185]

Denis was driven to pursue his theorizing by a desire to formulate universalizing, long-standing rules that could survive the permutations of

---

[182] 'La pensée qui gît dans cette émotion; je la roule, je la roule jusqu'à ce qu'elle soit élucidée à mes yeux…' Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories,* p. 51.

[183] capricieux, irrégulier et saccadé comme notre vie'. Ibid.

[184] 'pour la logique de l'effort et la grandeur des résultats, est en quelque façon parallèle à la tradition religieuse de l'Humanité. Ibid., p. 56.

[185] ' L'épris du Beau revient alors à Puvis de Chavannes, comme revient à Dieu le chrétien'. Alphonse Germain, "Puvis de Chavannes et son esthétique," *L'Ermitage* (March 1891), p. 140.

artistic change. He found in the diverse ideas and philosophies in circulation during the *fin-de-siècle* – from neoplatonism to psycho-aesthetics – stimuli for reconsidering the place and function of art within modern life. He adapted the *synthetiste* idiom of these years to fit his own developing sense of artistic purpose. In 'Les Arts à Rome' he exalted the classicism of the French painters Corot, Ingres, Delacroix and Puvis de Chavannes, who 'knew how to preserve their work' from the general 'clash of theories, systems, metaphysics' in flux within the cultural discourse of their time.[186] Yet Denis's conception of classicism, clearly, was indebted to the unstable amalgamation of ideas in circulation among his peers.

It has been useful to consider the ways in which the concern with the 'decorative' was inseparable from the influence that music had over the cultural imagination during these years. Having established that Denis's early milieu favoured a rapprochement between the thought of painters and musicians, the following chapter will consider how Denis's affiliation with contemporary musicians strengthened his aspiration for cultural renewal, in the context of the Catholic faith that was the underlying inspiration of his career.

---

[186] 'le heurt des théories, des systèmes, des métaphysiques. C'est un fait que Corot, Ingres, Delacroix et tout près de nous Puvis de Chavannes ont su préserver leur œuvre de ces influences.' Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories*, p. 54.

CHAPTER 2
Parallel religious visions: musical and visual traces of medieval re-invention

The French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) revealed his enthusiasm for the religious imagery of Maurice Denis in an interview first published in 1986.[1] In particular, he acknowledged the inspiration for the fifth scene ('The Angel Musician') of his opera *Saint Francis of Assisi* (1983) as deriving in part from one of Denis's illustrations for an edition of *Petites Fleurs de François d'Assise* (1913).[2] The *Petites Fleurs* was a French translation of a 14th-century anonymous Italian text *Les Fioretti*, a collection of popular legends about the life of the thirteenth-century Saint Francis. The illustration in question, of an angel playing a small viol in an ecstatic reverie, had long lingered in Messiaen's mind **[Figure 28]**: 'That image, which made a great impression on me, came back to me when I decided to compose my opera', he claimed. 'It's a particularly tempting scene for a composer', he continued, 'since it must show convincingly how the celestial music played on the viol by the Angel caused Saint Francis to faint.'[3]

In the original legend, St Francis is deep in contemplation, praying for an intimation of celestial ecstasy. The Angel enters, and paraphrases the words of St Thomas Aquinas to 'heed the music of the invisible', while entrancing St

[1] Messiaen is known for his adventurous harmonic language, innovative compositional techniques and fondness for medieval liturgical chant.
[2] Denis's original designs were, like many of his book illustrations, converted from watercolour sketches into woodcuts by the engraver Jacques Beltrand.
[3] Olivier Messiaen, *Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel*, trans. E. Thomas (Portland, OR, 1994) p. 230-1.

Francis with the sounds of the viol.[4] In his own modest illustration, Denis set the miracle within a dense forest of pale slender tree trunks, which evoke Baudelaire's 'temple' of 'living pillars'.[5] This setting is sanctified by the luminous figure of the angel, suspended just above the ground — transcending the earthly realm even while visiting it. Tall, statuesque, almost pillar-like though weightless, the figure rhymes with the verticality of the tree trunks. The counterpointing lateral movement of the tree branches at the top of the picture hints at a gentle melodic motion carrying from 'above' the intimation for which the friar is praying. Dark streaks of paint 'behind' the trees converge towards an imaginable vanishing point just above the frame of the image to suggest a limitless space beginning just beyond the 'temple' – a reminder perhaps of the distances traversed by the saint in his spiritual journeys.

The composer's admiration for Denis's illustrations – to which I return later in this chapter — was not fortuitous. Although born thirty-eight years apart, he and Denis shared connections within France's Catholic milieu. Messiaen owed much to the religio-aesthetic Catholic revival with which Denis was involved at the turn of the century – not least through the composer Vincent d'Indy's music school the Schola Cantorum (where Messiaen taught in the 1930s). This chapter considers how Denis's religious ambitions may have been shaped in part by the contemporaneous practice and composing of religious music. Denis felt a particular affinity with d'Indy and his rejection of the culture of artistic 'individualism' which allegedly threatened French cultural continuity.

[4] See Vincent Perez Benitez, *Olivier Messiaen's Opera, Saint Francois d'Assise* (Bloomington, IN, 2019), p. 267. For the sound of the viol, Messiaen substitutes the ondes martenot, instructing the performer to enter the unlit stage bathed in strong light.
[5] Baudelaire, 'Correspondances'.

D'Indy's lofty musical philosophy accorded with Denis's belief in the artist's 'necessary servitude' to God.[6] In this chapter I discuss their shared longing to restore the pious culture (as they perceived it) of the Middle Ages.

Belief in the Catholic roots of France's national identity was bound up with the advocacy of a form of medievalism informed by a more general promotion of the 'Gothic' around the turn of the century, but from which as we shall see, it sought to distance itself. Despite fairly extensive scholarship on the artistic manifestations of the *fin-de-siècle* medieval revival – notably Katharine Ellis's *The politics of plainchant in fin-de-siècle France* and Elizabeth Emery's *Romancing the Cathedral: Gothic Architecture in Fin-de-Siecle French Culture* – there have been few attempts to pursue interdisciplinary connections between these artistic initiatives.[7] One might single out Laura Morowitz's and Elizabeth Emery's *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in fin-de-siècle France* — an interdisciplinary examination of the commercialization and cultural 'reinvention' of the 'age of faith'.[8] But this work, like those cited before it, pays scant attention to the fact that this was a cultural movement that continued well into the twentieth century, as the example of Messiaen demonstrates. Richard Griffiths's seminal study *The Reactionary Revolution* remains the most significant survey of the evolution of Catholic thought into the early decades of

---

[6] Maurice Denis, 'L'importance du sujet dans la peinture religieuse'. Conference paper presented at the Institut supérieur de philosophie at the Catholic University of Louvain, 10 December 1923. First published in *Notes d'art et d'archéologie*, (April 1924), pp. 17-22 and (July 1924), pp. 40-5.

[7] Katharine Ellis, *The Politics of Plainchant in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Farnham, 2013); Elizabeth Emery, *Romancing the Cathedral: Gothic Architecture in Fin-de-Siècle French Culture* (New York, 2001).

[8] Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz (eds), *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in fin-de-siècle France* (Farnham, 2003).

the twentieth century, although its focus is predominantly on literature.[9] My consideration in this chapter of Denis's illustrations for some of this literature will extend our appreciation of his decorative idiom. The chapter will then examine the significance of Denis's interest in the Gregorian chant revival, before turning to the respective institutions that he and the composer Vincent d'Indy founded as extensions of their mission to 'sanctify' contemporary French culture.

The young Denis was assured of his vocation as a religious artist by the age of fifteen, writing in an early diary entry: 'I have to be a Christian painter and celebrate the miracles of Christianity', while at the time finding his feet within the fragmented cultural energy of Belle Époque Paris.[10] This youthful self-identification as a religious painter did not preclude his entertaining the possibility of also infiltrating the *fin-de-siècle vie bohème*: 'I found a bohemian studio in a bohemian city complete with canvases, easels, bibelots, jumble, disorder and cigarette smoke ... This is the life that I dreamed of … Remove the cigarettes and add an altar to Mary, and I would be completely at home.'[11] To some extent, his years with the Nabis afforded him the opportunity to live out this romanticized existence, but he was later to acknowledge a certain degree of confused posturing during this decade: **'**...all was topsy turvy. Our aspirations,

---

[9] Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution; The Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870-1914.*

[10] 'Oui, il faut que je sois peintre chrétien, que je célèbre tous ces miracles du Christianisme.' Denis, *Journal I,* 22 May 1885, p.59.

[11] 'J'ai trouvé … un atelier de bohème, dans une cité de bohèmes, des toiles, des chevalets, des bibelots, des fouilles, du désordre, de la fumée de cigarettes … C'est là la vie que j'ai révé,…. Otez les cigarettes, ajoutez un autel à Marie, et j'aurais été chez moi.' Ibid., p.60.

our mysticism were not always, in truth, very orthodox.'[12] Nevertheless, the tenets of Symbolism retained their significance for his theorizing of religious art, as noted in Chapter 1. He boldly proclaimed in his first text on religious art, 'Notes sur la Peinture Religieuse' (1896), that Symbolism is a 'Christian theory'.[13] A principle of transfiguration was essential to Denis's understanding of Symbolism — transfiguration being, for him, the vehicle of spiritual revelation immanent in aesthetic experience. This idea, as I shall show, was central to his understanding of the religious sentiment that he so admired in the works of the *primitifs* Giotto and Fra Angelico. It was also aligned with wider religious intellectual stirrings of early twentieth century religious writers. An attempt to relate these religious inclinations to the work of Denis's musical friends will indicate the extent to which Catholicism was held to be woven into France's cultural fabric, even while being so severely threatened by the Republic.

'They were Catholics because they were Frenchmen'[14]

'Ici se convertit Paul Claudel' reads a plaque near the southern rose window of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, commemorating the conversion of the poet and playwright in 1886 at the age of eighteen. Claudel described his epiphanic conversion in his memoir: he had come to the cathedral for the evening Vespers service, and his revelation coincided with the choir's singing

[12] 'Elle le fut à tort et à travers. Nos aspirations, notre mysticisme n'étaient pas, à la vérité, toujours très orthodoxes.' 'Le Symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 172.
[13] Denis, 'Notes sur la peinture religieuse', *Théories*, p. 42.
[14] Said in reference to recent converts Ernest Psichari and Charles Péguy, whose Catholicism was inseparable from their national pride. G. C. Rawlinson, *Recent French Tendencies: From Renan to Claudel, A Study in French Religion* (London, 1917), p. 121.

of the Magnificat.[15] The abruptness of this conversion, prompted by the affective power of the sung liturgy, reminds us of the spiritual revelation-through-music with which this chapter began: Denis's illustration for *Petites Fleurs de François d'Assise*.

Denis came to know Claudel through the soirées of Henri Lerolle and the composer Ernest Chausson in the early 1890s.[16] He later went on to provide illustrations for Claudel's *Sainte Thérèse* in 1916, as well as for the 1940 edition of his best-known play, *L'Annonce faite à Marie*.[17] The poet's admiration for the painter is made clear in a letter to Denis's wife following the news of her husband's sudden death in 1943; Claudel described him as 'a great figure, a great talent and a great soul'.[18] The poet made known his appreciation of music's emotive potential in many of his prose writings: 'Painting halts the sun. Architecture petrifies proportions, and sculpture, attitudes. Poetry makes use of resistant materials ... But music carries us along with it … It takes us by the hand, we become one with it.'[19]

For Denis, as for Claudel, the music of Catholic ritual was an integral aspect of spiritual revelation. The painter's very earliest diary entries (written at the

---

[15] Paul Claudel, *Œuvres en prose* (Paris, 1965), 1010. Denis also describes the conversion in 'Le Symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 173.

[16] For further information on the relationship between poet and painter see Estelle Mattiato, 'Paul Claudel et Maurice Denis face à la décadence de l'art sacré', *Bulletin de la Société Paul Claudel*, 161 (2001), pp. 17-21.

[17] *Sainte Thérèse* was set to music by Darius Milhaud and performed in 1912 with the choir of d'Indy's Schola Cantorum (see below).

[18] Denis died in hospital after being knocked down in the street by a car in the Paris blackout. 'une grande figure, d'un grand talent et d'une grande âme'. Claudel, letter to Mme Maurice Denis (30 December 1943). MMD [Ms 2260].

[19] 'La peinture arrête le soleil. L'architecture pétrifie la proportion, et la sculpture l'attitude. La poésie met en œuvre des matériaux résistants … Mais la musique nous entraine avec elle … Elle nous prend par la main, nous ne faisons plus qu'un avec elle.' Claudel, *Œuvres en prose*, p. 230.

age of fourteen) reveal his fascination with the aesthetic environment of Catholic ritual. This appreciation was closely tied with his reverence for church music: 'Have you noticed the striking effect of simply singing the Creed?' he writes rhetorically following a service in August of 1885.[20] In a journal entry from a few weeks earlier he had felt inspired to convey the intense sensory richness of a religious procession: 'At the time of the blessing, the ladies of the Confrérie gather … kneeling with lit candles. It is picturesque …The candles are extinguished … black shadows are stirring in the blue steam ... I love church ceremonies: that's where my soul as an artist and my heart as a Christian fuse together ...'[21] His description of the scene as 'picturesque' suggests his imaginative rendering of the experience in paint, and the level of detail in the description indicates a mind actively projecting the scene onto a canvas. A number of his earliest paintings, such as *Messe Matinale* (1890) **[Figure 29]** display the painter's attempts at rendering, in a simplified manner, certain dominant memories of the interplay of light and praying bodies during such services. One can imagine the intensity of emotion that he might have felt on attempting to translate into paint that moment of religious transfiguration – a 'true illumination, a sort of intimate miracle' as experienced so intensely by Claudel.[22]

---

[20] 'avez-vous remarqué l'effet saisissant que produit, tout simplement, le chant du *Credo?*' Denis, *Journal I*, 30 August 1885, p. 45.

[21] 'Au moment de la bénédiction, les dames de la Confrérie se réuinissent … agenouillées avec les cierges allumés. C'est pittoresque … Les cierges s'éteignent … ce sont des ombres noires qui s'agitent dans de la vapeur bleue.' Ibid, 2 August 1885, p. 35.

[22] '…une véritable illumination, sorte de miracle intime…' 'Le Symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *Nouvelles théories*, p. 173.

Claudel was among many prominent French literary figures to convert to Catholicism around the turn of the century.[23] He was followed into the Church by Joris-Karl Huysmans (1892), Francis Jammes (1905), Charles Péguy (1908) and Ernest Psichari (1913), to name but a few. The Symbolist poet Charles Morice, so close to Gauguin and the Nabis in the 1890s, was also swept up in the tide of conversions. Initially sceptical of the relevance of Catholicism to contemporary life (and repulsed by the weakness of nineteenth-century religious art), he was equally suspicious of the hold that positivism and 'scientism' had over intellectual circles. Morice came to the view that the path of spirituality opened up by the hospitality to syncretism and esotericism of Symbolism offered the best hope of combating the destructive forces associated with the aforementioned schools of thought.[24] Denis was struck deeply by the rejuvenation brought about in Catholic circles by these conversions, reminiscing in 1920: 'Since … Verlaine, Hello, Bloy, Huysmans … Jammes, Péguy, Claudel, penetrated the circles most hostile to Catholicism [presumably the contemporary literary world], by dint of art and sincerity, with a really new and active apologetic, Religion has lost in the eyes of the world its bedraggled and "fossilized" aspect.'[25] Denis found inspiration in the ways in which these

---

[23] A similar phenomenon occurred in England among the so-called Decadent writers; see Claire Masurel-Murray, 'Conversions to Catholicism among Fin de Siècle Writers: A Spiritual and Literary Genealogy', *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, 76 (Autumn, 2012), pp. 105-125.

[24] For more information on Morice see Louis Lefebvre, *Une grande figure du Symbolisme: Charles Morice, le poète et l'homme* (Paris, 1926).

[25] '…Verlaine, Hello, Bloy, Huysmans…Jammes, Péguy, Claudel, ont fait pénétrer dans les milieux les plus hostiles au catholicisme, à force de l'art et de sincérité, une apologétique vraiment neuve et agissante, la Religion a perdu aux yeux du monde son aspect … «baderne».' Denis, 'Décadence, ou renaissance de l'art sacré', *L'Art et les artistes.* 1/3 (June 1919), pp. 93-95. Reprinted in *Nouvelles théories* (pp. 253-8), p. 257. These conversions were the subject of

writers kept alive their conversion experiences through their writing, and lamented the dearth of equivalently strong expressions of faith in the visual arts: 'We hardly see among the moderns, plastic works that correspond to the forms of thinking of a Léon Bloy, a Paul Claudel, a Péguy, a Sertillanges. The indisputable worthiness of the writers I am citing here is proved by their conversions. Do we have any religious art that endorses the prestige of Catholicism with as much strength and freshness?'[26] To some extent, Denis's remark understates the diversity of thought among those who considered themselves part of the Catholic renaissance: Charles Péguy was a committed socialist, Léon Bloy a 'fanatical Catholic polemicist', and the Dominican Anton-Gilbert Sertillanges a serious moral philosopher.[27] What these men had in common, however, was an energetic optimism, and something *against* which to define themselves: the corrupting, and encroaching, power of materialism, which had given rise to Claudel's diagnosis of a 'crisis of a malnourished imagination'.[28]

The fraught relationship between Church and State at the turn of the century played a part in the acceleration of these Catholic conversions, prompting a sense of urgency over the need for religious cultural expression. In 1891, Pope

---

conversations with his close friend the writer André Gide. See *Correspondance 1892-1945 André Gide – Maurice Denis*, p. 240.

[26] 'Nous ne voyons pas guère parmi les modernes, d'œuvres plastiques qui correspondent aux formes de pensée d'un Léon Bloy, d'un Paul Claudel, d'un Péguy ou d'un Sertillanges. Ce qui rend indiscutable la valeur des écrivains que je cite ce sont les conversions qu'ils ont faites. Avons-nous un art sacrée qui soutienne avec autant de force et de nouveauté le prestige du catholicisme?' Denis, 'Les nouvelles directions de l'Art Chrétien', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 223.

[27] Marlais, *Conservative Echoes*, p. 16; Denis illustrated several of Sertillanges's works: *Prière de la femme française pendant la guerre* (Paris, 1916); *Aux morts de la guerre prière à ceux qui sont partis* (Paris, 1916).

[28] 'la crise d'une imagination mal nourrie'. Claudel, 'Lettre à Alexandre Cingria sur les causes de la décadence de l'art sacré', (1919), reprinted in *Œuvres en prose*, p. 119.

Leo XIII issued his *Rerum Novarum,* an entreaty to the French Catholic Church to reconcile itself with the aims of the Republic, and to concern itself more with the conditions and needs of the proletariat. By 1905, however, the Republic's commitment to de-Christianization resulted in the Law of Separation, establishing state secularism and leading to the closure of Catholic schools and the dwindling of congregations. Resentment felt by Catholics towards the new legal framework engendered fierce debate as to the future place of the Church within the fabric of France's social life. Meanwhile the ongoing social disintegration caused by the fall-out from the Dreyfus Affair, over which the majority of Catholics took a stance favouring the Army against Dreyfus, reinforced political tensions. Attempts at reviving France's Catholic spirit were entangled with a nationalistic drive to create a homogeneous sense of cultural identity. The then director of the Louvre, Paul Jamot remarked: 'A secular Catholic tradition has so strongly nourished our civilisation that, in a well-born Frenchman, even if he believes himself entirely detached from religion, there always remains enough of the blood of his ancestors to guide, in the face of a religious theme, his spirit and his hand.'[29]

But for many it was no longer enough, in the new age of *laïcité,* to complacently accept a diluted and nostalgic form of cultural Catholicism – culture must itself be the propelling force behind the renewal of faith. Richard Griffiths notes that attempts by previous generations of literary Catholics in the

[29] 'Une tradition catholique séculaire a si fortement nourri notre civilisation que, chez un Français bien né, même s'il se croit entièrement détaché de la religion, il reste toujours assez du sang de ces ancêtres pour guider, en face d'un thème religieux, son esprit et sa main'. Paul Jamot, 'Maurice Brillant, la religion et l'art, d'après un livre récent', *L'Art vivant*, 65 (1 September 1927), p. 683.

nineteenth century to compromise politically and philosophically were dismissed by the writers associated with the Right during the twentieth century Catholic revival, as these 'writers entrenched themselves more and more firmly in the most extreme positions'.[30] Many Catholic writers, musicians and artists sought arenas for strengthening their religio-aesthetic beliefs through involvement in political organizations such as the anti-Dreyfusard Ligue de la Patrie Française (founded in 1898), and Charles Maurras's right-wing monarchist party Action Française – which will be discussed further in the following chapter. Paul Claudel, Denis, d'Indy and Léon Bloy were all supporters of Maurras's political movement (for its first few decades), while d'Indy was also a fervent supporter of the nationalist Ligue.

Denis's extensive body of book illustrations offers a powerful material testament to his commitment to the Catholic literary revival. The mutuality of the artistic-literary relationship seems clear: not only did the Libraire de l'Art Catholique publishing house offer collaborative opportunities for the painter, but his work also provided a source of inspiration for writers.[31] The playwright and novelist Henri Ghéon for example, experienced a reawakening of his faith during the First World War, and seemed to find solace in Denis's work. Writing to the painter in 1919, he professed his delight at the fact that Denis was moved by his conversion, adding, 'I feel as if I've been weaned on your painting and can't wait to see it again …'[32] Thereafter Denis was commissioned to provide three illustrations to mark the three divisions (joy, sorrow, glory)

---

[30] Griffiths, *Reactionary Revolution,* p. 4.

[31] Also known as Art Catholique. It was founded by Louis Rouart in 1911.

[32] 'Je me sens un peu sevré de votre peinture et impatient d'en revoir.' Henri Ghéon, letter to Denis, 24 May 1919. MMD [Ms 4553].

within Ghéon's collection of verses *Le Miroir de Jésus* (1920).[33] The semicircular format of each illustration is comparable to the Stations of the Cross that he was to install at around the same time in his private chapel in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (to be discussed in Chapter 5); indeed, the second illustration on the theme of the crucifixion for 'Miroir de Peine' is a fairly exact transmutation of Station IV **[Figure 30a]**. The illustration for 'Miroir de joie' is a reworking of one of his earliest Annunciation-themed works, *Catholique mystère* (1889) **[Figure 30b; Figure 31]**. This borrowing and revision of certain motifs is characteristic of the artist, and is particularly noticeable in his religious work. His approach perhaps puts one in mind of the Symbolist appreciation of the enduring power of the 'icon': a perpetual expressive formula that encapsulates the artist's response to phenomena.[34]

Denis's very first venture into book illustration came at the age of nineteen, after reading Paul Verlaine's poetry collection *Sagesse* (Wisdom) (1881), an exploration of the poet's Catholic childhood (written while the poet was trying to reconnect with his faith during a stint in prison).[35] Verlaine became known as the 'Poet of Music', his evocative images and the seductive incantation of his rhythmic language attracting countless musicians (such as Debussy, Charles Bordes and Ernest Chausson – all members of Denis's and d'Indy's social

---

[33] Henri Ghéon, *Le Miroir de Jésus: quinze petits poèmes* (Paris, 1920). A letter to the composer André Caplet in May 1924 reveals Denis's admiration for his friend's setting of Ghéon's text. See Denis, letter to André Caplet (12 May 1924). BnF, Département de la Musique, VM BOB-32178.

[34] The musician Réné Jullian found a similar practice in the work of Delacroix, comparing his method with the intrinsically musical 'theme and variation' format in a 1966 lecture entitled 'Delacroix et la musique du tableau'. Jullian, '192e séance: Delacroix et la musique du tableau', *Revue d'esthétique,* 19 (1966), pp. 214-16.

[35] Some illustrations were exhibited at the Salon au indépendants in 1891, Denis, *Henri Lerolle,* p.3. The illustrated book was published by Ambroise Vollard (Paris, 1911).

circle) to publish settings of his poems. Unlike many of his later illustration projects, the *Sagesse* illustrations were not a publisher's commission, but an independent initiative of Denis's, who had been profoundly moved by the penitential sincerity of a man 'coming home' to the faith. In total, Denis produced at least 70 designs for wood engravings (and eighteen designs for wood-engraved ornaments) for the *Sagesse* poems. The woodcut's associations with 'primitivism' – and its contingent requirement for simplification and elimination of extraneous detail – served Denis's purpose of distilling nature into its essential elements.[36] In 'Définition du néo-traditionisme' (1890), Denis laid out his medieval-inspired stimulus for his own book illustration: 'I dream of old missals with rhythmic frames … of the first woodcuts ... Illustration is the decoration of a book.'[37] He emphasized the fact that his images were not intended to be a mere representation of the text's subject, but rather an 'embroidery of arabesques on the pages, an accompaniment of expressive lines.'[38] They had the purpose, much like medieval manuscript illuminations, of transcending the literal meaning of the text in order to render beautiful the implicit message therein.

---

[36] Of course, the strong contours and flat aspect of these illustrations also borrow from the ukiyo-e Japanese craft, fondly adopted by the Nabis, and popularized by French poster art of the 1890s. See Colta Feller Ives, *The Great Wave: the Influence of Japanese Woodcuts on French Prints* (New York, 1974), p. 20.

[37] 'Je rêve d'anciens missels aux encadrements rythmiques, … des premières gravures sur bois […] L'illustration, c'est la décoration d'un livre.'. Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' (1890), as quoted in *Maurice Denis 1870-1943*, p. 350.

[38] 'plûtot une broderie d'arabesques sur les pages, un accompagnement de lignes expressive'. Ibid.

Although he left the woodcutting process to Jacques Beltrand, Denis's own designs were always conceived with the engraving procedure in mind.[39] Verlaine's title 'Wisdom' apparently belies the thread of childlike wonder and searching curiosity that weaves through the collection: one is perhaps reminded of Jesus's teaching in Matthew 18:4: 'Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven'. This attitude of 'naivety' – which will be discussed in greater depth shortly – is analogous to the effect that Denis sought in his illustrations, which adopt the same simplified, rhythmic orderliness that characterize his earliest religious paintings. One of the best known of these early paintings, *Montée au Calvaire* (1889) **[Figure 32]**, formed the basis for the illustration to Verlaine's poem 'The ancient soul was tough and ungainly' (Poem 1, XXIV), which tells of the pain of the Crucifixion **[Figure 33]**. The extreme simplification of the design, with the amorphous figures of the mourning women trudging diagonally across the flat plane, is a quintessentially Symbolist-Synthetist work. The poem 'Give them the silence and the mystery of love' is accompanied by a horizontal design of kneeling communicants shrouded in white, who reappear elsewhere in the poetry collection, almost as leitmotifs **[Figure 34]**. These figures seem to be an exteriorization of a vision that Denis noted in one of his more effusively votive journal entries from 1889, following Holy Communion: 'This is my great dream ... To be in the Heart of Mystery in the serenity of the Temple. All with me, all

[39] Denis later collaborated with Gabrielle Faure for his woodcut designs: for example, his designs for Henri Ghéon's *Le Miroir de Jésus* were engraved with her assistance.

in my Heart ... white things, vague, beautiful things, very elevated music.'[40] This image appears on the frontispiece of a musical setting of *Sagesse* by the honorary musical Nabi, Pierre Hermant. Hermant requested the use of Denis's illustrations in 1899 for the score's publication: '… I can't forget that it was your drawings that impressed me so much in the past, that made me interested in *Sagesse*' **[Figure 35].**[41] For the composer (who dedicated his musical setting to Denis), the illustrations took on the lyrical character of the poetry, distilling into undulating contours the simple rhythms of the verse. Adrien Mithouard, in his 1897 paean to the poet, described Verlaine as 'above all a musician'; to illustrate his article, he calls upon Denis to provide a selection of his *Sagesse* illustrations.[42]

In an article for *La Plume* in 1891, the poet and critic Adolphe Retté, who converted to Catholicism in 1903, described Denis's designs for Verlaine not as mere illustrations, but as 'very exquisite interpretation[s] that only a soul parallel to that of the poet could invent.' Interestingly, Retté was at this point a committed socialist and anarchist, but he found himself drawn to Denis's compositional style rather than to the 'scientific aberrations' of those neo-Impressionists, who shared his political outlook. '... [O]ne thinks automatically of certain missals of the Middle Ages, masterpieces by anonymous *imagiers'*,

---

[40] 'C'est mon grand rêve … Etre au cœur du Mystère dans la sérénité du Temple. Tous avec moi, tous dans mon cœur … des choses blanches, vagues, des choses belles, une musique très haute.' Denis, *Journal I*, 8 June 1885, p. 75.

[41] 'je ne peux pas oublier que c'était tes dessins qui m'avaient si fort impressionné autrefois, qui m'avaient fait m'intéressé à Sagesse'. Pierre Hermant, letter to Denis (23 February 1904). MMD [Ms 5513].

[42] Mithouard, letter to Denis (26 March 1896). MMD [Ms 8130]; Mithouard, *Paul Verlaine, ou, Le Scrupule de la beauté* (Brussels, 1897), p. 10.

continued Retté, affirming Denis's own intention.[43] In a journal entry from 1915, the painter himself reminisced about the development of these first illustrations for Verlaine: 'The sparer the image is, reduced to the only elements of which I am aware, of which I am master, the more appropriate it will seem to me', he writes, taking as examples the 'frustes et naïfs' drawings by Émile Bernard and Gauguin, which 'invented a sensibility reduced to its own means.'[44] Through this means, he argued, the artist might be better able 'to suggest ... mysterious relationships between man and things. This is really very similar to Verlaine's poetry.'[45] The transfiguration, through simplified forms and icons, of the poet's 'innocent' explorations of his faith was surely one of the most powerful expressions of Denis's religious Symbolism.

The *primitif* and the reawakening of religious sentiment

A little over a decade after first exhibiting his *Sagesse* illustrations, the painter gave a lecture at the Sorbonne under the auspices of the group 'Amis des Cathédrales' entitled 'Le sentiment religieux dans l'Art du Moyen Age' (1913). The lecture offered a consolidation of ideas that he had rehearsed in earlier essays within *Théories.* His vision of Fra Angelico as a devout *naïf* painter-monk was elaborated to its fullest. 'Put in such a humble and ingenuous soul, an ardent faith and the gifts of the superior artist, and you have Fra Angelico', he

---

[43] 'une interprétation très exquise que seule pouvait *inventer* une âme parallèle à celle du poète … On se reporte irrésistiblement à certains missels du moyen-âge, chefs-d'œuvre d'imagiers inconnus.' Adolphe Retté, 'Maurice Denis', *La Plume,* 57 (September 1891), p. 301.

[44] 'Plus cette image sera pauvre, réduite aux seuls éléments dont je suis conscient, dont je suis maitre, plus elle me paraîtra appropriée.'…'qu'invente une sensibilité réduite à ses propres moyens.' Denis, *Journal II*, 9 September 1915, p. 180.

[45] '…doit suggérer … des rapports mystérieux entre l'homme et les choses. Cela est vraiment très analogue à la poésie de Verlaine.' Ibid.

claimed.[46] The virtue of humility, unequivocally confirmed in the Christian tradition (and embodied so markedly in Verlaine's *Sagesse*) was aestheticized in Denis's mind as an epistemic and moral way of a painter to recognize the limits of his understanding of the world. Depriving one's canvas of 'all greed and all manner of rhetoric' was essential for the revelation of religious sentiment. [47] Indeed, religious sentiment, for Denis, had little to do with the professed faith of the artist, or indeed the subject matter of the work itself, but was instead intimated in the mode of a non-naturalistic rendering of nature — which Denis describes as *gaucherie* (usually translated as 'clumsiness' or 'awkwardness'). In his 1904 essay 'De la gaucherie des Primitifs' (published in *Théories*), he claimed that *primitif* painters, such as Fra Angelico and Giotto, were able to preserve 'le sens des objets' in a way that modern artists (with the exception of Maillol), clouded by their knowledge of painterly conventions and the search for the 'picturesque', could not.[48]

However questionable we might find Denis's vision of the unencumbered *primitif*, living in naïve awe of the world around him and oblivious to the 'tyranny' of the formulas of academicism, it was an ideal that strongly, and consistently, underpinned his sense of the religious. It should be pointed out that Denis's lauding of the era of the *primitifs* had little to do with *possessive* national heritage as such – after all, those he admired most (Giotto and Fra

---

[46] 'Notes sur la Peinture Religieuse', *Théories,* pp. 30-44 and 'De la Gaucherie des Primitifs', *L'Art de la vie,* 7 (July 1904), pp. 11-18. Reprinted in *Théories,* pp. 172-8; 'Mettez dans une telle âme humble et ingénue, une fois ardente et les dons de l'artiste supérieur, et vous avez Fra Angelico.' Denis, 'Le sentiment religieux dans l'Art du Moyen Age', *Bulletin de la Société des amis des cathédrales* (1914), pp. 73-87. Reprinted in *Nouvelles théories*, (pp. 135-68), p.164-5.

[47] 'dépourvu de tout orgueil et de toute espèce de rhetorique', 'Le sentiment religieux dans l'Art du Moyen Age', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 152.

[48] 'De la gaucherie des Primitifs', *Théories,* p. 173-5.

Angelico) were Italian. For him, the *primitif* served as an exemplar for modern-day French artists to reconnect with their country's Catholic traditions. After all, true Catholics looked to Rome first and France second, while Republicans looked to France alone. His essay on *gaucherie* was written partly in response to the state-sponsored 'Exposition des primitifs français', held at the Pavillon de Marsan in the Louvre in 1904. This exhibition was not a glorification of the devoutness of French medieval painters, but rather an overt display of nationalist superiority, with incorrect attributions and a revisionist narrative that relocated the innovations of the *quattrocento* to France. What is more, this revisionism was profoundly secular, in line, of course, with the Republic's wider secularizing mission. The introduction to the exhibition catalogue, by the art historian Henry Bouchot, betrays the main motive of the event. Bouchot rhetorically wonders whether it was the French School or the Dutch or Italians who were the originators of the *primitif* aesthetic, concluding rather implausibly that 'All the findings appear to be in the Parisians' favour'.[49] Denis was dismissive of the show's intention to simply 'serve national pride', self-consciously distancing himself by means of his essay from the Republican co-opting of the *primitif* ideal.[50]

The apparent Republican enthusiasm for a secularized version of the French Middle Ages was, at least in the minds of Denis and many Catholic writers (including Huysmans, Claudel and Bloy), insincere, being bound up with a disingenuous sentimentalism that had become a pervasive cultural force within

---

[49] 'Toutes les constatations paraissent en faveur des Parisiens.' Henri Bouchot, 'Préface', *L'exposition des primitifs français: La peinture en France sous les Valois,* exhib. cat. (Paris, 1904), p. 11.

[50] Denis, 'De la gaucherie des Primitifs', *Théories*, pp. 172-3.

religious art itself in the nineteenth-century. The popularity of inexpensive pastiches of medieval devotional objects amongst the general public signified the general decrepitude of modern ecclesiastical craftsmanship and the commercialization and appropriation of sacred art.[51] In his novel *La Femme Pauvre* (1897) Léon Bloy invented the expression 'Saint-Sulpicien' to refer pejoratively to the faux-medieval 'kitsch' devotional objects and paintings on sale in the area around the church of Saint Sulpice in Paris, designed for someone 'who leafed more often through the menu at his bakery than he did through the pages of the Holy Book.'[52] Such examples of *bondieuserie*, Denis commented, rather regretfully in his Journal, were nevertheless treated as suitable vehicles of piety for the laity.[53] For Denis, Bloy and other Catholic revivalists, Saint-Sulpicien objects lacked aesthetic, and therefore spiritual, value. In a 1918 article for *La Vie et les Arts Liturgiques*, Denis elaborated on the distinction between the *objet religieux* – a clichéd, industrial product, giving religion a dull colour and an outdated and boring 'je ne sais quoi' – and the *objet d'art*, which, 'brings to the service of God powers of emotion and lyricism, always new and always active'.[54] This lecture followed the influential publication in 1917 of the Swiss Catholic artist Alexandre Cingria's *La Décadence de l'Art Sacré.* Here Cingria called, like Denis, for a renewal of

---

[51] Denis remarked on the phenomenon in 'Les nouvelles directions de l'Art Chrétien', *Nouvelles théories*, p. 204.

[52] Léon Bloy, *La Femme pauvre* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1962), p. 107. First published 1897.

[53] Denis, *Journal I,* March 1889, p. 152. *Bondieuserie* is a pejorative term (derived from 'bon' and dieu') to mean religious knick-knacks.

[54] '…apporte au service de Dieu des puissances d'emotion et de lyricisme, toujours neuves et toujours actives.' Maurice Denis, 'Préface pour l'Arche', *La Vie et les arts liturgiques: revue mensuelle*, 4, no. 46, (October 1918), pp. 503-7. Reprinted as 'Objet religieux et objet d'art', *Nouvelles théories,* (pp. 244-52), p. 246.

modern art that did not rely on mere replication of Gothic styles, which he condemned as being associated with 'false prudery'.[55]

The encroachment into the realm of religious art of a materialistic artificiality threatened – these Catholic artists believed – sincere engagement with religious truths. Proposing an intellectual foundation for an antidote to this modern malaise, Denis made scattered references in many of his writings to theological aesthetics deriving from the medieval philosopher St Thomas Aquinas, whose thought enjoyed a resurgence among Catholics at the turn of the century.[56] There is not scope here to investigate in detail the tenets of this Thomist philosophy which is hinted at in Denis's pages. But since this is a particularly under-appreciated aspect of his thought, it is worth pointing out that Denis anticipated the 1920s' flourishing of the neo-Thomist (or neo-Scholastic) movement in the wake of the publication in 1920 of *Art et Scholastique* by the theologian Jacques Maritain. There Maritain strove to re-accustom 'to beauty the faithful, whose taste has been spoiled for more than a century past'; and he laid out the requisites for a truly religious form of art in the modern age.[57] The text is relevant to us here given its indebtedness to Denis's own ideas about the renewal of religious art, and Denis's interest in Maritain's philosophy. In a

---

[55] 'Fausse pruderie…' Denis quotes Cingria's remarks in 'Les nouvelles directions de l'Art Chrétien', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 204. In 1916, Cingria collaborated with Denis on the renovation of the church of Notre-Dame in Geneva.

[56] In 1879 Pope Leo XIII published the encyclical Aeterni Patris, which commended the works of Thomas Aquinas for reading and inspiration, reinforcing an already growing ambition among many European Catholics to resituate the Saint's philosophy at the heart of the Church's teachings.

[57] Jacques Maritain, 'Appendix II: Some Reflections Upon Religious Art' in Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (trans. J. F. Scanlan), 4th impression, (London, 1934), p. 187. In the 1920s, Denis moved within Maritain's cultural and social circle, and his eldest daughter Noële was a student of Maritain's during his tenure as a professor at the Institut Catholique.

letter addressed to Denis in 1922, Maritain shows his interest in Denis's collection of essays *Nouvelles théories,* writing: '…from my philosophical point of view, I am happy to see … your exquisite feeling for art, invoking certain great ideas and formulas of Saint Thomas.'[58] Both Maritain and Denis understood the 'ingenuousness' of the medieval *primitifs* as being a result of the spiritual armour with which they were equipped (a quality reflected in the writings of St Thomas).[59] A phrase attitubuted to Fra Angelico — 'to paint the things of Christ one must live with Christ' — became a mantra for both Maritain and Denis.[60] Living 'in Christ' as an artist, according to Maritain, did not entail the endless production of art on religious subject matter. Rather, like the *primitifs* - 'Nurslings of the Church' – it required the artist to allow 'their souls to pass into their art'.[61] In so doing, their work (whatever its subject) might inspire 'religious sentiment' by bearing witness to God through the intelligent rendering of its maker.

Denis's interest in Thomism was perhaps in part an attempt at self-insertion into a growing intellectual milieu. As he stated in 1919, 'it is desirable that an artist ... translates, even before he discerns them clearly, the bubbling of the new forces which agitate in it'.[62] But his references to neo-Scholasticism point

---

[58] 'à mon point de vue de philosophe, je suis heureux de voir votre pensée, et votre sentiment exquis de l'art, invoquer certaines grandes idées et certaines formules de Saint Thomas.' Maritain, letter to Denis, 22 April 1922. MMD [Ms 7575].

[59] 'la plus moyenâgeuse ingénuité'. Denis, 'Le sentiment religieux dans l'Art du Moyen Age', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 162.

[60] Maritain quotes Fra Angelico in *Art and Scholasticism,* p.55. (The phrase became a mantra for Denis's Ateliers d'Art Sacré, which will be discussed shortly.)

[61] Ibid., p. 163.

[62] 'il est désirable qu'un artiste traduise, avant même qu'elle les discerne nettement, le bouillonnement des forces neuves qui s'agitent en elle.' Denis, 'Les nouvelles directions de l'Art Chrétien', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 222.

to the growth of an epistemological understanding that supported his ambition to bring back a universal paradigm for religious art based on a re-imagining of lost pre-Renaissance traditions. Denis was following Thomist ideas, as a means of validating certain personal attitudes towards the nature of religion and art, long before Maritain had set pen to paper. The Thomist notion of beauty expounded by Maritain asserts the importance of an intellectual process in which the mind and object of perception become pleasingly unified: the work of art is the realization in sensuous form of creative intuition. Art requires the transposition of one's preconscious response to the world into a plastic language that does not lose sight of its materiality (so, avoiding illusionism), and renders intelligible the painter's subjectivity. This aligned with Denis's own conception of Symbolism, discussed in the previous chapter. A conference paper given at Notre-Dame in 1918 entitled simply 'Le Symbolisme et l'art religieux modern' offers his clearest expression of the relevance of Symbolism to contemporary religious art:

> I demand that, by means of an effort of transposition – by Symbolism! – you attempt at least to promote … the personages and sentiments thus represented; that you paint them so that they seem to be painted, submitted to the laws of painting, that they do not seek to fool my eyes or my spirit. That is what is meant by style. And that is what I call: truth. .[63]

[63] 'Je demande que par un effort de transposition — de Symbolisme ! — vous essayiez au moins de promouvoir … le sentiment et les personnages représentés ; que vous les peigniez de telle façon qu'ils aient l'air d'être peints, soumis aux lois de la peinture, qu'ils ne cherchent pas à me tromper l'œil ou l'esprit. C'est le moyen qu'ils aient du style. Et c'est ce que j'appelle: vérité.' Denis, 'Le symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *Nouvelles théories*, p. 174.

For Maritain, mere 'reproduction', in the manner of 'illusionistic' art, could never give the intellectual faculties full play. The task of creating formal 'beauty' out of material elements required the prioritizing of clarity, proportion and integrity (the three conditions that Saint Thomas assigned to beauty), rather than the pursuit of verisimilitude. In a work that is 'harmoniously proportioned', he writes, 'some principle of intelligibility' will shine forth in the forms represented.[64] This notion of 'form' derives from the Aristotelian conception of reality as being a radiation of some intelligible inner principle, or interior metaphysical form. The artistic representation of intelligible form relies, according to the philosopher, on the translation of 'a unique and dominating intuitive emotion' arising from contact with matter.[65] This idea was consolidated for Maritain by his reading of Denis, who constantly insisted on 'the existence of correspondences between lines, forms, colours and on the other hand our states of mind, between the visible and the invisible …'.[66]

The philosopher John Trapani succinctly summarizes Maritain's position: 'The intellect [for Maritain] is a superior, intuitive, immaterial knowing power that operates together with the instrumentality of the senses ... and, having being as its proper object, it puts us in direct contact with reality itself.'[67] Therefore aesthetic experience is in itself a mode of intellectual understanding, leading to what Maritain described as 'Poetic Knowledge' – a connatural, intuitive and non-conceptual mode of knowledge. This mode of knowledge,

---

[64] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p. 46.
[65] Ibid., p. 38.
[66] 'l'existence de correspondances entre les lignes, les formes, les couleurs et d'autre part nos états d'âme, entre le visible et l'invisible.' Denis, 'Le sentiment religieux dans l'Art du Moyen Age', *Nouvelles théories*, p. 176.
[67] John Trapani, *Truth Matters: Essays in Honour of Jacques Maritain* (Washington DC, 2004), p. 10.

this 'truth', is never possible, as Maritain would have it, by 'imitation as a reproduction of things', but rather by 'imitation as manifestation of a form'.[68] It seems that the Maritainian idea of 'Poetic Knowledge' parallels Denis's understanding of Symbolism. As we have seen in Chapter 1, this search for the 'essence of things' — not the plain *reportage* of nature, but the non-'illusionistic' rendering of the natural world in accordance with one's immediate response to it – was a central thread running through the Symbolist thought of the Nabis. Religious art work that relies on formulas derived from academicism could not be a vehicle for sincere faith: Denis challenges his readers to try to pray before Léon Bonnat's *Le Martyrdom de Saint Denis* in the Panthéon, and to attempt to trace any sort of religious emotion in the work. His own conclusion is guided by his distaste for its illusionism: it has the character simply of a history painting, he claims, merely telling us a narrative in dazzling exactitude but devoid of all sanctity.[69]

'Art is the sanctification of nature'[70]

Early in 1919, Denis became a tertiary of the Dominican order, the religious order to which St Thomas himself belonged. His dedication to this particular tradition did not, however, prevent his appreciating other forms of Catholic teaching, as exemplified in his attachment to the thirteenth-century friar St

---

[68] Quoted in Stephen Schloesser, 'Maritain on Music: his debt to Cocteau', in A. Ramos (ed.), *Beauty, Art and the Polis* (Washington DC, 2000), p. 176.

[69] Denis, 'Le Symbolisme et l'art religieuse moderne', *Nouvelles théories,* pp. 191-2.

[70] 'L'Art est la sanctification de la nature'. Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 12. He repeats the phrase in an essay on 'Paul Sérusier', *L'Occident,* 85 (December 1908), pp. 278-80. Reprinted in *Théories,* (pp. 147-9), p.146 ; and in 'Préface à «L'esthétique de Beuron de Pierre Lenz» traduit par Paul Serusier', *L'Occident,* 35 (October 1904), pp. 201-3. Reprinted as 'L'esthetique de Beuron', *Théories* (pp. 183-7), p. 185.

Francis of Assisi. St Francis was traditionally revered for his avowal of a life of poverty and simplicity, and for his boundless devotion to the natural world.[71] Denis recognized an affinity in Franciscan teaching with his own attachment to the natural world: he looked with approval on the 'Franciscan tenderness' of landscape painters such as Corot.[72] Corot's naturalist painterly language may not have conformed to Denis's aesthetic ideal, but his reverence for the natural world gave his paintings a distinctiveness of which Denis approved. Denis's own stylistic language was understood by some critics, such as Jamot, to be suggestive of Franciscan piety.[73] In 1921, the painter was commissioned to produce a front cover design for the religious historian Georges Goyau's *Figurines franciscaines,* a text outlining the history and religious significance of the Saint. The modesty of Denis's designs was felt to be particularly appropriate for the subject matter of a saint who vowed to spend his life in poverty. The notion of humility, discussed in relation to the *primitifs,* was understood as being a particularly Franciscan quality, and, unsurprisingly, it was Fra Angelico whose work best articulated the 'compassion' of St Francis for Denis. [74]

His frequently uttered phrase about art 'sanctifying' nature, first declared in his 'Définition' essay of 1890, can be understood in the light of the painter's

---

[71] Saint Francis is the patron saint of ecologists. The most prominent pronouncement of his personal theology was his *Canticles of the Sun,* which praises God for his creation of the natural elements.

[72] Denis, 'Un siècle de couleur française', *Tribune de Genève,* (July 1918). Expanded version printed in *Nouvelles théories*, (pp. 71-85), p. 81.

[73] Paul Jamot, 'Une illustration des *Fioretti* par Maurice Denis', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 53/649 (July 1911), p. 12.

[74] Denis, 'Notes sur la peinture religieuse', *Théories*, p. 40.

Franciscan intuition.[75] A kinship between Denis's illustrations for *Petites Fleurs* (introduced at the opening of this chapter) and popular conceptions of St Francis, in their comparably 'child-like' view of the natural world, did not escape the attention of contemporaneous critics. In his preface to *Petites Fleurs*, its French translator André Pératé describes Denis as illustrating 'with the very gestures of the saint and his naive disciples, all the nature so ardently loved... A pious pilgrim ... he made himself the contemporary of Giotto...'[76] The comparison with Giotto is of course particularly fitting, given the reputation of his frescos depicting the life of the saint, at the San Francesco basilica in Assisi.[77]

Denis's *Petites Fleurs* designs are simple moments of meditation, capturing the interactions of religious figures within specific or symbolic landscapes. The frontispiece of the work, depicting St Francis surrounded by flocks of birds (in reference to the famous 'Lecture to the Birds' legend) shows the saint's torso as the symbolic trunk of a vast flowering tree, palms facing outwards in a gesture of hospitality **[Figure 36]**. Behind him stretches an Italian landscape, one that was perhaps drawn from Denis's own recent visits to Umbria and Tuscany. Indeed, there are numerous recognizable landscapes within the set of illustrations, drawn from his own 1910 pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Francis (as discussed in his journal).[78] For example, the image that accompanies the story of Saint Antoine (one of St Francis's disciples) preaching to the fishes in

---

[75] 'Definition de néo-traditionnisme', *Théories*, p. 12.

[76] 'avec les gestes mêmes du saint et de ses naïfs disciples, toute la nature si ardemment aimée … Pèlerin pieux …il s'est fait le contemporain de Giotto'. 'Préface' to *Les petites fleurs de Saint-François d'Assise*, trans. André Pératé (Paris, 1933), p. 19.

[77] In April 1910 Denis saw the Giotto, but was not entirely impressed. *Journal II*, p. 127.

[78] Ibid., especially pp. 124-132.

Rimini clearly shows the modern lighthouse in the port of Rimini itself **[Figure 37]**. Denis reused several of the motifs from *Petites Fleurs* for a decoration for the Chapelle des Franciscaines in Rouen (1930) on the subject of Saint Francis's life. One could argue that the *Petites Fleurs* illustrations and decorations for the Rouen chapels demonstrate his imaginative association between Catholicism and the Italian landscape which nurtured both his faith and his sense of the classically 'picturesque' – this idea will be explored further in the following chapter. [79]

Of course, Denis also drew spiritual sustenance from the landscape of his native France throughout his life. From his earliest works we see the landscape invested with symbolic, spiritual meaning. As we noted in Chapter 1, the theme of the forest path appears frequently as a visual metaphor for the progression of the soul towards religious enlightenment, achieved through a life sustained by faith and prayer. In *Chemin dans les arbres* (1891) **[Figure 38]**. Through the powerful movement into the depth of the fictive space, Denis emphasized the experience of the walker on that long, winding spiritual journey. The elongated, bare tree trunks on either side of the sinuous arabesque of the path dwarf the human figures, suggesting man's humility in relation to the natural world, an attitude that he found so powerfully evoked in *quattrocento* art. Many of his post-Nabi works realized an explicit pictorial association between faith and the French countryside through the integration of sacred events within contemporary vistas. Much has been said on the allure

[79] For a detailed discussion of this work see Fabienne Stahl, 'Un art religieux alliant tradition et modernité : l'exemple du décor de Maurice Denis dans la chapelle des franciscaines de Rouen', *Études Normandes*, 62 (2013), pp. 53-60.

of Brittany to the Nabis. For these painters, this land of wayside calvaries and 'saints and ancient customs', was saturated by the Catholic faith of its inhabitants.[80] The anthropologist Per Binde has noted that: 'If God has a certain presence in nature, then the peasant who lives and works in the countryside, would, logically speaking, be closer to God than people dwelling in the city.'[81] Denis continued to find religious inspiration in the people and landscape of this north-western French region long after the disbanding of the Nabis, travelling to Brittany every summer from 1899 onwards. In his 1906 painting *La vocation des apôtres* **[Figure 39]**, Christ appears garbed in a white mantle at the Breton port of Le Pouldu. He extends an arm to the two fishermen, Peter and Andrew, who are dressed in contemporary fishermen's clothing. A postcard that was in Denis's possession shows the particular spot where the scene unfolds, at the mouth of the Laïta.[82] This unambiguous visual conflation of Biblical narrative and contemporary Breton life signifies the persistence of Catholic tradition in the region. Perhaps the most powerful testament to his commitment to 'sanctify' *le terroir* of Brittany can be found in the 1909 painting *Magnificat [de Silencio],* commissioned, like *La vocation des apôtres,* by Gabriel Thomas **[Figure 40]**.[83] The scene, set on the balcony of his newly-purchased house Silencio overlooking Trestrignel bay, captures the intimate moment of silent greeting between the Virgin Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, before Mary speaks the words that we now know as the Magnificat.

---

[80] 'le pays des saints et des vieilles coutumes'. Denis, *Journal I,* 26 August 1885 p. 44.
[81] Per Binde, 'Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition', *Anthropological Quarterly,* 74/1 (2001), p. 19.
[82] MMD [Ms C.P.C.16].
[83] Thomas was a major financier, promoter and art collector (funding the construction of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées), who was to commission Denis to decorate the dining room of his house in Meudon-Belleville in 1908.

The serenity and composure of the figures belies the emotional intensity of the salutation, which is manifested symbolically by the intense yellow of the sunset reflected in the body of water behind the figures.[84]

The diffusion of the Catholic spirit within Breton culture was brought vividly to life for Denis in the famous Breton *pardons* (popular pilgrimages), a subject he returned to on numerous occasions. His *Le Pardon à Sainte Anne la Palud*, (1905), with its confrontation of carefree semi-naked bathers and Breton women in traditional costume walking in close-knit units, is an illustration of the continuing presence of religious ceremony within the early twentieth century **[Figure 41]**. Though seemingly unaware of each other, the two groups – the sacred and secular – are knitted together within the natural strata of sky, sea, and sand. This work was bought by the painter Théo van Rysselberghe, and it appears in the background of his 1908 portrait of the composer Vincent d'Indy **[Figure 42]**. Close observation of Rysselberghe's rendering of Denis's *Le Pardon à Sainte Anne la Palud* canvas reveals the inscription '*à Vincent d'Indy*' in the bottom left corner (occupying the place of Denis's own signature in the 'real' work). This placing of the dedication demonstrates Rysselberghe's recognition of the close relationship between the painter Denis and Vincent d'Indy.

Like Denis, d'Indy understood his creative work as a vocation inseparable from his faith. What is more, his admiration for certain composers depended on his perceiving – often, perhaps, wrongly – certain qualities in their work associated with the medieval tradition. In his study of César Franck, he claims

[84] The following year, Denis painted *Christ aux Enfants*, set in the same location and with the same bold use of yellow.

that the composer had a greater affinity, 'through his qualities of clearness, luminosity, and vitality, with the great Italian painters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. His ancestors were Gaddi, Bartolo Fredi, and Lippi.'[85] But what are we to make of the fact that, given the strength of his religious purpose, d'Indy wrote relatively few overtly religious works himself? This is a paradox that Stéphane Giocanti has explored, concluding convincingly that the composer entrusted to his profane work the religious and theological meaning that guided his life (an idea which conforms to Maritain's understanding of art's 'religious' nature as not being confined to its purpose or subject).[86] I would argue that this was apparent not only in his liberal employment of melodies drawn from liturgical chant, but also from his frequent use of French folk songs, which he believed to be derived from plain song.[87] D'Indy's cultivation of a form of musical *régionalisme* (that is, his awareness that certain melodies are particular to certain geographical regions), was undoubtedly a vehicle for his nationalist ideology. 'All artists concerned with the creation of national unity', he asserted in his essay on Beethoven, 'should be attached emotionally, mentally, and, where possible, physically to his own *petite patrie*.'[88] As for Denis, France's rural regions revealed to d'Indy a depth of lived tradition unattainable in the city.[89]

---

[85] Vincent d'Indy, *César Franck,* trans. Rosa Newmarch (London, 1922), p. 76.
[86] See Stéphane Giocanti, '*Vincent d'Indy* est il un compositeur religieux?' in M. Schwartz (ed.), *Vincent d'Indy et sons temps* (Sprimont, 2006), p. 261.
[87] D'Indy, *Cours,* vol I, p. 85.
[88] Quoted in A. N. Musk, 'Aspects of regionalism in French music during the Third Republic: the Schola Cantorum, d'Indy, Séverac and Canteloube' (D.Phil. thesis: University of Oxford, 1999), p. 99.
[89] See Andrew Deruchie, *The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle, Style, Culture, and the Symphonic Tradition* (Rochester, NY, 2013), p. 168.

In the words of the pioneering ethnomusicologist (and friend of d'Indy's) Julien Tiersot, folksong 'is worthy of being the messenger of every generous sentiment which arises in the soul of a multitude and carries it along'.[90] These melodies, passed down through oral tradition, seem to be implanted in the very soil of the country. D'Indy was particularly enchanted by the rich collection of melodies associated with his ancestral home in the south-east region of the Ardèche.[91] Virtually the only work of his that receives regular performances today is his *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* Op. 25 (1886) – the work is entirely based on a popular peasant folk tune from the Cévennes mountains in the Ardèche. In 1900 he published *Chansons populaires du Vivarais*, an assemblage of the hundreds of folk songs that he had collected in the region. Like liturgical chant, these songs are essentially monodic, relying on no accompaniment that might add constraints on the free human voice. In their simplicity, they share with chant the qualities of a humble 'primitivism.' One of the songs in *Chansons populaires du Vivarais,* 'La Pernette' (believed to be one of the oldest songs of France), epitomizes the very 'force of tradition' for Tiersot.[92] D'Indy goes further, and seeks to demonstrate that this melody is directly drawn from Gregorian chant, via a Bach chorale.[93] To recognize these folk melodies was to be reminded of the rich collective past of a land infused

---

[90] Julian Tiersot, 'Historic and National Songs of France', *Musical Quarterly*, 6/4 (October 1920), p. 599.

[91] Although born in Paris, d'Indy was deeply attached to his family ties in the south, and built a château in the region, from where he was to compose many of his later works. The significant number of watercolours that d'Indy made as a young man of the landscape of his birthplace in the Cévennes testifies to this.

[92] Quoted in Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, p. 658.

[93] Vincent d'Indy, *Chansons populaires du Vivarais,* op. 52 (1900), pp. 15-19.

with religious spirit.[94] While other composers interested in folk music, such as Louis-Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray, insisted that these popular songs stemmed from rhythms derived from the music of Ancient Greece, these melodies were for d'Indy, religious at root.[95] Denis owned a copy of Bourgault-Ducoudray's collection 'Trente mélodies populaires de Basse-Bretagne', from which his family would reportedly perform on informal occasions.[96] In its preface, the Catholic novelist François Coppée (a founder of the Ligue de la Patrie Française), noted the abundance of *cantiques* (popular religious melodies) within the Breton region, the 'simplicity and …deep fervour' of which, he claimed, was unparalleled.[97]

The aural equating of the sacred and the pastoral is also apparent in d'Indy's incorporation of liturgical chant melodies into his programmatic compositions inspired by the French landscape. His 1905 *La Jour d'été à la montagne*, a so-called symphonic triptych inspired by his birthplace in the Ardèche, consists of three movements: 'L'Aube', 'L'Après-midi sous les pins' and 'Le Soir'.[98] The composer described the 'triptych' form as being the only 'true national form': presumably he saw his country's religious heritage reflected in Trinitarian

---

[94] D'Indy, *Cours*, vol I, p. 84.

[95] Bourgault-Ducoudray, Maurice Emmanuel, Dédoat de Séverac and Joseph Canteloupe – all close associates of d'Indy – were involved in the folksong revival.

[96] *See Maurice Denis et la Bretagne* exhib. cat. musée de Morlaix, 13 juillet-29 septembre 1985 (Morlaix, 1985).

[97] 'la simplicité, l'expression de ferveur profonde'. François Coppée, 'Préface', in L. Bourgault-Ducoudray, trans. and edited F. Coppée, *Trente mélodies populaires de Basse-Bretagne* (Paris, 1885), p. 9.

[98] As the title indicates, the work is a paean to the natural world and has drawn comparisons with Richard Strauss's far better-known tone poem *Alpine Symphony,* composed a decade later. See Stefan Keym, 'De la "Divine Bonté" à l'Antichrist?' in Schwartz (ed.), *Vincent d'Indy et son temps,* pp. 195-210.

symbolism.[99] In this work (and in others on similarly pastoral themes), d'Indy implicitly draws a connection between the natural world and a religious musical world. The principal theme of the work's final movement is based upon the Vespers antiphon *Virgo prudentissima,* which d'Indy had discovered in a Benedictine Antiphony published in 1897.[100] An audience may not have recognized the specific antiphon on which the phrase is based, but the modal inflection of the melody and the sudden condensing of orchestral texture transports the listener to a sound-world evocative of the sobriety of religious ritual. He did not simply transcribe the melody, but used it as a sort of musical apparatus on which to hang a harmonically sophisticated, modern symphonic texture. What we find in this musical passage, as in so much of d'Indy's music, is a religious musical form stripped of its sacred signifiers: there are no voices to sing liturgical text, and the work is, on the face of it, secular. In fact, d'Indy integrates the melodic contours of the chant in much the same way as he incorporates themes derived from his beloved Gallic folk songs. We might understand this as the playing out in musical terms of Denis's motto: 'Art is the sanctification of nature'. Moreover, this is achieved through the embracing of medieval musical syntax, just as the character of Denis's work is informed by what he understood to be attributes of the *primitif* mentality.

[99] As quoted by Léon Vallas, *Vincent d'Indy: La maturité, la vieillesse, 1886-1931*, vol.II (Paris, 1950), p. 34.
[100] Giocanti, 'Vincent d'Indy', p. 257.

Gregorian chant and the Schola Cantorum

Denis's sensitivity to liturgical chant is apparent from his very earliest diary entries: the fifteen-year-old described the cantor's singing of *Et homo factus est* as so sublime that it made him 'tremble'.[101] Chant was powerful in the enactment of the liturgy, as it allowed for clear articulation of words and phrases, but through prayerful and entrancing intonation.[102] Denis's Thomist philosopher friend A.G. Sertillanges called upon St Thomas's own affection for liturgical music in his work *Prière et musique* (1935). He singled out plainchant and Palestrinian music as having a special place: '[this music] is a private prayer and knows only the sanctuary'. [103] Chant was not virtuosic, but simply an exalted form of prayer – an end in itself rather than a form of entertainment for others. This lack of a hierarchical distinction between performer and listener was also significant as a means of engendering communality. The austerity of liturgical chant was believed to offer a transformative and transcendent experience for the listener: its spareness and repetitive nature has a hypnotic quality that allows for inner reflection and contemplation among worshipful listeners. Its lack of harmonization, distinct metre and regular rhythmic impetus lends it a 'floating' quality quite unlike modern Western classical music. We might add to these distinguishing features the lack of resolute cadences, and the conjunct motion of the melody (that is to say, there are very rarely large leaps between notes).

---

[101] Denis, *Journal I*, 30 August 1885, p.45.

[102] Jeremy Begbie has written on this topic. See, for example Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge, 2000).

[103] 'ils se recueillent et ne connaissent que le sanctuaire', he quotes from St Thomas. A.G. Sertillanges, *Prière et Musique* (Paris, 1935), p. 88.

Denis was entranced by the widespread revival of Gregorian chant that had begun to gain momentum in France during the latter half of the nineteenth century, thanks largely to research undertaken by the Benedictine fraternity at the Abbey of Solesmes.[104] As we have seen (in the Introduction), the iconographical details of his decorations in the Sainte-Croix chapel of Le Vésinet indicate his familiarity with the conventions of chant notation. Various publications by the monks of Solesmes helped to circulate new theories about the melodies, notation, and singing methods of chant.[105] Specifically, the Solèsmes school of chant advanced a free style of singing, whereby notes would be grouped together syllabically and sung 'lightly and freely', in equal values, to emphasize the basic prayerful nature of chant. Solesmes's Dom Mocquereau remarked that chant's most salient character was its simplicity.[106] This 'condition of simplicity' was exactly what Maurice Denis found so valuable in pre-Renaissance culture, leading him to favour the simple contour of the arabesque.[107] The step-by-step single-line melody of chant perhaps offers the clearest instance of a musical 'arabesque', with lines rising and falling in a manner respectful of the meaning of the liturgical phrases. Claude Debussy explicitly conceptualized the relationship between chant and the arabesque. As

---

[104] Stephen Schloesser, *Visions of Amen: The Early Life and Music of Olivier Messiaen* (Michigan, 2014), p. 110. Pierre Combe, *The Restoration of Gregorian Chant: Solesmes and the Vatican Edition* (New York, 2003) also discusses in depth Dom Guéranger's (the Abbot of Solesmes) research on Gregorian chant which stimulated wider interest. Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments* (1998), draws compelling parallels between these attempts at a musical renewal, and the mid-century Gothic revival.

[105] Dom Pothier, *Les Mélodies grégoriennes* (Tournai, 1882); Dom André Mocquereau, *La Paléographie musicale* (Solesmes, 1889).

[106] Dom A. Mocquereau, 'L'Art grégorien, son but, ses procédes, ses caractères', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais; revue musicologique de la Schola Cantorum*, 3/2, (1897), p. 17. Originally given as a lecture at the Institut Catholique in 1896.

[107] Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 7.

noted in Chapter 1, he credited the so-called musical 'primitives' (Palestrina, Victoria, Orlando di Lasso), with developing the arabesque's 'divine sense'. They found its basis, he argued, 'in Gregorian chant, whose delicate tracery they supported with strong counterpoints.'[108] Denis himself understood chant as an intelligent adorning of the religious word analogous to the Symbolist painters' search for plastic and decorative equivalences to every thought and emotion: '… it is probably ideas like these [the Symbolist search for decorative equivalences] that we owe, among other things, to the Primitives, the Gregorian chant and the gothic cathedrals'.[109] Others recognized similar parallels. In his text on early twentieth-century religious art (which included much on Denis), the poet and critic Maurice Brillant insisted on harmony between 'the most recent aesthetic tendencies, and the *desiderata* of the liturgy, which, in music, maintains the beautiful tradition of Gregorian chant' with its 'elimination of exaggeration and superfluous ornament, [its] logic, simplicity and … grandeur.'[110]

Through his friendships with d'Indy and the composer Charles Bordes, cultivated in the salons of Ernest Chausson and Henry Lerolle, Denis was privy to debates on the religious music revival. Charles Bordes closely followed the developments at Solesmes, visiting the abbey in 1897 and sharing in the desire

---

[108] 'dans le chant grégorien et en étayèrent les frêles entrelacs par de résistants contrepoints.' Debussy, *Monsieur croche et autres écrits*, p. 34.

[109] 'Et c'est probablement à des idées comme celles-là que nous devons, entre autres choses, les Primitifs, le chant grégorien et les cathedrals gothiques.' Denis, '[I]mpressionistes et symbolistes', *Théories*, p. 27.

[110] 'les tendances les plus récentes de l'esthétique et les *desiderata* de la liturgie qui, et en musique, maintient la belle tradition du chant grégorien … l'élimination de la surcharge et de l'ornement superflu, la logique, la simplicité et… la grandeur.' This is a summary by Jamot in 'Maurice Brillant', p. 683.

to reconfigure the complex music of the monasteries as 'something natural, rooted in simplicity, and erupting spontaneously from the heart'.[111] On accepting the role of choirmaster at Paris's Church of Saint-Gervais in 1890 (a position facilitated by the intervention of Lerolle), Bordes founded the Chanteurs de Saint-Gervais, which was to become the capital's foremost choral society devoted to religious music, especially Gregorian chant. The choir's Holy Week concerts were reportedly so overcrowded that music critics were forced to squeeze themselves into confessional booths.[112] Denis was a frequent attendee – he reminisced in 1918 about going to hear Bordes and the singers of Saint-Gervais.[113] Bordes was a particular champion of Palestrina, who has sometimes been referred to as the 'Fra Angelico' of music on account of his comparably pious attitude to artistic creation. The Italian composer was celebrated for his use of ancient plainchant melodies as anchoring devices within his virtuosic contrapuntal choral music. His compositions therefore served as examples of the possibilities afforded by the integration of old and new musical models. On attending a Holy Week performance of Palestrina's music in 1893, Debussy remarked on the fact that there were few musicians in attendance, but rather 'literary people ... poets ... and people who care about the integrity of their art'.[114] Among these we can suppose, were many of the regulars at Lerolle's salon (which Debussy himself frequently attended), and it

[111] Schloesser, *Visions of Amen*, p. 111.
[112] See Harry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: A History* (London, 1996), p. 45.
[113] Denis, 'Le symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 171.
[114] Quoted in Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy; His Life and Mind*, 2nd ed. (London, 1966), pp. 171-2.

would be surprising if the musical events at Saint-Gervais were not a popular conversation topic within private salon culture.

Besides these services at Saint-Gervais, and the salons of Lerolle and Chausson, Denis was closely involved with a small musical circle on his doorstep in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, which was committed to the fusion of the arts in the service of a new religious aesthetic. At the centre of this group was the Alain family, and in particular the organist Albert Alain, to whom Denis was close.[115] In 1904 the artist designed the frontispiece for Alain's collection of melodies *Nos cantiques populaires* **[Figure 43]**.[116] In 1903, Alain was employed as the organist in the town's Chapelle des Franciscaines, founding a choir in the same year with its chaplain Clément Besse (a professor at Paris's Catholic Institute). The choral foundation was devoted to the renewal of liturgical chant, and became known as the Chorale des Franciscaines. Denis attended the local concerts, and committed to canvas a memento of the group in 1923 **[Figure 44]**. From 1907 onwards, the choir organized annual concerts which attracted the whole of musical Paris, and became involved in events of national significance. On 6th January 1921 the choir performed in the Pavillion de Marsan at the *Exposition d'Art chrétien moderne,* organized by the Société de Saint-Jean in 1921. The programme illustration (by Denis), is an exact copy of his 1904 illustration for Alain's *Nos Cantiques Populaires* **[Figure 45]**. The Chorale and this small *saint-germannois* fraternity propagated the Gregorian chant research of the musicologist Georges Houdard (1860-1913), who often joined Besse, Alain and

---

[115] Aurélie Decourt, *Un Musicien Dans La Ville: Albert Alain et Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1880-1971)* (Paris, 2001).

[116] This motif was also the basis for *L'Histoire de la musique*'s 'Le Chant Choral' (see Chapter 4).

Denis at the group's meetings. Houdard's principles differed from the Solesmes school of thought, in promoting the performance of neumes as fixed rhythmic units (in other words, as in a modern mensurated system).[117] Denis's forming of allegiances with followers of both rival 'schools' of chant suggests his appreciation of the general musical tradition, and a lack of concern with the specificities of performance practice.

It has been suggested that, for Denis, the experience of the close-knit community at the Chapelle des Franciscaines prefigured what he aimed to recreate at the religious art school he founded with George Desvallières just after the end of the First World War, the Ateliers d'Art Sacré.[118] But, arguably, it was the Schola Cantorum, founded in 1894 by Bordes, d'Indy and the organist and composer Alexandre Guilmant, that provided the most systematized model for the Ateliers. Denis was often to be found at rehearsals and performances held in the Schola's concert hall, and, as shown below, he would have shared many of its values and general aims.

Originally a sacred music society with offices at the Église Saint-Gervais, the Schola opened in 1896 as the École de Chant Liturgique et de Musique Religieuse in premises on the rue Stanislas, before evolving in 1900 into an *école supérieure* for general musical education at rue Saint-Jacques. Despite the expansion of its curriculum following this move, Gregorian chant and

---

[117] Georges Houdard, *L'Art dit Gregorien et la rhythme du chant, dit Gregorien d'après la notation neumatique* (Paris, 1897).

[118] François Boulet, *Leçon d'histoire de France: Saint-Germain-en-Laye: des antiquités nationales à une ville internationale* (Paris, 2006), p. 224.

Palestrinian counterpoint remained touchstones of the school's education.[119] The Schola's co-founder and first President, Alexandre Guilmant made explicit the desire to restore the relationship between art and religion in his inaugural speech for the school in 1896, calling on students to treat the study of music as a holy mission.[120] Just as Denis would envisage his pupils at the Ateliers to be disciples of Fra Angelico ('Notre grande maître sera Fra Angelico' he proclaimed), so the Schola's teaching was indebted to the model of Palestrina, whose music was described in the pages of *La Tribune* by the critic Camille Bellaigue as being 'so general and so anonymous' that it came close to 'what the philosophers call the category of the [I]deal'.[121]

Yet the Schola's critics accused the school of focusing too much pedagogical attention on the blind replication of Palestrinian 'horizontal' religious music (contrapuntal interweaving of voices) to the exclusion of 'vertical' homophonic chordal textures. The critic in question ('G. de G') had drawn a comparison with the visual arts: 'It is not by slavishly taking the same colours as Fra Angelico that one makes religious painting, but by animating his spirit and dreaming like him, under the arches of the cloisters.'[122] Ironically, the founders of the Schola could not have agreed more with this sentiment, which echoes

---

[119] This continued to be the case even into the 1930s, when Messaien (who praised Solesmes chant) taught there. See Messiaen, *Music and Color*.

[120] Guilmant's inaugural address was given on October 15, 1896, and reported in Jean de Muris, 'Compte rendu de la séance d'inauguration de l''École de Chant', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 2/10 (Oct 1896), pp. 145-52.

[121] Denis, 'Dernier état de l'art chrétien et de l'art sacré', *Nouvelles théories*, p. 284; Camille Bellaigue, 'Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina', *La Tribune de Saint Gervais*, 1/1 (January 1895), p. 4.

[122] 'Ce n'est pas en prenant servilement les mêmes couleurs que Fra Angelico, qu'on fera de la vraie peinture religieuse, mais c'est en s'animant de son esprit et en rêvant comme lui sous les ogives des cloîtres'. Quoted by l'abbé Perruchot in his article 'Nos concours de mai et juin', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 1/6 (June 1895), p. 13

Denis' pursuit of a modern equivalent to the 'religious sentiment' of the *quattrocento*.

In his inaugural speech Guilmant emphasized the familial ethos of the institution, setting out his desire for a close apprentice-style relationship between master and student, and emphasizing his suspicion of the meretricious accumulation of accomplishments. 'With this system, we hope to produce modest but confident workers, not greedy souls and dried fruit', he wrote.[123] Some of these points were later reiterated by d'Indy a speech in 1900 (at the inauguration of the school's new premises in the rue Saint-Jacques), in which he emphasized that the musician's goal was not to achieve personal glory, but to *serve*, in the 'sense of the sublime'.[124] Writing for *La Tribune* that same year, a witness remarked upon the miracle of the Schola's unique atmosphere of communality, claiming that it was inconceivable in the modern age to imagine artists working without concern for their own vanity and interests.[125] In order to attain this objective, the pupil (whether he or she be an instrumentalist, composer or vocal student) was required to undertake rigorous technical studies (which d'Indy described as the 'first degree' of teaching), combined with a firm spiritual education and artistic instruction (the 'second degree'). He remarked: 'Since it is absolutely proven that the principle of all art, whether painting, architecture or music, is religious, the students will

---

[123] 'Avec ce système, nous pensons former des travailleurs modestes mais sûrs, et non des orgueilleux et des fruits secs'. Quoted in de Muris, 'Compte rendu de la séance d'inauguration de l'Ecole de Chant liturgique', p. 146.

[124] Vincent d'Indy, 'Une école d'art répondant aux besoins modernes', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 6/11 (November 1900), pp. 303-314.

[125] Quoted in André Hallays, 'La maison de Schola', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 6/12 (December 1900), p. 336.

have nothing to lose and everything to gain in the frequentation of the beautiful works of these times of belief', he writes.[126] Intimate knowledge of one's musical predecessors should be a higher priority than the quest for originality, d'Indy believed, invoking the ideal of the medieval apprentice who faithfully copied the work of his forerunners in accordance with his 'artistic conscience'. It seems that d'Indy's pedagogical beliefs were nourished by a broad interest in scholastic philosophy, which placed emphasis on acquiring and preserving, in a methodical and scrupulous fashion, the riches of tradition.

As the principal rival to the state-run Conservatoire, the Schola gained a reputation among associates of the latter as promoting a cult of Catholicism.[127] (Unsurprisingly, the Schola enjoyed the full support of the city's Catholic intelligentsia and institutions, including the Institut Catholique, which regularly hosted talks by the school's staff members.[128]) In their *scholiste* purity and dogmatism, d'Indy and his disciples took a dim view of the musical 'eclecticism' promoted by the Conservatoire, whose concentration on producing opera composers and obsession with virtuosity was seen as symptomatic of deleterious Republican influence. D'Indy believed that musical probity derived not from the quest for *effect* (as he believed was advanced through the 'ignoble and meretricious' pursuit of virtuosity for its own sake at

---

[126] 'Comme il est absolument avéré que le principe de tout art. aussi bien de la peinture et de l'architecture que de la musique, est d'ordre religieux, les élèves n'auront rien à perdre et tout à gagner dans la fréquentation des belles œuvres de ces époques de croyance'. D'Indy, 'Une école d'art', p. 310.

[127] Jann Pasler, 'Deconstructing d'Indy, or the Problem of a Composer's Reputation,' *19th-Century Music*, 30/3 (Spring 2007), pp. 230-256.

[128] Romain Rolland lists the free lectures by d'Indy at the Schola and the Institut Catholique as being among the many educational opportunities available to the public, in *Musiciens d'aujourd'hui*, 3rd ed (Paris, 1908).

the Conservatoire) but from rigorous and logical interpretation.[129] One can see the results of this in reviews of concerts given by the Schola's teachers and pupils in its first few decades. For example, on attending one of the piano professor Blanche Selva's recitals in 1906, the musicologist Léon Vallas wrote enthusiastically about the fact that Selva was not interested in self-promotion.[130] He maintained that she did not choose music that would encourage applause, or that warranted grand virtuosic gestures (despite the fiendishness of much of her repertoire). Sharing d'Indy's deeply held faith and a belief in her musical pursuits as a spiritual vocation, Selva became known as d'Indy's 'spiritual daughter'. She appears as the pianist in Denis's illustration for *Album Pour Enfants Petits et Grands* (1905) **[Figure 7]**, with d'Indy in the background.

In general, d'Indy warned his composition students against the dangers of what he termed musical *verisme,* a neologism of his own coinage that presumably derived from the Italian school of operatic *verismo,* a style popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[131] Characterized by the use of ordinary contemporary life as the focal subject matter, the musical movement was largely inspired by the international naturalist literary movement, which, as we saw in Chapter 1, was treated with suspicion by Denis and the Symbolists. D'Indy's entreaty to his students not to pursue this 'narrow research after truth' had a strongly ideological bent: it is likely that he

---

[129] Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music,* p. 134.
[130] Léon Vallas, 'Société des Grands Concerts', *Revue Musicale de Lyon,* 3/22, (11 March 1906), p. 646.
[131] Manfred Kelfel, *Naturalisme, Verisme Et Realisme Dans l'Opera de 1890 à 1930* (Paris, 1984), pp. 180-90.

associated *verisme* in particular with the operas of Alfred Bruneau, who was fond of setting Zola's texts to music, and was a staunch and vocal Dreyfusard.[132] A pupil of the Conservatoire, where he studied under the opera composer Massenet, Bruneau was therefore a political and cultural adversary of the Schola. But of more interest here is d'Indy's subsequent wording: 'what produces beauty is not the slavish copy of nature but rather the impression felt, which becomes magnificent and idealized ... in the artist's soul it is then reduced and concretized into a work'.[133] D'Indy's comment makes little sense as a generalized statement about music (which is intrinsically non-representational and usually non-mimetic), but it is a clear avowal of the wider convictions to which Denis adhered, not only during his Nabis years, but also many years later when he was drawing closer to Thomist circles.

The Ateliers d'Art Sacré

Central to the ethos of the Schola were opposition to the promotion of virtuosity for its own sake, reliance on the authority of religious tradition, and a spirit of collaborative, non-competitive working. These were also fundamental values promoted at the art school that Denis was involved in setting up after the First World War with the painter George Desvallières. During the war Denis questioned why, if France had its own Catholic music school before the war (the Schola), 'why will it not have a school of Christian

[132] See Louis Laloy, 'Le Drame musical moderne. Les Véristes: Zola-Bruneau', *Le Mercure musical* (1 June 1905), pp. 75-84.

[133] 'recherche aiguë de la vérité: le rendu du réel n'a jamais été de l'art; ce qui produit le beau ce n'est point la copie servile de la nature mais bien l'impression ressentie se magnifiant, s'idéalisant … dans l'âme de l'artiste pour se réduire ensuite et se concrétiser en une œuvre.' D'Indy, 'Une école d'art', p. 311.

decorative arts after the war?' Surely, he continued, after the devastation of the war, the duty to commemorate the nation's sacrifice must give rise to new 'pious initiatives'?[134] Besides the immediate need for the reconstruction of destroyed churches, it has been argued, the 'Catholic' experience of the war, as a form of calvary, brought Catholic consciousness to a new height: the sacrifice of so many of the young for a higher cause was Christic in its proportion.[135] Denis used his conference paper entitled 'Les nouvelles directions de l'art Chrétien' (1919) to confirm his belief in the urgency of the Ateliers project, recognizing that 'There are artists who wish, like Pierre de Craon, the hero of Claudel's drama: "[f]or the new church not to be an empty vessel, or like a pointless wall, but like a living organ and an engine that go together"'.[136] The drama to which Denis refers here is Claudel's 'mystery play' *L'Annonce faite à Marie,* in which the architect Pierre devotes his life to the construction of cathedrals. He is a lonely figure, crippled by leprosy and living a life of poverty, but his resolute commitment to building the church of St Justice shines throughout the play as a symbol of the intensely pious spirit of the medieval workman. His particular appeal to Denis might have derived partly from his

[134] '…n'aura-t-elle pas après la guerre une école d'art décoratif chrétien?' Denis, 'Ce que sera la peinture Française après la guerre ?', *Le Correspondant,* 229/3 (25 November 1916), pp. 626-45. Reprinted as 'Le présent et l'avenir de la peinture française', *Nouvelles théories,* (pp. 11-58), p. 54.
[135] This idea is discussed in Arabella Hobbs, 'Calvary Or Catastrophe? French Catholicism's First World War' (Ph.D thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2016).
[136] 'Il y a des artistes qui veulent, comme Pierre de Craon, le héros du drame de Claudel: «Que l'église nouvelle ne soit point un vaisseau vide, et comme une vaine paroi, mais `a la façon d'un organe vivant et d'un engin que l'on combine».' Denis, 'Les Nouvelles Directions de l'Art Chrétien', *Nouvelles théories*, p. 196.

role as a kind of apostle among his workmen: the painter was perhaps inclined to see himself and his own mission reflected in the hero of Claudel's play.[137]

The sparse surviving records indicate that, under the direction of Denis and Desvallières, the doors of the Ateliers on the Rue de Furstenburg opened in November 1919.[138] Like Denis, Desvallières was disgusted by the commercialization of religious paintings and artefacts.[139] Along with his co-founder, he was optimistic about the restoration of a 'true' religious art worthy of the faithful: 'Christian art is not dead: it is reborn, for it returns to life,' he concluded in a conference paper given in 1912.[140] Desvallières had first conceived of the idea of a school for contemporary religious art that year, but it was not until after the First World War, and with the assistance of Denis, that the project took hold. On the governing committee of the Ateliers were such familiar names as Henry Cochin, Gabriel Thomas (who provided much-needed financial advice) and Paul Jamot (then curator of the Louvre).

Along with d'Indy's Schola, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artistic confraternities were clearly important precedents for Denis's Ateliers. Designed to group together 'all those interested in the progress of Art at the service of Faith', the Société de Saint-Jean, founded in 1872, proved an amicable environment in which like-minded artisans shared common artistic and

---

[137] 'For the pagan artist did everything from the exterior, and we do everything from the interior like bees … Everything is an act of thanksgiving.' Paul Claudel, *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, trans. L.M.S. Sill (New Haven, 1916), p. 36.

[138] *Maurice Denis 1870-1943*, p. 90.

[139] He referred to the 'infamous traffickers [ces infâmes trafiquants] of the figure of Our Lord J-C...' Desvallières, 'Réflexions d'un catholique', reprinted in *L'Arche (*1915), p. 52.

[140] 'Non, l'art chrétien n'est pas mort ; il rênait, car il retourne à la vie'. Desvallières, paper given for *Art chrétien* in 1912. Reprinted in *La Vie et les Arts Liturgiques*, 4/46 (October 1918), p. 528.

religious vocations. Under the leadership of Cochin, the society thrived in the early decades of the new century.[141] In 1912 the Société des 'Amis des Cathédrales' (on whose committee Denis served) was advertised in the pages of the Schola's bulletin.[142] Five years later Denis wrote an article for *La Vie et les Arts Liturgiques* on a new society, 'L'Arche', which shared the same aim of reinvigorating art.[143] The Beuron Monastery in Germany founded by Didier Lenz in 1865 (which the Nabi painter Jan Verkade joined in 1893), had also had some impact on the painter's own ambitions. The austere aesthetic of Lenz, founded on an understanding of geometric proportions, was akin in many ways to the minimalist monody explored at Solesmes. The meticulous research in musical palaeography and modality at the Solesmes monastery was matched by the painstaking studies undertaken by Lenz and his colleagues into the application of Pythagorean theories to modern art, and their investigations of ancient Greek and Egyptian art. As Denis noted in his 1905 essay 'L'Esthétique de Beuron': 'Through a renewed simplicity comparable to Gregorian music, Father Didier strives to reduce to a small number of simple relationships the elements of Beauty.[144] The urge to systematize and theorize fostered in both establishments was in part an effort to counteract the perceived sentimental, mawkish nature of contemporary religious art and music.

---

[141] Denis joined the Société in 1906 (followed two years later by Sérusier).

[142] *Les Tablettes de la Schola* (February 1912), n.p. Consulted in Denis family archives.

[143] Denis, 'Objet religieux et objet d'art', *Nouvelle Théories,* pp. 244-52.

[144] 'Par une simplicité renouvelée de la musique dite grégorienne, le P. Didier s'efforce de réduire à un petit nombre de rapports simples les éléments de la Beauté.' Denis, 'L'Esthétique de Beuron', *Théories*, p. 185. Denis first visited Beuron in 1903, detailing his findings and his discussions with Verkade in his journal.

The myriad confraternities active in France during the post-war years did not, however, match the orderly, hierarchical nature of the Schola institution. Nevertheless, these precedents bolstered Desvallières's and Denis's hope for the success of the Ateliers project. This sense of optimism comes across strongly in Denis's 1919 conference address, in which he announced triumphantly: 'our martyred churches will be raised up'. His galvanizing cry for the French people to use the 'same force of the French soul' that won the war to 'organize the arts of peacetime' reminds us of the nationalist implications that underpinned much revivalist opinion at the time.[145] This speech seems therefore in part to be a propagandizing effort for the place of an institution like the Ateliers in this specific moment of French history. He was explicit in the lecture about his indebtedness to the Schola Cantorum, referring to his desire to create a school 'organized on the plan of the Schola Cantorum', grouping the various disciplines (painting, sculpture, decoration, stained glass window design, etc) 'around a lively but also traditional orthodoxy...'[146] In fact, the strong discipline and hierarchical nature of the Schola was appreciated as a pedagogical model by many non-musicians. The abbé Marraud, whom Denis greatly admired, spoke powerfully in his *Imagerie religieuse et art populaire* (1914) of the need for artistic activity to regain its 'professional corporate

[145] 'nos églises martyres seront relevées….les mêmes forces de l'âme française qui ont gagné la guerre, organisent les arts de la paix.' Denis, 'Les nouvelles directions de l'Art Chrétien', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 195.

[146] 'organisée sur le plan de la Schola Cantorum … une doctrine à la fois traditionnelle et vivante.' Ibid., p. 239.

character' by bringing together artists in close collaboration.[147] According to the theologian Joseph Pichard, Marraud had considered direct involvement in the creation of the Ateliers with Denis and Desvallières, having read Desvallières's manifesto in support of a school of religious art in 1912.[148]

The primary objectives of Denis and Desvallières were as follows: firstly, to 'train artists and craftsmen in the practice of Christian art', while also 'to provide churches, especially those devastated by war, with religious works of an aesthetic, traditional and modern character.'[149] The need for continuity between tradition and modernity was a comparable challenge to that faced by the Schola. Like Denis, Desvallières was concerned with the 'sanctifying' of modern life as they experienced it in all its 'misery and grandeur, in all its intimacy'. 'This daily exploration will be undertaken with the Gospel in hand', he wrote in 1912.[150] In an article for *La Revue des Jeunes* in 1923, the art critic Pierre Hepp emphasized the benefits of having a school led by men with such vastly different temperaments, claiming that together they represent 'all that is new' in contemporary French painting.[151] Indeed, one could not imagine two more different renderings of the divine in religious art — Desvallières' expressionistic, emotionally wrought and richly hued paintings, clearly

---

[147] Abbé Léonce Marraud, *Imagerie religieuse et art populaire* (Abbeville, 1913). Denis pays homage to Marraud, who was killed in the war, in 'Les nouvelles directions de l'Art Chrétien', *Théories*, p. 205.

[148] Joseph Pichard, *L'Art Sacré Moderne* (Paris, 1953), p. 47. Desvallières had introduced the notion of the school to the Société de Saint-Jean with an article in the society's newsletter entitled 'Projet d'une école d'art placée sous la protection de Notre-Dame-De-Paris', *Notes d'art et d'archéologie de la Société de Saint-Jean* 24/6 (June 1912), pp. 108-111.

[149] Quoted in Catherine Verleysen, *Maurice Denis et la Belgique 1890-1930* (Louvain, 2010), p.76.

[150] 'Cette exploration quotidienne sera entreprise l'évangile à la main'. Desvallières, 'Projet d'une école', p. 109.

[151] Pierre Hepp, 'L'atelier d'art sacré', *Revue des Jeunes*, 13/22 (25 November 1923), pp. 404-9.

influenced by his instruction under Gustave Moreau, in comparison with Denis's restrained, classicized stylization. Denis, however, found much to admire in Desvallières' approach: on seeing the painter's *Le Drapeau de Sacré Coeur* in 1918, he writes: 'Admirable Desvallières! His Sacred Heart with the flag is full of substance.'[152]

The Ateliers were organized into workshops of different media: drawing, easel painting, fresco, modelling, book binding, wood engraving, stained glass and the designing of religious garments (led by George's daughter Sabine Desvallières). Each student was required to present to a Master (they included Denis, Desvallières, Jean Souverbie and Paul de Laboulaye) a sketch for him to correct every fortnight. To reach 'Companion' status, one must have a masterpiece approved by a jury of Masters. Beyond the specific techniques, Denis insisted on a proper artistic education in draughtsmanship, ensuring 'constant observations to the point of knowing enough about objects and the living to draw them with genius.'[153] Pupils were encouraged not only to study the great religious artists of the West (and particularly the French *primitifs* of the 13th century), but also to absorb Buddhist, Egyptian, and Syrian influences.

The schooling of students in the practice of 'Christian art' required familiarity with the liturgy, and attention to the moral dimension of aesthetic appreciation. Written in the Ateliers's statutes are the words ascribed to Fra Angelico on the importance of 'living with Christ', quoted earlier.[154] At least in

---

[152] 'Admirable Desvallières! Son *Sacre-Cœur au drapeau* est d'une matière grouillante,' Denis, *Journal II*, May 1919, p. 211.

[153] *Suzanne* Barazzetti-Demoulin, *Maurice Denis* (Paris, 1945), p. 134.

[154] Fra Angelico's words had also been a mantra for the group of musical Franciscans with whom Denis associated in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Boulet, *Leçon d'histoire de France*, p. 224.

theory, only practising Catholics were admitted to the workshops. Just as at the Schola, the communal experience of religion was important not only to underline the centrality of faith to the students' endeavours, but also to enhance a sense of fraternity and kinship. Once a month, all pupils were encouraged to attend mass together in the 'intimate circular chapel' at the Institut Catholique, reminding them of the 'nobility … of their task'.[155] Lectures on Catholic dogma were given frequently by resident theologians, and twice a year (on New Year's Eve and for the Feast of Corpus Christi in June), Ateliers masters and pupils were invited to Denis's house in Saint Germain-en-Laye, attending mass in his own private chapel. The decoration of this chapel, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, was indebted to the collaborative work of the Ateliers's pupils.

Denis stressed the importance of strictness and rigour, such as he imagined to have been so important to the functioning of medieval guilds: 'if there is some chance of restoring and renewing Tradition, it is through practice ... and discipline'.[156] The ethos of the school was supposed to be one of collectiveness – erasure of the individual ego of the artist was necessary for the production of honest religious works. The paradigm of anonymity was upheld as necessary for the dedication of one's life to a higher purpose – although realistically none of these modern artists could afford to maintain such isolation from the contemporary marketplace. Anonymity and communal production were, like revering the ideal of the innocent Breton farm labourer, a way of disengaging

[155] 'la noblesse … de leur tâches'. Hepp, 'L'Atelier d'Art Sacré', p. 408.
[156] 'S'il y a quelque chance de restaurer et de renouveler la Tradition, c'est par la pratique, l'expérience et la discipline.' Denis, 'Les nouvelles directions de l'Art Chrétien', *Nouvelles théories*, p. 240.

from the unhealthy demands of the art market. Denis envisaged that, rather than an academy, the Ateliers would be 'a grouping of workshops … where everything that served to decorate religion was executed, not for vague exhibitions, but for a precise destination… in such a way that the pupil became what he was before the Renaissance ... an apprentice, then an assistant to the master.'[157] This attitude of humility engendered by a hierarchical structure was absolutely analogous to the ethos promoted at the Schola Cantorum. The institutions had an equivalent vision of artistic production, turning 'inwards' and away from public appreciation, towards an idealized model of the self-sustaining confraternity. The philosophy cultivated by Denis and the *scholistes* could be understood as the large-scale realization of the dream expressed by the Nabi Émile Bernard in 1890: he wished to form a group entitled the 'Anonymous Ones' – whose objective was purely 'art for art's sake ... not glory, not commerce, not reputation: the edification of an idea, of a work.'[158] The Ateliers artists should submit themselves to a collective discipline, thus distancing themselves from modernity's obsession with individual genius; it was hoped that the Ateliers pupils would be mutually-inspired in their work, rather than rivals.

The quasi-utopian religio-aesthetic environment that Denis had conceived ultimately failed to live up to the painter's expectations. By 1929 he had begun to express frustration at the lack of discipline at the school, and the emergence

---

[157] 'un groupement des ateliers … où l'on exécuterait non pour de vagues expositions, mais pour une destination précise … de telle façon que l'élève devint ce qu'il était avant la Renaissance…' Ibid., p. 240.

[158] Quoted in Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, p. 167.

of 'trends that are contradictory to teaching.'[159] His own sense of losing control of the school's operation is supported by a comment made by a former pupil who alluded to Denis's taking on most of the administrative burden, an impossible feat, especially for a painter preoccupied with fulfilling independent commissions at the same time.[160] The school closed in 1947, after commissions had entirely dried up, by which point the directorship had long been in the hands of a former pupil, Henri de Maistre. Well before its closure, it was acknowledged, not least by Denis, that the Ateliers had ultimately been unable to fulfil their initial aims, struggling to maintain regular support and frequent commissions.[161] Following Denis's death in 1943, the Atelier project failed to recover from the repercussions of the Second World War.[162] The Ateliers' very first student, Marie-Alain Couturier, whose remarkable later success in the domain of ecclesiastical art owed much to his early experience with Denis and Desvallières, described the workshop as being rather too closed in on itself and self-congratulatory.[163]

But despite not achieving longevity, the Ateliers were more than a mere footnote in the century's ecclesiastical artistic history. Collaborations on projects for churches in the major international exhibitions of the 1920s and 30s

---

[159] 'indiscipline, et tendances avancées contradictoires avec l'enseignement'. Denis, *Journal III*, 1929, p. 116.

[160] Taken from a typed letter from a former pupil (signature illegible), held in the MMD archives.

[161] Denis, 'Resumé du Rapport de Maurice Denis sur les Beaux-Arts', *Revue des Jeunes*, 13/14 (July 1923), p. 674.

[162] The Schola Cantorum, however, still runs as a private music conservatoire. Its website states: 'Competitive spirit, too often induced by the notion of 'competition', is not accepted', indicating that, to this day, it abides by d'Indy's oft-asserted mantra: 'You don't make music against someone'. See: https://www.schola-cantorum.com/en/history/

[163] 'de trop systématique ... et de trop sûr soi'. Marie-Alain Couturier, *Dieu et l'art dans une vie* (Paris, 1965), pp. 49-50.

suggest its status as a principal institutional 'ambassador' of modern French church decoration. Pupils from the Ateliers contributed to the interior decorations for the churches in the 'Village française' at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs, in the Pavillon des Missions Catholiques at the 1931 Exposition Coloniale Internationale, and for the Pavillon Pontifical at the 1937 Exposition Internationale **[Figure 46]**. Within the grounds of Solesmes Abbey itself, the birthplace of the French chant revival, is a chapel of the Sacred Heart containing three stained glass window designed by Denis, which he completed in the 1930s. The church's four smaller chapels contain windows designed by Pauline Peugniez, who was Denis's pupil at the Ateliers between 1928 and 1936. Peugniez was particularly beholden to Denis's example, likening him to a 'saint' in the way that the 'lingering resonances' of 'divine music' circulated around his work.[164]

The fallout from the First World War, and the congenial confraternity of the Ateliers, undoubtedly encouraged a generation of younger artists such as Marie-Alain Couturier to turn their art into a religious vocation, even if the Ateliers' particular approach and ethos proved unsustainable in the long-term. This is demonstrated by the Ateliers' pupils' involvement in projects such as the Église Notre-Dame du Raincy, which stands today as a monument to the renewed spiritual dynamic of the early twentieth century **[Figure 47]**. Le Raincy became a prototype for modern religious church design in France, being the first church to be built using reinforced concrete. Sometimes referred to as

[164] 'les resonances attardées', 'des musiques divines '. Pauline Peugniez, 'Hommage à Denis: « je voudrais tant vous appris quelque chose »', *L'Art Sacré,* 3/25 (1937), p. 164. Other contributors to the homage included Bonnard and Jacques-Émile Blanche.

the 'Holy Chapel of Reinforced Concrete', the church (designed by the Theatre des Champs-Élysées architect Auguste Perret) is perhaps the most prominent manifestation of the revolutionary approach taken to ecclesiastical architecture and decoration following the destruction of 11,000 public buildings and churches during the First World War.

The Ateliers' most illustrious pupil, Couturier was a vital force behind the introduction of the twentieth century's most prominent European artists into the realm of religious art, associating himself closely with Maritain. His tireless campaign against the preponderance of insipid Catholic art in the nation's churches shared the vigour of Denis's own beliefs, although his stance was to take him, unlike Denis, deep into modernism's ambit. Long after Couturier's dissociation from the Ateliers, he still recognized – with certain qualifications – the value of his education there: 'despite what was certainly too systematic ... and too self-confident ... very valuable things were taught.'[165] On becoming director of the journal *L'Art Sacré* in 1937, he published a series of tributes to Denis (including his own), in celebration of 'a great artist whose works and thoughts can be found at every stage of the renewal of Christian art in our country.'[166]

Within the pages of *L'Art Sacré* are numerous reviews of performances of Olivier Messiaen's religious music, the composer with whom this chapter began. The activity of this later generation of Catholics has found a comparably

---

[165] Marie-Alain Couturier, unpublished diaries. Quoted in Lai-Kent Chew Orenduff, *Father Marie -Alain Couturier and the sacred art movement* (Ph.D thesis, City University of New York, 2002), p. 21.

[166] 'un grand artiste dont on retrouve les œuvres et la pensée a toutes les étapes du renouveau de l'art chretien dans notre pays.' M-A Couturier, 'Hommage à Maurice Denis', *L'Art Sacré*, p. 156.

important place within cultural history to that of the mid-to-late nineteenth-century popular medieval revival. Reflecting on the intervening years, Couturier wrote: 'It is clear that the generation that can boast the names of Claudel … Maurice Denis, Desvallières, Vincent d'Indy testifies that religious art in our country is not dead.'[167] This chapter has shown the richness of interdisciplinary Catholic discourse between these figures in the early twentieth century — particularly as it pertained to the reformulating of a vision of the Middle Ages. For Denis, the stability of tradition symbolized by Catholicism was complemented by the apparent immutability of classicism. The following chapter considers the place of Denis's work within contemporaneous debates on the 'Frenchness' of that classical tradition.

[167] 'il est bien clair que la génération que peut se glorifier des noms de Claudel, de Péguy, de Maurice Denis, de Desvallières, de Vincent d'Indy rend témoignage que l'art religieux chez nous n'est pas mort.' Ibid., p. 157.

CHAPTER 3

Classical chimeras and the contesting of *latinité*

> *To compose?!* … How many people are there in France — since we, in our Latin country, have abandoned Latinist studies — who are capable of giving an exact definition of this term … Compose, *componere* — to put together, to join into one whole, to arrange side by side; that is the material, fundamental meaning of the word. But the Latins attached to this noble vocable another, more abstract sense, containing an idea of comparison, of regular succession, of proportion and order … And solely in this latter acceptation should it be applied to a work of art.[1]

These remarks were made by Vincent d'Indy in a critical biography of one of his musical heroes, Beethoven, published in 1911. D'Indy bemoaned the abandoning of the study of Latin and classical culture, an attitude shared by many conservative Catholic critics at the time.[2] '[L]a force d'ésprit latin' was a central current within the wider nationalist movement in which Denis was also involved, although its particular significance and level of specificity varied greatly.[3] For d'Indy, the 'Latin' spirit could provide a counter example to the 'indulgent' music of his beloved (if problematically German) Wagner. For Denis's close associate and travel companion the novelist André Gide, Latinism and, more broadly, classicism, offered a model of restraint for a writer wishing to express general ideas rather than individual feelings.[4] This chapter considers how Denis's own works took on importance as embodiments of apparently

---

[1] Vincent d'Indy, *Beethoven: a critical biography*, trans. T. Baker (Boston, MA, 1913), p. 94. First published in 1911.

[2] The critic Ferdinand Brunètière, for example, was vociferous in his promotion of Latin: see 'La Question du Latin', *La Revue des Deux Mondes,* 72/4 (15 December 1885), pp. 862-81.

[3] D'Indy, *Cours,* vol. I, p. 71.

[4] Gide boasts: 'Je peux bien vous dire... que je me considère comme le meilleur représentant du classicisme.' *Morceaux choisis* (Paris, 1921), p. 92. For further discussion of Gide and classicism, see Enrico Guerini, Paola Codazzi, and Stéphanie Bertrand (eds), *Latin et latinité dans l'œuvre d'André Gide* (Paris, 2020).

competing priorities within a wider classical 'renewal'. His decorative ensemble *Terre Latine* offers an appropriate starting point. I shall then consider how the *méditerraneanisme* of the poet and politician Charles Maurras, the 'Occidentalism' of the writer Adrien Mithouard, and the Renaissance humanist preoccupations of the scholar Henry Cochin, were all strands of thought that coloured his own artistic development. The latter's influence, I argue, was inseparable from Denis's broader sympathy for Italian culture, occasioned particularly by his stays in Fiesole with the composer Ernest Chausson. We shall also see how, as a byword for the constancy of tradition and of canonicity, and as a label implicitly linked to value judgement, the term 'classical' played a comparable role in the discourse of Denis's musical friends. The discipline promised by the 'classical ideal' seemed to offer an inter-artistic means of cultural restoration, of the 'culte de la beauté, en toute harmonie', a means that was compatible, in Denis's mind, with the Catholic revival.[5]

Michael Marlais suggests that in turn-of-the-century France the mentality of 'latinity' bolstered the 'orientation away from northern Europe' while also serving 'the needs of anti-Semitism.'[6] The effect of the associated rhetoric must have been to widen the cultural rift that arose during the Dreyfus Affair, described by Adrien Mithouard as a divide between the 'harmonieux' (classicists like Ingres, who sought order and regulation – he included Denis and Sérusier in this group) and the 'expressifs' (naturalists, those who sought beauty in everyday life – Bonnard, Vuillard).[7] Denis himself insisted, in an 1899

[5] Adrien Mithouard, 'Le classique de demain', *L'Occident*, 1 (March 1902), p. 289.
[6] Marlais, *Conservative Echoes,* p. 215.
[7] Mithouard, *Le Tourment de l'Unité,* p. 293.

journal entry, upon a distinction in the visual arts between a 'goût latin' (simple and unified forms, a preference for the human body, geometric construction) and a 'goût sémite' (complex surfaces, less careful attention to draughtsmanship, small works).[8] The artist's troublingly worded comparison does not *necessarily* imply anti-Semitic sentiment —Vuillard's Jewish patron Thadée Natanson was firm in his appreciation of Denis as being 'among the first to reach out to [Jews] when they were persecuted'.[9] But it indicates the extent to which the divisive rhetoric provoked by the Dreyfus Affair came casually – and lazily — to permeate aesthetic discourse. The convictions of both Mithouard and Denis relied on a fundamental assumption that France was the true inheritor of the Greco-Roman tradition. The perception of Antiquity as a source not only of social cohesion, but also of French cultural superiority could be understood in terms of Benedict Anderson's influential concept of the 'imagined community'.[10] The assumption of a 'shared' belief in a set of foundational characteristics is central to this notion.

D'Indy's attention to the verb *componere* and its association with France's 'Latin' spirit, provides a useful indication of the breadth of the classical ideal. C*omponere* was a term typically applied to the 'spatial rhetoric' of classical architecture (most famously by Vitruvius), or to the art of rhetoric itself, in the Ciceronian sense of assembling well-constructed sentences. Only later did it acquire meaning in a pictorial and musical sense. In his highly influential *Della*

[8] Denis, *Journal I* (March 1899), p. 150.
[9] '[Denis] a été des premiers a leur tendre la main quand on les a persécutes'. Thadée Natanson, *Peints à leur tour* (Paris, 1948), p. 302.
[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* 2nd edition (London, 2006), pp. 1-7.

pittura (1435-6, translated by the author from his Latin version, De Pictura), the humanist thinker Alberti outlined the importance of *compositio* as an underlying principle. 'Composition' as the 'systematic harmonization of every element in a picture towards one total desired effect', was effectively invented by Alberti, according to Baxandall.[11] In his treatise Alberti also emphasized the *propriety* of compositional layout to the narrative or subject matter of the work (the *istoria*). Denis's own move to the classical was motivated by the ideal of pictorial decorum: the appropriateness of form to subject had much to do with conformity to moral and religious values.[12] This ideal was bound up with the painter's growing interest in producing large-scale works that might be understood allegorically (by both patrons and the public).

But Denis himself acknowledged the slipperiness of the term 'classical', noting how difficult it was to define 'without too much obscurity'.[13] McWilliam has noted that the term has been 'elevated as a mainstay of revisionist analyses of the period, although interpretation of its diverse and contradictory meanings is often sacrificed to more familiar and restrictive connotations that fail to register its rhetorical ambiguity or breadth.'[14] But to talk about the 'classical' in terms of competing fixed 'meanings' is itself misleading. As Wittgenstein,

---

[11]. Leon Alberti Battista, *On Painting: Book II* trans. John Spencer (New Haven, 1970), Translation of 1435-6 text first published 1956. www.noteaccess.com/texts/Alberti/2.htm. M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in 15th century Italy, A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (London, 1974), p. 137.

[12] A definition of decorum in painting might be borrowed from the words of the painter and theorist Paolo Lomazzo, who stated that it 'arises from the nature of the subject properly understood'. See Anna Bednarek and Francis Ames-Lewis (eds), *Decorum in Renaissance narrative art*, (London, 1992), p. 9.

[13] 'sans trop d'obscurité....' Denis, 'Cézanne', *Théories*, p. 246.

[14] McWilliam, *Aesthetics of Reaction*, p. 9.

among other philosophers, has insisted, the meaning of a word lies in its use; and words accrue nuances of significance in particular contexts.

France: *Terre Latine*?

Denis's decorative commission *Terre Latine inspiratrice d'art et de poésie* (1907) evokes an Arcadian France: figures enacting classical muses are engaged in pursuits that illustrate the 'inspiration' and cultural sustenance drawn from a land defined by its Greco-Latin heritage. Three large allegorical panels, 'L'Art Plastique', 'La Poésie' and 'La Musique', **[Figures 48-50]** and a fourth panel, 'Paysage' **[Figure 51]**, make up the main ensemble.[15] Two ornamental borders framing the door and two stained glass windows entitled *Nu au miroir* and *Nu aux mimosas* **[Figure 52]** complete the domestic decoration. The ensemble (now dismantled) was destined for the vestibule ceiling of an apartment belonging to the theatre director Jacques Rouché. Each panel was shaped and designed according to the architecture of the ceiling vault, but Rouché gave Denis 'the greatest liberty' as to the subject matter.[16] The panels were originally placed above heavy ornamental panelling, the vertical impulses of which make a striking contrast with the horizontal rhythms of the scenes in the decorative ensemble **[Figure 53]**.[17] Denis's paintings suggest a kind of *jardin celeste*, evoking a social ideal of cultivating a shared appreciation of tradition among

[15] The panels are now preserved in the MMD.
[16] Rouché, letter to Denis (1906). MMD [Ms 9685]. Rouché was a renowned patron of the arts. In 1907 he bought *La Grande Revue* and transformed it into a cultural journal. He was director of the Théâtre des Arts from 1910, and of the Paris Opéra and the Opéra-Comique from 1913 to 1944.
[17] For more details about the Rouché interior see Eugène Belville, 'Architecture et Décoration modernes: un hotel particulier à Paris', *l'Art décoratif*, 10/2 (August 1908), pp. 41-58.

like-minded artists. Rouché's Paris home functioned as a meeting place for the cultural élite (from André Gide to George Desvallières), who would have recognized in Denis's panels an idyllic, timeless evocation of their metiers, rooted within a classical tradition. Indeed, correspondence between painter and patron indicates that Denis himself wished to organize a private viewing of the works *in situ,* to coincide with another exhibition of his at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery.[18]

Denis exploits the large-scale format to create a structurally repetitive configuration across the four main panels of this *poème de soleil*.[19] The airborne figural motifs of each work are situated centrally, directly above the window frames of the apartment, emphasizing architectonic symmetry. The low horizon line of each individual panel, together with the outlines of the trees, produces a ribbon-like effect running across the ensemble. On visiting Rouché's vestibule, Paul Jamot remarked on 'the coloured orchestration of the symphony' that he finds there.[20] The musical metaphor might suggest that the sense of immersion in sound finds a parallel in the sense of envelopment by Denis's circular design, and in particular by the strong bands of colour, analogous in their clarity to the aural clarity of distinct layers of musical texture. A meridional atmosphere consonant with a classical 'feeling' is established by the colouring of delicate mauves and violets, restrained pinks and luminous whites, and by obvious geographical allusions – shorelines, fruit-laden trees and sparse clusters of cypresses. The strong planarity engendered

---

[18] Denis to Rouché [undated]. Bibliothèque de l'Opéra, L.A.S. Denis, Maurice n. 6.
[19] A. Mithouard, 'Maurice Denis', *Art et decoration,* 22 (July-Aug 1907), pp. 1-12.
[20] 'l'orchestration colorée de la symphonie'. Paul Jamot, 'Exposition Maurice Denis', *La chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, (1907) p. 125.

by this schema gives the entire ensemble a strongly organized decorativeness. The extreme clarity of the design helps directly to elucidate the meaning of the work, which should, I argue, be read as an allegory uniting the profane, humanist pursuits of the classical world with the gift of Christian inspiration. The 'terre latine' (the earthly realm) is at the same time a 'terre chrétienne' (as symbolized by the 'angelic' airborne figures).

This symbolism invites comparison with the depiction of the nine Muses in Puvis de Chavannes's state-commissioned *Le Bois sacré cher aux arts et aux Muses* (1884), with its titular allusion to its religious spirit **[Figure 27]**. In *Terre Latine*, Denis reuses motifs from his explicitly Catholic output: for example, the central soaring figure in 'La Poésie' **[Figure 49]** is strongly reminiscent of the Virgin in a decoration he completed for the Église Sainte-Marguerite in Le Vésinet (1903) **[Figure 54]**. Accompanied by a lyre player, she is the spiritual inspiration for poetry. She could be read as a figment of the poetic mind: with her lyre-playing companion, she is the incarnation of a kind of 'interior music', as is the airborne harp-player in 'La Musique' **[Figure 50]**. The trio of diaphanous women in flight behind them seem to echo the three ethereal figures in Puvis de Chavannes's *Le Rêve* (1883) **[Figure 55]**. On the ground to the left of this central airborne figure, looking up with rapt attention, is the figure of Madame de la Laurencie, d'Indy's daughter (an accomplished musician who was very close to Denis), with a mandolin in her lap.[21] Her upward gaze suggests a direct channel of inspiration with the spiritual figure

[21] She has been identified by Violaine Beraud Sudreau 'Maurice Denis à l'hôtel Rouché: *Terre Latine,* inspiratrice des arts', in *L'Atelier: Bulletin de l'association "Le Temps d'Albert Besnard"*, 5 (December 2009), pp. 32-46.

of lyrical poetry. To the right is a male figure dressed in flowing red garb, scroll in hand; perhaps he is an allusion to the early Renaissance poets and humanists Petrarch or Dante. If so, his presence perhaps allegorizes the rebirth of interest in classical antiquity, and his placement in the scene therefore suggests that this expression of classical renewal also had a firm place in the contemporary cultural life of France.

Within the sunlit landscape of 'L'Art Plastique' one finds a combination of the contemporary and the mythological **[Figure 48]**. The sculptor Aristide Maillol is depicted chiselling a female form in the left foreground, while in the distance, if we follow Maillol's gaze, we can discern the mythological figure of Paris choosing the most beautiful from Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, in accordance with the Greek myth. Denis contributed to the popular idea of Maillol as a linking figure between ancient Greece and southern France, writing in an article on the artist: 'By birth, by race, he belongs to the French Midi; he comes to us from the shores of the Mediterranean ….'[22] Denis's allusion here to Maillol's ethnic attachment to the south of France is reminiscent of the language used by committed nationalists such as Charles Maurras, who will be discussed shortly. The sculptor's inclusion within *Terre Latine* is testament to Denis's conception of his rootedness within, and his representativeness of, the South.

In the airy vestibule of Rouché's apartment, Denis invites a Parisian audience into his Arcadian vision representing the 'génie Latine', and 'une

[22] 'Par sa naissance, par sa race, il appartient au Midi de la France : il nous vient des bords de la Méditerranée ...' Denis, 'Aristide Maillol', *Théories*, p. 237. See also Bertrand Lorquin, *Aristide Maillol* (Geneva, 1994).

grace hellénique', which he believed might be kept alive by the very people privileged to be in Rouché's home.[23] The panels equate France's own geography with the idea of the classical: Denis's first biographer Barazzetti-Demoulin identifies the setting of 'L'Art Plastique' as Saint-Paul-de-Vence and of 'La Poésie' as the bay of Menton – both in Provence.[24] And yet she emphasizes the fact that the title of the panels places weight on 'neither the South nor Mistral's Provençe, but [on] their Latinity'.[25] My attention turns now to the political significance of this 'Latin' character – and Denis's involvement within the associated discourse.

'They say that a classical renaissance has begun'[26]

In 1909 Denis proclaimed: 'In the midst of its elders, youth has become resolutely classical', noting that, among avant-garde critics, the word 'classical' was now a 'supreme' compliment.[27] The association between classicism and aesthetic conservatism was countered by such figures as Apollinaire and Cocteau, who advocated the 'latinity', and national character, of movements such as Cubism well before the war.[28] Perhaps Denis, despite his aversion to

---

[23] Jamot, 'Exposition Maurice Denis', p 125.

[24] Barazzetti-Demoulin, *Maurice Denis*, p. 150.

[25] 'ne traitait ni du Midi ni de la Provence de Mistral mais de leur latinité', Ibid. 'Mistral' was Frederic Mistral, a Provencal poet who had established the regional movement *félibrige* in 1854 (see below).

[26] 'On a dit, c'est une renaissance du classicisme qui se prépare.' Agathon, *Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui*, 11th edn (Paris, 1913).

[27] 'Autour de ses aînés, la jeunesse est devenue résolument classique'. Denis, 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au classicisme', *Théories*, p. 267.

[28] In 1908, Apollinaire praised Braque for the 'nobler, more measured, better ordered, more cultured art' of Cubism that had come to replace the frenzied efforts of Impressionism. 'Preface to the *Catalogue de l'Exposition Braque*, Kahnweiler Gallery, (9-28 November 1908), reprinted in *Apollinaire on Art, Essays and Reviews, 1902-1918*, trans. S. Suleiman, ed. L.C. Breunig (Boston, 2001), pp. 50-2. Many scholars have written on *latinité* in post-war France e.g. Jeremy Guedj,

the experiments of the Cubists, is thinking partly of the likes of Apollinaire here, using to his advantage the flexible attributions of the term 'classical' in order to underline the significance of his own particular stylistic evolution. Apollinaire himself was rather conflicted in his opinions on Denis, but recognized his importance, remarking in a review of the Salon des Artistes Français in 1911:

> The influence of M. Maurice Denis is evident … The time is ripe for M. Maurice Denis to submit his candidacy to the Institute. His talent, his works, his opinions, aesthetic or otherwise, as well as the circle of his acquaintances, give him an incontestable right to that honour.[29]

Such views remind us of the mutable nature of the discourse on classicism, and of the manifold visual expressions of that fundamental practice of *componere*.

A widespread move towards classicism was recognized by numerous critics in the first decade of the twentieth century. A writer for *L'Occident* even noticed a surge of interest in the Poussins hanging at the Louvre: 'An elite of writers and artists, anxious to be attached to the finest French tradition, has taken as its master this harmonious and severe genius...'[30] The former Symbolist Charles Morice summarized in a 1910 article: 'We are in the aftermath of Symbolism in poetry, of Impressionism in painting, of Wagnerism in music, and here we are announcing a return of the French spirit to the classical ideal.'[31] The specific

---

'Judaïsme, fascisme et latinité: France-Italie, 1918-19', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée,* 95 (2017), pp. 173-198; Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (London, 1989).

[29] *Apollinaire on Art,* pp. 161-2. By 'Institute' he is presumably referring to the Institut de France.

[30] Georges Dralin, 'Propos', *L'Occident,* 3 (1 January 1904), p. 237.

[31] 'Nous sommes au lendemain du Symbolisme en poésie, et de l'Impressionisme en peinture, de Wagnerisme en musique, et voici qu'on annonce un retour de l'esprit français à l'idéal

alliance between the 'classical ideal' with a sense of 'Frenchness' is of great relevance to Denis, who refers on numerous occasions to three prominent figures of nationalism: 'Barrès, Mithouard, Maurras advise us to look for a rule in the past of our race'. But he adds: 'In truth I do not see that we can draw from the national tradition anything other than generalities as vague as those from which we come.'[32] This rather illuminating comment should not be taken as a dismissal of the importance of finding artistic inspiration in national tradition, but as recognition of the breadth of that tradition.

The painter recognized the political implications of this 'return' to tradition. In 1905 he published a rebuttal of recent comments made by Camille Mauclair on the danger of the new 'nationalist reaction', as manifested by individuals such as Maurras and Barrès. Rejecting Mauclair's alarm at the prospect, Denis claimed that in reality, there was a clear lack of uniformity and doctrinal consistency among the so-called 'neo-classicists', and that the views of Barrés, Mithouard and Maurras were rather divergent.[33] Denis continues to ridicule Mauclair's concerns by presenting as entirely reasonable their ambitions: 'Reactionaries, those who believe in the necessity of a teaching and a constraint! Nationalists, those who want this teaching to be based above all on the old national background, to develop the French qualities of taste, clarity

---

classique'. Charles Morice, 'Enquete dans les tendances actuelles', *Paris-Journal* (1 April, 1910). Quoted in Reff, 'Cézanne and Poussin', p. 166.

[32] 'Barrès, Mithouard, Maurras nous conseillent de chercher une règle dans le passé de notre race. A la vérité je ne vois pas que nous puissions tirer de la tradition nationale autre chose que des généralités aussi vagues que celles dont nous sortons'. Denis, 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh', *Théories,* p. 273.

[33] Denis, 'La Réaction Nationaliste', *Théories* pp. 187-198.

and moderation …'[34] This statement implies his disapproval of the liberalism that Mauclair espoused at this point.

We must look to the end of the nineteenth century for particularly strong stirrings of this renewed interest in the country's Greco-Latin heritage as a form of cultural self-legitimization, echoing what had occurred in France a century earlier.[35] The foundation of the short-lived *école romane* school of poetry (established by Jean Moréas in 1891 as a reaction to the Symbolist experiment which he had so enthusiastically embraced in 1885) was an indication of the growing interest among the more conservatively-minded intellectuals in a 'classical' renewal. Writing for *La Plume* in 1891 (a journal associated predominantly with promoting the Symbolist cause), Maurras, a champion of the *école romane*, noted the origin of the term '*romane*': 'Latin, Félibrean, Italian, Hellenic, it is the same. Jean Moréas … wanted to call it "Roman" and I did not say yes to this name without emotion, discovering in it …"the trembling of the native sea".'[36] This rhetoric – of the 'native sea' – hints at the nationalist tone that the short-lived movement was to take. *École romane* poetry was characterized by formality and stiffness of verse, conscious stylistic distancing from the suggestive verse of Symbolism. Symbolism, along with Parnassianism

---

[34] 'Réactionnaires, ceux qui croient à la nécessité d'un enseigne- ment et d'une contrainte! Nationalistes, ceux qui veulent que cet enseignement s'appuie surtout sur le vieux fond national, développe les qualités françaises de goût, de clarté et de mesure.' Ibid., p. 190.

[35] The perceived Republican virtues of Rome were much discussed following the Revolution. Thomson demonstrates the importance of this vision to the State, *The Presence of the Past,* pp. 14-15.

[36] 'Latin, félibréen, italien, hellène, il est le même. Jean Moréas … l'ai voulu appeler 'Roman' et je n'ai pas ouï ce nom sans émotion, y découvrant un peu… « le tremblement de la mer natale».' 'Barbares et romans', *La Plume,* 53 (1 July 1891), pp. 229-30. Maurras quotes from Moreas's poem *Le pélerin passioné* (Paris, 1891). The term refers to the Félibrige, the literary association founded by Frédéric Mistral and other Provençal writers in 1854 to defend and promote the Occitan language. Maurras was a strong supporter.

and naturalism, were held to be damaging influences that had broken the chain of France's literary tradition and perverted the national *génie*.[37] Even Paul Verlaine, the former darling of Symbolism, flirted with the rigorously conservative *romane* style at the time of writing his collection *Bonheur* (1891). Moreover, he was reported to have made a throwaway comment about Symbolism as being 'not French' to the journalist Jules Huret.[38] What he meant by such a bold statement is unclear; but perhaps it underlines the observation made by Richard Shryock, that a growing association between Symbolism and anarchism was troubling the more conservatively minded.[39] Maurras himself found much to admire in Verlaine's most spiritual Symbolist works – but he was careful not to label them as such.[40] The example of the *école romane's* ultimate failure perhaps underlines a point made by Denis in 1909, regarding the potential for a French 'renaissance': 'it is less the perfection of the models proposed than the strength and unity of the ideals of a vigorous generation'.[41] Although the *école romane* failed in its attempts to achieve a sustainable 'classical' model for modern poetry, it did nevertheless bolster a resurgence of interest in Greco-Latin civilization. The vehemently nationalist Maurras found the movement particularly fertile for the development of his later aspirations, which gained a voice through the political group Action Française. Ever since

---

[37] 'Parnassianism' refers to a literary style arising in the nineteenth century under the influence of positivism. Objecting to Romanticism's unbridled sensibility and unrestrained poetic forms, Parnassian writers promoted an impassive, objective voice.

[38] Quoted in Patrick McGuiness, *Poetry and Radical Politics in Fin de Siècle France: From Anarchism to Action francaise* (Oxford, 2015), p. 231.

[39] Richard Shryock, 'Reaction Within Symbolism: The École Romane', *The French Review*, 71/4 (March 1998), pp. 577-584.

[40] See Charles *Maurras, 'Paul Verlaine', Le Soleil*, (9 January 1896), p. 2.

[41] 'c'est moins la perfection des modèles qu'on se propose que la force et l'unité d'idéal d'une génération vigoreuse'. Denis, 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh', *Théories,* p. 274.

the days of the *école romane*, he aligned himself with the wider impulse of Mediterraneanism, the reclamation of the 'soul' of meridional France, as a cultural counterweight to the perceived 'barbaric' influence of Germanic culture.

Some months before the *inauguration* of Denis's *Terre Latine,* the artist found himself at 'L'Action française, le soir [de l'anniversaire] de la degradation de Dreyfus.'[42] Also present at the event was Degas, who firmly took the side of the anti-Dreyfusards in the political affair that raged for so many years at the end of the century.[43] The adherents to the political movement Action Française (which included Denis, d'Indy and fellow Schola composers) were all thus inclined, and believed firmly in a form of nationalist sentiment beholden to the affirmation of France's classical past.[44] Maurras took over the group's running shortly after its founding (by Maurice Pujo and Henri Vaugeois) in 1899 during the turbulence of the Dreyfus Affair.[45] He zealously promoted the idea that modern French society had betrayed the cultural ideals of the classical past by giving itself over to the individualistic, excessive tendencies born of the Revolution and Romanticism. The Revolution, and associated intellectuals such as Rousseau, had dispossessed the country both of its Greco-Roman tradition

---

[42] Denis, *Journal II,* 4 January 1907, p. 50.

[43] See Linda Nochlin, 'Degas and the Dreyfus Affair: A Portrait of the Artist as an anti-Semite' in Norman Kleeblatt (ed.), *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth and Justice* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 96-116.

[44]Members included Déodat de Sévérac, Réné de Castéra, and the editor of d'Indy's *Cours,* Auguste Sérieyx.

[45] Denis stated his support for the group in 'Réponse à l'enquête sur «l'orientation de la peinture moderne», menée par J.C. Holl', *Revue du temps present* 1/6 (2 June 1911), p. 569. He left the movement in 1926 when it was publicly condemned by the papacy.

and of the hierarchy of the Catholic church, he claimed.[46] The seventeenth century (the so-called 'Grand Siècle'), under the reigns of Louis XIII and XIV – the years of Versailles, of Poussin and Racine, and of the composers Lully and Couperin – was extolled by Maurras as France's cultural zenith, its civilization founded upon the principles of reason, harmony, beauty and discipline. He advanced the doctrine of 'integral nationalism' – the restoration of the monarchy to heal the country's divisions. In 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh', Denis claimed that '… the monarchist theory, integral nationalism, [i.e. the doctrine of Action Française] has among other advantages that of taking into account also the successful experiences of the past.'[47] There is no evidence that Denis was a fervent monarchist, but, as Bouillon notes, he recognized in the group's endeavours the desire to integrate an aesthetic outlook with a politics of traditionalism.[48]

Curiously, however, Maurras also sought legitimization for his form of traditionalism by relying on the advances of science, in an openly positivistic stance: 'What our ancestors did by custom and feeling, we do ourselves with assurance and scientific clarity, by reason and will'.[49] And just as central to

---

[46] See Stephen Wilson, 'History and Traditionalism: Maurras and the Action Française,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29/3 (July-September 1968), pp. 365-380.

[47] 'mais la théorie monarchiste, le nationalisme intégral, a entre autres avantages celui de tenir compte aussi des expériences réussies du passé.' Denis, De Gauguin et de Van Gogh', p. 267.

[48] Denis's name does not appear on the list of signatures attached to the 'manifesto' of 'integral nationalism' published in the first issue of the movement's newly launched daily newspaper. 'Le nationalisme integral', *L'Action française,* 1/1 (21 March 1908), p. 1. Bouillon, 'Politique de Denis', p. 101. The thinly spread ideological substance of the group attracted a wide range of people with specific antagonisms –but most prominent were anti-Semites and anti-Republicans. See also Michael Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic: Sorel, Barrès and Maurras* (Princeton, NJ, 1959), p.60.

[49] 'ce que nos ancêtres ont fait par coutume el par sentiment, le poursuivre nous-mêmes avec l'assurance el la netteté scientifiques, par raison, et par volonté.' Maurras, *Enquête sur la Monarchie,* 2nd edn (Paris, 1909), p. 463.

Maurras's lauding of France as the successor to the disciplined Hellenic and Roman worlds was his belief that the Catholic church preserved this ancient heritage, and 'the natural order of humanity'.[50] Maurras was not himself a committed Catholic. In the words of McWilliam, he 'instrumentalized' the faith for political ends.[51] The politician described Catholic spirituality as the 'brutal force which sets out once more to conquer the universe': this sort of inflammatory rhetoric was far from Denis's own appreciation of France's Catholic heritage.[52] The curious conflation of Catholicism, classicism and positivism that became the basis of Action Française's dogma was laid out in Maurras's 1905 text *L'Avenir de l'Intelligence*, a rallying cry for the French intelligentsia to work towards the spiritual reform of society against the 'anonymous forces of financial capitalism.'[53] In 1925, Denis himself provided fifteen small illustrations for a re-issue of the text **[Figure 56]**. Of particular note is the frontispiece, which features a female figure in a classical tunic playing a salpinx (an ancient Greek trumpet-like instrument). She could be Clio, the Greek muse of history (often pictured with a trumpet in hand), reminding the reader of the importance of following the lessons of the past. Other illustrations, including Orpheus and his lyre, are recycled from Denis's iconographical scheme for his *L'Histoire de la musique* decoration (1913) in the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (see Chapter 4). It is possible that Denis had in

---

[50] Quoted in Michael Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics, 1890-1914* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 53.

[51] McWilliam, *Aesthetics of Reaction*, p. 139.

[52]'… c'est la force brutale qui repart à la conquête de l'univers'. Maurras, *L'Avenir de l'Intelligence* (Paris, 1905), p. 13.

[53] Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism*, p. 48. Maurras's reference to the 'anonymous forces of financial capitalism' could be construed as implicitly anti-Semitic.

mind Maurras's own celebrated collection of poetry (also republished in 1925), *La musique intérieure,* the preface of which expounds upon the writer's sensitivity to the rhythms and lyricism of verse.[54] One might associate the 'musicality' of poetry and prose with the art of rhetoric central to the classical tradition. Consider, for example, the kinship projected in Denis's *Terre Latine's* 'L'Art Plastique' between poetry and forms of music-making **[Figure 48]**.

Little exists in the way of direct correspondence between Maurras and Denis, but there is evidence that Denis was close to several integral members of the organization. Louis Dimier, the art critic for Action Française's eponymous journal, and founder of the Institut d'Action Française in 1906, frequently sought Denis's advice.[55] The group's co-founder Maurice Pujo (who later co-founded the movement's youth organization Camelots de Roi) was encouraged by the prospect of Denis setting up an Action Française faction in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and expressed deep admiration for the painter on behalf of both himself and Maurras. Indeed, he concludes: 'I know you are very busy with your work which also works for us'.[56] This statement clearly implies the potential for Denis's work to function in a propagandizing manner for the movement. Their correspondence seems to have been initiated by a letter from Denis expressing sympathy for Pujo and the Action Française after a fallout resulting from the Camelots du Roi's sabotaging of the Jewish playwright

---

[54] See Maurras, 'Préface à *'La Musique intérieure,* 2nd edn (Paris, 1925). (Édition électronique réalisée par
Maurras.net, 2007), http://maurras.net/textes/38.html#note1. Last accessed 2 September 2022.

[55] '… je veux des idées et si vous en savez chez les gens les plus obscures du monde je vous serai oblige de me les enseigner'. Louis Dimier, letter to Denis (1906). MMD [Ms 3422].

[56] Je vous sais très occupé par votre œuvre qui travaille aussi pour nous'. Pujo letter to Denis (5 January 1913). MMD [Ms 9123].

Henry Bernstein's work 'Après Moi' at the Comédie Française.[57] Denis's reaction appears to align him closer than we might wish (especially considering Thadée Natanson's observation quoted earlier) to the toxic anti-Semitism of this Right-wing movement. Maurras's obsessive anti-Semitism, which fuelled his disgust for Dreyfus, was inextricable from his doctrine of 'integral nationalism', which 'synthesized populist xenophobia, exclusionary patriotism, and the reactionary elitism of royalism.'[58]

For Maurras, as for Denis, the political and the aesthetic were inextricably bound together. A healthy society, Maurras claimed, should be dependent on order maintained by a hierarchy of values which found full expression in the seventeenth century.[59] The spirit of his beloved French 'golden age' was embodied in the work of Poussin, whose Arcadias evoked (in Panofksy's words) the 'luxuriant vegetation, eternal spring, and inexhaustible leisure for love' brought to life by Virgil.[60] For Maurras, Poussin secured his status as pre-eminent inheritor of classical culture in part because of his indebtedness to the art of Rome. Maurras even asserted that the painter's immersion in Roman culture served only to enhance the artist's own sense of his Gallic background: 'this gallo-latin mix immediately recalls the high fusion of the Latin and

---

[57]Eugen Weber discusses this event in *Action française. Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-century France* (Stanford, 1962). See Pujo, letter to Denis, MMD [Ms 9122], in which Pujo thanks Denis for his letter at the time of the 'Bernstein Affair'.

[58] Richard Levy, 'Action Française' in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, vol. I (Santa Barbara, CA, 2005), p. 1.

[59] See in particular Gaetano Delonibus, *Charles Maurras's Classicizing Aesthetics* (New York, 2000).

[60] Erwin Panofsky, *Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition* (Oxford, 1936), p. 299.

Greek.'[61] Denis similarly came to exalt Poussin after his transformative experience in Rome, as laid out in 'Les Arts à Rome'. But while Maurras viewed Poussin's oeuvre as the acme of France's classical identity, Denis recognized an indigenous legacy, from Corot, to Puvis de Chavannes and to Cézanne, of classicism: in other words, the continuity of tradition, rather than the *recovery* of the past distinguished Denis's priorities from Maurras's.[62]

But their beliefs converged in their faith in the apparent *universality* of classical principles. As we saw in Chapter 1, Denis lauded the 'eternal' laws of classical 'balance and homogeneity', which were to be found in 'all beautiful' works.[63] In spite of his particular extolling of the 'Grand Siècle', Maurras was also inclined towards the idea that the truest classical works were 'written for all cultivated men from all countries and all times. There are works that pass above the differences between nations and civilizations, go straight to the heart … of human reason.'[64] Maurras's classicism was twofold then: rooted within a particular historical context, while simultaneously being outside the flow of time, as utopia is outside the realm of location. The philosopher Ortega Y Gasset has considered the 'uchronic' aspect of the classical ideal, which he understands as an uncovering of 'what is essential and immutable in [man]' beyond the historical recording of the aberrations and 'deformations' of man.[65]

---

[61] Quoted in McWilliam, *The Aesthetics of Reaction,*p. 159. See also Maurras 'Poussin et l'Occident', *Quand les Français ne s'aimaient pas* (Paris 1916), pp. 354-55.
[62] Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories,* pp. 44-56.
[63] équilibre et homogénéité …toutes les belles œuvres humaines.' Ibid., p. 47.
[64] Quoted in William Marx, 'Eliot and Maurras on Classicism', in Benjamin Lockerd (ed), *T. S. Eliot and Christian Tradition* (Lanham, MD and London, 2014), p. 80.
[65] See Juan Lopez-Morillas, 'Ortega y Gasset: Historicism vs. Classicism', *Yale French Studies*, 6, (1950) France and World Literature (1950), p. 72. On the concept of uchronia see Helga Schmid, *Uchronia: Designing Time* (Berlin, 2020).

As we shall see, a large number of the mythological works that Denis produced during the first two decades of the twentieth century could be understood as manifestations of the Maurrasian fiction of an exalted 'golden age' capable of being re-found.

Denis singled out Maurice Barrès as a figure equal to Maurras in his importance in nationalist debates. Denis had provided watercolour illustrations for an edition of Barrès's *La Mort de Venise* (1930), based on sketches made during his own trips to the city. The artist credits him with being 'the great exciter of French energies', encouraging a younger generation to appreciate the *culte du terroir.*[66] 'Without Barrès,' Maurras reportedly claimed, 'what would I have become?'[67] The older writer and politician Barrès found, as did Maurras, a compelling connection between nativism and classicism (which was bound up with a concomitant disavowal of the imperialism and colonialism that had so profoundly shaped the identity of contemporary France). He is perhaps best-known for his 1897 novel *Les Déracinés*, which eulogizes an intellectual community deeply connected with its French past and ancestral soil, contrasting it with the 'foreign' intelligentsia poisoning French culture like 'parasites'.[68] He was led by an instinctive sense of what he termed '*enracinement'* (rootedness): 'we [France] were the first nation of all Europe to grasp the idea of constituting a home-land.'[69] Barrès's significance lies not

---

[66] 'le grand excitateur des énergies françaises', 'Le Symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *Nouvelles Théories,* p. 172. Barrès, *Mort de Venise,* Illustrations de Maurice Denis, gravées sur bois par Jacques Betrand (Paris, 1930).
[67] Quoted in Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic,* p. 45.
[68] Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004), p. 133.
[69] M. Barrès, *The undying spirit of France,* trans. M.W.B. Corwin (New Haven, 1917), p.2. First published in French in 1916.

simply in his ideological beliefs but in the language in which he couched his ideas. The often lyrical, sometimes strident rhetoric employed by the 'mytho-poetic imagination' of nationalists such as Barrès undoubtedly played a significant role in reawakening nationalist emotions among the public – demonstrating again the close alignment between the realms of classical rhetoric and political discourse.[70] Although he did rally to the Action Française, it was with a certain reticence: 'I have always stopped giving my express adherence to the Maurras and Bourget movement,' he wrote, 'because one cannot dispense with the fact that when one is a traditionalist, when one is subject to the law of continuity, one must take things in the state in which one finds them.'[71] Such a view seems not dissimilar to Denis's less prescriptive view of the nature, and persistence, of national tradition.

But neither Barrès's nor Maurras's nationalist visions accorded so well with Denis's own understanding of the pluralities of tradition as did the thought of his close friend Adrien Mithouard.[72] What distinguished Mithouard's broad line of thought from that of Maurras and Barrès was his defence of medieval France, with its cathedrals and cloisters, as the highest point of Occidental civilization. He insisted that 'Classical art and romantic art were the two halves of the cathedral' – this was the essential thesis of his most prominent work *Le*

---

[70] See Philip Ouston, *The Imagination of Maurice Barrès*, (Toronto, 1974).

[71] Paul Bourget was prominent in the nationalist movement. 'Je me suis toujours arrêté de donner mon adhésion expresse au mouvement de Maurras et de Bourget … parce que je considère qu'on ne peut se dispenser quand on est traditionaliste, quand on est soumis à la loi de continuité, de prendre les choses dans l'état où on les trouve.' Maurice Barrès, *Mes Cahiers III*, (1902-4) (Paris, 1931), pp. 175-6.

[72] In 1899 Denis painted *Triptyque de la famille Mithouard* (private collection). Adrien's wife Jeanne was particularly close to Denis's wife Marthe. Mithouard accompanied Denis to Italy on numerous occasions, once provoking jealousy in Gide. See Gide, *Journals 1889-1949* (1904), p. 76.

Tourment de l'Unité (1901).[73] As the title of his journal *L'Occident* (founded in late 1901) suggests, its editor sought to establish the existence of a distinct occidental spirit: 'From the dawn of our world, people marched towards the West … From the East to Greece, from Athens to Rome, [human thought] came to us', he claims in the preface to the first issue.[74] 'Us' in this context refers, of course, to France, which (he claimed) boasted a modern manifestation of the Latin spirit and was thus 'the most intellectual country'. To be occidental was to possess this spirit, which allowed one 'to compose works of a more and more concise reason.'[75]

Mithouard's occidental spirit, while manifest across Europe's Latin countries, found its home on French soil; the writer was able to make such claims as 'The Occident is a *country* [my italics] of continuity', because of his underlying Gallocentrism. His was a kind of 'supranationalism', to use a concept explored by the philosopher Étienne Balibar: France embodied a kind of transnational essence as the epitome of Occidental expression (the inherently racist assumption of ethnic purity is bound up with such an idea).[76] The traditionalist faction of which Denis was a part gravitated towards Mithouard's journal. D'Indy and his Schola pupil Réné de Castéra were assigned the roles of

---

[73] 'L'art classique et l'art romantique furent les deux moitiés de la cathédrale'. Quoted in Tancrède de Visan, 'Adrien Mithouard et l'Occident', *L'attitude du lyrisme contemporain* (Paris, 1911), p. 218.

[74] 'Dès l'aube de notre monde, les peuples marchèrent vers l'Occident … D'Orient en Grèce, d'Athènes à Rome, [la pensée humaine] est venu chez nous'. Adrien Mithouard, 'De 1'Occident,' *L 'Occident* 1/1 (December 1901), p. 4.

[75] 'composer des oeuvres d'une raison de plus en plus serrée'. Ibid. p. 7.

[76] See Etienne Balibar, *Race, Nation Class: Ambiguous Identities* trans. C. Turner (London, 1991), p. 61.

music correspondents.[77] As noted in Chapter 1, the majority of Denis's *Théories* articles were originally published there (including 'Les élèves d'Ingres' (1902), 'L'influence de Paul Gauguin' (October 1903), and 'Cézanne' (September 1907). Acknowledging his friendship with Mithouard in *Théories,* Denis describes the journal as having 'placed the arts and letters in the atmosphere of tradition … which has already had such a profound influence on contemporary thought.'[78] Mithouard's recognition of a natural compatibility between the 'statues of Chartres' and 'the paintings of Poussin' had wide appeal for conservative thinkers, including Denis's friend the critic Tancrède de Visan, whose 1922 work *Essais sur la tradition française* was dedicated to Mithouard.[79] 'No one has shown better than Mithouard the intellectual affiliation of the Middle Ages with our contemporary time, through the classical age of the *Grand Siècle*', wrote de Visan.[80]

In the back pages of *L'Occident* (February 1903), Denis expressed his reticence at the idea of a 'Latin' resurgence:

> 'There is no 'Latin renaissance': there is the France that *is* and does not have to be reborn. There is no 'Latin influence', no 'Latin future' … There is no Midi opposed to the North: there is the virile and fecund West, alive and traditional ….'[81]

---

[77] De Beaupuy, Gay and Top, *René de Castéra,* p. 107.

[78] 'une revue qui a replacé les arts et les lettres dans l'atmosphère de la tradition, et qui a déjà exercé une si profonde influence sur la pensée contemporaine.' Denis, 'Les élèves d'Ingres', *Théories,* p. 128, fn. 1.

[79] Denis, 'La réaction nationaliste', *Théories*, p. 190.
Tancrède de Visan, *Essais sur la tradition française* (Paris, 1922).

[80] 'Personne n'a mieux montré que Mithouard la filiation intellectuelle du Moyen Age à notre époque contemporaine, à travers l'âge classique du grand siècle'. Ibid, p. 122.

[81] 'Il n'y a pas de 'renaissance latine' : il y a la France qui *est* et n'a pas à renâitre. Il n'y a pas d''influence latine', d'avenir latin'… il n'y a pas de *Midi* opposé au *Nord:* il y a l'Occident virile et fécondant'. Denis, 'Notes: Renaissance latine', *L'Occident* (February 1903), p. 144.

Perhaps he was responding to the recently founded journal *La Renaissance Latine* which had emerged in 1902 as a rival to *L'Occident.*[82] His statement seems to defend the natural continuity of an Occidental tradition in France, and is more akin to the rhetoric of Barrès (who stated in 1905 that tradition is 'a way of judging life, a way of feeling' embedded in national affiliation) than to Maurras's obsession with re-finding the nation's classical tradition.[83] Although it appears to contradict his assertions made elsewhere about a classical revival (such as 'youth has become resolutely classical'), it can be read as a more general statement about the intrinsic nature of French culture. These reassertions of classicism, he seems to imply, are not in themselves unique, but are a fundamental condition of the country's rootedness in tradition (itself a purportedly 'Western' trait). In this way, Denis's declaration is aligned entirely with Mithouard's argument in his *Traité de l'Occident (*which was dedicated to Vincent d'Indy): '[T]he West is endowed with a sense of duration; it never gets rid of the idea of continuity, it possesses the feeling of periods. Our arts, let us not tire of repeating it, have a strange affinity with Time.'[84]

Denis's *Terre Latine,* **[Figures 48-51]**, seems to embody Mithouard's ideal of the Occident as 'a *country* of continuity' — continuity manifested predominantly through the cultivation of the arts. In a 1907 article on the painter for *Art et Décoration* (written shortly after he had seen the Rouché commission), Mithouard compared Denis's idiom to the 'orchestral pages of

---

[82] Gabriel Hanotaux, 'La Renaissance Latine', *La Renaissance Latine,* 1/1 (May 1902), p.3.
[83] Quoted in McWilliam, *Aesthetics of Reaction,* p. 32.
[84] 'l'Occident est doué du sens de la durée; il ne se débarrasse jamais de l'idée de suite, il possède le sentiment des périodes. Nos arts, ne nous lassons pas de le redire, ont avec le Temps une étrange affinité.' Adrien Mithouard, *La Traité de l'Occident* (Paris, 1904), p. 87.

d'Indy and the melodies of Chausson'.[85] Mithouard's recognition of music as a powerful force of Occidentalism, a conviction on which he elaborates in the chapter 'Notre Musique' in *Traité de l'Occident* is paralleled in Denis's ensemble. In general *Terre Latine* seems to owe more to the synthetic classicism-inflected nationalism of Mithouard and an 'idea' of Occidental cultural permanence than to the more belligerent Greco-Latin nostalgia and *méditerranéanisme* of Maurras.[86]

L'Âge d'Or: visions of time transcended

Sarah al-Maraty has argued that *latinité* consists principally of a 'solar aesthetic', supposedly representing the brilliance of the Midi and the splendour of its ancient civilization.[87] The Midi took on a new ideological importance, not as a geographical location so much as an imagined construct. Figures such as Maurras enlivened the appreciation of its Hellenic, then Latin, foundations, and found in the Mediterranean Languedoc an intense nostalgia for the monarchy in particular. The city of Puvis de Chavannes's 1869 painting *Marseille, Colonie Grecque* offers a representation of Maurras's Phocaean vision **[Figure 57]**.[88] In 1895, a young Maurras described Puvis's œuvre as presenting a

[85] 'tension de l'âme qui vibre dans les pages orchestrale de d'Indy et dans les melodies de Chausson'. Mithouard, 'Maurice Denis', p. 2. CD, dossier for *L'Eternel Eté.*

[86] In an open letter to Maurras, published in *Traité,* Mithouard warned the politician of the danger of thinking too narrowly about the Western tradition. 'Lettre à Charles Maurras', *Traité de L'Occident*, pp. 149-160.

[87] Sarah al-Maraty, 'Des rayons et des ombres. Latinité, littérature et réaction en France (1880-1940)', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 95 (2017), p. 16.

[88] See Neil McWilliam, 'Opposing Strands: The Mediterranean as Site of Cultural Conflict Around 1900', *Artl@s Bulletin*, 10/2 (Fall 2021), pp. 21-36.

'new and purer world … parallel to reality'.[89] His work was a dream-like vision of what might, somehow, be recaptured by an intellectual elite capable of cultivating the virtues of the Greco-Roman world.

The ideal of a 'golden age' located in southern France was alluring to artists at all points in the political spectrum. Within the visual arts, one associates the turn of the century lure of the Mediterranean principally with the luminous surfaces of the neo-Impressionists, many of whose anarchist goals (Signac's in particular) were nurtured by a vision of a liberal and harmonious co-existence far removed from the strictures of Parisian life.[90] Signac's *Au temps d'harmonie* (1893-4), for example, that he toyed with naming 'Au temps des députés socialistes',[91] is one of his most explicitly utopian constructions, and finds a neat parallel in the words of the contemporaneous anarchist Charles Malato: 'The Golden Age is not in the past, it is in the future.'[92] Though far removed from the political conservatism of Denis and Maurras, the politicization of the South of France among those with anarchist ideals clearly stemmed from a comparable appreciation of the Midi as a region rooted in the classical past.

For the Fauves too, the Midi was a remote province that offered the possibilities of an edenic utopia because of its distance from the metropolis. Although stylistically very distinct Matisse's paintings *Luxe Calme et volupté* (1904) and *Bonheur de vivre* (1906) are now among the best-known artistic

---

[89] 'un monde nouveau et pur, et qui est 'parallele' à la réalité.' Charles Maurras, 'Le Goût de Puvis de Chavannes', *La Gazette de France* (8 January 1895), p. 1.
[90] Dymond, 'A Politicized Pastoral', pp. 353-370.
[91] Paul Signac, letter to Octave Maus. Reproduced in Marie-Jeanne Chartrain-Hebbelinck, 'Les lettres de Paul Signac à Octave Maus', *Bulletin of the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Beligique* (1969), p. 89.
[92] Quoted in Aline Dardel, 'Le thème de l'âge d'or dans la peinture', *La Gazette du hôtel Drouot*, no. 9 (3 March 1989), pp. 104-5. Consulted in archives of the musée de l'Oise, Beauvais.

formulations of an avant-garde allegiance to Mediterranean classicism.[93] A work in dialogue with these, and of comparable ambition, is André Derain's monumental 'The Golden Age' (1905), a powerful expression of southern luminescence that marries Divisionist technique with the unrestrained energy of Fauvism **[Figure 58]**.[94] Derain was influenced by Ingres's 'Turkish Bath', Gauguin's 'Primitivist' style, and Henri-Edmond Cross's bold application of paint.[95] One notes Denis's derision of Derain, however, who he claims has 'obviously little concern for nature, and horror of Greco-Latin beauty'.[96] Denis's distaste for Derain and Matisse stemmed in part from their rendering of the effect of light. He claimed that the 'optical shivers' and 'painful sensation of dazzling' that Matisse uses to capture the effects of sunlight, lead only to an aesthetic of 'blindness' that fails to capture any sense of true luminosity.[97] He maintained that the task of the artist, in capturing 'la grande lumière du soleil,' is to focus not on the direct representation of solar light, but on rendering the imaginative and emotional response to the *feel* of light, that will please the eyes. Gauguin, he claimed, was the ultimate master in this regard: when looking at his 'tropical' paintings, he says, one does not know on which side '"to turn one's parasol"'.[98] The sun becomes not a phenomenon of lighting, but a form of

---

[93] On Matisse and his 'classicism' see Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism*, p. 99.

[94] *Derain* and Matisse worked together through the summer of *1905* in the Mediterranean village of Collioure.

[95] See Susan Ball, 'The Early Figural Paintings of André Derain, 1905-1910: A Re-Evaluation', *Zeitschrift für kunstgeschichte*, 43/1 (1980), p. 79-96. Denis reserves particular praise for the neo-Impressionist Henri-Edmond Cross. See Denis, 'Henri- Edmond Cross, *Théories,* p. 165.

[96] 'peu de souci de la nature, et horreur de la beauté gréco-latine'. Denis, 'Liberté épuisante et stérile', *Théories,* p. 233.

[97] 'c'est le trouble rétinien, le frisson optique, la pénible sensation d'éblouissement.' Denis, 'Le Soleil', *Théories,* p. 220.

[98] 'vous ne savez pas … de quel côté «il faut tourner son ombrelle»'. Ibid, p. 222.

clothing that nature wears, and which the painter has the privilege of representing.

Those works of Denis's closest to Maurrasian mediterraneanism are his numerous beach scenes, so many of which are characterized by a distinctive high-toned palette of warm oranges and deep blues**:** *Euridice* (1906) **[Figure 59]** and *Bacchus et Ariadne* (1907) **[Figure 60]** are prominent examples, their subjects also indicating an imaginative association between the French shoreline and the idylls of Greek mythology. These shorelines, however, belong not to the Midi, but to the coasts of Brittany – specifically the regions of Perros-Guirec (Trestrignel beach) and Le Pouldu, where Denis spent much time on vacation. Denis's impassioned statement made in *L'Occident,* quoted earlier, that there should be no opposition between the Midi and the North of France seems borne out by these images. In a lecture on the inspiration afforded to painters by Brittany, Denis indicated why this particular region could provide such fruitful visual stimulation: 'a blue sea, a beach with an impeccable curve like a goddess's breast ... in the distance, Greek islands and, admirable detail, in this immense solitude, naked men bathing horses, as if escaped from a Greek vase or a frieze of the Parthenon.'[99] The explicit analogy drawn between the northern Brittany seaside and the culture of Ancient Greece here reveals the painter's desire to identify within the country cultural deposits of its classical heritage. But if the seascapes of Brittany remind him of the Aegean Sea, the moors inland have an austerity that he perceives to be uniquely Breton: 'it is

[99] 'une mer bleue, une plage d'une courbe impeccable comme un sein de déesse … au loin, des iles grecques et, détail admirable, dans cette immense solitude, des hommes nus baignant des chevaux, comme échappés d'un vase grec ou d'une frise du Parthénon.' Quoted in Denis, 'Vicaire (Le Pardon de Gabriel)', *En Bretagne,* 8 (November-December 1931), pp. 251-2.

this contrast which is the great characteristic of the country: charm half Greek, half Breton, well made to seduce idealists.'[100] This area – particularly around Perros-Guirec – manifests a fusion of cultural heritages in his mind.

Maurras emphasized the inseparability of a French regional culture (*pays*) and a national culture (*patrie*). A man from Provence such as himself should feel deeply rooted within his own region, while owing ultimate loyalty to the *patrie* (inevitably symbolized by Paris). This understanding was no doubt indebted partly to Barrès's idea of *enracinement.* The *patrie* was unified by the 'génie latine', rooted in ancient Mediterranean civilization. It was essential for Maurras to affirm the strength of its binding force, as a counterweight to 'a Germany that is too powerful', 'a Slavic immensity', and 'a vast Community of those who speak English'.[101] Denis's vision was of a mediterraneanized northern France that could advance the ideal of this geopolitical unity. The 'transfiguration' of the northern coastline into a luminous realm in which timeless myth and contemporary culture come together was both an intensely personal act of devotion to Brittany, and a declaration of cultural unity.

Denis's beloved Trestrignel beach at Perros-Guirec in Brittany (where he owned a holiday home) provides the setting for a central panel, 'La Plage', within his decorative ensemble *L'Âge d'Or* (1912), commissioned for the staircase of a Parisian townhouse belonging to Alexandre Berthier, Prince of

[100] 'c'est ce contraste qui est la grande caractéristique du pays: charme mi-grec, mi-breton, bien fait pour séduire des idéalistes.' Ibid.

[101] 'une Germanie trop puissante », «une Slavie [sic] immense» et «une vaste Communauté de ceux qui parlent anglais».' Quoted in Olivier Dard, 'Charles Maurras, le fascisme, la latinité et la Méditerranée', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 95 (2017), p.7.

Wagram **[Figure 61]**.[102] Family photos taken by the artist at the time of the Wagram works' completion show the area of the beach that provided the inspiration for 'La Plage', as does a wood-engraving made for the announcement of Denis's daughter Dominique's birth in 1909 **[Figure 62]**. The ensemble as a whole comprises seven wall panels ('La Source', 'La Plage', 'La Vallée', 'Les Colombes', 'La Treille', 'Fruits', 'Oiseaux') and a ceiling decoration (a ceruleum blue sky punctuated by softly contoured clouds with two groups of delicately draped women). The small supplementary panels 'La Treille' and 'Les Colombes' signify nature's bounty while the others, and in particular 'La Source' – a quintessentially classical subject also treated by Ingres and Puvis de Chavannes – illustrate the rejuvenatory effect of the natural world, in accordance with the mythical 'Golden Age'. The stream of water as a miraculous source for the bestowing of eternal youth is a classical archetype – and one that appears in Ingres's own *L'Âge d'Or,* which he himself described as being 'à la Raphael'.[103] Denis owned several postcards with preparatory studies of motifs from Ingres' painting.[104]

The rocky cliffs of Denis's 'La Plage' animate the plane, assuming a comparable magnitude to the rocky protrusion that forms the backdrop to Ingres' own *L'Âge d'Or* **[Figure 63]**. But the overhang in 'La Plage' has an animating role in the scene, delineating the areas of action below. The rocks have an almost flesh-like quality to them, evoking, perhaps, the rippling

[102] Berthier was an almost equally illustrious collector and art enthusiast as Rouché.
[103] 'ce sont des chants d'allégresse, des rythmes mélodieux … nul, en notre temps, n'a su créer des arabesques plus harmonieux'. Louis Vauxcelles, 'Societé nationale des beaux arts: salon de 1912', *Les Arts* (May 1912) np. CD, dossier *L'Âge d'Or*.
[104] See MMD [Ms C.P.I 2902-5].

musculature of a mythical Breton giant's torso.[105] The 'giant' sits with his upper arm held up to support a woman in flowing clothing playing the panpipes, leaning into the embrace of her nude companion. If we read the image in this way, the idea that Brittany might have been a region which embraced and cultivated the country's classicism becomes symbolically evident.

The same wind that wafts the strains of the panpipes onto the beach breathes life into the white shawl being wrestled with by the standing nude, animating the form of an arabesque. The dimples in the sand, indices of human activity, are perhaps a significant addition to the scene, adding weight to the contrast between contemporaneity and eternality. Beyond the footsteps in the sand is the figure of a nude youth on a white horse, who is visually connected to the figures on horseback in the distance. The youth seems to pause at the sight of familial bliss on his way to join the others: the gaze of this quasi-mythological youth – which reminds one of the figures which adorn the Parthenon frieze – forges an immediate connection between mythical past and serene present. The rider motif can be found 'haunting' the Breton beach in other scenes, such as *Plage à l'épargneul* (1903) **[Figure 64]**, and, even earlier, *Ils virent des fées débarquer sur la plage* **[Figure 65].**[106]

The figures of Denis's second central *L'Âge d'Or* panel, 'La Vallée', also seem to embody different levels of temporality: the modern bonnet sported by the

---

[105] Stories abounded of the 'race of giants' that used to populate the region. See Émile Souvestre, *Popular Legends of Brittany* (Boston, 1854).

[106] The title of this early work is an allusion to André Gide's *Voyage d'Urien* which the painter had recently illustrated. The motif of the horse and rider also puts one in mind of the *L'Age d'Or* decoration completed by Denis's friend Réné Ménard in 1908 (for the Sorbonne's Faculté de Droit), in which a nude male guides his white horse through the dense forest of (possibly) Fontainebleau. See Thomson, *The Presence of the Past*, p. 248-50. Puvis de Chavannes's *Vision Antique* (1885) also features Parthenon horses on the distant shoreline.

standing statuesque nude signifies contemporaneity, anchoring the pair to the present **[Figure 66]**. The seated musician to the right of the scene in the middle-ground, who entertains an audience of three women and two cherubic infants, is seated in profile to the viewer, presumably in imitation of postures found on Grecian vases. He plays the aulos (an Ancient Greek instrument) and sports a headband not dissimilar to that worn by Greek youths. Like the boy with the white horse in 'La Plage', he is a recurrent motif in Denis's arcadian scenes.[107] But the setting here - the verdant Italian landscape of Tivoli, recognizable by the waterfalls in the distance – pays homage to Denis's Italian sojourns.[108] This scene offers an alternative vision of a Golden Age, one directly inspired by Denis's time in Italy. The titular 'valley' can also be glimpsed in his 1904 painting *La Danse d'Alceste,* which seems directly inspired by a trip to Tivoli that year, as noted in his journal **[Figure 67]**: 'Tivoli and Hadrian's villa … the rainbows in the dust of the falls.'[109] The villa and rainbow feature prominently in this painting, with the rainbow also appearing in 'La Vallée'.

L'Âge d'Or's 'La Plage', with its 'mediterraneanizing' of the Breton shoreline, seems particularly compatible with a Maurrasian vision of France as a land defined by a Hellenic past, in contrast to the *barbarie* of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic culture. 'La Vallée', on the other hand, in the specificity of its allusions to Tivoli, suggests the painter's appreciation of Italy as a place of equal importance to the nurturing of the classical. Marie-José Salmon has

---

[107] For example, Denis's *La Plage Verte, Perros Guirec* (1909).

[108] Denis had a postcard of the Tivoli waterfalls in his private collection. See MMD [C.P.H 2774].

[109] 'Tivoli et la villa d'Adrien, les agneaux, les fleurs, les arcs-en-ciel dans la poussière des chutes'. See Denis, *Journal I,* 18 January 1904, p. 204.

identified members of Denis's family in both panels, suggesting an interpretation of these decorations as particularly personal visions of a 'Golden Age'.[110]

Italophilia and the lure of Fiesole

Denis's 'discovery' of Raphael in Rome and the merits of the classical method were discussed in Chapter 1. But the Florentine Renaissance as an equally significant, and related, inspiration is to be considered here. The painter's sense of affinity with the *quattrocento* deepened as he came to understand the cultural importance of humanist thought in the period. Nourished by the idea of Italy as the cradle of a reborn classical civilization, his Italophilia was of a kind with that of nationalist thinkers such as Mithouard, who claimed in *Le Tourment de l'Unité* that Cellini, Giotto, Filippo Lippi, Brunelleschi and Saint Francis are 'spirits of good humour', while Macbeth and Hamlet, 'ghosts of despondency [who] have arisen under the skies of the North, where mysticism is a silent pain'. The writer seems to have been attracted to a particularly strong cultural syncretism: 'one hardly needs to look for freethinkers among the [Italian] churchmen. The cathedral of Siena preserves Three Naked Graces which never scandalized anyone. Dante invokes the Muses to sing to the Virgin.'[111] Denis

[110] Marie-José Salmon, *L'Age d'Or de Maurice Denis* (Nantes, 1982), pp. 25-8.

[111] '… des esprits de belle humeur ; Macbeth et Hamlet, fantômes de découragement, ont surgi sous les ciels du Nord, où le mysticisme est une silencieuse douleur… il ne faut guère chercher, pour y trouver des libre-penseurs parmi les hommes d'église. La cathédrale de Sienne conserve Trois Grâces Nues qui n'ont jamais scandalisé personne. Dante invoque les Muses pour chanter la Vierge.' Mithouard, *Le tourment de l'unité,* p. 266.

spent several holidays in Italy with the Mithouard family, writing of 'delicious' evenings spent in Rome.[112]

Tourism to Italy among the French was burgeoning by the end of the 19th century. Texts such as Jean Schopfer's 'Voyage idéale en Italie' first published in *La Revue Blanche* in May 1898 provided the French public with a coherent itinerary through the diverse architectural and artistic achievements of the country's history.[113] But this fascination with Italy (primarily among the wealthy) was overshadowed by growing anti-Italian sentiment among Republican nationalists during the second half of the nineteenth century, who clung to 'la manie moderne de rebaisser l'Italie.'[114]

This anti-Italianism was identified, and decried, by Action Française's Louis Dimier, an art historian of some repute. At a time when the Republic was glorifying the school of the 'French primitives' (at the 1904 'Exposition des Primitifs', discussed in the previous chapter), Dimier wrote a paean to the Italian artist Primaticcio, who had been invited to decorate the interior of the Fontainebleau palace alongside Rosso Fiorentino, in the early 16th century.[115] Given the visible Italian influence within the palace, it became, among such nationalists as the Republican art historian Henri Bouchot, a symbol of toxic foreign influence over French culture. Dimier's suspicion of the defensive nationalist particularism of his Republican peers, which reflected the historical

---

[112] *Journal I*, (28 January 1904), p. 201.
[113] Subsequently published in book form: Jean Schopfer, *Voyage idéale en Italie* (Paris, 1899). Schopfer was one of Denis's travel companions in 1898 on his Roman adventure.
[114] Louis Dimier, letter to Eugène Müntz (20 May 1900). Quoted in Michela Passini, 'Louis Dimier, L'Action française et la question de l'art national', in O. Dard, M. Leymarie and N. McWilliam (eds.), *Le maurrassisme et la culture. Volume III: L'Action française. Culture, société, politique (*Villeneuve d'Ascq , 2010*),* p. 209.
[115] See ibid.

perspective of the Action Française, was also in line with Denis's understanding. Both Dimier and Denis were strongly attached to the idea of a national tradition, but without the *dogmatic* patriotism promoted within Republican circles. They followed in the tradition of the influential art historian Eugène Müntz, who, in his 1882 text *Les Précurseurs de la Renaissance*, acknowledged giving 'pride of place to the Tuscan school' since it 'served as an initiator for the whole of Europe.'[116]

A clear indication of Denis's attitude appears in an essay, published in 1904 in *L'Occident*, on the small Breton church of Kernascléden, the frescos of which had been largely forgotten. He admits to not 'blindly admiring' ancient French painting, preferring instead the great giottesques ancestors of Raphael and the Florentine *quattrocentisti*.' And yet his ambivalence is detectable: he laments that if such paintings were on the vault of an Umbrian or Tuscan church, 'they would have been famous long ago'.[117] There was a particular essence deriving from the long sustained foundations of tradition that gave Italy such authority in the painterly imagination. In an essay entitled 'La Peinture Decorative Moderne' for *Art et industrie* (1910), Frantz Jourdain remarked that 'if [Puvis de Chavannes] had lived in Florence, Venice or Rome, instead of the prosaic Place Pigalle ... if he had been born in this country of legend and dream that is Italy, of what cult would he not be the object!'[118]

---

[116] 'nous avons accordé la place d'honneur à l'école toscane. C'est que …elle a servi d'initiatrice à l'Europe entière'. Eugène Müntz, *Les précurseurs de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1882), p. 1.

[117] ' les grands giottesques ancêtres de Raphaël et les quattrocentisti Florentins'.
'elles seraient depuis longtemps célèbres !' Denis, 'Un chef d'œuvre inconnu', *Théories*, p. 133.

[118] 'si… Puvis de Chavanne [sic] avait … habité à Florence, Venise ou Rome, au lieu de la prosaique place Pigalle … s'il était né dans ce pays de la légende et du rêve qu'est Italie, de

During the year in which the Kernascléden text was written, the Louvre held its Exposition des Primitifs, which was widely derided by conservatives. Running consecutively was an exhibition at the Galérie Druet of Denis's Italian studies (*Etudes d'Italie, 1898-1904*). Gide remarked in the catalogue's preface on the way in which the 'terre classique' was able to 'discipline' the artist's sensibility.[119] A Russian visitor to the exhibition, the poet Maximilien Voloshin, observed that the artist liked to watch the world through the eyes of 'Beato' Angelico.[120] This idea of Denis imaginatively inhabiting the past – and conversing with the classical tradition – is perhaps significant. It was no doubt aided by the efforts of his cosmopolitan friends, including Gide and Ernest Chausson, who welcomed members of their Parisian circles to their houses in the Italian countryside. The congenial social milieu of Chausson's Parisian salon, in which musicians and artists came together in collaborative thinking was also fostered in his Italian residence, the Villa Papiniano, in Fiesole. Chausson, like d'Indy, was a pupil of César Franck, nicknamed by his students as the 'Pater Seraphicus' of French music.[121] A recollection by Denis written in a journal entry from 1931 reads: 'I remember my arrival in 1897 at Ernest Chausson's villa nestled among the roses of Fiesole. Exultet! Magnificat! The gentle Florentine landscape, arriving in the light – as though one is stepping

---

quel culte ne serait-il pas l'objet !'. Frantz Jourdain, 'La Peinture Décorative Moderne', *L'Art et industrie,* 2 (December 1910), n.p.

[119] Gide's preface is summarized in R. M., 'Petites Expositions', *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité,* 37 (26 November 1904), p. 2.

[120] See Anastasia Zelvenskaia, 'Maurice Denis et la Russie' in J-C Marcadé (ed.), *Le Dialogue des arts dans le symbolisme russe: actes du colloque, Bordeaux,* (12-14 May 2000) (Lausanne, 2008), p. 55.

[121] Chausson was greatly admired by d'Indy, who organised the premiere of Chausson's opera *Le Roi Arthus* after the composer's premature death in 1899.

straight into an Italian Primitif painting….'[122] Indeed, only a few minutes' walk from Chausson's holiday home was the Convent of San Domenico where Fra Angelico had made his home for eighteen years. Denis could even see the convent from the window of his room.[123] At the Villa Papiniano Denis spent numerous happy months exploring Fiesole, Florence, and the surrounding Tuscan environment. A letter to Madame Chausson on 10 October 1897 shortly before his first visit indicates the propitious timing of the trip: 'If I don't find the means to go and *flâner* for several months in Italy, I will let myself be taken over by new and sterile work, by the insatiable need to produce that Paris fever gives'.[124]

The use of 'flâner' here suggests a level of familiarity or comfortableness within the public spaces of Tuscany such that he can absorb himself in his surroundings without the self-consciousness of an outsider.[125] As Baudelaire wrote in 'The Painter of Modern Life', the perfect *flâneur* is able '[t]o be away from home and yet to feel everywhere at home.'[126] Denis came to refer to Italy as his 'second home, [his] old mistress'. Even by the time of his trip to the Chausson home in 1897, he acknowledged, in a letter to Vuillard, that he

---

[122] 'Je me souviens de mon arrive, en 1897, à la villa d'Ernest Chausson, parmi les roses de Fiesole. *Exultet. Magnificat !* Douceur des horizons florentins, arrive dans la lumière – et comme si l'on entrait de plain-pied dans un tableau de primitif…' Denis, *Journal III*, 1931, p. 144.

[123] According to a letter to Vuillard, *Journal I*, 23 November 1897, p. 124

[124] 'Si je ne trouve le moyen d'aller flâner plusieurs mois en Italie, je me laisserai reprendre par de nouveaux et stériles travaux, par l'insatiable besoin de produire que donne la fièvre de Paris.' Reproduced in *Journal I* (10 October 1897), p. 122

[125] For, as the sociologist Keith Tester remarks in his study of the flâneur, the term implies a 'sense of being *of* rather than being in.' Keith Tester, *The Flaneur* (London, 2014), p.3.

[126] Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and other essays* (New York, 1964), p. 9.

would explore his surroundings 'not at all as a tourist, like the first time'.[127] Staying in a region so strongly associated with Fra Angelico, and, indeed with the beginnings of the Florentine Renaissance, allowed Denis to indulge in imaginative communion with the Italian Primitifs whom he so admired. Viewing the Fiesole Altarpiece (1424-25) *in situ* (in the San Domenico Convent) gave him the occasion to insert himself imaginatively into the drama of Angelico's life. To invoke Christopher Wood's and Alexander Nagel's idea of the 'multiple temporality' of artistic creations, it is easy to imagine how the painter might have conceptualized the work as a 'magical conduit to other times and places', in far greater vividness than an encounter with the same work in the Louvre would allow.[128]

The previous chapter introduced the importance of the *naïveté* of the child to Denis's artistic imagination (an attitude also strongly associated with Gauguin and the Symbolists who spoke of 'painting like children').[129] But the *flâneur* of Baudelaire is also marked by a capacity to retain the sensibility of the child who 'sees everything with a state of newness'.[130] For Baudelaire the mark of genius is the capability to be at once 'child-like' in one's curiosity and to remain always attuned to the analytical power of Reason, 'which enables [the artist] to order the mass of raw material which it [the inner child] has involuntarily

---

[127] 'Seconde patrie, vieille maîtresse'. Denis, *Journal III,* 1931, p. 130; 'pas du tout comme touriste comme la première fois'. Denis, letter to Vuillard (23 November 1897), *Journal I*, p. 123.
[128] Christopher Wood and Alexander Nagel, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York, 2010), p. 16.
[129] Quoted in Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom*, p. 27. See my discussion of Verlaine's *Sagesse* in Chapter 2.
[130] Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* p. 8. Denis described Baudelaire as 'le plus grand des critiques d'art' in 'Liberté épuisante et stérile', *Théories,* p. 227.

accumulated.'[131] The effusiveness of his remarks on his experiences in Fiesole suggests Denis's inhabiting of this two-fold artistic nature that Baudelaire proposes. His unreserved delight at the Tuscan landscape has the same candidness of his earliest journal entries made in response to his experiences at mass as an adolescent. Physical and psychological removal from the stifling pressure of the Parisian art scene seemed to re-energize the youthful *flâneur* in him, allowing him to step away from the grip of modernization and 'progress': 'One feels invaded by I don't know what serenity ... in this asylum of traditional Beauty'.[132] It seems that Denis had a profound psychological investment in a sense of *quiete* that encompassed the landscape, the architecture and the artworks that he came across in Tuscany and Rome.

The close friendship between Denis and Chausson, and their appreciation of each other's creative endeavours, is revealed in their extensive correspondence throughout the 1890s, and demonstrated by the three decorative panels that Denis produced for the Chausson family residences. It seems that both musician and artist had a period of self-revelation during their time in Italy. In a letter written from Fiesole in 1895, the composer remarked on finding himself 'completely changed' on discovering Italy's beauty, as if he were 'returning home'.[133] Indeed, Jean Gallois makes a reference to the 'before- and the after-Fiesole' periods of Chausson's work.[134] Like d'Indy, Chausson was enthralled by *wagnerisme*, but was troubled by the power that it had over his own work.

---

[131] Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', p.8.
[132] 'On se sent envahir par je ne sais quelle sérénité … dans cet asile de la Beauté traditionnelle.' Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories,* p. 50.
[133] Quoted in Jean-Pierre Barricelli and Leo Weinstein, *Ernest Chausson: The composer's life and works* (Norman, OK, 1955), p. 109.
[134] Quoted in Bouillon, *Earthly Paradise* p. 53.

Over the course of his career he also began to express distaste for 'descriptive' or 'programmatic' music (compositions which seek to illustrate a text). His stays in Italy may have had some bearing on his confidence to produce so-called 'pure' music: he concludes the letter quoted above with the following: 'My sojourn here will not have any direct musical influence. However, there are many things which I am tempted to write - *pure* [my italics] music this time - and which have been inspired in me by the landscapes or works of art here.'[135]

In March of 1899, Denis wrote to Chausson asking for a suitable inscription, in Italian, for the third of his commissioned panels, *Terrasse à Fiesole: Villa Papiniano* (1899) **[Figure 68]**: one which would adequately express the great respect of 'the humble painter that I am' for 'the mighty artist that you are'.[136] His emotional absorption in the work of the Italian *primitifs* is reflected in the character of this third panel: the simplification of the figures, combined with a lack of spatial recession and a restricted palette are remininiscent of *quattrocento* frescoes. Chausson shared his friend's admiration for Fra Angelico and the Italian Primitives in particular, as is evidenced in a letter from composer to painter from 1894, in which Chausson encloses a photograph of 'Beato' Angelico's 'Paradis', intended as a means for Denis to introduce his new-born son to the painter's work when he grows older.[137] Recognition of their shared appreciation of the Italian Primitifs led Denis in 1898 to paint Madame Chausson in a formal profile pose (characteristic of *quattrocento* portraiture), that brings to mind Piero della Francesca's portrait of the Duchess of Urbino

[135] Barricelli and Weinstein, *Ernest Chausson*, p. 83.
[136] '… le petit peintre que je suis … l'artiste grand seigneur que vous êtes.' Denis, letter to Chausson (January 1899). Thérèse Barruel, 'Maurice Denis et Ernest Chausson', p. 72.
[137] Chausson, letter to Denis (2 November 1894). Ibid. p. 68.

(one half of a double portrait commission). In the distance appears the city of Florence as viewed from Fiesole **[Figure 69]**. Denis chose the view from the Villa over the San Domenico monastery to illustrate a passage in Ambroise Vollard's edition of *Imitation de Jésus-Christ* (1903), which was dedicated to the memory of Chausson, who had died three years earlier.

We can also recognize the terrace of Chausson's Villa Papiniano in a panel from Denis's ensemble *L'Eternel Été* **[Figure 70]**.[138] Completed in 1905 for a music room belonging to Herr Mutzenbecker in Wiesbaden, the series (which consists of four vertical panels – 'Le Chant Choral', 'L'Orgue', 'Le Quatuor', 'La Danse' – and one rectangular panel, 'L'Oratorio' **[Figure 71]**) transplants (principally sacred) musical rituals into the sunny environs of the Tuscan countryside. The Chausson terrace appears in 'Le Chant Choral', in which the composer's family is transformed into an orderly choir dressed in traditional chorister's garb **[Figure 72]**. The placing of the singers to the right of the scene provides space for the depiction of a verdant environment; it also allows the painter room to show a procession of white singers on the left. These singers – evocative of a religious chorus - continue their solemn processing in 'L'Oratorio', accompanied by a sequence of harp players, whose arabesque rhythms remind us of the painter's wallpaper design *Les Harpistes* (1893) **[Figure 5]**. In 'Le Quatuor', the sacred procession of singing communicants continues, accompanied by the string players. In 'L'Orgue' a female figure sits at a portable organ set against the Fiesolian hills **[Figure 73]**. Immediately

[138] The final paintings were destroyed, but this painted ensemble on a screen gives a good indication of the four vertical panels of the finished work, and of 'L'Oratorio'. I have also relied on black and white photographs that circulated in contemporaneous journals.

below her are a trio of women in relaxed postures, seemingly immersed in the organ music, which they follow on a score.

This particularly intimate scene was perhaps inspired directly by Denis's own experiences of music-making at the Chausson villa. Paul Jamot's favourable description of the work appeared in *La Gazette des Beaux Arts* in 1906: 'The five panels on which the composition unfolds are ingeniously diverse and each has its own charm, complete while playing, like respectful musicians, their part in this quintet of form and colour'.[139] The whitened tones of the ensemble are in stark contrast to the saturation of his 'pagan' mythological scenes, many of which present a 'warmth' commensurate with Mediterranean climes. We might think of Denis's observations in 'Le Soleil', quoted earlier, on sunshine as a 'myth of beauty, a focal point of harmony' rather than a simple phenomenon of lighting.[140] The particular quality of luminosity was perhaps intended to provide maximal contrast to the wood panelling of Mutzenbecker's music room.[141]

Humanist Renaissance[s]

Denis reserved particular praise for Chausson's symphonic poem *Soir de Fête*, remarking on its 'light and decorative' quality in a letter of 1898.[142] The

---

[139]'Les cinq panneaux sur lesquels se déroule la composition sont ingénieusement divers et ont chacun leur charme propre, complet tout en jouant, comme des musiciens respectueux, leur rôle de partie dans ce quintette de la forme et de la couleur.' Paul Jamot, 'Les Salons de 1906', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 587/3 (1 May 1906), p. 367.

[140] Denis, 'Le Soleil', *Théories*, p. 223.

[141] C. de Castera et J.M. Sert, 'Une décoration de Maurice Denis pour une chambre de musique' *L'Occident*, no. 55 (June 1906) pp. 297-301.

[142] 'Quelle belle couleur d'orchestre, comme l'arrangement est clair et décoratif.'. Denis, letter to Chausson (March 1898). Quoted in Barruel, 'Maurice Denis et Ernest Chausson', p. 72. Barruel

composer completed the work while staying in Fiesole, reportedly wishing (as recorded in a letter to his friend Octave Maus) to evoke an impression not of a raucous fair, but of a distant celebration wrapped within the serenity of the Florentine evening.[143] The 'decorative' quality which Denis recognized in the music perhaps derives from the clarity of the melodic lines that emerge from the limpid orchestration. The composer avoids boisterous dance-like rhythms in favour of gentler, undulating melodic movement somewhat reminiscent of the dream-like sensitive textures of Debussy. This atmospheric musical evocation invites comparison with a decorative work by Denis that pays explicit homage to the social life of the Florentine evening: his commission for the octagonal cupola of the music room of Charles Stern's Parisian townhouse, *Soir Florentin,* completed in 1910.[144] Inspired by the early Florentine humanist Boccaccio's collection of novellas known as *The Decameron* (1348), the four principal panels, 'La Danse', 'La Cantate', 'Baigneuses', and 'Le Poème', also derive iconographical features from Denis's experience of Tuscany.[145] The characters in Boccaccio's story take refuge in the Tuscan countryside from the plague raging in Florence, filling their evenings with companionable cultural pursuits (as Denis's family did in the sanctuary of Chausson's home).

---

provides a commentary, detailing the relatively extensive collection of works by Denis which Chausson owned, including *La Farendole* (1895) and *La Visitation Brettone* (1897).

[143] See Albert van der Linden, 'Deux Lettres d'Ernest Chausson', *Revue Belge de Musicologie,* 3/2 (1949), pp. 116–17.

[144] A photograph of the work in situ appears in an article on Stern's interior: M-P. Verneuil, 'Un Intérieur Moderne', *L'Art et décoration*, 17/1 (January 1913) pp. 53-61.

[145] Denis, *Journal II,* 18 April 1910, p. 130. Four smaller decorative canvases linking the larger *Soir Florentin* scenes ('Les pins', 'Les cyprès', 'Les collines' and 'Les Oliviers'), also drawn from sketches and memories of his travels in a 'pays bien cultivé', have unfortunately been lost. 'La Danse' has also been lost.

'La Cantate' depicts seven music-making women, perhaps in reference to Boccaccio's line in the introduction of the *Decameron*: 'And I shall also include some songs, which these seven ladies sang for their mutual agreement' **[Figure 74]**.[146] Denis's inclusion of a string quartet alongside the three singers contemporizes the scene, as a form of chamber-music making common among the domestic gatherings of which Denis was a part. His 1910 trip to Italy, during which he completed *Soir Florentin*, was rich in musical experiences. He was joined by d'Indy, the pianist Blanche Selva, and Madame de la Laurencie (d'Indy's daughter), who arranged intimate performances of contemporary French works, as noted in his journal.[147] The two groups of performers in 'La Cantate' are serenading a couple (the male figure perhaps represents Boccaccio), who journey down an 'aisle' formed by a tunnel of foliage such as one might find in Florence's Bardini Gardens. The central fountain in 'Baigneuses' **[Figure 75]** imitates the Fontana delle Scimmie in the Boboli Gardens in Florence, while the women themselves seem to be inspired by a memory noted in the pages of a diary entry made around the time of his undertaking the work: 'The beautiful laundry at Subiaco … Beautiful women, young ones with strong legs like Raphael's women, the most beautiful attitudes.'[148] Their sculptural nude bodies contrast with the clothed forms of the women in 'Le Poème' **[Figure 76]**. An extant sketch of 'La Danse' **[Figure 77]** indicates the circular arrangement of bodies, their movements coordinated by

---

[146] See Eleanora Beck, 'The Decameron and Music' (Brown University, 2010). https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/arts/music/muprelu.php. Last accessed 12 September 2022.

[147] See *Journal II,* 1910, p. 122.

[148] 'Le beau lavoir de Subiaco … De belles femmes le jeunes avec des jambes robustes comme des femmes de Raphaël, les plus belles attitudes'. Ibid. (2 April, 1910), p.124.

two musicians in the right-hand corner. In his review of the panels (which were displayed at the 1910 Salon d'Automne), Roger Marx writes: 'No theme better suited to the poetics of M. Maurice Denis. The happy fortune to evoke, under the Italian sky, the graces of the dance, the pleasure of the song and the recitation, the free beats of the naked bodies around the water features.'[149] The centrality of music-making to Boccaccio's tale fulfils the purpose of the commission itself, which was to decorate Stern's Paris music room. This accordance was recognized in the many positive responses to their display at the Salon d'Automne: '… Denis realized the miracle of hearing the violins, harps and contralti before the concert had even begun. The atmosphere is entirely symphonic, bathed in sounds, in celestial clarity…' wrote Louis Vauxcelles.[150] A critic for *The Studio* describes the 'impression … of music, sweet, soft and sustained' that is aroused by the feeling of 'gracefulness' in the panels.[151] One could imagine Chausson's *Soir de fête* being an entirely appropriate aural companion piece to the ensemble.

One man who singled out the panels for considerable praise was Guillaume Apollinaire, who remarked on the 'ravishing music' of the ensemble – and admitted to being 'angry' with himself at not having recognized this on first

---

[149] 'Point de thème qui s'ajuste mieux a la poétique de M. Maurice Denis. L'heureuse fortune d'évoquer, sous le ciel d'Italie, les grâces de la danse, le plaisir du chant et de la récitation, les libres ébats des corps nus aux alentours des pièces d'eaux', Roger Marx 'Le Vernissage du Salon d'automne', *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité,* 32 (8 October 1910), p. 252.

[150] 'M. Denis a réalisé ce miracle que l'on ouït les violons, les harpes et les contralti avant même que le concert n'ait préludé. L'atmosphère est toute symphonique, baignée de sons, de clartés célestes…' Louis Vauxcelles, 'Le Salon d'Automne de 1910', *L'art décoratif* (October 1910), p. 162.

[151] [Author unknown] 'Studio-Talk', *The Studio*, 51/213, 1910, p. 237. Consulted in Petit Palais archives.

encountering the work.[152] Apollinaire notes too that Denis's 'Christian humility' has succeeded in 'interpreting, without betraying it, the humanistic paganism of Boccaccio'. Apollinaire's recognition of Denis's faithfulness to the humanist spirit of the early Florentine Renaissance bears further consideration. The painter's sympathy for the particularity of Florentine culture is evident in a diary entry from 21 April in 1910: 'It seems to me that I knew Donatello, Ghirlandaio, Dante; they are old friends.'[153] These figures, each of whose work has been understood in reference to a specific ethic of human nobility, a mark of Renaissance humanism, were models of aesthetic cultivation that Denis desired to emulate. The 'humanist' element of Denis's own preoccupations has never been explored in relation to the artist's move to a classical style, but it is, I believe, closely connected to his revelatory experiences in Italy, and in particular to his understanding of the nascent Christian humanist movement that developed in Italy (Florence in particular) during the 14th and 15th centuries. In 1492 the Italian humanist Marsilio Ficino claimed glory for his native city of Florence, writing optimistically of a 'golden age' that had 'seen the rediscovery of arts and sciences that once had disappeared: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, music, old songs in harmony with the lyre of Orpheus.'[154]

If Christian humanism can be described – at the risk of oversimplification – as an intellectual reconciliation of Christian theology and classical thought, it is no wonder that Denis was attentive to the period. The importance of classical

---

[152] *Apollinaire on Art*, p. 114.
[153] 'Il me semble que j'ai connu Donatello, Ghirlandaio, Dante: ce sont de vieux amis'. *Journal II*, 21 April, 1910, p. 132.
[154] Quoted in Heinrich Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* (Berlin, 2004), p. 366.

learning, often understood to be a defining feature of the Renaissance, had remained important in the intellectual life of the Middle Ages. (Dante's treatment of Virgil in *The Divine Comedy* indicates this.) Equally, the spirit of Thomism, a central intellectual current within the Middle Ages, touched upon in the previous chapter, was kept alive during the Renaissance. That the rationality of the human mind opens the path to God was a conviction which continued to be widely held. As we have seen, the apprehension of beauty, for the Thomists, was inseparable from cognition – an exercise of the intellect induced by the pleasing nature of an object's form. ('Beauty is essentially the object of *intelligence'*, wrote Maritain).[155] Intelligence, and therefore 'beauty', were demonstrative of a divine order that transcended epochs and sensibilities, but which was nevertheless drawn from the natural world. Like religion itself, art might display a transcendent ideal that could overcome the disintegration of a nation's aesthetic identity.

It was Denis's close friend Henri Cochin (brother of Denys, commissioner of *La Légende de Saint Hubert* in 1897) who guided him to the realization that Fra Angelico was more than the designation *primitif* suggests, that he was a model of humanistic clarity and rigour. The integral Thomist aesthetic priorities of *integritas, consonantia, claritas,* and *eutrapelia* (wholeness, proportionality, clarity, and pleasure in moderation)[156] were guiding principles for Angelico, as well as for his close Florentine associates Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti. Aquinas himself stated: 'Beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses

[155] Quoted in John Trapani, *Poetry, Beauty, and Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain* (Washington DC, 2011), p. 122.
[156] Carl Brandon Strehlke and Ana González Mozo (eds), *Fra Angelico and the birth of the Florentine Renaissance*, exhibition catalogue (London, 2019), p. 58.

delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind – because even sense is a sort of reason, just as is every cognitive faculty'.[157] Artistic principles based on proportion and visual harmony were seen, by Aquinas and early Renaissance theorists, as derived from a profound understanding of the objective experience of nature. Denis came to appreciate this understanding, and incorporated it into his own theorizing in terms of the desirability of both 'subjective' and 'objective' deformations, as set out in this thesis's first chapter. The 'universe of thought' captured in the work of the painter-monk has been the subject of a poststructuralist study by Didi-Huberman in his *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration* (1995).[158] Both Didi-Huberman and Denis were transfixed by Angelico's Christian understanding of painting as informed by Albertian ideals of image-making.

In 1927 Denis wrote an essay in praise of his recently deceased friend Cochin. Finding a 'kindred spirit' in Cochin, he described the learned man as attracted to 'the cult of music and beauty', and admired his taste for 'Antiquity blended with Christian revelation.'[159] Cochin was a respected Dante scholar at this time: in 1907 (the year of *Terre Latine*), Denis had illustrated Cochin's translation of *Vita Nova.*[160] Writing on Cochin twenty years later, he remarked

---

[157] Ibid., p. 59

[158] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance & Figuration*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago, 1995).

[159] Denis completed a set of illustrations for Henry Cochin's translation of Dante's *La Vita Nuova* in 1907. Dante's text stands as a profound testament to the way in which an intense romantic love could be the key to poetic and artistic vision – an idea that would have resonated strongly with Denis, whose own passion for his wife Marthe was a singularly motivating factor for his art. Denis described the texts as 'love poetry purified by the Christian spirit.' Denis, 'Un humaniste chrétien: Henri Cochin', *La Revue hebdomadaire,* 10/44 (29 October 1927), p. 595.

[160] Cochin was responsible for organizing the sixth centenary celebrations of Dante's death in 1922, presiding over a *comité français catholique* which counted Denis amongst its members. See

on a potential collaboration between Cochin and Chausson who had expressed interest in setting *Vita Nova* to music.[161] In the context of a description of Cochin's essay on the humanist text *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione, Denis made an illuminating comparison between Cochin's visage and a portrait of Castilgione by his friend Raphael (1514-15). The similarity of their appearances causes Denis to wonder whether Cochin is himself the 'Castiglione of our times'.[162] A lecture given by the curator Léon-Honoré Labande in 1928 on Cochin's significance indicates the breadth of his influence over French intellectual circles, and considers the profound impact that his extensive travels around Italy had. 'What appealed to him in the preparation of his [text on Fra Angelico] was not so much the technical study of a spiritualized art as the social and religious history of the country where it had blossomed ...'[163] Cochin first travelled to Italy in 1875, recalling in 1911 that the *ivresse* of his first trip had continued to stay with him: 'Italy reappeared as an earthly paradise, haunted by Masaccio, Donatello, Piero della Francesca ... I saw only exquisite forms'.[164] In his obituary of the writer, the historian Paul Hazard

---

Alexandre Masseron, 'Dante 1321-1921', *Almanach catholique française pour 1922* (Paris, 1922) pp. 86-89.

[161] Denis, 'Un humaniste chrétien: Henri Cochin', pp. 591-2. Chausson was clearly deeply interested in Dante. See BnF: Département de la Musique [VM BOB-19956] for his Dante extracts.

[162] Ibid. Castilgione's text was a philosophical dialogue that tackles etiquette for courtiers (including ideas on self-comportment and morality). It was a key Renaissance humanist text. Denis's Atelier pupil Pauline Peugniez likens Denis to 'one of the humanists' from Castiglione's work. Peugniez, 'Hommage à Denis', p. 161.

[163] 'Ce qui le séduisit donc, dans la préparation de son nouvel ouvrage, ce n'était pas tant l'étude technique d'un art spiritualisé que l'histoire sociale et religieuse du pays où il s'était épanoui …' Léon-Honoré Labande, 'Notice sur la vie et les travaux de M. Henry Cochin (1854-1926)', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 72/4, 1928. p. 449.

[164] L'Italie réapparaissait comme un paradis terrestre, hanté par Masaccio, Donatello, Piero della Francesca … Je ne voyais que des formes exquises'. Ibid., p. 440.

went so far as to claim that the Italians took Cochin as one of their own.[165] Denis's own sense of extra-temporal release in Italy seems to have been felt by Cochin too. One could understand their respective work with reference to the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the 'chronotope', which he defines as the 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relations that are artistically expressed ...'[166] Italy was not simply a place to which *latinistes* could nostalgically retreat: it was revered as a country in which the present is enfolded in the past. The Grand Tour had bequeathed to France a rich body of travel writing on Italy; but it was the likes of Cochin and Denis in the early twentieth century who helped to highlight a 'Latin unity' between France and Italy that could have intrinsically political meaning. By 'threatening the bonds of the existing order through its radical reformulation of the experience of time and space', their work had the potential to excite the mindsets of those nationalists concerned with ensuring that the classical tradition endured as a basis for modern culture.[167]

Coda: the *franckistes*

The composer Henri Duparc, friend of both Cochin and Denis and a pupil of César Franck, wrote a 'Florentine Serenade', and dedicated the work to Cochin – an act which Denis made reference in his own paean to Cochin. Duparc was

---

[165] P. Hazard, 'Le Souvenir d'Henry Cochin', *Revue des Deux Mondes,* 1), 38/1 (1 March 1927), p. 203.

[166] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel' in M. Holquist (ed.) *The Dialogic Imagination,* trans. C. Emerson (Austin, TX, 1981), p. 84.

[167] See Martin Hurcombe, 'From the Grand Tour to the Political Tourist': Italy and the Encounter with *homo fascista'*, in M. Hurcombe, A. Kershaw and M. Cornick (eds), *French Political Travel Writing in the Inter-war Years* (New York, 2017), pp. 26-64.

partly responsible for introducing Vincent d'Indy to the merits of Richard Wagner's operas. D'Indy's admiration for Wagner, and his belief (along with the *bande à Franck*) in the superiority of German musical heavyweights such as Beethoven and Bach did not accord well with Maurrasian *latinité.* Curiously, however, Wagner was welcomed as a cultural model by figures associated with the nationalist Ligue de la Patrie Française, a movement to which d'Indy adhered. The German composer's anti-Semitism, which d'Indy espoused, could be appealed to in seeking the purification of French music from 'the contaminated Jewish style'.[168] Figures, such as Maurice Barrès, who had become frustrated with the monarchist dogmatism of Action Française, were influential within the Ligue. These competing manifestations of nationalist sentiment among the early twentieth century conservative milieu are too complex to receive full attention in this thesis. But despite their differing priorities, their cohesion as an ordered, harmonious 'us' into a nebulous opposition to a 'barbaric' other surely relied on accepting the integrity of the classical tradition. Such Manichean distinctions were to form much of the melodramatic rhetoric of Action Française. In the worldview of Maurras, the 'classicist' has within his or her grasp the capacity to *compose* (*componere),* that is, to construct by submitting the part to the whole (in an Albertian sense), while the 'decadent' was given over simply to 'sensations fortes et violentes'.[169] The basic sense in which we can understand the classical ideal as method was discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to Denis's paintings. We might think of such

[168] Quoted in J. Walker, *Sacred Sounds, Secular Spaces: Transforming Catholicism Through the Music of Third-Republic* (New York, 2021), p. 181.
[169] Charles Maurras, *L'Étang de Berre* (Paris, 1928), p.323.

statements by Denis as: 'Style is a certain grandeur obtained by voluntary sacrifices, of expression through Simplification. Thus: desired expression, nothing useless, architectonic order, proportions ... It is because architecture is the first and oldest of the arts that any effort towards style, by bringing art back to its architectural principles, involves a reaction, a return.'[170]

The strict regulating of a work's details to a set of compositional principles (analogous with architectural construction) was directly comparable to the musical process exalted by d'Indy and the *bande à Franck.* For d'Indy, such a process, underpinned by classical values, was intrinsically part of France's national character. 'Order in men, thought, and the state meant discipline, composition, and conformity, the absence of anarchy, the avoidance of chaos and of formless mass.'[171] These words of Maurras, could easily have come from d'Indy's pen; despite his appreciation of Wagner's music and membership of the Ligue, he later adhered to the Action Française. In 1915 he gave a conference paper entitled 'Musique française et musique allemande', in which he described modern German composers (with the exception of Wagner), as musical 'barbarians'. In general, he claimed, German composers (by which he means Bach and Beethoven) were only capable of producing respectable music

[170] 'Le Style, c'est une certain grandeur obtenue par des sacrifices volontaires, de l'expression par la Simplification. Ainsi,: expression voulue, rien d'inutile, ordonnance architectonique, proportions … C'est parce que l'architecture est le premier et le plus ancien des arts que tout effort vers le style, en ramenant l'art à ses principes architecturaux comporte une réaction, un retour'. *Journal I,* 1904, p. 210.

[171] Quoted in Charles Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*, ed. P. Chardon, 16th edn (Paris, 1937), p. 264.

during the Baroque and classical eras because [then] they gave themselves over to the 'Latin customs of clarity, concision, and sense of proportion.'[172]

The 'reawakening of French music' that Denis identified at the *fin-de- siècle* was at least in part an acknowledgement of the work of César Franck's pupils.[173] Franck died in 1890, before Denis himself could form a friendship with the composer, but he was surrounded by the so-called *franckistes* (Chausson in particular), and fellow admirers (such as André Gide).[174] The cultivation of discipleship around Franck was largely a result of d'Indy's ceaseless advocacy. In an extended tribute, he praised Franck's commitment to 'the sure and immovable principles laid down by the gathered traditions of the great musical geniuses.'[175] D'Indy attributed Franck's 'Latinness' to his efforts as a musical architect, particularly in his prominent use of 'cyclical form', a technique designed to link together movements of a sonata or symphony through the repeated use and gradual development of, a single melodic unit. In his text on the composer, d'Indy goes to great lengths to emphasize the importance of this method, 'the basis of modern symphonic art'.[176] He described it as a 'method' to draw attention to the way in which Franck's music betrays a 'conscientious manipulation of form', subordinating 'impulse' as he

---

[172] See discussion in Barbara Kelly, *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870-1939* (Rochester, NY, 2008), p. 143.

[173] '… un réveil de la musique française.' Denis, *Henry Lerolle et ses amis,* p.9.

[174] Gide wrote, in a diary entry for 5 February 1902, about his ability to 'plunge and re-plunge' himself into the *Trois Chorales*. *Journal 1889-1893,* p. 127.

[175] D'Indy, *César Franck*, p. 91. D'Indy took a central role in the organising of Franck's 1922 anniversary celebrations, acting as a conductor at the main commemorative concert at the Opéra on 7 March, perhaps with half a mind to styling himself as Franck's rightful successor. See R. J. Stove, 'Franck After Franck: the composer's posthumous fortunes', *The Musical Times*, 152/1914 (Spring 2011) p. 55.

[176] D'Indy, *César Franck*, p. 171.

does so. In his *Cours,* d'Indy took care to situate the cyclic form within a broader musical tradition that began with Bach: 'The universal genius of J.S. Bach was … no stranger to the art of cyclical composition … this art, so generally neglected at the end of the 18th century and in the middle of the 19th was to reappear only in Beethoven, and lead, with César Franck and his school to its full bloom.'[177] Denis, a great admirer of Bach, saw a parallel between the technical accomplishment of the composer and Raphael, writing in a journal entry from 1910: '…I learn that d'Indy will go to Rome at Easter. I promise to convert him to Raphael: he is not Mozart, he is Bach'.[178]

D'Indy singled out Franck's Symphony in D minor and the Sonata in A for Violin and Piano as two works which 'consecrate' his 'lofty' musical logic.[179] Andrew Deruchie claims that the 'effectiveness of the discursive campaign' put forth by d'Indy and the *franckistes,* led to 'cyclic form [being] … indelibly associated with the Franck-d'Indy axis.'[180] Other *franckistes* self-consciously sought to place themselves as heirs to Franck. Denis's friend the composer Paul Dukas exclaimed: 'César thought cold-bloodedly and struggled furiously: a principle which is most important to observe in composition.'[181] As Richard

---

[177] ' Le génie universel de J.-S. Bach n'était …point étranger à l'art de la composition cyclique …: cet art si généralement délaissé à la fin du xviii' siècle et au milieu du xix ne devait reparaître que chez Beethoven, et aboutir, avec César Franck et son école, à son plein épanouissement.' D'Indy, *Cours,* vol. II, part I, p. 85.

[178] 'j'apprends que d'Indy ira à Rome à Pâcques. Je lui promets de le convertir à Raphaël: ce n'est pas Mozart, c'est Bach'. Denis, *Journal II,* March 1910, p. 117.

[179] D'Indy analyses these works in his *Cours*, vol. II, part II, pp. 422-426.

[180] See Andrew Deruchie, 'Saint-Saëns's Cyclic Forms' in Steven Vande Moortele, Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers, and Nathan John Martin (eds), *Formal Functions in Perspective, Essays on Musical Form from Haydn to Adorno* (Rochester, NY, 2015), p. 159.

[181] Richard Langham-Smith, liner notes *for Dukas: Symphony in C major / Polyceute Overture*, BBC Philharmonic, Yan Pascal Tortelier (Colchester, 1994), p. 5.

Langham-Smith has pointed out, the composer's reference to 'César' probably referred not only to Franck but also to a certain Roman Emperor. In 1897, when Debussy was experimenting with Javanese gamelan music, Dukas self-consciously wrote a symphony in C major entirely dependent on established symphonic formulae. Though deeply unpopular among the general public at its première, the work gained recognition as having 'a very classical' inclination, a label which, according to Andrew Deruchie, remains to this day.[182] The French composer and conductor Guy Ropartz remarked that Dukas felt no need for theatrical display, but clothed his works in modesty through 'the abnegation of the self', which elevated it to a *humanisme* 'properly classical.'[183] Dukas decried the 'excess of subjectivity' that coursed through the music of certain nineteenth century 'greats' (Liszt, Berlioz, Strauss); such egoism, he claimed, was the result of an over-enthusiastic search for literary precision in music: quite the opposite of the 'pure' music of the *Franckian* classicists.[184] The 'musique construite' of Franck, in the mind of his followers, constituted a 'modern French School' based on the symphonic tradition that had declined after the reign of Beethoven.[185] Crucially, for D'Indy, Franck's symphonic methods had granted France a role as the instigator of a new musical tradition that had lost its way in Germany.[186]

---

www.chandos.net/chanimages/Booklets/CH8765.pdf. Last accessed: 1 September 2022. Four letters from Paul Dukas to Denis are held in the musée Maurice Denis.

[182] Deruchie, *The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle*, p. 228.

[183] 'par l'oubli du moi…' Guy Ropartz, 'Les Œuvres symphoniques de Paul Dukas,' *Revue Musicale*, 16 (May-June 1936), p. 63.

[184] Quoted in Deruchie, *The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle*, p. 233

[185] 'Musique construite' is a phrase of the critic Louis Laloy. Quoted in Vaughan, 'Maurice Denis and the Sense of Music', p. 44.

[186] D'Indy, *Cours,* vol. II, part 1, p. 159.

This kind of rhetoric is closely aligned with Denis's conception of the 'classical' as being an art of *humilitas,* and submission to laws inscribed within the Western tradition, as discussed in the first chapter. 'Thus the classical methods that best give evidence of the artist's conscience and passion, by exulting them, still have this result of concealing both his personal emotion and taste. His originality is erased, disappears, so to speak, in the breadth and perfection of the formula: a challenge similar to the one proposed to the soul by Christian Wisdom in view of eternal salvation through self-denial.'[187] It was also understood to be at the centre of Franck's own aesthetic, a fact that even Debussy was able to recognize: 'I have taken the opportunity of Good Friday to render homage to one of the greatest [Franck], thinking that this homage befits the idea of sacrifice which the greatness of the man evokes in the sanctity of the day.'[188] The alleged nobility of artistic 'sacrifice' was a classical hallmark that linked Franck in the minds of many to the work of Puvis de Chavannes.[189] Camille Mauclair wrote, rather elaborately, of Franck's music as invoking the 'calm light, long serene lines and sacred woods' of Puvis de Chavannes, in combination with the 'mellow golden beauty' of Corregio and Perugino.'[190] D'Indy, in his own text on the composer published in 1909 placed Franck and

---

[187] 'Ainsi les méthodes classiques qui font le mieux paraître, en les exaltant, la conscience et la volonté de l'artiste, ont encore ce résultat de dissimuler et son émotivité et son goût personnels. Son originalité s'efface, disparaît pour ainsi dire dans l'ampleur et la perfection de la formule : épreuve semblable à celle que propose à l'âme la Sagesse Chrétienne en vue du salut éternel par le renonce- ment de soi.' Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories,* p. 48.

[188] 'J'ai pris l'occasion du Vendredi-Saint pour rendre hommage à l'un des plus grands, pensant que cet hommage répondait à l'idée de sacrifice qu'évoque la grandeur de l'homme dans la sinteté du jour'. Claude Debussy, 'Musique', *Gil Blas* (13 April 1903), p. 2.

[189] For example, Gustave Geffroy discusses his work in terms of 'necessary sacrifices'. Geffroy, 'Salon de 1884,' *La Justice* (7 May 1884), p. 2.

[190] 'lumière étale, ces longues lignes sereines, ces bois sacres … moelleuse beauté dorée'. Mauclair, *La Religion de la Musique* (Paris, 1909), p. 176.

Puvis together as examples of 'beauty and sincerity'.[191] Elsewhere, d'Indy cites a remark made by the writer Georges-Paul Collet: 'In the history of painting, [Denis] occupies the same place as César Franck in modern music'.[192]

These vague analogies do not presuppose direct formal parallels between Franck's music and Denis's paintings. But they do testify to a shared deference to the classical tradition that was inseparable from their strongly-held Catholic faith. The more such analogies were made, the stronger the sense of a united cultural mission. The close entwinement of visual and musical culture with nationalist politics in the early decades of the century allowed for the mutual reinforcing of notions of the 'classical'. We might recall Denis's comment, quoted earlier, about the unity of the generation being more important than the 'perfection of its models'.[193] Some fifteen years later, he reflected on the manifestations of nationalist sentiments in the recent past, distinguishing the doctrinal preferences of Maurras and Barrès from those of Mithouard, whose conception of the Occident was founded upon a broad alliance of the 'classical tradition, humanism, [and] catholicism'. Mithouard, according to Denis, looked as far 'as to Venice' for the limits of the Occident, but found 'most pleasure in recognizing the characteristics of the West' in the Île de France and Anjou.[194] The painter's adherence to Maurras's Action Française no doubt had some

---

[191] D'Indy, *César Franck*, p. 61.

[192] 'Dans l'histoire de la peinture, [Denis] occupe la même place que César Franck dans la musique moderne.' Cited in *Correspondance Jacques-Émile Blanche - Maurice Denis (1901-1939)* ed. Georges-Paul Collet (Paris, 1989), p. 15.

[193] Denis, 'De Gauguin et de Van Gogh', *Théories,* p. 174.

[194] 'c'était la tradition classique, l'humanisme, le catholicisme …'/ 'il les a cherchées jusqu'à Venise … c'est surtout dans l'Île-de-France et Anjou qu'il avait plaisir à reconnaitre les caractères de l'Occident'. Denis, 'Les revues d'avant-garde', *Belles Lettres: Revue Mensuelle des lettres françaises,* 6/62 (December 1924), pp. 135-6.

bearing on his appreciation of the significance of the Hellenic culture of the South (reflected in his 'mediterraneanized' paintings of Brittany). But his own personal attachment to Italy and its *primitifs*, strengthened by his particular experiences in Fiesole with Chausson, prevented him from fully indulging in this sort of prescriptive nationalism.

CHAPTER 4
Bodies in motion: Denis and gesture

In 'La Danse', one of five panels that make up Denis's ensemble *L'Éternel Été*, four barefoot female figures dressed in white tunics move in a chain, with bent knees in rhythmic unison **[Figure 78]**. A lute player in the foreground provides the accompaniment, while joining in the lively movements. She faces away from the viewer, somewhat obscuring the succession of dancers, but reminding us as she does so of the need for a musical ambience to propel the rhythms of the dancers' feet. As this chapter proposes, the configuration depicted in 'La Danse' is reminiscent of the Greek-inspired choreographic sequences employed by the American dancer Isadora Duncan, from whom, in the early twentieth century, Denis drew much inspiration. There has been little attempt to consider Denis's interest in dance within the context of choreographic innovations in France more generally. Indeed, much work remains to be done to draw art historical studies of the period into the scope of dance studies (and vice versa), although the recent work of Lynn Garafola, Juliet Bellow, Lucia Ruprecht and Nell Andrew has made a promising move in this direction.[1]

The rehabilitation of dance's cultural significance towards the end of the nineteenth century in France can be traced in the works of Degas and the prose of Mallarmé. For the latter, dance was a powerful form of 'poetry', able to

[1] Lynn Garafola (ed.), *Legacies of Twentieth Century Dance* (Middletown, CT, 2005; Ann Daly, *Done Into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Middletown, CT, 2002); Lucia Ruprecht, *Gestural Imaginaries: Dance and Cultural Theory in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York, 2019); Juliet Bellow, *Modernism on Stage: The Ballet Russes and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Farnham, 2013). Thomson also discusses the resurgence of a broad interest in a 'classicism' of movement in *The Presence of the Past,* pp. 214-29.

express through the manipulations of the body elemental ideas. Mallarmé asserted: 'the dancer *is not a woman who dances* … but a metaphor … suggesting … with a bodily writing what it would take paragraphs in scripted prose … to express.'[2] In this chapter we shall see how both Denis and Duncan appreciated this quasi-hieroglyphic understanding of the gestures of dance. Duncan was far from alone in promoting a system of movements supposedly derived from Ancient Greece as a solid foundation for a modern choreography: Denis's friend the composer Maurice Emmanuel and the pedagogue Émile Jaques-Dalcroze were also occupied with this endeavour. Appreciation of Denis's involvement with this reimagining of dance will promote a more sophisticated understanding of potential meanings implicit in the careful 'staging' of bodies in his work.

As a paradigm of ideal beauty in the classical world, the depicted nude or semi-clothed human body has been regarded by artists since antiquity as synonymous with a kind of socio-cultural ideal, as a projection of human experience removed somehow from mundane historical contingency. Kenneth Clark's well-known distinction between the merely 'naked' and the idealized 'nude' drew attention to the latter's intrinsic aesthetic qualities.[3] In his wake, such scholars as Marcia Pointon, Lynda Nead and Jill Burke began to contend with the political dimension of the female nude — the threat of fetishization,

[2] '… la danseuse *n'est pas une femme qui danse* … mais une métaphore … suggérant … avec une écriture corporelle ce qu'il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer ...' Stéphane Mallarmé, Œ*uvres complètes* (Paris, 1951), p. 304. [Emphasis original].

[3] K. Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (London, 1956).

and the social understandings of sexuality.[4] Denis's constant focus on the female form perhaps merits attention in these terms. But the central concept relevant to this chapter is that of the nude as a 'form of rhetoric' to which both men *and* women have access 'psychically'.[5]

The sculptural bodies in Denis's decorative series *L'Histoire de Psyché* (1908) offer a starting point for considering his isolation of the body as a locus of distilled gesture. The theme of gesture, or expressive movement, informs the following discussion of Denis's depiction of 'moving' bodies, such as those that appear in *L'Histoire de la musique* for the Theatre des Champs-Élysées in Paris (1913). Gesture had a twofold importance for the painter: it engendered a decorative harmony on the surface of the canvas, but it is also had a rich social meaning, reaching beyond the canvas to the renewed cultural interest in the gestures of Greek dance. By considering the mediation between real moving bodies and two-dimensional bodies, this chapter reveals Denis's involvement in and contribution to, a growing socio-cultural awareness of forms of kinaesthetic perception. My analysis of *L'Histoire de la musique* closes with a brief consideration of its narrative, returning us to a central concern of the thesis: the defining of cultural tradition.

---

[4] See Marcia Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908* (Cambridge, 1990); Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London, 1995); Jill Burke, *The Italian Renaissance Nude* (New Haven, CT, 2018).

[5] Pointon, *Naked Authority*, p. 14. Richard Leppert, *The Nude: The Cultural Rhetoric of the Body in the Art of Western Modernity* (New York, 2018), p. 7.

'A thousand singers praise you': Maillol and *L'Histoire de Psyché*[6]

If there was one contemporary artist who, in Denis's mind, had perfected the serenity of the classical nude, it was Aristide Maillol. We have seen Denis pay homage to the sculptor in 'L'Art Plastique' of *Terre Latine,* by depicting him in the process of rendering in marble the female form **[Figure 48]**. Like Denis, Maillol was drawn to the possibilities of the female body as decorative form. The story of the Judgement of Paris, to which Denis alludes in 'Les Arts Plastiques', might seem an apt metaphor for attention to the female form, with its 'theme of … men looking at naked women.'[7] The art critic Julius Maier-Graefe stated, somewhat facetiously, that 'if it were not for female breasts and thighs, Maillol would not have become an artist'.[8] For the sculptor, there was nothing that could not be expressed by the female figure, which was a self-sufficient architectonic form whose meaning resided in the harmony of her proportions and the roundedness of her forms. What Maillol appreciated in Archaic and Classical sculpture was the equilibrium of structural forces, its 'archaic massiveness and simplification'.[9] In his own essay on the sculptor, Denis claims that, like the true 'Classic', he preserves the 'essential logic' of any object by transforming it into a 'supreme harmony'.[10]

---

[6] 'mille chanteurs … Vous vantent'. Quotation from Charles Maurras's poem 'Pour Psyché', published in *La Syrinx*, 1 (January 1892), p. 5.
[7] John Berger, 'Chapter 3 of *Ways of Seeing* (1972)' in H. Robinson (ed.), *Feminism Art Theory: An Anthology 1968 – 2014* (Chichester, 2015), p. 296.
[8] Quoted in *Maillol and Dina: For Dina Vierny,* exhib. cat., Marlborough Fine Art 3 May-22 June 2001 (London, 2001), p. 8.
[9] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture: Greek Sculpture and Modern Art from Winckelmann to Picasso* (London, 2012), p. 238.
[10] Denis 'Aristide Maillol', *Théories,* p. 236.

The non-specific terms in which the artist wrote about Maillol's female bodies perhaps reflects his wider concern with comprehending the nude as an ideal form, rather than as an object of sensuality.[11] This attitude is revealed particularly strongly in his essay 'La Mort de Renoir' (1920), in which he appealed to Maritain to confirm the answer as to why Renoir's nudes do not seem shocking. He imagined Maritain's possible response as confirming that the artist's *sens plastique* has transfigured the female body through its unapologetically painted quality.[12] The fact that our eyes are drawn as much to the play of colour and modelling of the form on the plane as to the depicted nude, placed the work firmly within the world of painting. '[Renoir's nudes] have become forms and colours … Signs, symbols, images of Renoir's optimistic sensibility, they keep of nature only what the painter wanted to retain for the joy of the spirit; and not at all for the base passions.'[13] This claim brings to mind Denis's most famous maxim from 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme'. The Thomist A. G. Sertillanges, a close friend of both Maritain and Denis, concurred with the painter, suggesting that the quality of the nude was made not by the materiality of the subject but by 'le sentiment d'art' ...'[14] Many contemporary art historians will find fault with this position, especially given the view of Renoir as a misogynistic sensualist that has evolved in recent decades. But it is nonetheless a position that helps us understand the element

---

[11] 'le Nu est chaste, le Nu est beau', he exclaimed in an early journal entry. *Journal I*, 18 March 1888, p. 68.

[12] Denis, 'La Mort de Renoir', first published in *La Vie* (1 February 1920), pp. 33-35. Reprinted in *Nouvelles Théories* (pp. 107-117), p. 108.

[13] 'Elles sont devenu formes et couleurs … Signes, symboles, images de la sensibilité optimiste de Renoir, elles ne gardent de la nature que ce que le peintre bien voulu en retenir pour la joie d'esprit … et rien pour les passions basses.' Ibid., p. 108-9.

[14] Sertillanges, letter to Denis, (undated). MMD [Ms 10073].

of the 'sublime' found by critics, and appreciated by Denis, in the works of Maillol. The flesh of the nude for Renoir was – Denis would argue – a pretext for the exploration of the manipulation of colour and texture, and in this sense, was a healthy pursuit. In a similar vein, Denis would consider the weightiness of Maillol's sculptures not as a sensual indulgence in the materiality of the female body, but as an attempt to condense the Hellenic equilibrium of forces manifested in that most natural of forms.

The affinity between Denis and Maillol is evident from a consideration of Maillol's preparatory methods. Maillol spent years on individual sculptures, without assistants; during the initial stages he produced countless drawings directly from the model, thereafter turning to small terracotta models to perfect his forms. The final work, conceived as being viewed from all angles, is a synthesis of multiple points of view united in what appears to be a coherent vision.[15] This system is exemplary of Denis's classical method: the desirably slow, rational process of composing an image by 'rolling' around an impression until it can be expressed with exactitude.[16] Maillol began his career as a Nabi, and was particularly interested in the reliance of tapestry designers on the simplification of forms: Denis noted that the 'noble arabesques' of his tapestries testified to his early research of form.[17] But it was in sculpture that the artist's search for distillation of form was ultimately best satisfied. Denis also relied extensively on successive drawings from models for his painted figures, a process which allowed him to 'summarize the essence of

[15] See Judith Cladel, *Aristide Maillol, sa vie—son œuvre—ses idées* (Paris, 1937).
[16] See Chapter 1 for Denis's admiration for Puvis de Chavannes.
[17] Denis, 'Aristide Maillol', *Théories,* p. 250.

movement'.[18] His search for the essential character of the *ligne mélodique* is particularly clear in a preparatory charcoal drawing for the second panel of his ensemble *L'Histoire de Psyché* **[Figure 79]**.[19] The figure of the seated Psyche is animated by the eddying folds of her garments, which pick up the movement of her Botticelli-esque hair. The curvature of her left arm, and the curling-under of her hand heighten a serpentine rhythm through her body that renders her a paradigm of classical balance. Her posture offers a striking example of Hogarth's 'line of beauty' – a winding line that leads the eye in a 'pleasing' manner across a form – not unlike the arabesque.[20]

The *Psyché* ensemble was commissioned in 1907 by the Russian art collector Ivan Morozov for his Moscow home **[Figure 80]**. The project provides perhaps the clearest indication of Denis's commitment to a fantasy of corporeality indebted to a classical idiom comparable to Maillol's.[21] At Denis's suggestion, Morozov also purchased four sculptures by Maillol, entitled *Pomona, Flora, Été* and *Printemps*, to complement the murals **[Figure 81]**.[22] Morozov's only stipulation for Denis was that the commission should have a mythological subject-matter, in keeping with Denis's own preoccupations at the time.[23] No subject was more appropriate to Denis's interests than that of Psyche, the

---

[18] 'l'essential du mouvement.' Denis, 'Notre enquête sur le dessin et son enseignement', *Les Arts Français: arts, métiers, industrie,* 9 (1917), pp. 164-166, reprinted as 'L'enseignement du dessin', *Nouvelles théories*, pp. 97-8.

[19] 'Grande importance de la ligne mélodique dans la décoration'. Denis, *Journal I*, March 1899, p. 152.

[20] William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London, 1753).

[21] The panels were recently exhibited at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, in *The Morozov Collection: Icons Of Modern Art* (22 September 2021 – 03 April 2022).

[22] The letters from Denis to Morozov are in the Pushkin Museum archives. I am grateful to Fabienne Stahl for showing me reproductions held in the Denis family archives.

[23] Morozov had bought Denis's *Bacchus and Ariadne* in 1907. See A. Kostenevitch, *The Nabis* (New York, 2009), p. 13.

Greek goddess of the soul famed for her beauty **[Figures 82-88]**. It was arguably the most apposite theme for an artistic exploration of the 'body beautiful', and Denis claims to have chosen the story on account of its 'idyllic character, full of mystery'. He suggested to Morozov 'a modern translation of this ancient legend that is so beautiful and so plastic'.[24] As several scholars have pointed out, his efforts to contemporize the myth led him to situate certain scenes within recently visited regions of Italy.[25]

The story originated in an Ancient Greek oral tradition and became popular in the 2nd century AD when the Platonic philosopher Lucius Apuleius incorporated it into his fable *The Golden Ass*. As the most beautiful woman in the world, Psyche incurs the jealousy of Venus. Venus's son Cupid falls in love with Psyche, but only after various hindrances and tribulations is their marriage sanctioned by Jupiter **[Figure 87]**. In this penultimate image, Denis depicts Maillol at the far-right hand side, gazing at the newly-weds as if they were models in his studio. Although he followed Apuleius's story closely, Denis did make a notable addition, producing a final panel depicting the pair ascending into heaven **[Figure 88]**. It seems likely that in doing so he was drawing attention to the myth's significance as an allegory of divine redemption.

The spiritual and philosophical significance of the Psyche myth has been the subject of much scholarly debate, acquiring allegorical importance over the

---

[24] 'Une traduction modern de cette vielle legend si belle et si plastique'. Denis, letter to Morozov (21 July, 1907?). Reproduction in Maurice Denis family archives.

[25] Lake Maggiore, the gardens of the Isola Bella, and the Giusti gardens of Verona have all been traced within the panels, based on sketches, postcards and photographs that Denis took himself. See Anne Baldassari (ed.), *The Morozov Collection: Icons of Modern Art*, exhib. cat. (Paris, 2021).

centuries both as a parable of the fall of man, driven by lust and sinful curiosity, and as a symbol of the union between the soul and God (as represented by Cupid's love).[26] Psyche was, in the words of Cora Gilroy-Ware, an 'atemporal subject for art, a categorically hybrid and pliable figure … continually remade'.[27] The goddess was commonly understood as embodying the Platonic ideal of beauty. In 'Les Arts à Rome' Denis noted that the masterpieces of classicism 'are penetrated by a powerful idealism; and the idea of beauty being the visible form of truth, a Platonic idea, is most applicable to these masterpieces' (see Chapter 1).[28] The figure of Psyche, then, was not merely a cipher for the fantasy of ancient Greece, but the ultimate allegory of the visual tradition of *nuda veritas*. Indeed, Psyche's allegorical significance seems to have had a lasting influence on Denis's imagination: he returned to the Psyche myth in both *L'Histoire de la musique* for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (discussed later in this chapter) and *L'Histoire de l'art français* for the cupola of the Petit Palais in 1925.[29]

Morozov's attention was first drawn to Denis by the artist Alexandre Benois, who had written a laudatory article on the painter in the journal *Mir Isskusstva* in 1901.[30] As a designer for the *Ballets Russes*, Benois was particularly interested

---

[26] On the myth's significance within the visual arts see M.G. Bernadini (ed.), *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche: Myth in Art from Antiquity to Canova*, (Rome, 2012).

[27] Cora Gilroy-Ware, *The Classical Body in Romantic Britain* (New Haven and London, 2020), p. 20.

[28] 'On sent cet art pénétré toujours d'un puissant idéalisme, et c'est à ses chefs-d'œuvre que s'applique cette pensée, d'ailleurs platonicienne, que la beauté est la forme visible de la vérité'. Denis, 'Les Arts à Rome', *Théories*, p. 54.

[29] Jamot, *Maurice Denis*, p. 10.

[30] Alexandre Benois, 'Moris Deni', *Mir iskusstva,* no. 7 (1901), p. 53. Reprinted in I. Dorontchenkov (ed.), *Russian and Soviet Views of Modern Western Art, 1890s to Mid-1930s*, trans. C. Rougle (Berkeley, CA and London, 2009), pp. 59-61.

in the ways that French artists – from Puvis de Chavannes to Matisse – were resolving what he described as 'the problem of modern mural painting ... not virtuoso works, but art that … works its effects just by the run and rhythm of interweaving lines and the resonance of colours.'[31] He was particularly struck by the synthesis of visual sources in Denis's work, from 'the Italian Pre-Raphaelites ... Puvis de Chavannes … the Gothic illuminators … Botticelli and Filippino Lippi', claiming that these 'mad' images held an 'irresistible power' that he was not ashamed of admiring.[32]

Denis drew inspiration from the monumentality and architectonic nature of the decorative frescos he saw in Rome and, in particular, those which treated the Psyche theme. He held Raphael's Loggia (which he studied in the Villa Farnesina on his 1898 trip to Rome with Gide) in extremely high regard. In a letter to Gide, he described his own *Psyché* as looking 'very chaste in comparison with that of [Raphael's pupil] Giulio Romano', whose Psyche fresco the painter had encountered in the Palazze Te in Mantua.[33] Denis's lack of interest in conveying tactile sensuousness was a consequence not only of his detachment from the myth's erotic subtext (in line with his understanding of the significance of the nude), but also of his concern with ordering nature in accordance with the principles of classicism, rather than seeking after illusory realism or attempting to articulate immediate, fleeting impressions. Perhaps

---

[31] This statement appeared in Benois's article 'Moscow Impressions', published in the newspaper *Rech,* in 1911. Reprinted in Dorontchenkov, (ed.), *Russian and Soviet Views of Modern Western Art*, p. 104.

[32] Benois, 'Moris Deni', p. 59.

[33] Denis, letter to Gide (12 December 1907). Published in Denis, *Journal II,* 1 March 1908, p. 90.

abstracting from the merely sensory was essential to the painter's ambition to find a language consonant with the immutability of the myth itself.

There is a smooth, moulded rotundity to the highly choreographed figures in each panel; the eye's attempt to understand them as a coherent part of their Italianate environment is thwarted by their statuesque presence. In other words, the bodies assert themselves plastically, almost in the manner of real bodies frozen within the *poses plastiques* of a *tableau vivant.* Indeed, William-Adolphe Bouguereau's famous salon painting *L'enlèvement de Psyché* (1895) was a favoured subject for *tableaux vivants* in the late nineteenth century, appealing as it did to spectators' voyeuristic impulses.[34] Denis's lofty ideal for his panels could not be further from the scopophilic attraction of the *tableau vivant*, but the sculptedness of his figures exploit the same 'illusory' quality as these staged 'petrified performances'. The figure of Cupid in **[Figure 82]**, for example, seems to 'hang' – in keeping with the convention of the *deus ex machina* – in isolation from his surroundings. The 'petrified' gesture of Venus in **[Figure 86]** is rendered all the more prominent for the viewer by her disjunctive positioning within the scene: she appears to stand on a cloud, which bears no relation to her physical environment. On this cloud rest three pink cherubs, whose stone counterparts appear atop the entrance pillars that frame the scene. The 'interchangeability' of flesh and stone becomes even more pronounced – and deliberate – when one takes into account the four additional *grisaille* columns **[Figure 89]** that Denis produced to complement the narrative panels. These *trompe l'oeil* figures, set in painted 'alcoves', complement the nudes of the

[34] See Elena Stevens, 'Striking an Attitude: Tableaux Vivants in the British Long Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, University of Southampton, 2017), p. 149.

panels. They also act as counterparts to Maillol's own four sculptures placed in each corner of Morozov's room.

The resulting effect of 'double' artifice obstructs our understanding of Psyche and her world in a 'human' fashion, and seems indicative of how Denis himself understood the significance of the myth. But the unyieldingly sculpted quality of these bodies serves another purpose – of isolating and amplifying bodily gesture. The art historian André Chastel proposes that, in the representation of the human body, 'the *expressive gesture* is the privileged carrier of psychological charge'[35] In other words, the affective power of an artwork lies in its gestural quality. The frozen *contrapposto* attitude, with arms raised, of the central figure of Psyche in the first of the ensemble's panels was modelled by Denis's wife Marthe. The pose is not dissimilar to that of the central figure in 'La Plage' of *l'Âge d'Or* **[Figure 63]** (also based on Marthe). Indeed, the whiteness of the flesh of 'Marthe' in *L'Âge d'Or*, coupled with the carefully variegated play of light and shadow, mark her out from the more tonally harmonious grouping of her companions. This achieves a statuesque quality comparable to the analogous figure in *Psyché*. It seems to be filtered through his own 'pastiches' of *quattrocento* nudes (such as his *Nu à la manière de Lorenzo di Credi* (1898) **[Figure 90]**) and Maillol's *Nu arrangeant ses cheveux* (1898) **[Figure 91]**.

It is no wonder that the term 'Maillolized' has been used in reference to Denis's painted figures, even if little attempt has been made to explore the

[35] 'le geste expressif est le porteur privilégié de la charge psychologique'. André Chastel, 'L'art du geste à la Renaissance', *Revue de l'Art*, 75 (1987), p. 9.

significance of this epithet.[36] On one level, Maillol's four women accompanying *Psyché* are specific personifications, as their titles suggest. But, in their uniformity, they each seem to stand for Psyche herself. In his purportedly instinctive ability to synthesize from nature – to create, in Denis's terms, synthetic beauty – the sculptor is able to instantiate the 'visible form of truth'.[37] We can appreciate how the sculptures would have harmonized with Denis's 'Maillolized' panel figures in the space of Morozov's vast room. The effect was one of stylistic synthesis, between the disciplined, ordered neoclassicism of Maillol's sculptures, Denis's paintings and the architectural space they inhabited.

In his later years, Denis described the *Psyché* ensemble as a product of his 'easy and formulaic' period, a statement which seems to disprove those critics, such as Mauclair, who bemoaned the fact that, although the artist is 'bringing to bear pell-mell all the influences reflected in his lively and curious intelligence, [he] is unable to fuse them.' For Mauclair, Denis descends into 'l'académisme italianisant' in the vein of Ingres's student Flandrin or Girodet (a pupil of David).[38] The critic Jacques Rivière, who had, until seeing *Psyché*, been a fervent admirer of Denis, accused the artist of imagining that he was producing 'vast machines of Italian decadence in pasteboard, for the use of millionaires who have a drawing room to decorate…'[39] Rivière was seemingly

---

[36] Bouillon, *Maurice Denis: Earthly Paradise,* p. 272.
[37] 'la forme visible de la vérité'. Denis, 'Les arts à Rome', p.55.
[38] '…apportant pêle-mêle toutes les influences reflétées dans sa vive et curieuse intelligence, n'arrivent pas à les fondre…' Camille Mauclair, 'Le Salon d'Automne', *Revue Bleue* (October 1908). CD: *Pysché* dossier.
[39] Quoted in Bouillon, *Earthly Paradise,* p. 274.

horrified by its artificiality; his reference to the construction of a 'vast machine' hints at the *tableau vivant* comparison proposed earlier.[40]

These critics were judging the ensemble as displayed at the 1908 Salon d'Automne, and were not privy to the effect of its installation in Morozov's music salon. Also known as the White Salon, this was a grand, neoclassical space with high ceilings, gracefully moulded columns and delicate ornamentation **[Figure 80]**. The oblong space was illuminated with skylights that would have heightened the brightness of the airy environment, enhancing the luminosity of Denis's colour scheme.[41] In 1909 Denis travelled to Moscow to supervise their hanging. In a January diary entry he remarked on the 'grey stone and smiling grey marble' of what he saw as a rather 'cold' room, and was anxious that some additional decorations be added to link the five murals: the *grisaille* 'statues' and Maillol's sculptures served this purpose. Notwithstanding Denis's observation, it seems that the final decorative ensemble, as it appeared in Morozov's music room, did not displease him, at least initially: 'My colours maintain their strength, as in the Salon, but they are brought together more harmoniously'.[42]

Given the function of Morozov's salon as a music room, it is tempting to draw a musical analogy with this ideal of harmony, in the sense of the orchestration of an environment. This analogy could also be precise: the readily allegorizable nature of the Psyche myth generated interest from composers

[40] It was also a term applied to large 'academic' salon paintings.
[41] B. Whitney Kean, *French painters, Russian collectors: the merchant patrons of modern art in pre-revolutionary Russia* (London, 1994), p. 96.
[42] 'une grande salle froide, gris pierre avec meubles gris souris … Mes colorations se maintiennent fortes, comme au Salon, mais font bloc plus harmonieux.' Denis, *Journal II*, January 1909, p.100.

seeking to evoke, through the virtual movement of music, the movement of the 'soul' which many understood the myth to symbolize. The French Baroque composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully (to whom Denis pays homage in his *L'Histoire de la musique*) completed an opera on the myth in 1678. Of more direct relevance was César Franck's own symphonic poem for chorus and orchestra (1888) on the same theme. According to Grivel, Denis could have heard the work at any number of performances in France between 1897 and 1906 – especially since the work was championed by d'Indy (who was also the work's dedicatee).[43]

That Denis was not only familiar with, but moved by, this work of Franck's is indicated by his dedication of a section of his frieze *L'Histoire de la musique* (1913) to the symphonic poem, using a motif drawn from one of the *Psyché* panels.[44] It is probably not coincidental that both painter and composer saw fit to add an apotheosis to Apuleius's tale, representing the couple's ascension into Heaven. (Franck's work ends with an ecstatic orchestral finale.) A devout Catholic, Franck was attracted to the myth on account of its spiritual allusions. D'Indy insisted that Franck was 'incapable of seeing the subject from anything but a Christian point of view', and that he treated the libretto as a 'mystical rather than an erotic poem.'[45] In 1910 Rivière (who was primarily a music critic) remarked, in a rather pompous interpretation, that 'for the poetic envelope of antique myth [Franck] substitutes the history of the Soul and of Love.'[46] Just as Denis came to doubt the success of the decorative ensemble, so too did Franck become uneasy with his own work in later years. For all d'Indy's emphasis on

[43] Grivel, *Maurice Denis et la musique*, p. 155.
[44] See below, in the final section of this chapter.
[45] Quoted in Vallas, *César Franck*, p. 205.
[46] Quoted in R.J. Stove, *César Franck: his Life and Times* (Plymouth, 2012), p. 262.

the work's 'purity', its lush orchestration, languorous chromaticism, and lack of clearly defined thematic material generated a Wagnerian sensuality that was at odds with Franck's strict insistence on structural clarity. Indeed, several contemporaneous critics felt that he was betraying his own religious mission, by exploring such a 'pagan' subject. They maintained that the work embodied a musical eroticism on account of its climactic passages and prioritization of dramatic content over independent musical structure. The composer himself came to prefer his earlier work *Les Béatitudes* (to be discussed in Chapter 5) in which, he claimed, 'one won't find a sensual note'.[47] The conflicting accounts of this musical work, as either a profoundly spiritual endeavour, or as indulgently sensual, paralleled the tensions inherent in an analysis of Denis's *Psyché* panels.

The Psyche story also attracted those with Symbolist inclinations. In 1911 the poet Gabriel Mourey wrote to Denis requesting his designs for the costumes and set of his three-act dramatic poem *Psyché*, having also approached Debussy for the music.[48] Mourey described his work as a 'prière en vers', and indicated that the idea for Denis as a collaborator came about after he saw the painter's *Psyché* panels at the Salon d'Automne.[49] Although the collaboration with Denis did not come to pass, the work was performed in 1913 (with music by Debussy). Musing on Mourey's poem, the poet and librettist Maurice Étienne Legrand remarked on its being 'a kind of tale from the Thousand and One

[47] Ibid.
[48] See André du Fresnois, 'Notes de Théâtre, Psyché de Gabriel Mourey', *La Revue critique des idées et des livres* 22/127 (25 July 1913), pp. 230-2.
[49] Gabriel Mourey, letter to Denis (31 July 1911). MMD [Ms 8357].

Nights of Antiquity.'[50] His remark testifies to the accessibility and popularity of the Psyche myth. A photograph of the staging of Mourey's poem shows the actors draped in voluminous white Grecian garments **[Figure 92]**. Unlike with painting and sculpture, social propriety prevented on-stage nudity. And yet clothing did not have to be a barrier to displaying the body, as one figure in particular demonstrated. The dancer Isadora Duncan was forthright on the subject of the female nude, claiming that 'nudeness is truth, it is beauty…'[51], and, elsewhere, that 'through all the ages woman's body has been the symbol of highest beauty … All art, does it not come originally from the first human consciousness of the nobility in the lines of the human body?'[52] Her onstage performances, in which she was often fairly scantily clad in a translucent white tunic, bore witness to her wish not to hide her body, but to use her garments to suggest the movement of her limbs, and, by extension, her bare form.

Denis and Isadora Duncan: wave forms

Common to the work of Duncan and Denis was a heightened sense of line. In 1890, Denis had written: **'**In the beginning, was the pure arabesque'.[53] This statement was modified thirty years later by the musical theorist Jean d'Udine, who claimed in *L'art et le geste* (1910) that 'In the beginning was Gesture'.[54] D'Udine's work explores in great depth how the arts are bound together,

---

[50] 'n'est-ce qu'une sorte de conte des Mille et une Nuits de l'antiquité?' M.E. Legrand, 'Psyché', *Écho de Paris* (31 August 1913), n.p. BnF, département Arts du spectacle, 8-RF-68061.
[51] Isadora Duncan, *Isadora Speaks: Writings & Speeches of Isadora Duncan*, ed. F. Rosemont (Chicago, 1994), p. 48.
[52] Ibid., p. 41.
[53] 'A l'origine, l'arabesque pure'. Denis, 'La Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 7.
[54] Jean d'Udine, *l'art et le geste* (Paris, 1910), p. 86.

metaphorically, through the animating principle of 'gesture'. Both assertions relate to the idea of rhythmical movement as being a primary artistic impulse. D'Udine perceived dance as the prime exemplar of synaesthetic union between the visual and the auditory. He promoted the idea of bodily gesture as a kind of 'meta-model' for the performing arts, inspired by the theory of eurythmics established by his teacher, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. In *L'art et le geste*, d'Udine recalled the efforts of the Nabis and their decorative aesthetic:

> Just like the symphonists, the decorators say to us: "The polychrome arabesques which we create ... are born only of certain relations of forms and colours whose proportions allure our eye, disregarding any movement" … They think that their arabesques ... do not imitate anything. I believe, on the contrary, that they always imitate movements.[55]

It seems possible that d'Udine had Denis specifically in mind with this statement. Yet he has misunderstood the Nabis' decorative project: abstract gestures on the canvas do not imitate movement itself, so much as, in the words of Sérusier, 'the *idea* of movement'.[56] There is a *virtual* movement to line (as Alberti himself suggested), just as there is *virtual* movement within music.[57]

One of the most striking examples of the decorative translation of the *idea* of movement is the wave. Several paintings attest to Denis's interest in its decorative potential: these include his 1916 painting *La Vague* **[Figure 93]**, and

---

[55] 'Tout comme les symphonistes, les décorateurs nous diront : «Les arabesques polychromes que nous créons …sont nées uniquement de certains rapports de formes et de couleurs dont les proportions séduisent notre œil, abstraction faite de tout mouvement». Eh bien! là encore, il y a illusion de la part de ces créateurs. Leurs arabesques … n'imitent rien, pensent-ils. Je crois, au contraire, qu'ils imitent toujours des mouvements.' D'Udine, *L'art et le geste,* p. 99.

[56] Sérusier, *ABC de la peinture*, p. 51.

[57] 'the painter, wishing to express life in things, will make every part in motion—but in motion he will keep loveliness and grace'. Alberti, *On Painting: Book II*, p. 74.

the much later *Jeunesse ou vague au ballon rouge* (1935) **[Figure 94]**, a painting which in its clarity and straightforwardness, harks back to his earliest Synthetist style. In the latter painting, the perpendicularity of the figures provides a pleasing contrast to the horizontal surge of the wave crest, although the two figures running to the left seem almost to be chasing the breaking wave. The viewer imagines the arc of the red ball, once thrown, tracing the same curve as the wave top. In fact, the entire composition is 'set' in relationship to the linear undulation of the wave crest. In *La Vague*, however, there is a closer visual accord between the human figures themselves and the waves. The left-most woman seems to propel herself away from the rock, echoing the unfolding motion of the wave, while the woman in the foreground drapes her arm over her head as if in counterpoint to the movement of the wave.

The form of a wave, like the bending of a branch, or the movement of leaves, can be 'abstracted' on the canvas in the form of decorative arabesque-like contours. Delineating the form of an object that moves requires, often, an exaggeration of that form in order to emphasize the maximal potential of its movement. Denis was as conscious of this fact in painting as the dancer Isadora Duncan was aware of the need to amplify the movements of the natural world through her body. She famously believed that 'all movements in Nature seem … to have as their ground plan the law of wave movement.'[58] The wave movement not only generated a simple formal principle for successive movements, 'bound endlessly in one cadence', it also bore, for Duncan, a

[58] Duncan, *Isadora Speaks*, p. 44.

symbolic connotation of continuity and eternality, with its suggested ebb and flow of energy.[59] The reassuringly repetitive and rhythmic nature of waves breaking on the shoreline, in harmony with the strength and direction of the breeze, might be appreciated as a perpetual elemental force shared by all of humanity across time.

In an article written for the women's magazine *Femina*, Duncan described her emotion on seeing her young niece dance on the shore: 'She danced because the waves danced in front of her … because she felt she was dancing with all of nature.'[60] Duncan believed the secret of beautiful movement among the Ancient Greeks to be their intuitive finding of a mimetic relationship between the human body and the natural world. The exploiting of this pre-conscious state – this bodily mimicry – was the underlying principle of her choreography: her poses involved the distillation of the most essential and fundamental gestures found in nature, as she perceived them. They were re-enacted on stage as 'ornamental lines of motion', as materializations of a more general sensation of the movement of our living surroundings.[61]

The earliest exchange of letters between Duncan and Denis appears to have been in 1911, during which time Denis was busy working on the designs for *L'Histoire de la musique.* Duncan invited the painter to tea with her at her home

---

[59] Isadora Duncan, 'Depth' in *The Art of the Dance*, ed. S. Cheney (New York, 1928), p. 99.

[60] ''Elle dansait parce qu'elle était pleine de la joie de vivre. Elle dansait parce que les vagues dansaient devant elle… parce qu'elle sentait qu'elle dansait avec toute la nature'. Duncan, 'Ce que je pense de la danse', *Femina* (April 1914), p. 189. BnF, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, artist dossier for Isadora Duncan.

[61] See Juliet Bellow, 'Drawing a Line with the Body', in Anne Leonard (ed.), *Arabesque Without End* (London, 2021) p. 173.

in Neuilly-sur-Seine, where Denis was perhaps able to sketch her.[62] But the dancer had made herself known in Parisian cultural circles years before, and it seems reasonable to assume Denis's familiarity with her innovative methods by the time of his *Psyché* project, and even of his *L'Éternel Été* commission (i.e. around 1905). D'Udine himself praised her Paris performances in the spring of 1904, remarking on the fact that, although many musicians were incapable of understanding her gestures, painters were following 'with infinite pleasure' her bodily 'translations' of melodic lines.[63] Duncan was known to have been inspired directly by the attitudes of painted bodies within the classical tradition. Her comment that '[t]he phrase 'the beauty of line' is – by itself – absurd. A line is beautiful only when it is directed toward a beautiful end'[64] is distinctly Albertian. Alberti found movements directed upwards 'into the air' to be the most 'pleasing'; the upwards gymnastic leap was clearly a staple gesture within Duncan's repertoire, but the idea of 'upwardness' did not have to consist of dynamic propulsion.[65] A contemporaneous journalist described a soirée in 1899 in which Duncan replicated the gestures and movements of Botticelli's *Primavera,* to a musical accompaniment provided by Arnold Dolmetsch.[66] Botticelli's figures on 'tip-toes' give a firm sense of bodily ascension without the need for exaggerated movement. That such classical expression should find a direct place in Duncan's repertoire confirms an

---

[62] See Duncan, letter to Denis (14 November 1911). MMD [Ms 3630].

[63] 'avec un plaisir infini'. Jean d'Udine, 'Isadora Duncan', *Le Courrier musical* 7/10 (15 May 1904), p.340. George Desvallières was fulsome in his praise of a Duncan performance in 'Reconstitution de danses antiques', *La Grande revue* (10 March 1909), pp.181-3.

[64] Duncan, *Isadora Speaks,* p. 52

[65] Alberti, *On Painting: Book II,* p. 74

[66] 'Isadora Duncan', *The Lady* (2 August 1900) quoted in Nesta MacDonald, 'Isadora re-examined', *Dance Magazine* (July 1977), p. 64.

affinity with Denis. This affinity is corroborated by the invitation that Duncan extended to Denis in 1920, to join a judging jury for a poster competition set up to publicize her shows.[67]

Duncan's motivations were, we might note, incompatible with the narrow nationalistic mindset of some of Denis's milieu. Hers was a global doctrine – through movement and dance one might regain communal knowledge of what it means to have human emotions, and a human body. Addressing the Berlin Press Club in 1903, she claimed: 'The Greek dances were spontaneous and natural. We must seek to revive them. Not mere national dances, but *human* dances.'[68] Her innovative repertoire of movements, prompted by her desire to revive the imagined communal sensuality of Antiquity, was appreciated by her audience as a means of liberating the dancer's body and the spectator's eye from the constraints of classical ballet. This bodily 'emancipation' could provide the foundations for an art 'of the future'. Henri Ghéon, writing for Gide's *La Nouvelle revue française*, hinted at this potential in a rapturous evaluation of Duncan: 'Aspiration, return, flight towards what could be … towards the active beauty of human forms, in the first ages of the world, before art.'[69] This rhetoric of upwards ascension, discussed earlier in the context of classical attitudes, takes on a kind of spirituality to which Denis would have been sensitive. Duncan sought in her reconstructions of classical movement a

---

[67] Duncan, letter to Denis (17 April 1920). MMD [Ms 3633]. Duncan hoped that Antoine Bourdelle, the photographer Edward Steichen, the artist André Dunoyer de Segonzac, and Picasso would also be on the jury.

[68] Duncan, *Isadora Speaks,* p. 33.

[69] 'Aspiration, retour, en vol vers ce qui put être … vers la beauté active des formes humaines, aux premiers âges du monde, avant l'art.' H. Ghéon, 'Isadora Duncan et M. Pierre Lalo', *La Nouvelle revue française,* 27 (March 1911), p. 475.

form of eternal intersubjectivity, akin to Maillol's ideas about sculpture. At times, she even went so far as to distance herself from the specifically 'Grecian' aspect of her dance: 'From their mystery [the mystery of Greek gesture] came my dance – not Greek, not Antique, but in reality the expression of my soul moved to harmony from Beauty'.[70] Her poses served to manifest the 'great abstractions of human experience', in a comparable way to such myths as Psyche – which, after all, means 'soul'.[71]

Greek dance: rhythmical marks, rhythmical movements

The meaning of gesture is not borne merely by coded signals. Indeed, as the historian Keith Thomas has pointed out, 'gesture' in its original meaning signified the general carriage of the body.[72] Dance and the visual arts might offer a means of cultivating a way of bearing oneself, and the interplay between the two could be especially valuable for that cultivation. The nineteenth-century ballet master Carlo de Blasis considered the arabesque (the specific balletic pose in which the upper body leans forward or backwards in opposition to the working leg) the most 'charming' and 'graceful' of all dance attitudes. He suggested that the dancer should regard herself as 'a painter in composing and assembling, to the end that everything in your picture is

[70] Quoted in Allan Ross Macdougall, 'Isadora Duncan and the artists', *Dance Index,* 5/3 (March 1946), p. 61.
[71] John Martin, 'Isadora Duncan and basic dance' in P. Magriel, (ed.) *Isadora Duncan* (New York, 1947), p. 8.
[72] Keith Thomas, 'Introduction', in Jan Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (eds), *A Cultural History of Gesture* (Ithaca, NY, I992), p. *2.*

harmonious.'[73] Central to Renaissance aesthetics was the idea that the rendering of a pose through the careful fixing of contours on a two-dimensional surface had the potential to make a psychological impression comparable in its strength to that of a body in motion. This is nowhere more evident than in depictions of dance. Denis was particularly interested in the 'farandole', the representative dance of Provence. Always in 6/8 time, it has the energy and rhythmic impetus of a jig. A photograph taken by the artist of a farandole in Brittany in 1906 gives an indication of its quickness and vigour **[Figure 95]**. The farandole's ancestor was an Ancient Greek community dance (the form presumably arrived in France via the Greek colonies in the South), and its simple form was considered to have remained unchanged for over two thousand years. If one had to choose a French dance emblematic of the country's Greco-Latin heritage, it would undoubtedly be this.

The farandole appears in multiple guises in Denis's oeuvre. It is first suggested in an 1893 wallpaper design entitled *Les fillettes* **[Figure 96]**. There the curvature of their linked arms is echoed by the foliage; human gesture and the patterns of flora are visually integrated into an overall design that projects a gentle sense of rhythm. The dance also appears in a panel belonging to his decorative scheme *Frauenliebe und Leben* (1895) **[Figure 97]**. (The artist completed a second version of the scene for Chausson in 1896).[74] In this frieze-like work, three young women, with hands interlocked, career to the right, the

[73] 'En composant, en réglant soyez peintre; que tout dans votre tableau soit en harmonie.' Carlo de Blasis, *Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse* (Milan, 1820), pp. 32-34.

[74] See Katherine Kuenzli, 'The anti-heroism of modern life: symbolist decoration and the problem of privacy in fin-de-siècle modernist painting' (Ph.D thesis, University of California, 2002) p. 104.

undulating motion of their arms strikingly enhanced by the contours of their dresses. A design for a fan **[Figure 98]**, completed a year later, depicts another trio of farandole dancers, the lower halves of their bodies cut off by the semicircular shape of the fan, so that the rise and fall of their arms becomes the main focus. The central figure stares out invitingly at the fan holder, as if entreating her to wield her fan in kinaesthetic empathy. The farandole also appears in *Terre Latine* **[Figure 99]** (discussed in the previous chapter), in the right hand corner of 'L'Art Plastique'. Close observation reveals a sinuous line of dancers stretching behind the foreground trio, hugging the side of the hill top, which, with its own vertiginous swerve, puts the viewer in mind of the fluid movement of fabric, or even water.

For the *Terre Latine* farandole, it was reportedly Christine Lerolle, daughter of Denis's friend Henri Lerolle, who served as the principal model.[75] Christine was a pupil of the dancer Loïe Fuller, famed for her use of diaphanous veils and the effects of electric lighting **[Figure 100]**. The swirling, voluminous effect that characterized her dancing was the inspiration for Denis's design for the front cover of André Rossignol's composition *Douce Vision* (1899), which depicts a female figure swept up in a whirlwind of fabric, as she completes a turn on her tip toes **[Figure 101]**.[76] The strong directional marks inscribed into her billowing dress activate movement in this illustration. As decorative forms, Fuller's dress, and the hilltop behind the farandole dances in *Terre Latine*, provoke the response of imagined kinaesthetic perception. In all of these

[75] She was close to Denis's wife Marthe, as shown in their playful correspondence For example Christine Lerolle, letter to Marthe Denis (3 August 1899). MMD [Ms 6852].

[76] Delphine Grivel, 'Maurice Denis et les musiciens suisses,' *Revue musicale de Suisse romande*, 55/4 (December 2002), pp. 32–41.

farandole examples, Denis's use of the *ligne ondulatoire* has a dynamic quality to it, giving life to a preceding, and proceeding, stately motion that captures the potential elegance of the dance, rather than its speed. Both the *Terre Latine* hillside and Lerolle's dress suggest movement without imparting a sense of strong kinetic energy. Denis's emphasis is instead on decorative contour and clarity of form, whether in the solid rock or the soft fabric. The virtual movement on the canvas has a sculpted quality to it (this was an aspect of Duncan's dancing sometimes commented on by artists – Rodin declared that she had 'attained sculpture and emotion effortlessly').[77]

An important inspiration, and cultural precedent, for Duncan's dancing was the research of the composer Maurice Emmanuel, whose book *La Danse grecque antique: d'après les monuments figurés,* published in 1896 (based on his thesis completed a year earlier), brought him international recognition. The thesis is a comprehensive examination of the art of Greek dancing, based on figures depicted on Greek vases and bas-reliefs preserved in the Louvre.[78] The author draws out the similarities between Greek dance forms, and the methods of modern balletic technique, concluding that, while many of the basic postures are comparable, Greek dance exhibited a freer, less inhibited use of the entire body. Denis and Emmanuel recognized their shared affinities for the classical Greek tradition, and Denis was familiar with Emmanuel's thesis, owning a

[77] Auguste Rodin, 'Sur Isadora Duncan', in special issue dedicated to Duncan of *L'Œuvre* (November 1911), p. 1. BnF, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, artist dossier for Isadora Duncan.
[78] Maurice Emmanuel, *The Antique Greek Dance after Sculptured and Painted Figures*, trans. H.J. Beauley (London, 1916).

signed copy from the composer himself.[79] In 1920, the musician suggested introducing the students at the Paris Conservatoire to Denis's *Théories*, and his admiration for the painter is clear from their correspondence.[80] Opportunities arose for their collaboration (such as on Emmanuel's opera *Salamine*, premiered in 1929) but were never realized.[81] Emmanuel was a fervent admirer of Franck and grew close to the musicians of the Schola Cantorum, having been asked by Charles Bordes to give a lecture on 'French music and the worship that it deserves' during the 1903-4 season.[82]

The Emmanuel specialist Christophe Corbier has noted that Denis's search for a 'classical' art of synthesis and simplification was reflected in the composer's own 'aesthetic of modern classicism.'[83] Throughout his study, Emmanuel was insistent on the naturalness of Greek dance (*l'orchestique grecque*): 'In ancient Greece, all the world danced, although all the world were not dancers,' he proclaimed, pre-empting Duncan's own conception.[84] Emmanuel was among the scholars who affirmed the existence of the farandole

---

[79]I thank Anne Eichner-Emmanuel for copies of Denis's unpublished letters to Emmanuel, and to Fabienne Stahl for showing me Denis's signed copy of *La Danse grecque*.

[80] See Emmanuel, letter to Denis (4 April 1920). MMD [Ms 2682]. For evidence of the composer's appreciation of Denis see, for example, Emmanuel, letter to Denis (28 August 1919), MMD [Ms 3681], in which he expresses his great admiration for the painter. In one of his last communications with Denis, Emmanuel thanked the painter for the inspiration that his writing provided. Emmanuel, *Lettres choisies.* ed. C. Corbier (Paris, 2017), p. 558.

[81] The librettist declined Denis's staging for *Salamine*, favouring an 'orientalist' painter. See Emmanuel, letter to Denis (14 April 1920). MMD [MS 3682].

[82] 'La musique française et le culte qu'on lui doit'. Corbier, *Maurice Emmanuel* (Paris, 2007), p. 83. Emmanuel published a text on Franck in 1930. Emmanuel, *César Franck: étude critique* (Paris 1930).

[83] Christophe Corbier, 'Continuité, Tradition, Nouveauté : essai sur l'esthétique de Maurice Emmanuel' in *Tradition et innovation en histoire de l'art*. Actes du 131 Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques, Grenoble, 2006 (Paris, 2009), p. 210.

[84] Emmanuel, *The Antique Greek Dance*, p. 19. 'Essai Sur L'Orchestique grecque' was the title of Emmanuel's original thesis.

in Greek culture, citing several vases that display the formation.[85] 'In a farandole, the dancer loses all personality, and is simply one in a chain …', he writes, adding that it was common practice for a musician to be stationed separately at the end of the line, directing the dancers – just as we see in 'La Danse' in *L'Éternel Été* **[Figure 78]**.[86] The anonymous, rhythmical line of figures on these vases, sometimes reduced to mere triangular hieroglyphs, were also, according to Emmanuel, associated with the movements of the Greek chorus in traditional tragedy. 'The Greek word for Chorus means much more than ours, for it implies a union of the dance and the song. The dance of the Greek chorus, like the dance without words, possessed certain decorative features which were conventions.'[87]

The unaffected simplicity of movement that Emmanuel associated with the choreographic customs of Ancient Greece was also consistent with a strong sense of theatricality: 'Always, always the Greek dancer acted', he concluded adding that although Greek dance was inferior to modern French ballet from a technical point of view, 'it was dramatically superior.'[88] He described the difference between the gymnastic elements of the dance (usually consisting of basic movements such as running and walking) and the mimetic gestures, which draw their expressive potency from imitating symbolic social gestures. Perhaps the most striking of these was the funerary ritual of tearing out one's hair, which, in dance, became the raising of the hand to the head with the other

[85] Ibid., p. 329.
[86] The farandole also features in Denis's 'Musiciennes', a panel in the scheme *Éternel Printemps* that Denis completed in 1908 for the home of Gabriel Thomas.
[87] Emmanuel, *The Antique Greek Dance*, p. 216.
[88] Ibid., p. 283.

directed towards the body. The frenzied ritual becomes transfigured into a dramatic gesture that retains expressive meaning for the audience.

This interconnection between social gesture, quotidian bodily movement and choreographed action finds expression in many of Denis's post-Nabi paintings. His 1912 *Plage aux lutteurs* **[Figure 102]** conveys this sense of theatrical movement particularly strongly. Denis's image is separated into three distinct areas: the women and child lying down in the foreground, the four seated women in the middle-ground, whose attention is caught by the two male wrestlers, the running child and a lone male figure on the shoreline. The seated figures' gaze on the men indicates the men's role as *performers*. The wrestlers, in their nudity and the symmetry of their movements appear to be a direct reference not only to the wrestling tradition of Ancient Greece, but also to the dances popular in Athens that involved a simulation of wrestling. The other adult male, with his elegantly raised left leg and pointed foot is strongly reminiscent of types of figures found on Attic vases. Denis fuses his flowing garment with the white tops of the wave, evoking (wittingly or otherwise) the ubiquity of the wave form in the Greek dances promoted by Duncan. Half hidden behind the left-most seated woman in the middle ground is a familiar figure who had previously made an appearance in works such as *L'Âge d'Or*'s 'La Vallée': a young boy playing the Greek double-flute **[Figure 66]**. This diegetic sound, in the thick of the action, has perhaps prompted the male on the right to begin his 'dance'.[89]

[89] I use the term 'diegetic' to indicate music that is 'heard' by the characters within the scene.

This Greek ideal of rhythmical movement (*orchestique grecque*) had an important advocate in the influential dance theorist Émile Jaques-Dalcroze who inspired research into movement and gesture in Europe during the early 20th century, not least Jean d'Udine's *L'Art et le geste.*[90] Dalcroze was himself inspired by Emmanuel's own research into Greek dance, while Emmanuel profited from Dalcroze's eurythmy lessons for his opera *Salamine*.[91] The theorist is best known for establishing the school of rhythmical gymnastics known as eurythmics: 'a series of sculptural, mimetic dance exercises and poses, originally compiled under the name *plastique animée.*'[92] His method centred on the bodily expression of musical feeling, and he strongly believed in the psychic force and regulative power of moving to music. But he ultimately strove after autonomy of plastic expression that did not require the aid of music or speech, but which might recall, by itself, the vitality of music.[93] This endeavour seems analogous to that of Denis and the Nabis, with the 'lyrical' energy of their pictorial surfaces being understood as equivalent to the artist's emotional response. This striving after autonomy of form – a plastic expression that is symbolically meaningful without recourse to literary underpinning — was at the heart of Denis's own Symbolism. In 1917, Denis paid a visit to Dalcroze's dance studio in Geneva, remarking in his journal: 'The movements

---

[90] According to Bhogal, *Details of Consequence,* p. 97.

[91] Stephen Moore, 'The writings of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze: Toward a theory for the Performance of musical rhythm' (Ph.D thesis, Indiana University, 1992), p. 40.

[92] See Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes* (New York, 2015), p. 49.

[93] 'The final culmination of studies in moving plastic is certainly the direct expression of aesthetic feelings and emotion without the aid of music or even of speech.' Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, *Eurythmics Art and Education*, trans. F. Rothwell. (London, 1930), pp. 28-9. First published 1920.

of the legs are the most harmonious and the most natural, the walk, the run.'[94] Dalcroze certainly felt an affinity with Denis's work. In a letter to the painter written at some point during Dalcroze's extended stay in Paris (1924-26), he entreated Denis to help him spread the word about a new series of lessons on '*plastique animée'* designed specifically for painters and sculptors, and eagerly requested Denis's attendance.[95] A '[d]etermined enemy of virtuosity', as he described himself to Denis, Dalcroze was specifically seeking to master the fusion of the individual gesture with a 'geste collectif'.[96]

This 'geste collectif' could be understood in multiple ways. Dalcroze refers in the first instance to the search for a harmony and equilibrium between multiple dancing bodies – the sense of 'moving as one body' (purportedly exhibited in the farandole dance). But one might also consider the significance of this statement in terms of cohesion between dancer and onlooker – kinaesthetic empathy that facilitates healthy bodily awareness. This 'connectedness' was promoted by Dalcroze's collaborator Adolphe Appia (a pioneer of modern stage lighting) whose work *Music and the Art of the Theatre* was partly indebted to Dalcroze's innovations. In the 'Preface' Appia writes:

> The Eurythmics initiated by Dalcroze is still the only discipline which first awakens the … vital aspirations of the human body ... We have seen that the harmonious culture of the body, as it obeys the profound commands of the music created for this purpose, tends to overcome our passive isolation as spectators, changing it into a feeling of mutual

[94] 'Les mouvements des jambes sont les plus harmonieux et les plus naturels, la marche, la course … !' Denis, *Journal II,* April 1917, p.194.
[95] Dalcroze, letter to Denis (no date). MMD [Ms 2901].
[96] 'ennemi acharnée de la virtuosité'. Dalcroze, letter to Denis (no date). MMD [Ms 2902].

> responsibility, of collaboration somehow implicit in the very fact of a production.'[97]

Appia's reference here to the 'harmonious culture' of the body recalls the ambitions of Denis in his development of the sculptural, 'Maillolized' forms of *Psyché.*

Denis's preoccupation with Arcadian myths in the years leading up to the First World War seems to owe much to the nexus of ideas developed by Dalcroze, Emmanuel and Duncan (as well as, more generally, to what Harold Segel calls the 'unparalleled interest in physical culture … that consumed Europe' in the early twentieth century).[98] Although the artist continued to rely on the epics of Greek mythology as subjects for his visions, his focus was more on capturing an athletic spirit than on narrative detail. To the solid corporeality found in *Psyché,* Denis introduced Dalcrozian athleticism. The painting *Galatée* of 1917 depicts the eponymous character launching herself elastically towards the waves on tip-toes **[Figure 103]**. Music's presence can be felt particularly strongly in this work: the figure of the flute-playing Pan sits atop the Breton cliffs in the distance. Ludicrously enlarged, he cuts a visually imposing figure that insists upon the intrinsic musicality of these movements.

Leaps and running movements are synthesized to decorative effect particularly well in 'Jeux des laveuses', part of a six-panel series *Jeux des Nausicaa* (now dispersed) that Denis completed in 1914 **[Figure 104]**. The series

---

[97] Adolphe Appia, *Music and the Art of the Theatre* (Miami, 1962), p. 6. For more info on the relationship between Appia and Dalcroze, see Richard Beecham's 'Appia, Jaques-Dalcroze, and Hellerau, Part Two: 'Poetry in Motion', *New Theatre Quarterly,* 1/3 (August 1985), pp. 245-61.
[98] Harold Segel, *Body Ascendant: Modernism and the Physical Imperative* (Baltimore and London, 1998).

was exhibited at the 1914 Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, but was probably commissioned by Eugène Druet, proprieter of Druet Gallery.[99] Concurrently, Denis's friend the composer Réné de Castéra (one of the Schola Cantorum's first pupils) was writing the music for a ballet on the myth, and the musician and painter conversed extensively on the production. The *Tablettes du Schola* announced the performance in June 1914, advertising sets and costumes by Denis – but these have not been found.[100] Clearly, however, his private commission for Druet was shaped by his involvement with Castéra's project. The Homeric myth, which Denis returned to in 1923, served as a pretext for the depiction of athletic movement, an exercise in the rendering of *plastique animée*, rather than a serious attempt to elucidate the narrative of the myth. In 'Jeux des Laveuses', it is not clear which of the figures is Nausicaa herself. (The painting corresponds to the opening of the myth, which sees the Phæacian princess hastily washing her garments before her impending wedding.) Denis exploits visual pathways formed by the linkage between limbs and fabric to generate strong gestural movements which bind the image together rhythmically. In two of the vertical accompanying panels anachronistically depicting women engaged in a game of tennis, the careful synthesizing of human form and environment - through the *déformation* of the tree trunks in the background – reflects the late Synthetist idiom found in *La Légende de Saint Hubert* discussed in Chapter 1 **[Figure 105]**.[101]

---

[99] See Groom, *Beyond the Easel*, p. 210.
[100] See De Beaupuy, Gay and Top, *René de Castéra*, p. 290.
[101] George Desvallières completed his own commission n the theme of *Nausicaa* in the late 1890s – its radical stylistic contrast only highlights Denis's commitment to a plastic classicism.

The model for the most prominent figure in 'Jeux des Laveuses' was the Ukrainian-born dancer Natacha Trouhanowa.[102] Trouhanowa offered herself to the Parisian stage as one of the Russian 'exotic creatures of mystery' during the early decades of the twentieth century.[103] Ostensibly, she was involved in a cultural milieu far removed from Denis's circle: the intoxicating world of the Ballets Russes. She became particularly celebrated in Paris after her role as Salomé in 1907 (the quintessential *femme fatale* role that transfixed audiences in the early 20th-century because of its potential for erotic display and 'fashionably aestheticized' Orientalism).[104] But the dancer and the painter nevertheless drew close, probably through Trouhanowa's friendship with d'Indy.[105] Even the highly culturally conservative Maurice Barrès was drawn to her performances, describing her dancing as 'spectacles of a universal value'.[106] Trouhanowa served not only as Denis's studio model, but as a guide to Paris's musical life, often inviting him to concerts, including to a performance of Paul Dukas's Symphony in C, discussed in the previous chapter.[107] She also played an important role in *L'Histoire de la musique,* to which I now turn.

---

[102] Barruel, *1913: Théâtre des Champs-Élysées,* p. 82.

[103] Lynn Garafola, 'Soloists Abroad: The Pre-War Careers of Natalia Trouhanova and Ida Rubinstein' in Garafola (ed.), *Legacies of Twentieth Century Dance*, p. 149.

[104] Clair Rowden, 'Whose/who's Salome? Natalia Trouhanowa, a Dancing Diva' in C. Rowden, (ed.), *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories* (Farnham, 2013), p. 77.

[105] 'Piot me présente à Trouhanowa dans sa loge. Elle vient nous inviter à Saint-Germain à venir entendre Saint-Christophe. Grande émotion' Denis, *Journal II*, May 1912, p. 144. See also Trouhanowa, letters to Denis (11 August 1912) and (no date). MMD [Ms 10976] and [Ms 10988].

[106] 'spectacles d'une valeur universelle.' Quoted in Raymond Escholier, 'Natacha Trouhanowa', *La Danse* (July 1921), p. 2. Barrès was, when convenient, able to put aside his intolerance to justify his appreciation for the popular entertainment of the day.

[107] See Trouhanowa, letter to Denis (no date). MMD [Ms 10957].

Music and dance at Paris's 'monument to the modern era'[108]

Denis's most enduring contribution to the world of French music and dance was undoubtedly his decorative commission for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, completed in 1913. As an ambitious project with immense cultural prominence, his cupola design *L'Histoire de la musique* established him in the eyes of many as the inheritor of Puvis de Chavannes's mantle **[Figure 106]**. The critic Jean de Foville described the painter as having put the ensemble 'fervently at the service of music', rather than envisaging it as an end in itself.[109] But Denis's panels are more than a delineation of music's history. They are a celebration of the *embodied* experience of listening to all music – an appropriate celebration for a venue conceived by its impresario Gabriel Astruc as a new 'temple of the arts'.[110] On seeing *L'Histoire de la musique* for the first time, André Michel, the curator of modern sculpture at the Louvre, exclaimed: 'Another Puvis de Chavannes is born to us, with perhaps more ... true and innocent lyricism'.[111] The 'lyricism' to which the critic refers is probably that of the 'abstracted' surface gestures and rhythms running through the panels. In a journal entry of 1910, Denis alluded to the profound influence of Puvis's *Le Bois Sacré* (the Sorbonne version) on his own conception of the scheme: 'I believe that, having admitted my division, in the sense of hall and stage, of earth and sky, it would be necessary … to come closer to the unity of place, as Chavannes

---

[108] *La Comédie des Champs-Élysées: direction Léon Poirier, 15 avenue Montaigne, Paris* (Paris, 1913), n.p.

[109] 'L'artiste … a mis [la peinture] avec ferveur au service de la musique.' Jean de Foville, 'Maurice Denis', *La Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* 33/193 (10 April 1913), p. 286.

[110] Quoted in Gloria Groom, *Edouard Vuillard: Painter-Decorator: Patrons and Projects*, *1892-1912* (New Haven and London, 1993), p. 201.

[111] Quoted in Charles Chassé, *The Nabis and their period*, trans. M. Bullock (London, 1969), p. 60.

(Sorbonne) understood it' **[Figure 107]**.[112] The painter had expressed his appreciation for Puvis's mural in the 1890s: 'the hemicycle by Chavannes at the Sorbonne ... It's composed of beautiful shapes isn't it, aesthetes? And the depth of our emotion comes from the sufficiency of these lines and colours to explain themselves, as simply beautiful and divine.'[113] The integrated, organized planes within the dream-like atmospheric world of *Le Bois Sacré* was, as one critic commented, a result of the dominating 'use of verticals and horizontals, the choice of a grey and dull tonality'. Denis also ordered his canvases so as to curtail the sense of depth and focus attention on broad gestural movements. Rather than a Puvis-esque muted palette, he used pastel tones that mediate between the strongly luminous effect generated by the Art Nouveau designer René Lalique's central glass dome and the warm red upholstery of the auditorium furniture. In his detailed examination of the symbolic content of *L'Histoire de la musique*, Henri Cochin wrote 'I shall criticize any audience member in the theatre if, before asking about the subject matter, he is not initially satisfied by the 'sufficiency of colours and lines.'[114] Denis's realization of this effect relied partly, I suggest, on his absorption in the gestural world of 'modern' Greek dance.

---

[112] 'Je crois que, étant admis ma division, dans le sens salle et scène, de la terre et du ciel, il faudrait cependant se rapprocher de l'unité de lieu, comme l'entendait Chavannes (Sorbonne).' Denis, *Journal II,* 1910, p. 136.

[113] 'L'Hémicycle de Chavannes à la Sorbonne … C'est une belle forme, esthètes ! n'est-ce pas ? Et la profondeur de notre émotion vient de la suffisance de ces lignes et de ces couleurs à s'expliquer elles-mêmes, comme seulement belles et divines de beauté.' Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Theories*, p. 9.

[114] 'Je blâmerai de même le spectateur du théâtre des Champs-Élysées, si, avant de demander le sujet, il ne se rassasie tout d'abord de la "suffisance des lignes et de couleurs"'. Henri Cochin, 'Les symboles de Maurice Denis', *La Revue Hebdomadaire* (March 1913), p. 36.

Opening on the Avenue de Montaigne in 1913, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées was a symbol of the reassertion of France's cultural centrality within Europe, as well as an arena for the 'communion' of minds in the presence of great art. In 1908 Astruc had appointed Gabriel Thomas, the owner of Denis's *L'Éternel Printemps* series, to manage the project financially, and to commission appropriate decorative schemes for the theatre's exterior and interior.[115] Denis was, unsurprisingly, Thomas's first choice for the main auditorium, while Édouard Vuillard was assigned the Théatre de Comédie foyer, the smaller theatre adjacent to the main auditorium. Ker-Xavier Roussel was invited to design the curtain for the main stage, choosing the mythological theme of the procession of Bacchus. The building's concrete, quasi-neoclassical façade (designed by Auguste Perret) is punctuated with pilasters above which is set a grand frieze by the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle depicting Apollo surrounded by his muses **[Figure 108]**. The sculptor also completed five smaller reliefs (*La Comédie, La Tragédie, L'Architecture et la Sculpture, La Musique,* and *La Danse*) placed above the building's entrances **[Figure 109 and 110]**.

In itself a display of ultramodern architecture and decoration, the theatre hosted opera and ballet productions which were too extravagant for the relatively small stages of Paris's existing venues. The main auditorium itself was spacious, with each seat designed for maximum comfort and placed to have as good a vantage point as possible. There were 1920 seats fitted within a space that could have accommodated 3000: the design suggests a concern with

[115] See J-P. Bouillon, '« Pour un plafond: ô ces voix d'enfants chantant sous la coupole! »: Maurice Denis au Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, 1908-1913', *Revue de l'art,* 157/1 (2015), pp. 69-82.

providing for a serious-minded, culturally-educated (and relatively prosperous) audience. This main stage was dedicated both to avant-garde works of music (most famously, the scandalous premiere of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre de printemps* in May 1913) and to a more frequently presented traditional repertoire, particularly by French composers. The opening gala concerts in April 1913, organized by Gabriel Astruc, were devoted primarily to contemporary French music. The programmes included work by Camille Saint-Säens, Emmanuel Chabrier, Gabriel Fauré, Vincent d'Indy, Claude Debussy and Paul Dukas.[116] Each composer was present to conduct his own work, adding to the commemorative value of the occasion.

Denis's circular frieze, 372 metres in circumference, was designed to harmonize both iconographically and stylistically with the décor of the theatre's interior. According to Jamot, Denis achieved 'a carefully premeditated harmony between the architecture and the painting'.[117] The entire decorative project for the theatre emphasized the fundamental role of physical gesture and rhythm as a unifying principle of the different art forms – as manifested in the plastic contours of Bourdelle's external frieze. Denis was a great admirer of the sculptor, and was grateful for his encouragement on his decorative projects.[118] He was also responsible (alongside Astruc) for commissioning the sculptor to produce a commemorative memorial to Debussy, although Bourdelle died

---

[116] See Camille_Saint-Saëns, letter to Philippe Bellenot (16 mars 1913), in which the composer dicsusses the concert on 3 April in which he takes part. BnF, département Musique, NLA-254.
[117] See Jamot, 'Le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées', p. 292.
[118] 'l'approbation de Bourdelle est le plus précieux des éloges.' Denis, letter to Bourdelle (undated). Paris, Musée Bourdelle: MB_ARCH_BO_AB/B.1.08.C61.

before the project could be realized.[119] Bourdelle's and Denis's large-scale Théâtre decorations shared with their architectural setting an air of permanence, an assumed confidence in the enduring value of the art whose performances they oversaw.

Bourdelle turned to Isadora Duncan as the model for the main frieze; each of the nine Muses surrounding Apollo is based upon her poses, which the sculptor distilled into regulated forms evocative of the rhythms of music. Bourdelle had first become interested in the dancer in 1909, on seeing her performance of Gluck's *Iphigénie* at the Théâtre de la Gaîté-Lyrique. She had been a regular 'muse' of his ever since.[120] Seeking to integrate further the art and architecture of the auditorium interior, Denis produced two bronze reliefs, *Le Chant* and *La Danse,* placed directly above the main stage at either side of the organ pipes **[Figures 111a and b]**.[121] In *Le Chant*, the left-most animated figure cuts a marked contrast with the closely-grouped girls pouring over a songbook, incarnating the music sung by her companions. The freedom and weightlessness of her movements are undeniably Duncan-esque. The chain of dancers in *La Danse* was inspired by Duncan's classes (her students were affectionately referred to as 'miniature Isadoras').[122] But on close inspection we notice a lute player, turned away from the audience, directing the dancers in exactly the same manner as the farandole-type configuration of *L'Éternel Été*'s

[119] See letter from 'Comité du Monument à Claude Debussy' to Bourdelle (29 June 1929). Paris, MB: Dossier for *Monument à Debussy.* Maillol was the committee's second choice sculptor. See Marianne Wheeldon, *Debussy's Legacy and the Construction of Reputation* (New York, 2017) for a discussion of the monument.

[120] On their relationship, see Juliette Laffon (ed.), *Isadora Duncan: Une Sculpture Vivante* (Paris. 2009).

[121] The actual bas-reliefs were carried out by Richard Guino, a close associate of Maillol.

[122] Carl van Vechten, 'The new Isadora', in Magriel, *Isadora Duncan*, p. 32.

'La Danse' **[Figure 78]**. This reusing of a particular motif – which occurs elsewhere in this decorative scheme – exemplifies the quasi-'hieroglyphic' treatment of certain subjects that were of central importance to Denis. The painter's continual self-reference within his prolific output of commissioned work perhaps amounts to a form of personal signature. These reliefs mimic the stylized stone choreography within Bourdelle's decorations on the theatre's exterior, although the latter, with their more severe geometric contours, directly reconcile the moving bodies with the strict architectural regularity of the façade. Denis's interior reliefs, by contrast, serve to connect the real bodies moving on the stage below with the supple painted bodies dancing in the frieze above. This particular use of sculpture had been noted by the painter in his 1890 'Définition' essay as being the natural artistic step between the 'pure arabesque' of Egyptian paintings and Byzantine mosaics, and the 'metopes of Greek temples' and 'the church of the Middle Ages'.[123] The construction of the square proscenium in the auditorium, and the 'neo-Greek' external façade are strongly imitative of the classical metope. These reliefs were not, therefore, simply ornamental additions, but in themselves important signifiers of Antiquity.

The one element of Denis's decorative contribution to the Théâtre auditorium that has not survived was, arguably, the component that most powerfully encapsulated the Dalcrozian notion of *plastique animée* (the embodied nature, and kinaesthetic potential, of musical appreciation). Gabriel Thomas tasked Denis with decorating the exedra of the theatre stage (the

[123] Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme', *Théories,* p. 7.

recessed space occupied by musicians when the Théâtre hosted concerts).[124] Denis chose to paint a series of musical characters and tempi in the form of dancing female figures. A surviving sketch of the ensemble (known as *Les Mouvements et les Nuances*) offers evidence of his design, with each figure corresponding to one of the following musical terms: Scherzando, Adagio, Cantabile, Espressivo, Graveo, Andante, Presto, Appassionato, Gracioso, Largo and Allegro **[Figure 112]**. The development of this particular project has been overlooked in the Denis literature, but it provides an essential insight into the painter's attempts to transcribe onto the canvas the *idea* of movement.

In a letter to Gabriel Thomas dated 28 January 1911, Denis indicated his desire to see the dancer one last time, in a performance of Bach's Suite in D, before her departure to America.[125] It is clear from the letter that Denis had already witnessed the dancer in action – perhaps in Glück's *Orphée et Euridyce* at the Concerts Colonne conducted by Gabriel Pierné on January 18 1911.[126] According to Lillian Lowenthal, '[w]henever it appeared in Paris, Isadora's *Orphée* was announced in the press as a cultural event of commanding magnitude; all were summoned to the theatre'.[127] In the performance, Duncan's role was equivalent to that of the Greek chorus: her motions were not illustrative of the story's development, but they 'assumed the silent and concentrated focus of the drama's emotion'.[128]

---

[124] See De Foville, 'Maurice Denis', pp. 268-86.
[125] Denis, letter to Thomas (1910). I am grateful to Clémence Gaboriau and Fabienne Stahl for providing this to me. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Maurice Denis family archives.
[126] As suggested by Clémence Gaboriau.
[127] Lilian Lowenthal, *The search for Isadora: the legend & legacy of Isadora Duncan* (Pennington, NJ, 1993), p. 137.
[128] Ibid., p. 138.

A series of vigorous sketches of Duncan dating from around this time provide clear evidence of Denis's attempting to capture her in motion **[Figures 113a and b]**.[129] It seems that the painter consolidated these quick studies into a series of painted sketches **[Figures 114a and b]**, which appear almost as fluid as the drawings in their execution, as if he was attempting – through swift brush strokes – to imitate the vitality of Duncan's limb movements. Several more pages of these painted sketches (the originals of which have now been lost) were subsequently published in *L'Art décoratif* (1913), to accompany an article on the dancer by her staunch admirer José Clara.[130] We can compare poses from pencil sketch to painted sketch: the figure in **[Figure 115]** holding up a musical instrument, for example, appears in **[Figure 116]**.[131] Each painted figure, enclosed in a separate spatial envelope, is distilled into essential lines of limb and drapery. These painted figures capture the completion of a movement, that split-second moment in which the dancer has reached the height of her momentum. They were to form the inspiration for the poses in *Les Mouvements et les Nuances.*

In these sketches, Duncan's movements become crystallized as icons; their gestural simplicity enabled them to be conjured 'back' into more 'sculpted' bodies in the exedra (or as allegories within the complex schema of *L'Histoire de la musique*). The final step for the artist was to hire a model who would recreate

---

[129] Exact date unknown. I am grateful to Fabienne Stahl for details of this notebook.

[130] Jose Clara, 'Isadora Duncan', *L'Art décoratif*, 15/194-5 (August/September 1913), pp. 103-8. Clara begins the article by invoking the religious sensation that pervades the stage when Duncan dances: 'Quand Elle paraissait, nous avions tous la sensation que … Dieu devenait présent', p. 103.

[131] Duncan could well have provided the inspiration for Denis's illustration for Maurras's *L'Avenir de l'Intelligence*, discussed in the previous chapter.

a number of these specified dance poses in his studio. Working directly from the model, Denis produced carefully wrought drawings of Duncan's original poses **[Figures 117a and b]**. They are infused with the sculptural sensibility of Denis's female bodies, imparting a strongly classical spirit. The vigorous trace of the brush gives way to the methodical, intellectual process of *disegno.* Through the mediation of the model, Duncan's original movements became in some sense abstracted in the artist's mind – a memory, or distillation of movement, like those hieroglyphic forms found in Grecian vases. The final exedra paintings (now lost) were monochrome, a choice perhaps intended to imitate the vases of Antiquity, but one which also indicated faithfulness to Duncan's aim—as Desvallières put it— to 'suppress … the false and deceptive décor' so that the dancer might 'let instinct … emerge as freely as possible so that beauty could emerge.'[132]

In a letter dated 26 May 1912, Denis reminded Trouhanowa that she promised to model a pose from his Théâtre murals for him.[133] According to Stahl, Trouhanowa was the studio model for the worked-up drawings for many of these Duncan-inspired poses for *Les Mouvements et les Nuances.* One notes the connection between 'Gracioso' **[Figure 118]** and a 'captivatingly stylized' portrait of the dancer painted in 1912 **[Figure 119]**.[134] Her crouching posture suggests imminent movement, especially through the poise of the left

---

[132] '…a supprimé, parce que factice et mensonger, le décor.' … 'Il faut laisser [l'instinct] se faire jour aussi librement que possible pour que la beauté surgisse…' George Desvallières, 'Les Expositions', *La Grande Revue,* vol. 54 (10 March 1909), p. 183. A photographic reproduction of the finished 'Presto' (unlocated) appears in *Journal II,* May 1912, facing p.145.

[133] Denis, letter to Trouhanowa (2 May 1912). Accessed online: https://www.ader-paris.fr/en/lot/18093/3531821.

[134] Louis Vauxcelles, 'Le Salon d'Automne, supplément gratuit', *Gil Blas* (7 November 1913), p. 3.

foot, the toes of which are primed to propel her body upwards. The subtle extension of the small finger of her left hand suggests the carefully poised grace of a ballet dancer's hand position. She smiles beguilingly at the beholder, as if waiting for a cue to resume her movement. Trouhanowa also served as the studio model for 'Presto' **[Figure 120]**, whose leaping movement also provided the basis for one of Denis's beach paintings, *L'enfant qui court sur la plage* **[Figure 121]**, a work now cut down to show only the lower half of her airborne torso. As in 'La Plage' for *L'Âge d'Or* (see Chapter 2), the footprints in the sand are a prominent feature, attesting here the vivacity of the dance, while also symbolising the temporality of movement itself. The indication of the serpentine movement of her veil is matched in the small sketch for *Les Mouvements et les Nuances* **[Figure 122]**.

Allegorizing music: *L'Histoire de la musique*

If *Les Mouvements et les Nuances* presents symbolic embodiments of musically categorized 'states of the soul', Denis's cupola frieze *L'Histoire de la musique* enacts a four-part allegory **[Figure 106]**. Considering the functioning of the works together, one might conceive of the exedra design as a 'bodying forth' of the figures within the frieze that provides a halo for the theatrical space. Within each panel of *L'Histoire* are meticulous personifications of composers, performances and musical works. Since Thérèse Barruel has analyzed extensively the intended allegory of the characters within each of the four

panels, only a selective outline is necessary here.[135] The scheme consists of four large rectangular panels: 'L'Orchestique Grecque' (depicting the origins of music, this panel is the most visible, situated directly above the stage) **[Figure 123]**, 'L'Opéra' and 'La Symphonie' on either side **[Figures 124 and 125]**, and 'Le Drame Lyrique' **[Figure 126]** to the rear of the auditorium, opposite 'L'Orchestique Grecque'. Separating these large panels are four smaller 'cameos', entitled 'Le Chœur', 'L'Orchestre', 'la Sonate' and 'L'Orgue' (the same themes as the panels in Denis's *L'Éternel Été* scheme). The choreographed intertwining of bodies across the entire cupola imposes a strong rhythmic impetus around the space, even if one is too far distanced to take note of the iconographical details.

Denis acknowledged the challenge of marrying specific historical figures and musical characters with thematically unified landscape settings for each scene. A journal entry from 1910 reads: 'Difficult to transition between the diverse landscapes and the particular sentiments in each scene'.[136] Of course, their setting high up in the theatre's cupola necessarily limited their comprehensibility for most of the audience, who could have deciphered only the dominant idea of each scene, and the principal oppositions between them. For example, the neoclassical pillars of the Versailles architecture in 'L'Opéra' provide a convincing visual echo of the vertical impulse of the tree trunks in 'La Symphonie'. This visual harmonization was perhaps intended to emphasize the two equally important but divergent paths of music's evolution

---

[135] See Thèrèse Barruel, 'La Coupole de Maurice Denis', in T. Barruel and C. Loupiac (eds), *1913: Théâtre des Champs-Élysées*, exhib. cat. (Paris, 1987), pp. 72-88.

[136] 'Difficulté de transition entre les divers paysages et le sentiment particulier à chaque scène.' Denis, *Journal II*, 1910, p. 136.

from Antiquity – the humanistic culture associated with the operatic form, and its undeniable rootedness, through the mysterious forces of dance and rhythm, in the most basic impulsions of human nature. The highly rhythmical gestures of 'L'Orchestique Grecque' provide a visual counterpoint to the more hieratic, formal posturing found in 'Le Drame Lyrique', suggesting an evolution from the imagined Dionysian rites of Antiquity to the development of a more sober Christian aesthetic. Something of the 'nature' versus 'culture' dichotomy emerges here, with the lithe naked bodies of the ancient world acting as a counterpoint to the elaborately costumed characters of the contemporary lyric drama. Thus Denis finds a way of accomplishing 'a logic to the subject within the staging … in order to minimize the spectator's cerebral work'.[137]

The scheme of *L'Histoire de la musique* depended largely on D'Indy's and Denis's shared understanding of the trajectory of musical history, with the composer providing clarification and 'logic' to Denis's own ideas.[138] At this time, d'Indy was working on a revised version of the first volume of his *Cours* (published 1912), in which he laid out his model for the evolution of music's primary forms.[139] He insisted that 'the dramatic genre existed, quite complete … in plainchant and among the masters of the Renaissance'.[140] This idea is suggested by Denis's inclusion of the small cameos 'Le Chœur' **[Figure 127]** (as

[137] '… une logique de sujet dans la mise en scène…afin de réduire au minimum le travail cérébrale du spectateur.' Ibid., 1911, p.140.
[138] '… ma conversation d'une heure avec d'Indy, au café Weber, me précise à moi-même mon projet, et y ajoute de la logique, de la clarté, et tous les développements qu'il faut'. Ibid., p. 135.
[139] Maurice Emmanuel was putting together his *Histoire de la langue musicale* (Paris, 1911) at this time as well.
[140] 'Le genre dramatique existait, tout à fait complet … dans le plain-chant et chez les maitres de la Renaissance'. Quoted in E. Borell, 'L'Opéra ancien en Italie et en France', *La Revue critique des idées et des livres* (25 December 1913), p. 674.

a symbolic representation of Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony) and 'L'Orgue' **[Figure 128]** (as an illustration of religious music so central to these periods), placed within music's development towards 'Le Drame Lyrique'.[141] Although the main allegories of the four rectangular panels are secular in nature, it was important to both the composer and the painter, given their insistence on upholding their culture's rootedness in Christian values, that references to the centrality of Catholic music were included. After all, d'Indy's Schola Cantorum was founded (as noted in Chapter 2) with the explicit purpose of spreading knowledge of religious musical masterpieces across France. Jamot's description of 'Le Chœur' (whose motif Denis later reprised for a concert programme **[Figure 45]**) reads: 'It is the choir of the church, the pure voice without accompaniment, as in Gregorian chant (unison), or in Palestrinian chant (vocal polyphony)' the two specific vocal styles championed at the Schola.[142]

With the help of the composer, then, Denis constructed an elaborate symbolic project merging musical works, composers, and his own musical acquaintances and family members. The combining of historical figures with the painter's contemporaries suggests Denis's wish to promote a dialogue between present-day French culture and an idealized national tradition borne out of the country's religious and classical roots. Each panel includes specific references to common musical friends. In 'Le Drame Lyrique', we can trace allusions to the disciples of César Franck, the *franckistes*, to whom Denis and

---

[141] Note the similarity between 'L'Orgue' and the equivalent panel for *L'Éternel Été* **[Figure 73]**.
[142] 'C'est le chœur d'église, la voix pure sans accompagnement, comme dans le chant grégorien (unisson), ou dans le chant palestrinien (polyphonie vocale).' Jamot, 'Le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées', p. 312.

d'Indy credited a musical renaissance. Barruel has traced the figure of d'Indy's daughter Madame de la Laurencie among the women.[143] I would venture that the clusters of airborne figures allude to the series of decorative panels that Denis produced in the 1890s for Chausson (two of which represent similarly ethereal floating forms). Denis's inclusion in this panel of a direct quotation from his *Psyché* series **[Figure 84]**, as discussed earlier, is significant in the context of Franck's influence. In the 'cameo' 'La Sonate', the pianist is the piano professor Blanche Selva (a pupil of César Franck), one of the few actively influential female musicians of this circle, and someone whom Denis greatly admired **[Figure 129]**. It has been speculated that the musical work being played in the scene is Franck's Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major (1886), beloved of Selva and her group. Denis's friend the violinist Paul Poujard can be identified in the seated audience, while the composer Réné de Castéra turns Selva's pages.[144] The four modest representations of daily music-making in these 'cameos' — either domestic or religious — are 'contextualized' as part of a broader musical tradition defined by the allegories of the four large panels.

Among the many allusions to contemporary musicians we also find the presence of Isadora Duncan and Natacha Trouhanowa. The care with which Denis rendered each body within the panels is indicated by the extant drawings of individual poses, some of which were modelled on the dancers' movements. A page from Denis's notebook of Duncan sketches provides the inspiration for the nine Muses that dance in front of Apollo in the same panel **[Figure 130]**. A drawing of Trouhanowa **[Figure 131]** forms the basis of the

[143] Barruel, 'La coupole', p. 81.
[144] Ibid., p. 80.

figure of Ariadne in 'L'Orchestique Grecque' **[Figure 132]**. She appears also in 'La Symphonie' and in 'Le Drame Lyrique'.[145] In this latter panel, the dancer, seated in the foreground with her back towards the audience, embodies Dukas's *La Péri*, nestled among references to the contemporary Ballets Russes, whose first Paris season in 1910 Denis attended **[Figure 126]**.[146] Trouhanowa's embodiment of *La Péri* was probably a reference to Jacques Rouché's 'Concerts de Danses' at the Théâtre du Châtelet in 1912, which Denis comments on in his journal.[147] Trouhanowa herself was closely involved in the conception of each of the four dances in the show (as Clair Rowden has shown for Schmitt's *Salome,* and Helen Minors for of Dukas's *La Péri*).[148] The cohesion between music, dance and visual spectacle in this 1912 performance was an inheritance from the Ballets Russes, but the focus on four pieces by modern French composers seemed to assert a patriotic basis for the event. A critic for *Comoedia* noted that Trouhanowa had done what Diaghilev had only promised: that is, to 'serve the cause of modern French music.'[149]

Denis must have realized that the audience – even those in the balcony – would have had immense difficulty in 'reading' the significance of each of these figures. It seems clear, then, that this project was as much a personal consolidation of his appreciation of music and dance as it was a design to enhance a particular space. However, Denis aids our comprehension of these

---

[145] According to Escholier, 'Natacha Trouhanowa', p. 2

[146] Dukas's *La Péri* was a one-act ballet written in 1912. Trouhanowa choreographed the work, and performed the role of the Peri (a winged spirit).

[147] Denis, *Journal II*, May 1912, p. 144.

[148] Rowden, 'Whose/who's Salome?', pp. 71-99; Helen Minors, 'Paul Dukas' La Peri as interpreted by two balletic collaborators', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22/1 (2006), pp. 117-35.

[149] Quoted in Garafola, 'Soloists Abroad', p. 59.

panels with inscriptions running below. The caption below 'L'Orchestique Grecque' **[Figure 123]**, for example, reads in translation: 'Out of the Dionysian rhythms uniting the word of Orpheus, Apollo orders the games of the Graces and Muses'. This panel – the most visible of the four, at the heart of the auditorium directly above the stage – pays homage to the lithe rhythms of the dances of antiquity that, as discussed, provided a sort of motoring energy to Denis's work at this time. Apollo stands at the centre of a Mediterranean landscape, directing the Graces, who dance freely around him. A Doric temple appears on a hilltop in the background, inviting audience members to compare the theatre in which they were sitting with the architectural spaces of Antiquity. To the left of the scene, Dionysus leads his dancers, while Orpheus, on the right, accompanied by Eurydice, tames savage beasts with his song. D'Indy himself acknowledged in *Cours* the value placed on the rhythmic arts within ancient Greek civilization. The composer's explicit emphasis on the importance of 'rhythm' as a unifying aspect of all art forms, accorded with Denis's conception of the decorative nature of painting. D'Indy wrote: 'Order and Proportion in Space and Time; this is the definition of Rhythm. Rhythm is therefore a primary element common to all kinds of art; it is the one that generates the right order of lines, forms, colours and sounds.'[150]

'L'Orquestique Grecque' not only accords with d'Indy's musical premise, but also seems to affirm the theories of Dalcroze and the values of Duncan and Emmanuel. The ideal of bodily liberation from restrictive nineteenth century

[150] 'L'Ordre et la Proportion dans l'Espace et dans le Temps; telle est la définition du Rythme. Le Rythme est donc un élément premier commun à toutes les sortes d'art; c'est lui qui engender la bonne ordonnance des lignes, des formes, des couleurs et des sons.' D'Indy, *Cours,* vol I, p. 18.

attitudes through movements derived from the regulated forms of Greek dance seems consonant with the Apollonian 'ordering' of Dionysian rhythms in 'L'Orchestique Grecque'. In a 1911 diary entry Denis described his wish to imbue this panel with: '1. The idea of dancing in a sunny country and 2. The idea that this Dance is associated with religious sentiment.'[151] This passage offers confirmation of the 'Christian humanist' reading of Denis's work, as discussed in Chapter 3. 'L'Opéra' **[Figure 124]** and 'La Symphonie' **[Figure 125]** to either side of 'L'Orchestique Grecque' provide the twin stimuli that are fused together in 'Le Drame Lyrique', the panel richest in musical allusions **[Figure 126]**.

Postlude: *Parsifal* and Frenchness

A brief consideration of the significance of the iconographical choices in 'Le Drame Lyrique' moves us away from the specificities of dance and gesture, and back to the wider question of the nature of French tradition. Front and centre of the scene are characters from Wagner's operas: to the left Tristan and Isolde embrace, while Brünnhilde charges on horseback towards the central figure of Parsifal holding aloft the Grail. This placing of Parsifal at the end of the narrative could be read not as a culmination of music's history but rather as a challenge to Denis's French musical contemporaries **[Figure 133]**. Denis wrote to Gabriel Thomas in 1911: 'I am very keen to represent Parsifal as the centre of modern music = EXPRESSION AND CHRISTIANISM, as opposed to the

[151] '1. L'idée de la Danse dans un pays ensoleillé; 2. L'idée que cette Danse est associée à un sentiment religieux'. Denis, *Journal II,* 31 August 1911, p. 141.

Apollo of the ancient dance panel = HARMONY AND PAGANISM'.[152] This accorded with his very first idea for the scheme, which was predicated on the dual harmonic and expressive threads of music's development.[153] But it was a decision undoubtedly encouraged by d'Indy, who found in Wagner — paradoxically — the possibility of a renewal of French music.

D'Indy considered himself to be up to the task of producing explicitly Gallic Wagnerian music. Lamenting the demise of French lyric drama during what he termed the *Italo-cosmopolite-judaique* era of the 19th century, he sought a Wagnerian symphonic conception of endless melody united through leitmotivic development.[154] His most substantial lyric drama, *Fervaal* (1897), is known as the 'French Parsifal,' and, according to James Ross, it was the most profoundly Wagnerian opera ever composed by a Frenchman, drawing explicitly on the narrative arc of *Parsifal* but relocated to southern France, and situating the birth of Christian charity within France's Catholic tradition.[155] D'Indy's choice of setting – in his own region of the Cévennes – was a deliberate compensatory gesture towards consolidation of the nationalist sentiments of the opera's theme. Huebner interprets the opera's libretto as 'an allegory about the founding of France out of the Celtic spirit.'[156] Small wonder, then, that d'Indy strongly encouraged Denis to put its principal musical

---

[152] 'Je tiens beaucoup à représenter Parsifal pour l'opposer comme centre de la Musique moderne = EPXRESSION ET CHRISTIANISME, a l'Apollon du panneau de la Danse antique = HARMONIE ET PAGANISME'. Denis, letter to Thomas (24 October 1911), quoted in Bouillon, '"Pour un plafond"', p. 77.

[153] *Journal II,* 1910, p. 135.

[154] See Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics & Music,* p. 70.

[155] See James Ross, 'D'Indy's 'Fervaal': Reconstructing French Identity at the "Fin de siècle"', *Music & Letters*, 84/2 (May, 2003), pp. 209-240.

[156] Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin De Siècle*, p. 324.

inspiration, *Parsifal*, at the very heart of his iconographical programme. The visual proximity of allusions to the *franckistes* (as discussed) and to Wagnerian opera in 'Le Drame Lyrique' is perhaps a demonstration of d'Indy's own claim that Franck's symphonic compositions offered the starting point for a 'French' reinvention of Wagner's aims.

Conservative and left-wing French critics alike found in *Parsifal* the model for a modern 'social drama'. Commentary in *La Revue Socialiste* ran: 'This new drama responds to a social need. It is the product of the moral circumstances in which we live.'[157] There was a firm belief that putting music and drama to the service of the portrayal of legends and myths could attract a new audience to cultural enjoyment. After all, the theatre and music hall served as places where people could negotiate social and political differences. The notion of music drama as a vehicle for both the expression and cultivation of a utopian social ideal was central to Wagner's own theorising. In his essay 'Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft' (*The Artwork of the Future* (1849)), in which he justifies the necessity of a new, revolutionary form of theatre based on 'the great unitarian Artwork of Greece', he remarks on the sterility of contemporary art: 'Today no isolated art can invent anything new anymore; and not only plastic art, but no less the arts of dance, instrumental music, and poetry.'[158]

The desire to dissolve one's individuality in the shared subjectivity of a collective spiritual experience, made possible by the unification of art forms,

---

[157] 'Ce drame nouveau répond à un besoin social. II est le produit des circonstances morales dans lesquelles nous vivons.' Alphonse Richard, 'Un drame social', *La Revue socialiste* (November 1896), pp. 554-5.

[158] Quoted in Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Tragedy's Endurance: Performances of Greek Tragedies and Cultural Identity in Germany since 1800* (Oxford, 2017), p. 2.

was one of the forces behind the technical innovations of Wagner's Bayreuth Festival, inaugurated in 1876. Hugo von Hofmannsthal discussed the Wagnerian 'Bayreuth experience' in terms of a revival of the 'ancient instinct' for festival. 'Of all secular institutions, the theatre is the only remaining one of any power and universal validity that links our love of festival … to the ancient instinct of festival implanted in the human race from time immemorial.'[159] One can imagine just how profoundly the designers of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées would have concurred with this sentiment. The idea that Greek melodrama, in its unification of artistic forms, could achieve a transcendence that confirmed the essential commonality of human experience was a powerful one that stimulated d'Indy and the *franckistes*, and by extension, Denis. It is this 'ancient instinct of festival' which Denis conjures in 'L'Orchestique Grecque', and it is the same instinct that is symbolized by Parsifal holding the Grail in 'Le Drame Lyrique'. Thus we might surmise that the whole cycle is really a commentary on the eternal renewal of culture, and a celebration of music as part of that all-embracing process.

For d'Indy, Denis and Wagner, the rejuvenation of the arts meant a return not only to the ideal of Greek drama, but also to its sacred origins, as made explicit in the Christianized allegory of Parsifal. The French philosopher Gilbert Durand described *Parsifal* as paradigmatic of 'modern art religion' in that it represents a form of theatre that flourished from Antiquity to the Baroque period – namely, that of a communal theatre of 'elevated religious presence' – before the professionalising of theatre and opera in the eighteenth

[159] Quoted in David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, NY, 2011), p. 102.

century (as represented in Denis's 'L'Opéra' panel).[160] The elevation of the theatrical experience to an almost spiritual plane was closely linked in the minds of Denis and the French Symbolists with the spiritual ambition that Wagner expressed in 'Religion und Kunst' (*Religion and Art* (1880)) as 'the duty of art to rescue religion.'[161] He argued that with the modern secularization of society, all the arts fall into decline, and that the arts alone had the capacity to be conduits of religious sentiment. This view accorded with Denis' sense of artistic purpose, as made explicit in such essays as 'Notes sur la peinture religieuse'.[162] Denis's 'dream', as recorded in 'Les Élèves d'Ingres' (1902), to create an 'intimate union between Greek form and the Christian spirit' is expressed in the symbolism of the 'lyric drama' and, indeed, in the entire narrative of *L'Histoire de la musique.*[163] We might add that the circularity of the allegories' arrangement (albeit circumstantial, given the layout of the auditorium) lends a strong sense of continuity to the movement between the ancient and the modern.

This chapter has considered how rhythms and gestures were (in the words of Jean d'Udine), 'crystallized into a stable form' in the bodies depicted in Denis's work.[164] In so doing it has shown how cultural expressions of continuity and universality were localized within depictions of the moving body. The following chapter develops an understanding of the embodied

---

[160] Quoted in Ibid., p. 103.
[161] Quoted in Jennifer Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France, 1870-1914* (London, 1986), p. 50.
[162] Denis, 'Notes sur la peinture religieuse', *Théories*, pp. 30-45.
[163] '…ce rêve d'une union intime entre la forme grecque et l'esprit chrétien…' Denis, 'Les élèves d'Ingres', *Théories*, p. 113.
[164] 'cristallisés dans une forme inaltérable'. D'Udine, *L'Art et le geste,* p. 8.

experience of the artist's large-scale decorative work, particularly as pertaining to understandings of shared social identity.

CHAPTER 5
Ritual and decoration in the church and the theatre

The previous chapter, with its attention to dance and gesture, considered the 'decorative' choreographing of bodies within Denis's ensembles. In this chapter the topic will be extended by taking into account the possible embodied response of viewers to two of Denis's constructed decorative environments: the interior of his private chapel (completed between 1915 and 1928) in the grounds of his house, 'Le Prieuré' in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and his set and costume designs for d'Indy's opera *La Légende de Saint-Christophe*, premièred at the Paris Opéra on 6 June 1920. These are two of Denis's most ambitious, though most neglected, projects. Can we understand these environments as spaces of comprehensive artistic integration with the potential to complement the artist's broader desire for social reintegration? Can attending to the conditions in which they would have originally been experienced and interpreted shed light on their symbolic role?

By the end of his life Denis had made a name for himself in France principally as a decorator of churches.[1] As his own private place of worship, the chapel of 'Le Prieuré' could be considered the most authentic manifestation of his personal ambitions. Detailed analyses of the practical process of the decoration have been undertaken by Fabienne Stahl and Martine Chenebeaux-

[1] Paul Fierens, 'L'Œuvre sacré de Maurice Denis', *L'artisan et les arts liturgiques,* 15/1 (March 1946), p. 1. His decorations for l'Église du Saint-Esprit, l'Église Saint-Louis de Vincennes and the Church of St Paul in Geneva are representative examples of his designs.

Sautory.[2] But there exists no rigorous attempt to set the project within a wider cultural context, or within the artist's broader aspirations. *La Légende de Saint-Christophe* proved to be Denis's only substantial project for the stage, and was his closest collaboration with the musician whom he so admired. Musicologists including Fulcher and Huebner have examined d'Indy's ideological and political motivations, but no scholarship attempts to assess critically Denis's contributions to the opera, or to understand the value of the piece as a 'total' work of art.[3] This is perhaps because, despite its popularity in 1920, the opera has since fallen into obscurity, and no recording of the full work exists.

The visual and spatial factors inherent in both projects could be said to serve similar purposes, despite the very different constraints to which each were subject. For both church and theatre, Denis followed the basic commitment to providing an audience with a legible, evocative visual stimulus befitting the drama of the occasion – either the literal drama of theatrical performance, or the spiritual drama of the Mass. While Denis's involvement with d'Indy's opera supported the composer's objective of bringing Catholic traditions into the space of the theatre, in the methodical conception of his chapel interior, I would argue, Denis sought to affirm the theatrical element of religious worship. In the case of both (religious) theatre and church service, the drama of Catholic ritual unfolds in a manner that encourages the audience, or

---

[2] Martine Chenebaux-Sautory, 'La décoration de la Chapelle du Prieuré à Saint-Germain-en-Laye', (MA thesis, Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 1986); Fabienne Stahl, 'Les décorations religieuses de Maurice Denis (1870-1943) entre les deux guerres (1914-1943)' (Ph.D thesis, Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, 2009).

[3] Jane Fulcher, 'Vincent d'Indy's 'Drame Anti-Juif'' and its Meaning in Paris, 1920', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2/3 (November, 1990), pp. 295-319; Steven Huebner, 'Vincent d'Indy et le «drame sacré» de *Parsifal* à *La Légende de Saint-Christophe*' in J-C Branger and A. Ramaut (eds), *Opéra et religion sous la IIIe République* (Saint-Étienne, 2006), pp. 227-56.

congregation, to feel part of a broader, cohesive *communitas*.[4] There is a sense in which Catholic ritual and tradition are dramaturgical in themselves, serving as an active agent in shaping collective identity in a manner comparable to theatrical performance. Mallarmé himself proposed such an analogy, as David Roberts has discussed in relation to the role of the Wagnerian 'total work of art' within modernism: 'For Mallarmé the universal archetypes of the quest for meaning – the myths, symbols, and rites of religion – are resumed and objectified in the universal drama of the [Catholic] Mass.'[5] The poet famously mistrusted the influence of realism in contemporary theatre, appreciating the dramatic art form only in terms of its ability to touch upon the mystery of the collective.[6]

Since Mallarmé, performance scholars – and theologians – have investigated theatre-going and church-going as significant social practices that engender a feeling of community and commonality amongst a social body. Recent scholarship informs my discussion of Denis's two projects. Richard Schechner has investigated the human propensity to create rituals, attending to the intrinsic theatricality of ritualistic action: 'In ritual, action begets action; in theatre, action begets thought. But since ritual and theatre are a double system, all theatrical performances have the ambition to affect action, and all rituals seek to entertain and stimulate thought'.[7] This recognition of the intertwined

---

[4] Used in the sense understood by Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY, 1974), p. 45 – as a bond uniting people above specific social structures.

[5] Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*, p. 134.

[6] See Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crayonné au théâtre', *Divigations* (Paris, 1897), pp. 153-231.

[7] Richard Schechner, 'The Future of Ritual', *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 1/1 (Winter, 1987), p.16. See also Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia, 1985).

nature of theatre and ritual has been further elaborated upon in Harold Turner's phenomenological approach to Christianity, itself indebted to the writings of the religious phenomenologist Gerardus van der Leeuw, who proposed in psychological terms a 'sacramental' experience of reality for believers.[8] This has informed my discussion of Denis's chapel, which I assume to have been experienced principally by Denis's Catholic friends.

One might also think of the chapel and the theatre environment in terms of 'spatial practice', to use Henri Lefebvre's term. His emphasis on the body's being subject to the determinants of space and environment seems particularly applicable to ecclesiastical and theatrical sites. Indeed, Lefebvre himself (a staunch atheist) makes such a claim regarding the experience of the Catholic mass. He understands the ritual as reminiscent of the ancient genre of tragedy, with its protagonist (priest), audience (congregation), choir, and community founder, who dies but is ultimately brought back to life to serve the community. 'What a poetic drama, where anyone watching … is … forced to participate, drawn on by the senses even into the realm of theological meanings!'[9] The kinship that Lefebvre finds between ancient tragedy and modern religious ritual reminds us of the narrative of continuity constructed in *L'Histoire de la musique.*

This chapter considers how Denis's ambitions for the chapel demonstrated a close attention to the embodied practices of religious ritual, considering spatial

---

[8] Harold Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (The Hague, 1979). Gerardus Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, trans. J.E. Turner (London, 1938).

[9] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991), p. 220. This idea of the compulsion to participate was also particularly important to Van der Leeuw, who was probably influenced by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mentality* (London, 1923).

and temporal navigations of the space. These practices, as I shall show, were shaped by the Catholic response to the trauma of the First World War. The second half of the chapter proposes ways in which an audience might have interpreted the fictive worlds generated by Denis's opera sets as closely aligned with the moralistic message of d'Indy's libretto. In particular I show how the contrast between the sacred and the profane was reinforced in the sets through Denis's use of distinct decorative idioms.

La Chapelle du 'Prieuré': a local sanctuary

In 1914, Denis purchased an abandoned hospital in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (built at the end of the 17th century by Louis XIV and Madame Montespan), which he renamed 'Le Prieuré' ('The Priory'). Attached to the building was a dilapidated chapel, constructed in 1718 but deconsecrated since the Revolution. By June 1915, Denis had begun work — the 'great chapel offers its walls to me' — starting with the Stations of the Cross.[10] The war greatly protracted the decorative process. (Although he was declared medically unfit to serve on the front line, Denis worked as a military administrator and railway guard from 1914-15.)[11] The chapel decoration was eventually completed, with the addition of the Beatitudes, some fourteen years after it was begun **[Figure 134]**. Even though this important decorative element was added well after the other features of the interior, its final appearance was a result of the artist's active engagement with the space over a prolonged period of time. The chapel's

[10] '…la grande chapelle …. m'offre ses murs'. Denis, *Journal II*, 24 June 1915, p. 176.
[11] See Fabienne Stahl, 'Maurice Denis dans la Grande Guerre', *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, 10/1 (2012). https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.4814

defining feature is undoubtedly its unity of execution, a fact which many contemporary critics remarked upon; noting that Denis's personal circumstances (as the chapel's owner, and as head of the Ateliers d'Art Sacré, with many eager decorative artists at his disposal) allowed him full mastery over every aspect of the design.[12] From the candelabra to the altar cloth, from the Stations of the Cross to the stained glass windows, every element of the ecclesiastical ensemble was designed, or overseen, by Denis.

And yet this process was intensely collaborative: the finished chapel stands as the ultimate realization of the ambitions of the Ateliers project - communal working for the glory of God, and the sacrifice of individual ambition to a collective vision. His assistants included the Ateliers's pupils Henri Marret, Marie-Alain Couturier (discussed briefly in Chapter 2), and the sculptors Simone Callède and Albert Dubos among others. Denis only worked with those artists and companions whose aesthetic motivations were consonant with his own conviction that '[t]he language that suits religious art is a language devoid of pride and lies, and therefore of rhetoric.'[13] Even his family became involved in the project: the antependium (the cloth hanging over the altar) was completed to a design by Denis's daughter Bernadette. The consonance of its constitutive elements was remarked upon by numerable commentators: '[y]ou have to go back a long way in the history of art to find a work so complete in

[12] For example see Francois Fosca, 'La Chapelle de Maurice Denis à Saint-Germain-en-Laye', *Les Lettres*, 1/11 (January 1925) pp. 205-25. Reprinted as booklet (Paris, 1925).

[13] 'Le langage qui convient à l'art religieux, c'est un langage dépourvu d'orgueil de mensonge, et par conséquent de rhétorique'. Denis, 'Le sentiment religieux dans l'art du moyen âge', *Nouvelles Théories*, p. 152.

its unity of execution', wrote André Maurel in 1923 (*Inspecteur Géneral* of Museums and the Fine Arts), thinking back to the Italian Renaissance.[14]

The urgency with which Catholics sought new examples of religious art in the first quarter of the 20th century, particularly in the wake of the First World War, was discussed in Chapter 2. Many of those frequenting the chapel during the first years of its opening would have concurred with Paul Claudel's assertion that the mediocrity of contemporary churches was demonstrative of the modern 'timidity of faith' and 'domination by convention and formulae …'[15] Denis's chapel became a beacon for those critical of the state of sacred art and ecclesiastical decoration. Fosca wrote: 'For some years now, there has been a lot of talk about a renaissance of sacred art ... Despite all the efforts ... what was missing was a really convincing demonstration, an important example. Since the completion of 'Le Prieuré' ... this example exists.'[16]

The chapel was consecrated shortly before the marriage of Denis's daughter Anne-Marie on 22 April 1922. Reports of the marriage indicate the importance of a musical ambiance, placed within the full sacramental rituals of Catholicism. Denis himself claimed that the music was the element that best

---

[14] 'Il faut remontrer bien loin dans l'histoire de l'art pour rencontrer une œuvre aussi complète dans son unité d'exécution'. André Maurel, 'La Chapelle de Maurice Denis à Saint-Germain-en-Laye', *La Renaissance de L'art français et de l'industrie de luxe* (May 1923), p. 245.

[15] 'timidité de la foi et du sentiment … domination des conventions et des formules…' Paul Claudel, letter to Alexandre Cingria (19 June 1919). Republished in Claudel, *Positions et propositions; art et littérature* (Paris, 1938), pp. 223-28.

[16] 'Depuis quelques années, on parle beaucoup d'une renaissance de l'art sacré … Malgré tous les efforts … Il manquait une démonstration vraiment probante, un exemple important. Depuis que la chapelle du Prieuré … a été achévée, cet exemple existe'. Fosca, 'Maurice Denis et la chapelle du Prieuré', p. 205. On the chapel's popularity see also Maurice Brillant, *L'Art Chrétien en France au XXe siècle* (Paris, 1927), p. 307.

succeeded.[17] Lerolle praised the 'silent mass with those lovely songs so well sung and so touching, in that chapel so full of you and all those you have loved.'[18] The experience of religious choral singing in surroundings precisely orchestrated by Denis may have put a discerning audience member such as Lerolle in mind of an event held two years previously at the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts on 25 May 1920. As part of the annual exhibition, Denis organized a concert of Gregorian chant to take place within the gallery devoted to religious art, which he himself had curated.[19]

Lerolle's reference to the chapel's being 'so full' of the artist was probably an acknowledgement of the numerous references to his lifelong friends that Denis wove into the iconography of certain decorative elements. The principal stained glass window behind the altar, *La Vie du Christ*, with its tripartite telling of Christ's life (from the bottom up: the Nativity, the Last Supper and the Crucifixion) is replete with personal references **[Figure 135]**. The narrative invites the spectator's eye to move upwards towards the celestial canopy coating the chapel's ceiling, but more particularly to the monumental silhouette of the Sacred Heart, set within a bright mandorla, and resembling a Byzantine Pantocrator. One meets Denis's second wife Elisabeth Graterolle (whom he married in 1922), nestled within the Nativity scene. Graterolle was the music teacher of Denis's daughter Bernadette at the Schola Cantorum (who also

[17] See Denis's letter to Verkade (25 April 1922). Reproduced in *Journal III*, p. 27-9.
[18] '[c]ette messe silencieux avec ces jolis chants si bien chantés et si touchants dans cette chapelle si pleine de vous et de tous ceux que vous avez aimez.' Lerolle, letter to Denis (11 May 1922). MMD [Ms 7014].
[19] Maurice Emmanuel, 'Un Chœur au salon', *Le Correspondant*, 243 (25 June 1920), pp. 1035-44; Robert de Sizeranne, 'L'Art religieux et les Salons de 1920', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 6/57 (1920), pp. 586-600.

appears in the window scene, playing the violin behind her teacher and step-mother). The score from which Graterolle sings is Franck's *Redemption*. In a letter discovered by Fabienne Stahl in the family archives, Graterolle wrote: 'Redemption is so much in the subject of the stained glass: 'This crib where sleeps this child', and … moreover it seems to me that [the music of] Franck goes well with your life and mine.'[20] Graterolle's close involvement with the Schola drew the painter still closer to this musical circle, as did, presumably, their shared love of César Franck.

The chapel soon opened its doors to the public for morning Mass every Sunday (which the local bulletin predicted would be well attended on account of the quality of its decorations).[21] Some of those in attendance would have found themselves depicted as apostles within the Last Supper scene of *La Vie du Christ*, including Adrien Mithouard, Gabriel Thomas and Henri Lerolle. A midnight Mass poster designed by the artist indicates a level of active publicity promoting religious events at the chapel **[Figure 136]**. That the painter (a 'devoted parishioner') intended the space to be a focal point for the community of Saint-Germain-en-Laye is also suggested by references in the local bulletin (with which Denis was closely involved) to tours of 'Le Prieuré' and its

[20] 'Rédemption est tellement dans le sujet du vitrail : "Cette crèche où dort cet enfant" … et puis il me semble que Franck, ca va bien avec vous et avec moi'. Graterolle, letter to Denis (16 décembre 1921) (Denis family archives). Quoted in Fabienne Stahl, 'La chapelle du Prieuré: testament artistique de Maurice Denis'. Unpublished conference paper presented at *Maurice Denis, moderne et anti-moderne*, musée d'Orsay, 17-18 novembre 2006, p. 22. Marthe also appears, embracing the couple's youngest child François, along with Denis's daughters Anne-Marie and Noële.

[21] [anon], 'La Chapelle St-Louis-St-Marthe des Fonds de l'Hôpital', *Bulletin Paroissial de Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, 11/125 (May 1922), n.p. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, archives paroissiales.

buildings.[22] The cover illustration for Saint-Germain-en-Laye*'s bulletin paroissial* was, for several years, Denis's depiction of Christ embracing local workers in front of the town's château **[Figure 137]**. This theme prefigures his decorative commission *La Dignité du travail* (1931), but in this context it was firmly intended to signal to readers that Saint-Germain-en-Laye was a unified Christian community.[23] Indeed, the local priest Duchemin claimed in 1910 that 'Saint-Germain is a Christian town in its entirety. The Christian life is very intense.'[24]

Denis had good reason for attempting to sustain a close-knit confraternal ethos, since he derived much inspiration from the local community – and particularly from the musical fraternity of the Chapelle des Franciscaines, as discussed in Chapter 2. It was Albert Alain and Clément Besse's Franciscan choir who performed, at Denis's request, at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts exhibition on 25 May 1920. The only remaining physical trace of this regular gathering in the Chapelle des Franciscaines (now a Greco-Catholic Ukrainian church) is a commemorative plaque dedicated to Besse, with a bas-relief designed by Denis (executed by his friend Paul Véra) **[Figure 138]**. Denis's carving nods to the character of the chapel's community: a sanctuary that nourished young singers in the art of sacred song. The wings of the angel-

---

[22] For example, [anon] 'Programme des Conférences et Excursions', *Bulletin/ Société des Amis du vieux Saint-Germain,* 2 (April 1924), p. 26.
'paroissien dévoué'. 'Nécrologie: Mme Maurice Denis', *Bulletin Paroissial de Saint-Germain-en-Laye,* 8/93 (September 1919), p. 105.

[23] *La dignité du travail* was commissioned for the Organisation internationale du Travail) in Geneva.

[24] 'Saint-Germain est une ville chrétienne dans son ensemble. La vie chrétienne est très intense'. Quoted in Aurélie Decourt, *Albert Alain (1880-1971), organiste et compositeur français* (Paris, 2000), p. 31.

chorister figure in the centre protectively enfold the younger singers, just as the arms of Christ enfold the workers of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in his cover design for the local bulletin.

The shadow of death hung over the painter's preparations for the chapel. The turmoil of the First World War filled the pages of the newspapers, while the health of his wife Marthe began to slowly deteriorate around the time of 'Le Prieuré's purchase. Marthe's death on 22 August 1919 precipitated Denis into fervent action, and the chapel was ultimately dedicated to both Saint Louis (Louis IX of France) and Marthe. A window, centrally placed on the left hand wall of the church represents Marthe in the form of her namesake, the wife of Lazarus, appealing to Jesus.[25] Below the scene is a mortuary portrait of her in her youth, under which reads: 'I am the Resurrection and the life; those who believe in me will have eternal life' [John 11:25], to which Denis adds the question: 'Marthe, do you believe in this?' **[Figure 139]**. This rhetorical appeal to his dead wife is perhaps the most profoundly personal element of the entire decorative ensemble and a transparent indication of the artist's commitment to the doctrine of the Resurrection. Three years before Marthe's death, during the Easter of 1916, Denis had remarked: 'Easter in our chapel: I can see the central force of this beautiful dogma of the Resurrection, of such a shining truth.'[26]

The parallels between the Resurrection and the experience of the war are not difficult to grasp. On an intuitive level, both events revealed, and moved beyond, the limits of ordinary human comprehension—if in apparently very

[25] A second window, situated between windows of Sainte Geneviève and Joan of Arc, shows her as the Virgin Mary.

[26] 'Pâcques dans notre chapelle: j'aperçois la force centrale de ce beau dogme de la Résurrection, d'une vérité si éclatante.' *Journal II*, 1916, p. 185.

different ways.[27] For Catholics, the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection was a message of hope and redemption that might have resonated with those distraught by the losses of the First World War. In his journal, Denis observed: 'This idea of sacrifice is perhaps at the heart of everything that makes patriotism and war great. It is not natural, it is supernatural'.[28] This spiritualizing of war – the justifying of bloodshed in terms of its consolatory redemptive power – was a popular narrative, and certain Catholic devotions became particularly closely entwined with the conflict. Alain Dénizot and Annette Becker have investigated the renewed significance of the Sacred Heart devotion during the war.[29] Denis, as Chenebaux-Sautory has demonstrated, was also attached to this 'very beautiful modern devotion'.[30] In the midst of the conflict, he painted *Le Sacré-Coeur [de la Triennale],* illustrating the Calvary in the middle of a desolate battlefield, with the lines of the trenches visible **[Figure 140]**. In the centre of this bleak scene Jesus's heart glows with a soft orange light. Denis's version of the Sacred Heart for his chapel is stripped of the trauma of war, projecting instead a comforting after-glow of victory **[Figure 141]**. He favoured the iconographic type of Christ with arms outstretched in a welcoming, almost maternal, embrace (as opposed to Christ holding the Sacred

---

[27] One could consider this idea within the framework of Jean-Luc Marion's notion of 'saturated phenomena'. See Jean-Luc Marion, 'Christ as Saturated Phenomenon: The Icon of the Invisible' in Marion, *Givenness and Revelation* trans. S.E. Lewis (Oxford, 2016), pp. 61-88.

[28] 'Cette idée de sacrifice est peut-être au fond de tout ce qui fait la grandeur du patriotisme et de la guerre. Elle n'est pas naturelle, elle est surnaturelle.' Denis, *Journal II,* 24 June 1915, p. 178.

[29] See Alain Dénizot, *Le Sacré-Coeur et la Grande guerre* (Paris, 1994); Annette Becker, *The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-1930* (London, 1998).

[30] See Martine Chenebaux-Sautory, 'De Sainte-Marguerite du Vésinet (1903) à la chapelle du Prieuré de Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1922)', [actes du colloque St-Germain-en-Laye, 8 mars 2014], *Bulletin des Amis de Vieux-Saint-Germain* (2014) pp. 199-217.
'très belle dévotion moderne'. Denis, 'Notes sur la peinture religieuse', *Théories,* p. 41.

Heart in his hands).[31] This stance underscored Jesus's humanity, while also echoing his attitude of suffering on Calvary**.** Other biblical allusions to bodily resurrection in the chapel appear as two frescos in the choir: *La résurrection de Lazare*, and *Noli mi Tangere*.

Denis completed the Stations of the Cross in 1915 during his wartime stint as a railway guard. The art critic Arsène Alexandre described the Stations as 'not only affirmations of faith, but also a flourishing of patriotism. This masterpiece … was born during the war, and is of the war.' For Alexandre, their arc shape was not to do with the requirements of the chapel's architecture but rather inspired by the 'arch of the bridges along which [Denis] kept watch during his nights of anguish and prayer'.[32] Denis made no indication that this was the case, but his very first Station, 'Condamné à mort', is constructed in such a way as to suggest the artist's position peering out from under an arched entrance **[Figure 142]**. The 'flourishing of patriotism' that Alexandre detected in the Stations derived not from anything explicit in their content, but in his belief that Denis undertook the project as an endeavour that was symbolically resonant with the frail social body of France in need of regeneration. 'Patriotic' – or perhaps nationalist – references can be found throughout the chapel's interior. After all, the space was dedicated to Saint Louis (Louis IX, famed for his crusades and his mission to fulfil France's duty as 'the eldest daughter of the Church'). The four cardinal virtues in Thomist theology (prudence, justice,

[31] See Franziska Metzger and Stefan Tertünte (eds), *Sacred Heart Devotion. Memory, Body, Image, Text, Continuities and Discontinuities* (Vienna and Cologne, 2020).

[32] '… n'est pas seulement une affirmation de foi, mais aussi une floraison de patriotisme. Ce chef-d'œuvre… est né pendant la guerre, et de la guerre … par l'arc des ponts le long desquels il montait la garde pendant ses nuits d'angoisse et de prière.' Arsène Alexandre, 'Les œuvres et les hommes, II: Sur un calvaire de Maurice Denis', *Les Arts*, 154 (April 1916), p. 17.

fortitude and temperance), are allegorized as scenes of Louis's life in medallions painted directly onto the wood of the choir**.** Joan of Arc – the Catholic warrior saint beloved by French patriots – is the subject of a stained glass window. The women allegorizing the theological virtues above the main chapel entrance are clothed in the colours of the *tricolore* (rather than the standard red, green and white) **[Figure 143]**. This same trio appeared in Denis's 1915 painting *La Foi, l'Espérance et la Charité,* as guiding spirits for soldiers in battle, or perhaps, as spectres of the women that these young men had left behind **[Figure 144]**.

France's military victory gave a particular impetus to the teachings of the Thomists, followers of the 'only optimist theology' (in the words of G. K. Chesterton).[33] Indeed in 1920, *La Revue Universelle* was established to propagate the views of those dedicated to a patriotic spiritual renewal in France. Its founders, Jacques Bainville and Henri Massis, were firm associates of Maritain (and adherents to Action Française). Denis was particularly close to Massis, and collaborated with him on the illustrations for his short text *Impressions de Guerre* (1916).[34] He was a signatory, alongside Maritain, Maurras, Desvallières, Ghéon and Mauclair, of Massis's manifesto 'Pour un parti de l'intelligence' published in *Le Figaro* (1919), in which the author described a future France that could 'defend the spiritual interests of humanity.'[35] Denis paid tribute to Thomistic thought in the Latin inscription of the *La Vie du Christ* window which

---

[33] G. K. Chesterton, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton* vol. II, *St Thomas Aquinas,* ed. G. Marlin and R. Azar (San Francisco, 1986) p. 487.

[34] See Henri Massis, letter to Denis (4 December, no year). MMD [Ms 7797].

[35] '…défendre les intérêts spirituels de l'humanité'. Henri Massis, 'Pour un Parti de l'Intelligence', *Le Figaro, supplément littéraire* (19 July 1919), p. 1.

translates as: 'In birth man's fellow-man was He, His meat while sitting at the board; He died, our ransomer to be, He reigns to be our great reward'. The verse is taken from a Eucharistic hymn by Aquinas, for the Blessed Sacrament. The words focus on the 'real presence' of Jesus, as 'fellow-man', and, in the third line, on the Eucharist as a sacrifice, reminding the chapel-goers of the central tenets of theological teachings. France's post-war regeneration had to be a spiritual one, according to Thomists such as Maritain.

As Stephen Schloesser has stated, 'Clearly, the war had changed France … the body politic needed integration, and the Church was yet another part of the *patrie* in need of repatriation.'[36] Denis's chapel therefore had the potential to be, for the Saint-Germain-en-Laye community, a sanctuary for the post-war healing of the social body. The ultimate rationale for church-building, as expounded by theologians such as Joseph Ratzinger (Pope XVI) and David Fagerberg, is to make both a meeting place for (in this case) Christians (*domus ecclesiae*), and a house in which God resides (*domus dei*). The church reminds us, according to Fagerberg, that 'the eternal resides in time, and the incorporeal is spatially located.'[37] If the concordance between religious elements in the space emphasized the worshipfulness of the endeavour, their cohesion – into a kind of religious 'total work of art' – served to focus the attention of visitors to the *domus ecclesiae* entirely towards worship. Visitors' sense of the significance of each decorative element was presumably conditioned by their awareness of the

---

[36] Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Toronto, 2005), p. 100.

[37] David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology? (Chicago, 2004) p. 15.*

building as a central place of meeting for the local Christian community.[38] Lindsay Jones has claimed that the 'meaning' found in sacred architecture is in 'the interactive relation that subsumes both the building and the beholder – in the ritual-architectural event in which buildings and human participants are involved'.[39] Denis explicitly recognized the cooperative role of the worshipper, describing the public as his 'collaborator' and admitting: 'I would be rather tempted to say: Public, you are my master'.[40]

'*Émouvoir, consoler, faire prier*': a theological journey around the space[41]

'The chapel of the Priory (...) is … quite unique in our time …' wrote Père Marie-Alain Couturier in 1931. He continued: 'It is necessary to have seen it finished … with its large blue and grey monochrome hues on the walls. It is an enchantment.'[42] The following discussion considers the chapel in this finished state – complete with the 'large grey and blue' Beatitudes (only completed in 1928, some six years after the chapel's consecration). These additional murals direct one's interaction with the sacred space particularly persuasively, and suggest that Denis was prioritizing a bodily engagement with the space. In his influential inquiry into ritual and place, Jonathan Smith asks 'What if place were not the recipient but rather the creation of the human project? What if

---

[38] Harold Turner's discussion in *From Temple to Meeting House* depends largely on these two conceptions of the church – as *domus dei* and *domus ecclesiae*.

[39] Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture,* vol. I (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 29–41.

[40] 'Je serais plutôt tenté de dire: Public, tu es mon maître.' Denis, 'Les nouvelles directions', *Nouvelles Théories,* p. 202.

[41] Denis, *Journal III* (1923), p. 39.

[42] '… une œuvre tout à fait unique à notre époque … Il faut l'avoir vu terminée … avec ses grands camaïeux bleus et gris sur les murs. C'est un enchantement.' Lettre au père Régamey, 20 février 1931, fonds Couturier, archives dominicaines de France, Le Saulchoir, cote : C-4B 29. Quoted in Stahl,' La chapelle du Prieuré', p. 1.

place were an active product of intellection rather than its passive receptacle?'[43] The interior of the chapel is far from a 'passive receptacle': every surface and ritual object was configured in such as way as to impress upon the devout worshipper certain basic theological beliefs linked to the theme of sacrifice and Resurrection.

The marriage of ornamental detail (within the altar furnishings, for example) with more consequential iconographical elements (in the narrative paintings and stained glass windows) ensures the homogeneity of the interior space. This sense of decorative cohesion also operates as a 'sort of asceticism', putting one in mind of Denis's oft-asserted idea that 'style [is a] system of … subordination, in each element, of the accessory to the essential'.[44] Every element of the design seems either to echo or to harmonize with proximate components, down to the very candelabras on the altar piece. Painted in the same grey-blue of the tabernacle, altar table and surrounding panelling, the wooden candelabras do not assert themselves as decorative objects of ritual *added* to the space; they are simply light-giving components fully integrated within the church's central locus of the Eucharist (the altar) **[Figure 145]**. The small gilt medallions which decorate the base of each depict the torso of praying women. These figures are comparable to the Symbolist 'hieroglyphs' of his early work, and are particularly reminiscent of the illustrative icons that punctuate the pages of *Sagesse* **[Figure 146]**.

---

[43] Jonathan Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago and London, 1987), p. 26.

[44] '…une sorte d'ascèse.' Denis, 'Le symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *'Nouvelles Théories* p. 191.
'Le style, système de subordination … dans chaque élément, de l'accessoire à l'essentiel'. Denis, *Journal II*, 17 June 1919, p. 212.

The sacramental focal point of the chapel is the tabernacle.[45] Harold Turner reminds us in his phenomenological analysis of sacred architecture that the Old Testament Mosaic temple was 'explicitly modelled on a revealed heavenly pattern'.[46] Since, for Denis, the clarity and purity of symmetry in itself carried a suggestion of the numinous, his tabernacle can be understood as reiterating this feature of the Biblical temple **[Figure 147]**. The artist's efforts to visually integrate the tabernacle's decorative elements with surrounding components also reinforce its sacramental centrality. The small painted sun is a tiny echo of the Sacred Heart in the ceiling vault above it. The sun also echoes Christ's halo, and the Eucharistic wafer that he holds aloft in the window behind the altar. The four embedded brass figures (made by the Swiss sculptor Marcel Feuillat) play a role in this visual nexus: the two that frame Jesus's face are diminutive echoes of the plaster statues of the Angel Gabriel and Virgin Mary to either side of the altar (completed by the sculptor Joachim Claret). The two kneeling figures above seem to mimic the upwardly curving bodies of the troupe of flying angels that support Christ's arms on the cross at the very summit of the altar window. This effect is enhanced by the framing arcs on the front of the tabernacle, which echo that of the window arch **[Figure 148]**. From the centre of the tabernacle's front, the enamelled face of Jesus gazes out with wide mournful eyes from behind a trellis (an allusion to Chapter 2:9 from the Song of Solomon **[Figure 149]**).[47] The trellis has the effect of mimicking the lead cames of the window behind it. The visage of Christ in the tabernacle becomes

[45] Duncan Stroik, *The Church Building as a Sacred Place* (Chicago, 2012), p. 26.
[46] Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House,* p. 28.
[47] 'My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice', Song of Solomon 2:9 (KJV).

an implied visual metonym for the window. Thus the entire tabernacle is designed to emphasize the theological idea of a sanctuary (holding the 'real presence' of Christ) within a sanctuary (the chapel, in which one is expected to feel the presence of Christ).

Even the non-stationary aspects of religious ritual – such as liturgical clothing – were attentively designed with the overall effect of synthesis in mind. The first chasuble created to be worn in the chapel's services is an illustrative example, made in 1920 by Sabine Desvallières to a design by Denis **[Figure 150]**.[48] The green silk of the garment's body corresponds to Ordinary Time in the liturgical calendar, but the choice of colour for the cross-shape ornamental design (which conforms to the traditional design of the vestment) responds to a concern for tonal balance. Ordinarily, these decorative bands would be simply patterned with abstract motifs. Denis's design bears symbolic meaning: the dove of the Holy Ghost encircled by the vivid sun rests on the front, as a powerful reminder to the faithful of divine grace. As with his painted decorations, a concern with simple legibility is apparent here. The flamboyant sun on which the central dove motif rests is a visual reminder of the Sacred Heart that emblazons the church's apse. The dove itself moves with the priest to become an earthly counterpart to the doves that soar on the chapel's ceiling. The motif thus connects, and brings 'to earth', two central symbolic elements of the chapel's roof. Denis's assertion that 'it is the orderliness of the composition, the intimate geometry … the magic of the

[48] See Danièle Véron-Denise, 'Sabine Desvallières (1891-1935): itinéraire d'une artiste brodeuse dans le premier tiers du XXe siècle', *Patrimoines du Sud,* 14 (2021). https://doi.org/10.4000/pds.6945

colours, that constitute the essential of the religious expression' is borne out both internally within this garment's design, but also through its connectedness with other elements of the chapel interior.[49] His very early Synthetist paintings emphasized visual connections within church interiors. Particularly striking is *La Messe* (1890), in which the circular golden decoration on the priest's chasuble answers the mysterious yellow orb within the space of the tabernacle **[Figure 151]**. This sensitivity to the union of motifs is exercised to its fullest extent in the Prieuré chapel interior.

The unified decorativeness of design contributes to an effect that the religious historian Mircea Eliade might have described as 'hierophany' (similar to the 'numinous').[50] The spiritual ritual begins at the crossing of the main 'threshold', from the expansive gardens of 'Le Prieuré'.[51] In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade observes: 'For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others.' The hierophanic experience of entering the chapel orientates the worshipper in a particular way: 'When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding expanse.'[52] The potential for this 'revelation' through spatial disruption was particularly important for Denis's chapel, given its connection to his family's living quarters. A second entrance, underneath the organ, led

---

[49] 'c'est l'ordonnance de la composition, la géométrie intime … la magie des couleurs, qui constituent l'essentiel de l'expression religieuse.' Denis, 'Le symbolisme et l'art religieux moderne', *Nouvelles Théories,* p. 187.

[50] See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York, 1963), p. 6.

[51] The term 'threshold' is popular within phenomenological interpretations of sacred space.

[52] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: the nature of religion,* trans. W. R. Trask (Florida, 1959), p. 20.

directly to the main house, and was presumably used frequently by the family. While facilitating the integration of spiritual worship into daily life, the sacred space had to be sufficiently distinct from this domestic area, to replace the usual accretion of sobriety generated by the customary 'entry sequence' to a church.[53]

On entering the chapel via the main door, one has the impression of an intermingling of earthly and cosmic realms **[Figure 134]**: the wide skyscape that stretches across the arched ceiling offers a nebulous counterpart to the unapologetic solidity of the wood panelling that runs around the lower half of the walls. The striking, simple symmetry of the space – which is emphasized by the positioning of the dark blue curtains on the confessional booths, and the dark blue upholstery around the altar in the centre – is reminiscent of the 'spiritual geometry' of larger ecclesiastical spaces (such as those described by Alberti in his architectural treatise).[54] We might also think of this arresting architectural regularity as reflective of corporeal symmetry itself: the German philosopher Robert Vischer pronounced that 'we find all regular forms pleasing because our organs and their functional forms are regular.'[55] While difficult to take literally, such a proposition raises the idea that spatial experience might be analysed metaphorically in terms of an extension of the body. A body is made up of multiple members that work in harmony to produce *wholeness.* We might say the same about the elements of Denis's

---

[53] See Thomas Barrie, *Sacred Place: Myth, Ritual, and Meaning in Architecture* (Boston, 1996), p. 59.
[54] Discussed in *Rudolf Wittkower, Architectural principles in the age of humanism, 5th edn (Hoboken, NJ, 1998).*
[55] Harry Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou, (eds), *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, (Los Angeles, 1994), p. 97.

chapel. We might also be put in mind of the numerous bodily metaphors in scripture: the church (as in, a fellowship of worshippers rather than a physical edifice) as the 'body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 12: 27) or the 'body as the temple of the Holy Ghost' (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20).

Such a notion ties in with Lefebvre's phenomenological idea of an 'anatomy of space generated by living bodies'.[56] A living organism, he points out 'is subject to the determinants of … space ... the spatial body's material character derives from space.'[57] This is of particular importance in the context of the chapel experience, since one's acknowledgement of being 'embodied' is essential to a believer's awareness of being earth-bound, and therefore subject to God's dominion. It could also be argued that Denis's insistence on religious art as the translation of a spiritual state is in some sense an appeal to the basic idea of the soul as animating and orientating an organism towards a way of life. Denis accepted the Thomist understanding that the soul is immanent in the form of the body. He paraphrased his own definition of Symbolist art with the words of his Thomist friend Père Sertillanges: '[Symbolism] is what Fr. Sertillanges calls: Speaking to the instinct, presenting the living idea blossomed into art forms, as the soul blossoms into visible organs.'[58]

The members of the congregation entering the chapel are made aware of the vertical dimension of the space, through Denis's demarcating of three distinct 'layers' **[Figure 152]**. Positioned at eye level are the Stations of the Cross, which represent the earthly suffering that believers have to endure in order to earn

[56] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 61.
[57] Ibid., p. 195.
[58] Denis, 'Les nouvelles directions', *Nouvelles Théories*, p. 228.

salvation and redemption. Running along the walls above are depictions of the Beatitudes: the blessings bestowed on those innocently suffering in the eight ways illustratively specified by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 3-10). For each Beatitude, a group of named figures is depicted interacting with an angel. As a whole, the series represents the reward of that earthly suffering: the moment of conciliation between man and God. Uppermost is the 'Kingdom of Heaven' skyscape — at one end of which lies the Sacred Heart, and at the other female personifications of the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity **[Figure 153]**. The ceiling seems to represent the final Christian eschatological vision – eternal life in heaven. Perhaps the doves indicate the souls of those departed figures who were close to Denis, or the souls of the blessed in the Beatitude murals. The Sacred Heart is the focal point of the celestial vision, and exemplifies Denis's incorporation of the viewer's embodied experience into the chapel space. The act of moving the eyes upwards to reach Christ's embrace generates for the devout viewer the self-realization of his or her earth-bound existence. Christ's bright white heart, which radiates from the centre of his chest, echoes the Eucharistic wafer in the stained glass Nativity scene below. The two scenes are also connected by their warm orange-yellow tones. The geometry of the flames extends to knit together the architectural impulses of the chapel, and seems to draw in the doves that soar across the vault.

Denis also configured a horizontal journey around the space. The Stations of the Cross invite the spectator to step into the Biblical story, following Jesus's sufferings on the way to Calvary. Echoing the Via Dolorosa processional route

through Jerusalem, these series of images are the ultimate example of embodied Christian worship, igniting in the pious imagination a desire to empathize with the toil of Jesus through the solemn procession around the walls of the church. Denis's choice of a warm-hued palette (in contrast with the cold blue of the wood panelling), and their slightly recessed placement generates a sensation of these scenes as glowing glimpses into an alternate world: the hot, dusty spaces of Jerusalem.[59] The eight Beatitudes above function like the Stations, as points of reflection. The figures in the two largest panels face towards the altar (save for the unnamed angelic figures at the head of each group) **[Figures 154a and b; Figure 155].** The chapel-goer is drawn into a physical enactment, or echoing, of these characters' movements towards the religious heart of the building. On approaching the altar to receive the Eucharist during the Mass, the communicant feels himself or herself surrounded by these spectral beings in blue. The worshipper is encircled by a march of human souls towards God: the 'angels' in the four Beatitudes on the chapel's south side are shown to be welcoming the earthly souls (most clearly demonstrated in 'Blessed are those who mourn' **[Figures 154a and b]**. In the corresponding Beatitude on the north side, 'Blessed are the peacemakers', the angel *leads* the peacemakers towards the altar **[Figure 155]**. These processional figures lining the wall thus inform the congregation's own spiritual journey, turning the chapel into a 'hodological' space — a space of possible movement.[60]

---

[59] The Stations are reproduced in P. Amblard, *Maurice Denis*: *Le Chemin de croix de Jésus*, (Paris, 2015).

[60] Hodological space refers to space through which we move – specifically spaces which have 'pathways'. See Robert McMutrie, *The Semiotics of Movement in Space* (New York, 2016), p. 41.

The positioning of Denis's Beatitudes emphasizes not only their eschatological meaning but also the imminence of that promised future. Directly facing the visitor on entering the chapel from Le Prieuré's gardens are the first and eighth Beatitudes, to either side of the *La Vie de Christ* window **[Figure 148]**. These are the only two of the eight statements that are not promises written in the *future* tense. Instead, they are clear indications of the heavenly realm *already* belonging to believers ('theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'), acting as *inclusio* for the other six. These eight statements could also be read more explicitly as a 'journey', according to the interpretation of St Augustine. The saint 'famously views the Beatitudes sequentially, as seven stages on the path to blessedness', with the eighth offering a summation of the sequence of blessings.[61] The raised arm of the angel in the first Beatitude (to the left of the window) seems to gesture outwards to the space of the church, inviting the figure of St Francis of Assisi to undertake a journey around the walls. It is also significant that Denis chooses St Francis as a solo voyager, being the saint most closely associated with the humility implicit in the Beatitudinal world view so important to Denis. By following the gesticulation of the angelic figure, the congregant is prompted to trace the frieze around the walls of the chapel, ending with the cross-bearing figure of the eighth Beatitude. As well as an exegetic image of Christ's instruction to 'let him … take up his cross daily, and follow me' (Luke 9:23), this figure is a postlude to the Stations of the Cross,

[61] See Ian Boxall, *Matthew through the centuries* (New Jersey, 2019), p. 112.

which end with Christ's burial (positioned before the chancel on the right of the chapel).[62]

The Beatitudes: music, and the material embodiment of Franciscan piety

The theme of the Beatitudes held a prominent place in Denis's religious oeuvre. Having already executed two series for French churches (the chapel of the old Bishop's palace in Limoges in 1915, followed eight years later by Saint-Louis de Vincennes), the Le Prieuré murals (1926-28) were his penultimate foray into the Biblical theme.[63] In a journal entry from 1923 he noted that, when making religious art, one must 'eliminate what is boring, what doesn't touch anyone: [for example] the Sermon on the Mount (do the 'Beatitudes' instead).'[64] A Christian audience would be moved, he implied, more profoundly by the visual exegesis of the eight verses, than by a depiction of Jesus delivering the sermon.

In 1914 the painter remarked that '*Parsifal, The Beatitudes* and *Sagesse* ... have created a state of mind conducive to Christian art … the influence of this music and literature should have effects similar to those produced by the mysteries in

[62] Among the figures depicted in the frieze are Fra Angelico (prominent among those that make up 'Blessed are the Meek'), Denis himself as Bartiméus ('Blessed are those who mourn'), and Sérusier as the figure of King David. Information from the catalogue raisonné team at the musée Maurice Denis.

[63] The Église du Sacré-Coeur in Saint-Ouen was Denis's final Beatitudes project. For further information about his Beatitudes see Claude de Martel, 'Les processions des Béatitudes: un thème original de Maurice Denis' (July 2015). https://www.narthex.fr. Last accessed 6 September 2022.

[64] 'éliminer ce qui ennuie, ce qui ne touché personne… le Sermon sur la montagne (faites plûtot les Béatitudes'. Denis, *Journal III,* 1923, p. 39.

the art of the fifteenth century'.[65] His familiarity with *Sagesse* and *Parsifal* have been addressed in Chapters 2 and 4 respectively; but what of the Beatitudes? Denis was undoubtedly referring to César Franck's oratorio (for orchestra, chorus and soloists) based on the Bible verses, completed in 1879 and considered to be his most important work. In 1911 the first unabridged professional rendition of the oratorio was performed at the Colonne concerts. In March 1912, d'Indy conducted excerpts of the piece at the Salle Gaveau.[66] Denis probably attended at least one of these occasions, and the work is alluded to in 'Le Drame Lyrique' panel in *L'Histoire de la musique*.[67] D'Indy extensively analysed the 'true musical epic poem' in *Cours,* illuminating the verses' significance for such a religious composer.[68] Posthumous appreciation of Franck's *Béatitudes* during the War was widespread, as claimed by the novelist Constance Maud, who described a 1917 performance at Notre-Dame as 'falling like healing rain' on the mourning crowds.[69]

The artist's comparison of Franck's *Béatitudes* with 'the mysteries of the art of the fifteenth century' might be elucidated by Debussy's comments on the work: '…the art of Franck serves the music, barely demanding glory for the composer … This homage responds to the idea of *sacrifice* [my italics] which evokes the

[65] 'Parsifal, Les Béatitudes et Sagesse … ont fait naître un état d'esprit propice à l'art chrétien … l'influence de cette musique et de cette littérature devrait donner des effets analogues à ceux que produisirent les mystères sur l'art du XVe siècle'. Denis, 'Tendances actuelles de l'Art chrétien', *La vie et les arts liturgiques*, 2/13 (March 1914), p. 26.
[66] See Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy and his World*, p. 174.
[67] Barruel, *1913: Théâtre des Champs-Élysées*, p. 82.
[68] 'véritable poème épique musicale'. D'Indy, *Cours,* vol. III, p. 303.
[69] Constance Maud, *Sparks among the stubble* (London, 1924), p. 126.

grandeur of the man.'[70] This vague notion that Franck's music was somehow stripped of 'personality' in its conformation to enduring laws of composition accorded with d'Indy's own appreciation of the composer, discussed in Chapter 3. It might also be understood in theological terms: as Denis wrote, 'Let us avoid idolatry, that is to say the cult of ourselves, the cult of the artist.'[71] A certain paradox (hinted at by Debussy) can be traced in the fact that Franck *as a man* was, in fact, idolized for the very fact that his music was deemed to be the very model of humility.

The verses of the Beatitudes retain power because of their repetitive, memorable nature. This repetition is central to the practice of ritual devotion, providing also an appropriate foundation for musical composition. Within each of Franck's eight musical segments, the voice of Jesus is interwoven with that of the 'Celestial Chorus', which offers a commentary on each virtue. The symmetrical dramatic structure and melodic unity generated by a repeated motif associated with the baritone role of Jesus indicates the composer's commitment to rigorous compositional logic. But there is much variety within this overall uniformity; the drama is achieved through the alternation of voices.[72] Similarly, there is a certain hieratic repetition to Denis's figures, but the significance of their gestural contrasts helps their legibility, particularly in the opposing large scenes of the mourners and the peacemakers. The

---

[70] ' … l'art de Franck … sert la musique sans presque lui demander de gloire ... cet hommage répondait a l'idée de sacrifice qu'évoque la grandeur de l'homme.' Debussy, 'Musique', *Gil Blas* (13 April 1903), p. 1.

[71] 'Évitons l'idolâtrie, c'est-à-dire le culte de nous-même, le culte de l'artiste.' Denis, 'Le symbolisme et l'art réligieux moderne', *Nouvelles théories,* p. 185.

[72] For a more detailed analysis see Howard Smither, *A History of the Oratorio,* vol. IV (Chapel Hill and London, 2000), pp. 573-584.

theatricality of the mourners' prayerful gestures could be understood in terms of the Warburgian 'pathos formula', while the raised arms of the peacemakers are directly drawn from the formalized gestures of the Mass.[73] The purpose of both forms of gesture remind one of da Vinci's declaration: 'The elements of painted scenes must move those who look at them to experience the same emotions as those represented in the story, that is to feel terror, fear, fright or pain, grief and lamentation'.[74]

Da Vinci's understanding of the capacity for affective transmission from painting to viewer is commensurate with notions of 'empathy' (or *Einfühlung* – literally, 'feeling into'), a concept that has received much scholarly attention in recent decades.[75] Our social and moral nature relies to a great extent on our capacity for empathy: a 'sense of being emotionally and cognitively "in tune with" another person'.[76] Through powerfully gestural art, such as Denis's Beatitudes, the believer is prompted to imaginatively inhabit a particular emotional state. When identities are attached to these figures (through Denis's careful labelling), the bond of empathy potentially becomes all the more powerful.[77] As a whole the Beatitudes remind the believer that spiritual fulfilment and happiness are available for all humankind; in other words, the verses are a profound example for the faithful of God's empathy for his people.

---

[73] For an interesting discussion of 'pathos formulae' see Nigel Spivey, *Enduring Creation: Art, Pain, and Fortitude* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), pp. 112-36.
[74] Quoted in Ernst Gombrich, *Means and Ends: Reflections on the History of Fresco Painting* (London, 1976), p. 13.
[75] For an account of the notion of empathy see Susan Lanzoni, *Empathy: A History* (New Haven, CT and London, 2018).
[76] Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2016), p. 152.
[77] For a relevant discussion of empathy and religious ritual see Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2011).

In having empathy for those sufferers represented in the Beatitudes, the compassionate viewer, according to a believer, moves closer to a state of grace.

Common to an early Franciscan understanding of the first Beatitude ('Blessed are the poor in spirit') was the belief that it indicated acceptance of physical poverty.[78] In his frequent proclamations about the need for a modern religious painter to grasp the 'religious sentiment' of the *primitif*, Denis sought to align himself with the modesty associated with Saint Francis, as discussed in Chapter 2.[79] To be a Franciscan was to adopt a servile mode of being in the world; to be a religious painter, according to Denis, was to do likewise. While it does seem that the artist was under some financial pressure during the early years of the chapel's construction, this perhaps only served to enforce his sense of identity as an apostle of humility. How might we understand the chapel's interior to give expression to this theological position?

Denis relied on the services of the architect Auguste Perret (designer of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées) for the chapel's re-design. Despite widely differing views (Perret himself was an agnostic), the two shared a comparable aesthetic outlook. Just as Denis rejected virtuosity and the search for the illusionistic rendering of nature, so Perret purged his designs of ornament and gratuitous historical references, preferring the purity associated with ancient Greek temples.[80] Perret oversaw the placing of the pulpit, the wood panelling

[78] Quoted in Boxall, *Matthew through the centuries,* p. 114.
[79] Denis, 'Les nouvelles directions', *Nouvelles Théories,* p. 236.
[80] See Jean-Louis Cohen, Joseph Abram and Guy Lambert (eds), *Encyclopédie Perret* (Paris, 2022), p. 271.

and the liturgical furniture.[81] His plan to use wooden panels for the lower half of the chapel's stone walls was in keeping with Denis's overall vision of simple homogeneity and cleanliness of lines and materials. Perret appreciated wooden constructions as a direct link to the earliest forms of architectural skeletons: 'In the beginning, there is no architecture other than a frame in wood.'[82] The visibility of the wood, particularly in combination with the relative nakedness of the stone above it, evinces a kind of material truth to construction (*verité constructive*). It also serves, perhaps, to enhance the distinction between worldly and heavenly space. The connotations of wood as a material, its implications of earthliness, humility and, of course, its use for the crucifix, made the material a particularly apt choice. 'Why should the trim of the altar, the door of the tabernacle be fake, gilded with powdered bronze, or falsely Gothic? Why not be content with poor candelabras made of real wood …?', Denis questioned in 1919, suggesting that he was already considering at this point the individual elements of the chapel's interior.[83]

The painter's comment, quoted earlier, about the chapel 'offering him its walls' comes to mind in a consideration of his Beatitudes. Their restrained colour does not detract from the wall surface – they adorn, rather than obscure, the surface. Puvis de Chavannes was said to have exclaimed 'If [the painter]

---

[81] https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k63659200/f141.image.r=DenisPaul Jamot, *A. G. Perret et l'architecture du béton armé* (Paris, 1927), p. 61.

[82] Cited by Roberto Gargiani, *Auguste Perret 1874–1954: Teoria e opere* (Milan, 1993), p.75.

[83] 'Pourquoi la garniture de l'autel, la porte du tabernacle seraient-elles en toc, dorées avec du bronze en poudre, ou faussement gothique ? Pourquoi ne pas se contenter de pauvres candélabres en vrai bois …?' Denis 'Les nouvelles directions de l'art Chrétien', *Nouvelles Théories*, p. 214.

doesn't care about the wall … the wall will throw him up!'[84] This sentiment was echoed by Denis, when documenting the 'pleasure' of 'the life of the scaffold: … the exciting struggle with the material: the wall, the colour, the optical material.'[85] One might connect his respect for architectural surface with the ideals of the Nabis ('Walls, walls…to decorate!'), as well as with the fresco tradition with which Denis grew familiar during his time in Italy.[86] Indeed, the austerity of the blue palette of the Beatitudes seems to have been inspired directly by that experience. He noted in his *Journal*: 'Remember, in Sant'Andrea [della Fratte, in Rome] and elsewhere, the gold inscriptions on a dull blue background … For the chapel of the Priory.'[87] Denis experimented with a fresco process using a novel industrial paint known as Stic-B. According to Stahl, who has extensively analysed his method, Denis was one of the first artists to use this matte paint, which enjoyed brief popularity after the First World War.[88] Stic-B was initially used as wall paint for the coating of public and domestic spaces. Its industrial origins seem particularly appropriate for their usage in Denis's chapel. As a medium developed for functionality, rather than for its artistic value, it bore, arguably, a connotation of modest labour akin to the Franciscan ideal. Denis's decision to paint the figures in blue monochrome dematerializes the bodies, stripped as they are of naturalistic colour. We are led

---

[84] 'S'il se f…de la muraille … la muraille le vomira!'. Quoted in M. Vachon, *Puvis de Chavannes* (Paris, 1895), p. 115.

[85] 'la vie de l'échafaudage: … la lutte passionnante contre la matière: – le mur, la couleur, la matière optique'. Denis, *Charmes et leçons d'Italie*, p. 114.

[86] 'Des murs, des murs ... à décorer!' Quoted by Jan Verkade in *Le tourment de Dieu* (Paris, 1926), p. 94.

[87] 'Se rappeler, a Sant'Andrea et ailleurs, les inscriptions or sur fond bleu terne, qui accord si bein avec le ton de pierre des grisailles. Pour la chapelle du Prieuré.' Denis, *Journal III*, 16 March 1928, p. 91.

[88] Fabienne Stahl, 'Maurice Denis (1870-1943) et le Stic B', *Histoire de l'art*, 58 (2006), pp. 93-103.

to treat them as phantom presences, as a spectral parade of figures from centuries past, all influential in the shaping of the Catholic intellectual tradition. In the chapel interior, '[p]ast and present fold in upon each other'.[89] Recent memories of war and death elicited by the iconography were alleviated by the reassuring reminder of the richness of the Catholic tradition.

La Légende de Saint-Christophe: an 'opera of ideas'[90]

The constituent elements of Denis's chapel interior function as an ensemble to instil an awareness of the embodied and communal aspect of worship. Denis's set designs for d'Indy's three-act opera *La Légende de Saint-Christophe* can be understood in similar terms: as tableaux that assist with the projection of d'Indy's vision of social cohesion through religion. D'Indy argued that the very purpose of composing an opera or music drama was the spiritual edification of the public. *Saint-Christophe,* his final opera, was, in the words of the d'Indy scholar Andrew Thomson, 'a work of lofty philosophical pretentions, being no less than his profession of faith in the realm of thought, as well as art.'[91]

Adapted from the Saint's story as told in Jacques de Voragine's 13th century hagiographic collection *La Légende dorée,* d'Indy's libretto (which he wrote himself) is also a powerful statement of nationalism, and so modified as to incorporate the composer's anti-Semitic and xenophobic views. European opera had become a powerful cultural force during the nineteenth century for

---

[89] I borrow this phrase from Christopher Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford, 2005), p. 12.

[90] Jane Fulcher, 'The effect of a bomb in the hall: The French "opera of ideas" and its cultural role in the 1920s' in V. Johnson, J.F. Fulcher and T. Ertman (eds), *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 119.

[91] Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy and his World,* p. 183.

the expression of nationalism, with Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* and Verdi's *Nabucco* among the most well-known examples. In France, the tradition of 'grand opera' (defined as a work with 'an aesthetic of monumentality achieved through the allotment of considerable weight – scenic, dramaturgical, musical – to the public and political side of the plot') flourished as a means of establishing cultural hegemony.[92] Works such as Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* (1849) or Massenet's *Le Cid* (1885) achieved immense popularity. Towards the end of the century, a certain 'defensive posture' towards foreign operatic influence took hold, particularly in relation to the operas of Wagner, as discussed in the previous chapter.[93] As noted there, D'Indy was among the most vociferous in his defence of a French operatic tradition, a stance which was not inconsistent with his appreciation of Wagner's 'music dramas'. *La Légende* was to be his *magnum opus.* For it to be a success, he required an artistic collaborator with a firm attachment to the consolidation of national tradition.

However, the suggestion of Denis as collaborator originally came not from d'Indy, but from another mutual friend, Carlos de Castéra (brother of the composer Réné).[94] Clearly, Castéra was sensitive to an affinity between d'Indy's attempt at conjuring an epic drama that was both timeless and distinctly *mediévaliste*, and Denis's own endeavours to recapture for a modern age the spirit of the *primitifs* in his painting. But it was the Paris Opera's

---

[92] Huebner, 'After 1850 at the Paris Opéra: institution and repertory', in D. Charlton (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 298.
[93] Christophe Charle, 'Opera in France, 1870 – 1914: Between nationalism and foreign imports', trans. J. Boitin, in Johnson et al. (eds), *Opera and Society,* p. 244.
[94] Denis, *Journal II,* May 1912, p. 144.

director Jacques Rouché who officially commissioned the painter.[95] The lack of scholarship on Denis's theatrical work might suggest that he was not actively interested in theatrical set designs. Yet correspondence between him and Rouché suggests mutual openness to potential theatrical collaborations. In 1911, Denis accepted 'in principle' to design the sets for a performance of Rameau's *La Guirlande,* having seen a performance given by Charles Bordes at the Schola some years previously.[96] Other projects mooted included Monteverdi's *L'Orféo* and Molière's comedy-ballet *Le Sicilien* (with music by Lully).[97] Why Denis did not end up with these commissions himself is unknown, but later letters to Rouché indicate his regret at being too preoccupied with other projects to take up certain suggestions.[98]

By the time of the *Saint-Christophe* rehearsals, Rouché was confiding in Denis his exasperation with d'Indy's stubbornness and poorly executed vision.[99] But d'Indy's ultimate satisfaction with Denis's designs is suggested by his keeping the artist's maquettes for decades after the performances in his private study.[100] As well as a stage curtain, Denis created eight tableaux for the three scenes in each act (except for Act II, scene I, which did not require a change of set). The most substantial extant material sources for Denis's set designs are the

---

[95] Rouché, letter to Denis (22 January 1914). MMD, [Ms 9687]. Rouché had taken over the Opéra's management in 1913.
[96] Denis, letter to Rouché (11 April 1911). BnF: Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, L.A.S Denis, (Maurice), 25.
[97] Ibid. (8 August 1910). BnF L.A.S Denis, (Maurice), 25.
[98] Ibid. (4 May 1911). BnF L.A.S, Denis, (Maurice), 22.
[99] Rouché, letter to Denis (24 May 1920). MMD [Ms 9695].
[100] According to Léon Vallas, 'Le peintre religieux et le maître de 'Pelléas', *Le Présent* (22 November 1943), n.p.

preparatory models housed in the BnF, which we can rely on to provide a fairly accurate indication of the three-dimensional stage.[101]

Unlike grand opera, which generally eschewed myths and legends, d'Indy's work evoked the tradition of the medieval 'mystery play', a genre that had received renewed attention from Denis's friend Henri Ghéon.[102] The mystery play (or more specifically the 'miracle play', as those works which dramatized the lives of the saints were generally called) was the most popular form of theatrical entertainment in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. '[C]ommunity markers of the Roman Catholic faith', the mystery play as a socio-cultural phenomenon, as well as a formal model, had the function of reinforcing the religious identity of a community.[103] For d'Indy, the staging of the Saint Christopher story was less about familiarizing the audience with the narrative, and more about situating it as a dramatically realized story about the human condition that could inform one's understanding of contemporaneous political circumstances. Fulcher has referred to d'Indy's opera as an 'opera of ideas', insofar as it served a didactic purpose aligned with d'Indy's broader cultural ambitions.[104] D'Indy chose the story as a vehicle of universal moral principles in the idiom of Christianity. But the narrative also offered him the opportunity to express his abhorrence for all that he deemed undesirable about contemporary France.

---

[101] The designs were subsequently painted and erected on the stage by Emile Bertin.
[102] According to Léon Vallas, *Vincent d'Indy*, vol. II (Paris, 1950), p. 327.
[103] Margaret Rogerson, 'Medieval Mystery Plays in the Modern World: A Question of Relevance?', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 43 (2013), p. 343.
[104] Fulcher, 'Vincent d'Indy's "Drame Anti-Juif"'.

The legend tells the story of Auferus the giant from Canaan, whose sole aim is to serve the most powerful ruler in the world. D'Indy's wish to impart nationalist significance to the legend led him to specify that the action should take place not in Canaan but in the mountains of the Cévennes in southern France (his birthplace). He was entirely reliant on Denis to convey this to the audience through the painted topography. In Act I scene I, Auferus first serves the Queen of Delight **[Figure 156]** but is persuaded by the King of Gold in scene II, that gold is more powerful than pleasure **[Figure 157]**. Scene III introduces Auferus's third master, the Prince of Evil.[105] The Prince, who travels in this scene to the mountains with Auferus, proves to the giant that he is more powerful still than the Queen of Delight and the King of Gold **[Figure 158]**. But Auferus realizes that even the Prince fears the King of Heaven – his first intimation of the truly Divine unfolds musically in scene III, as a children's choir chants 'Oh Sainte Croix, our one hope' to a Gregorian chant melody. 'What is this song so different from the others?' wonders Auferus, struck by its stillness. Act II opens with a long orchestral prologue entitled 'La quête du Dieu', in which we are told of Auferus's search for this mysterious all-powerful Heavenly Being. This prologue runs into Act II scene I, with the stage for both being masked by Denis's curtain, in front of which stand the singers reciting the saga **[Figure 159]**. Eventually, in Act II scene II, Auferus returns to the countryside of his homeland **[Figure 160]**, where he meets a hermit who suggests he uses his size and strength to help transport people across a dangerous torrent. Scene III delivers the crux of the narrative: the miracle of

[105] His presence is prefigured at the end of scene II, with the head of a goat leering through the palace window [Figure 157].

Auferus's conversion **[Figure 161]**. The giant carries a small child across the river, who reveals himself to be Christ, and subsequently baptizes Auferus, giving him the name Christopher ('carrier of Christ'). Act III scene I follows the machinations of the King of Gold and the Prince of Evil, which take place in the Winter Palace of the Grand Judge **[Figure 162]**. They sentence Christopher to death for proclaiming the power of Christ, but try to tempt him to sin before killing him. The Queen of Delight is sent to the giant while he languishes in prison in an attempt to seduce him (Act III scene II).[106] But she is overcome by his piety and converts to Christianity herself. The final scene (Act III scene III) shows Christopher's martyrdom in front of amassed crowds, ending with the newly converted Queen's supplications: 'Saint Christopher, pray for us!' **[Figure 163]**

Denis's designs were subject in part to the demands of d'Indy, but also to those of Rouché. Rouché's role not only as artistic director, but as, essentially, a senior civil servant, meant that he was subject to particular stipulations.[107] These conditions placed emphasis on the cultural 'exceptionalism' of the state-funded Opéra, and specified that Rouché must host seventeen new works during his tenure, at least fourteen of which were to be by French composers.[108] Given recent anti-Germanic feeling and the trauma of the First World War, it might seem an odd choice for Rouché to programme *Saint-Christophe*, a work by a Wagner-inspired, politically divisive composer (not to mention the

[106] The maquette for this scene no longer exists. Extant preparatory studies for the set provide a rough indication that Denis envisaged a dark brick-walled interior.
[107] For more details see Louis K. Epstein, 'Toward a Theory of Patronage: Funding for Music Composition in France 1918-1939' (Ph.D thesis, Harvard University, 2013), pp. 108-124.
[108] See Michel Noiray and Solveig Serre (eds), *Repertoire de L'Opera de Paris 1671-2009: Analyse et interprétation* (Paris, 2010).

extraordinary expense of this particular production). But as Huebner observes, d'Indy was, along with Debussy and Franck, the most performed French composer during the 1916-17 season.[109] His symphonic composition *Sinfonia brevis de Bello Gallico* (1916) was appreciated as a monument to French patriotism and nationalism during the war. Rouché's decision for the first post-war French opera première was in fact rather politically astute, since parties of the Right, a large proportion of whom were practising Catholics, had been particularly successful in the 1919 election.[110] No doubt Rouché also recognized the political advantages of employing Denis, an artist regarded by so many as the 'heir' to Puvis de Chavannes.

'Truly the [Paris] Opera has never given us a show of higher quality,' reads a review in *Le Ménestrel* on 18 June 1920.[111] According to reports, the public showed their appreciation at the premiere with an effusive standing ovation following the prelude of Act II.[112] The positive reception is explained in part by the appeal of d'Indy's invocation of the sustaining power of myth and tradition for those sections of the French audience who appreciated his religious and conservative propagandizing. But support for the opera came from all political positions: the Left as well as the Right, it seems, was eager to find contemporary lessons in the myths of the past. Writing for the left-wing weekly *Le Populaire,* the socialist poet Georges Pioch wrote: 'I do not expect those of M. d'Indy's worshippers who are parked in L'Action française to meditate to any

[109] Huebner, 'Vincent d'Indy et le 'drame sacré'', p. 243.
[110] See Fulcher, 'Vincent d'Indy's "Drame Anti-Juif"'.
[111] 'vraiment l'Opéra ne nous donna jamais spectacle de qualité plus haute.' A. Mariotte, 'La Semaine Musicale', *Le Ménestrel: journal de musique,* 82/25 (18 June 1920) pp. 252-3.
[112] G.L., 'A l'Opéra', *Comoedia,* 14/2730 (7 June 1920), p. 1.

degree on the *maximum socialism* … which abounds in La Légende.'[113] Pioch's observation underscores the fact that d'Indy's opprobrium towards bourgeois 'vulgarity' was shared, for very different reasons, by the radical left. Denis's highly symbolic staging, which served to underscore basic dichotomies between 'corrupting' materialism and the 'pure' and natural, contributed to the broad-spectrum appeal of the work. Understanding the immediate context – both physical and political — of the opera's performance at the Palais Garnier is essential in considering the implications of this dichotomy.

'*Trop d'or, trop d'or!*': the Palais Garnier

The performance theorist Richard Schechner has described the social ritual of attending the theatre as a '*nest*' for the theatrical event itself.[114] The cultural significance of the Palais Garnier, combined with anticipation of the work's premiere built up in the press, undoubtedly added cultural weight to the occasion.[115] Described as a 'new cathedral of bourgeois Paris', the Palais Garnier was a monument to Republican cultural prestige and wealth.[116] Its extravagant assimilation of Palladianism and Rococo embellishment was characteristic of the *Beaux-Arts* architectural style in the nineteenth century **[Figure 164]**. In accordance with the stylistic wishes of Napoleon III, no section of the interior or exterior was left without opulent, neo-baroque ornamentation.

---

[113]' je n'espère pas que ceux des laudateurs de M. d'Indy qui sont parques dans l'Action Française méditent utilement le *socialisme maximum*…qui abonde dans La Légende.' Georges Pioch, 'Au théâtre', *Le Populaire,* 2/775 (9 June 1920), p. 2. [Emphasis original]

[114] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York, 1988), p. 195.

[115] It had been the home of the Paris Opéra since 1875.

[116] Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman (eds), *Architecture, from Prehistory to Post-modernism* (New York, 1986), p. 449.

In his 1878 guide, *Le Nouvel Opéra de Paris*, the Opéra's architect Charles Garnier admitted hearing on many occasions the words 'Too much gold, too much gold!' in the Opéra's foyer.[117] The building's reception on opening in 1875 was decidedly mixed, with Debussy describing it disparagingly as a 'Turkish bathhouse' and commentators complaining that the six-tonne chandelier blocked the view of the stage from the gallery **[Figure 165]**.[118] There is undoubtedly a scopophilic aspect to Garnier's design; the decorative sumptuousness of the interior and exterior encourages the visitor to indulge in what was in fact an illusion of immense luxury (as there was little in the way of actual gold). In his 1908 survey *Musiciens d'Aujourd'hui*, Romain Rolland described the theatrical space as 'more than ever an ostentatious salon, a bit faded, where the audience is more interested in itself than in the performance'.[119] Today, tourists still flock to the Palais Garnier, not just to see performances but to immerse themselves in the interior Versailles-like surroundings, with their shimmering surfaces that mimic the phantasmagoric potential of an elaborate operatic performance.

In the late nineteenth century, the Opéra stage played host to a large number of 'grand opera' performances. These included works by d'Indy's nemesis, Massenet, such as *Le Cid* (the first opera to receive its premiere at the Opera, in 1875), which Huebner has described as occupying 'a space somewhere between a literary monument and a big-budget Hollywood film adaptation shot on

---

[117] 'Trop d'or, trop d'or!'. Charles Garnier, *Le nouvel Opéra de Paris,* vol. I (Paris, 1878), p. 37.
[118] Alan Riding, 'Arts Abroad; Opera House is Cleansed, and 1875 Paris Comes to Life,' *The New York Times* (June 21 2000) via www.nytimes.com. Accessed 6 September 2022.
[119] Rolland, *Musiciens d'aujourd'hui*, p. 225.

location.'[120] The aesthetic of monumentality was, as Huebner points out, closely entwined with the institutional conventions of opera itself. The 'frame' of the Opéra was worthy only of the most elaborate, expansive productions. D'Indy, as noted in Chapter 4, was forthright in his dismissive attitude towards the tradition of 'grand' opera which had its Parisian home at the Opera. *Saint-Christophe* was construed by his supporters as a reaction against 'exotic, anti-Christian and anti-national subjects played by scary semiquaver chemists.'[121] But, inevitably, the composer was reliant on the same state machinery and visual magnificence that underpinned the tradition of grand opera at the Garnier.

The most extravagantly ornamental scenery in Denis's sets is symbolically associated with corrupt characters. In the opening scene, the lustful Queen of Delight seduces Auferus. Denis's set **[Figure 156]** could be read as a perverse, exaggerated 'Venusberg' tableau, or as a mocking reference to the 'intoxicating' atmosphere invoked by the Ballets Russes.[122] D'Indy's libretto instructions demand 'aphrodisiac' fragrances and that all aspects should come together to 'exalt the senses'.[123] But Denis's design diverged markedly from d'Indy's instructions, which stated that the walls be covered in Byzantine mosaics tracing 'the deeds of the great courtesans'.[124] The Queen is instead part of a

---

[120] Huebner, 'After 1850 at the Paris Opera', p. 294.

[121] 'les sujets exotiques, antichrétiens et antinationaux musiqués par d'effrayantes chimistes de la double croche'. Jean Drault, 'Les Premières', *La libre parole* (10 June 1920), p. 2.

[122] 'Fulcher makes the analogy with the 'Venusberg' of Wagner's *Tannhauser.* Fulcher, *The Composer As Intellectual* (Oxford, 2005), p. 98.

[123] 'parfums aphrodisiaques… exalter les sens'. Typed manuscript of *La légende de Saint-Christophe* with annotations by Maurice Denis for the preparation of the décor." MMD [Ms 5768], p.3.

[124] 'les hauts faits des grands courtesans'. Ibid.

perverted Occidental world. Denis decided to paint the set a deep rich red, to add floral garlands and a gilt ceiling, at the base of which runs a frieze of writhing nude bodies, perhaps as part of a mythological theme. In the space of the theatre, this addition may have served as a critique of the academic style of painting associated with the likes of the Garnier's own frieze painters, such as Paul-Jacques-Aime Baudry who was largely responsible for the ceiling of the Grand Foyer. Only the rose bushes and the Queen's central divan remain from d'Indy's original inventory of stage props. Besides the obvious symbolic connotations of red as a colour of passion and lust, the effect of the set when combined with the gilt capitals and plinths suggest a reflection – or perhaps even continuation – of the space of the Garnier auditorium itself. The 'classical' frieze, golden ceiling, and two curtained archways seem to mirror the most prominent aspects associated with the experience of the Palais Garnier's interior. In this sense Denis's set functions in a manner akin to what Foucault termed the 'heterotopia': 'real sites that can be found within culture, [that] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.[125] The theatre theorist Joanne Tompkins has applied this notion directly to the world of the theatre, defining the term in this context as a 'location that, when apparent in a performance, reflects or comments on a site in the actual world, a relationship that may continue when audiences leave the theatre.'[126] The Queen's on-stage arena seems to call into question the moral character of certain cultural practices associated with the Opéra institution. The scene seems to be an

[125] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias'. Trans. from *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5 (1984), pp. 46-49, at https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf, p. 3.
[126] Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (London, 2014), p. 1.

implicit critique of the scopophilic gaze. Yet d'Indy relied also on that gaze for his audience's entertainment in the first scene, for which he also specified in the libretto that 'nude slaves' should serve the Queen on stage.[127]

One might make the same observation about the Palace of the King of Gold (Act 1 scene II, **[Figure 157]**) and the Winter Palace (Act III, scene I). Denis coated the dark walls of this latter set with a mass of white arabesques **[Figure 162]**. This additional decorative ambiance (which is not mentioned in d'Indy's libretto instructions) perhaps suggests the painter's belief in the 'sinful' nature of gratuitous artistic embellishment (an attitude shared also by the composer). The addition of a false purple proscenium with golden embellishment adds a further framing device. Its central medallion provides a visual echo of the gilt medallion embedded in the auditorium's 'external' proscenium. This link allows the stage space to function as a meta-theatrical space in itself. The setting up of a kind of *mise-en-abyme* (a term first appropriated by Denis's friend André Gide), emphasizes the artificiality of the internal world of the drama.[128] This device also functions as a way to train the eye onto the motif of Denis's central medallion design: a winged calf. In Christian iconography, this creature is usually associated with Saint Luke (the emblem was popular in the Middle Ages), and came to signify noble sacrifice. Its implication for this particular scene, in which the plotting of Saint Christopher's death takes place, is clear. Presumably, however, only those familiar with the visual conventions of religious art would have understood this particular signifier. Those audience

[127] MMD [Ms 5768], p. 3.
[128] Gide first uses the term in *Journal 1889-1939* (Paris, 1948), p. 41.

members might have registered the motif as anticipating the story's dénouement, and as a sort of meta-symbol for the entire narrative.

Denis's set for the King of Gold is perhaps the most arresting as a spectacle of opulence, and should be considered in the light of the opera's sinister ideological charge **[Figure 157]**. The composer's demonstrable anti-Semitism appears in the form of the King, whom d'Indy specified should be a 'small man' with 'frizzy hair and a hooked nose'.[129] A letter written to Pierre de Breville in 1903 in the very early stages of the opera's long gestation is particularly telling, twinning as it does a series of racist stereotypes about putative Jewish faults with an attack on named Jewish and political contemporaries:

> I have been working on the draft of my new anti-Jewish drama which I am very excited about … I will not make any current allusion … and that the characters will not be named [Alfred] Dreyfus, [Joseph] Reinach, or even [Emile] Combes... It would give too much honour to these disastrous louts, but I would like to show in this drama … the nauseating Judeo-Dreyfusian influence and its flourishing, with the flowers of Pride, Pleasure, Money, in conflict with the good flowers of Faith, Hope, Charity. All this is framed in a well-known legend, which lends itself very well to this adaptation.[130]

This letter, of course, was written during the ongoing furore surrounding the Dreyfus Affair.

---

[129] 'un petit homme…Il a les cheveux crépus et le nez busqué'. MMD [Ms 5768], p. 19.

[130] 'J'ai travaillé à l'ébauche de mon nouveau drame antijuif qui me passionne beaucoup … je n'y ferai aucune allusion actuelle et que les personnages ne se nommeront ni Dreyfus, ni Reinach, ni même Combes... Ce serait leur faire trop d'honneur à ces funestes goujats, mais je voudrais montrer dans ce drame … la nauséabonde influence judéo- dreyfusarde avec sa floraison, les fleurs Orgueil, Jouissance, Argent, en conflit avec les fleurs du bien, Foi, Espérance, Charité. Tout cela encadré dans une légende bien connue, mais qui se prête très bien à cette adaptation'. D'Indy, letter to Pierre Bréville (17 September 1920). Quoted in Vallas, *Vincent d'Indy*, vol. II, p. 327.

Eugen Weber once remarked that 'Anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century France was as French as croissants'. But by the time this opera was performed, in a post-war society whose chauvinistic impulsions were above all anti-German, public expressions of anti-Semitism had lessened.[131] D'Indy still harboured fanatical resentment towards Jewish involvement in the world of French opera, which he was to express in his essay *Richard Wagner et son influence sur l'art musical français* (1930). Here, he accused 'the Jew' of bolstering the commercialization of opera on account of his 'greed', thereby reducing the genre to a money-making enterprise.[132] D'Indy appeals to a cultural trope employed by Richard Wagner in his own caustic text *Judaism in Music* (1868), according to which the Jew is able only to 'imitate', rather than to create. According to d'Indy, all the perceived 'ills' of 19th century musical drama – including the appearance of the Operetta genre – could be blamed on Jewish composers such as Meyerbeer, Offenbach and Adolphe Adam. With this in mind, it seems that the King of Gold figure, whom he labels in the libretto simply as 'le Juif', could be understood as far more than just a shallow stereotype. For d'Indy, he was a symbol of much of what the composer found wrong with operatic culture. Denis, despite never being a vocal anti-Dreyfusard, was seemingly unfazed by d'Indy's use of an abhorrent caricatural Jewish stereotype for one of the opera's central characters.

A critic for the journal *La France* praised the 'beautiful simplicity' of Denis's scenes of nature, but considered the painter to have been 'troubled' by the

---

[131] Eugen Weber, *France, Fin-de-siècle* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), p. 130.
[132] Vincent d'Indy, *Richard Wagner et son influence sur l'art musical français* (Paris, 1930), p. 12.

challenge of the architectural scenes.[133] He singled out the set for the King of Gold's Palace for criticism, stating that it reminds one of the worst examples of 'fairground' theatre, with its poorly understood, naïve rendering **[Figure 157]**. Instead, he advises, the designer should have used blocks of glass to recreate the powerful, glittering illumination of gold. The critic, however, seems to have misunderstood Denis's intention with this particular design. Denis's rendering of the scene could be read as a symbolic realization of particular negative cultural associations bound up with anti-Semitic attitudes to which d'Indy openly subscribed.

The kind of elaborately constructed ornate architectural devices that Denis applied to the King's Palace was a characteristic feature of the extravagant dioramas found within the nineteenth century grand opera tradition that d'Indy associated with Jewish influence**.** In instructions laid out in the libretto, d'Indy requested walls hung with expensive paintings, alongside precious objects and 'some bad taste furniture'.[134] He also wished for huge bay windows to allow for extensive views onto the countryside. Denis, as we can see, significantly modified this visual framework. The prominent inclusion of a statue of a golden calf recalls the Israelites' idolatry as recounted in the Old Testament, and invokes iconographic traditions associated with that story. The calf is situated within a grand entrance hall dominated by teal, yellow-gold and cerulean blue, which, under electric lighting, come together to produce a brassy, greenish hue. While a few of d'Indy's desired ornaments were realized onstage, such as the subtly deformed marble sculptures at the foot of the stairs,

[133] 'une belle simplicité'. Guillot de Saix, 'Le Théâtre', *La France* (9 June 1920), p. 2.
[134] MMD [Ms 5768], p. 12

Denis's seems to have focused on the generation of a particular tonal quality.[135] He did not fulfil d'Indy's demand for landscape views through the windows. The elaborate framing of these windows draws our attention to the potentiality of a majestic view, but the thwarting of this potential engenders in the stage space a stifling, claustrophobic feeling. Ensconced in his oppressive palace of gold, the King has no regard (literally) for the natural world.

On the libretto Denis even scribbles down 'very shallow décor', and the maquette indicates just how shallow Denis's design was in comparison with the other sets.[136] The strong foreshortening necessitated by the stairs draws our eyes to the illusory quality of the flat canvas on the stage. As with the design for the Winter Palace, the addition of the blue proscenium arch at the front of the stage functions in an analogous way to a picture frame, placing the palace firmly in the realm of artifice. Perhaps the unapologetic flatness of Denis's architecturally-detailed design was a visual commentary on the impossibility of pictorial illusion on the stage (and indeed, on the canvas). And so Denis's design could be read as a *caricature of* over-stated opulence, and therefore as a critique of the practices of nineteenth-century grand opera sets, which themselves were associated in the mind of d'Indy with Jewish 'interference' on the operatic stage. Denis's disdain for the tyranny of naturalism, and d'Indy's contempt for the practices of grand opera which relied so heavily on naturalist visual formulas, are combined here. If we consider the humorous musical leitmotifs that d'Indy associates with the King in this scene – lively pizzicatos

[135] In scribbled annotations on the reverse of the manuscript, he notes 'Vases de Sèvres' for this scene. MMD [Ms 5768].
[136] 'décor très peu profond'. MMD [Ms 5768], p. 12.

in the strings and outbursts on muted horns– it is perhaps easier to imagine the target of this visual mockery. Indeed, Fulcher claims that in this scene, the composer is deliberately aping 'the squareness and monotony of rhythm that [d'Indy] associated with Meyerbeer.'[137]

The dramatic character of the Jew as a sort of 'stock villain', associated with greed and wealth accumulation dates back to the medieval mystery plays which the composer so admired. At least in medieval England, according to Stephen Spector, the mystery play contained some of the most vehemently anti-Jewish material to be found in the history of English literature.[138] Assigned to the Jew was all vice ('Pride, Pleasure, Money') that was foreign to the tenets of Christianity ('Faith, Hope, Charity'). Within the contemporary operatic tradition, the reduction of such a figure to this crude caricature perhaps served to undermine any serious political statement that d'Indy wished to make. The poet Pioch described the character as *guignolesque* ('puppet-like') in *Le Populaire*.[139] As Léon Vallas remarked in his extended commentary on the work, there was a 'vehement' satire within this 'vast artistic, moral, political, social and racial pamphlet.'[140] Here Vallas was perhaps also referring to a passage in Act I scene III, in which series of cortèges enter and exit the stage, each one standing for a social group that the composer found repugnant. The procession begins with the *Faux Penseurs,* who sing 'Down with the priests! Down with religion', and ending with the *Faux Artistes,* who intone 'No more rules, no

[137] Fulcher, 'Vincent d'Indy's 'Drame Anti-Juif'', p. 308.
[138] Stephen Spector, 'Anti-Semitism and the English Mystery Plays', *Comparative Drama* 13/1 (Spring 1979), p. 3.
[139] Pioch, 'Au théâtre', p.1.
[140] 'une véhémente satire, un vaste pamphlet artistique, musical, politique, social, racial.' Vallas, *Vincent d'Indy,* vol. II, n.p.

more studies, let's keep it small …let's keep it original!'' Marching between them are the *Faux savants,* who sing the praises of the 'volt, amp, hyposulphite, hydroxide, bichlorate, radium!'[141] The sudden intrusion of specific scientific references into an otherwise atemporal scene was surely intended for comic effect.

Denis's costume designs proposed clothing the King in a contemporary suit, perhaps intending to bring to mind the stereotypical Jewish banker dreamed up in anti-Semitic caricatures **[Figure 166a]**. He also allocated to the character's coterie a distinctly 'modern' typist (not mentioned in d'Indy's libretto) **[Figure 166b]**. The rich, fanciful designs for the other characters, which seem to be deliberately anti-historical in their diversity (as if plucked from the narrative account of opera's development in Denis's *L'Histoire de la musique*) throw these two characters into stark relief. The critic who referred to the King of Gold's set as an example of 'fairground' theatre arguably picked up on the intended effect: Denis's designs seem to accentuate the tendency of d'Indy's libretto towards farce. Such a result surely threatened to undermine the ideological profundity of d'Indy's work. Nevertheless, it does seem that the painter's response to this scene was affected by an atmosphere of reflexive anti-Semitism among his immediate peers. This scene, and the two interior scenes discussed above, are characterized by a 'warped' decorativeness that appears to be anathema to Denis's ideal of constructive, 'honest' decoration. As we shall see,

---

[141] 'A bas les prêtres! A bas toute religion!'; 'Plus de règles, plus d'études, faisons petit … faisons original! 'volt, ampere, hyposulfite, Hydroïde, bichlorate, Radium!'. MMD [Ms 5768], p. 20.

their effect is accentuated by the *synthetiste* approach that he takes to the three landscape sets, against which the moments of sacred revelation take place.

The sanctification of the operatic stage

Saint-Christophe was appreciated by critics as a quasi-sacramental event in itself. The music critic Louis Laloy proclaimed that d'Indy had built 'his cathedral. It has been inaugurated at the Opera.'[142] Thinking of how this work allegedly 'consecrated' the Paris Opéra's stage also reminds us of d'Indy's indebtedness to Richard Wagner, in particular to *Parsifal,* as discussed in Chapter 4. The German composer described *Parsifal* not as an 'opera', but as 'A Festival Play for the Consecration of the Stage'. This suggests his desire to sanctify the space of Bayreuth through performance.[143] It seems that the ritualistic and didactic function of d'Indy's modern 'mystery play' perhaps had the potential to serve a similar public ceremonial function.[144] Denis's sets were central to this endeavour: the fictive landscapes he created for the passages of spiritual drama within the story transfigure the stage space into symbolic realms. These realms are reliant for their evocative influence on a kind of 'synthetist' decorative ideal – in stark contrast to the ornamental excess of the designs discussed earlier, which are associated with nefarious characters.

Auferus's own moments of divine inspiration or revelation occur within landscapes that d'Indy described with great precision in the libretto. Denis

---

[142] 'd'Indy a édifié sa cathédrale. C'est à l'Opéra que nous l'avons inaugurée' Louis Laloy, 'La Légende de Saint Christophe', *Comoedia*, 14/2731 (8 June 1920), p. 1.
[143] See Ryan Minor, 'Wagner's Last Chorus: Consecrating Space and Spectatorship in "Parsifal"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 17/1 (March, 2005), p. 2.
[144] D'Indy described *Parsifal* as 'une veritable cathédrale Gothique' after a performance in 1882. Quoted in Yves Ferraton, *Vincent d'Indy, 1851-1931: dessins et aquarelles* (Langres, 2003), p. 51.

remained relatively obedient at least to the spirit of the composer's instructions. We have seen in Chapter 2 how Denis's commitment to the 'sanctification of nature' was comparable to the inspiration that the composer drew from the natural world. Presumably it made sense to both that 'nature' should provide an emblematic contrast to the ornamental opulence of the interior spaces inhabited by the opera's wicked characters. Denis, I argue, exploited the decorative idiom of his Synthetist experiments to great effect in these designs. This idiom was consonant with certain contemporary ideals promoted by the opera's director, Jacques Rouché.

Although Symbolist theatre productions were decidedly out of fashion by the second decade of the twentieth century, certain conventions associated with those productions were adopted by innovators such as Rouché. Denis was familiar with Jacques Rouché's text *L'art théâtral moderne* which set out the approaches developed during his tenure at the Théâtre des Arts (partly influenced by innovations that had been taking place in international theatre houses over the last few decades).[145] 'The staging of a play should neither distort nor over-decorate it, but only highlight its main lines and the character of its beauty', Rouché observed.[146] He suggested that this 'character' might be achieved through the elimination of overt naturalism. The designer, therefore, should think of his set not as a 'canvas destined to be displayed in a gallery,

[145] Rouché, *L'art théâtral moderne* (Paris, 1910). Denis congratulated Rouché on this publication in a letter dated 7 December 1910. BnF LAS Denis, (Maurice), 22.

[146] 'De même, la mise en scène d'une pièce ne doit ni la déformer, ni la parer à l'excès, mais seulement mettre en valeur ses lignes principales et le caractère propre de sa beauté.' Rouché, *L'art théâtral moderne,* p. 1.

but like a decorative work.'[147] It is no surprise that Rouché was therefore drawn to working with modern painters who had made a name for themselves as *artiste-decorateurs* such as Denis and Réné Piot.[148] We might consider Denis's affinity with a simplified decorative language to be particularly apt for stage design, which requires the sacrificing of detail to larger recognizable forms and masses that are legible to an audience from a distance. Denis's visual rhetoric transcends the mundanity of verisimilitude, placing emphasis instead on the affective forces that govern our relationship with the natural world: 'The ideal of art is to condense, to summarize in a small number of clear and concise forms the infinitely varied relationships that we perceive in nature'.[149] The three highly stylized 'Symbolist' rural realms of *Saint-Christophe,* the loci of sacred revelations, afford the painter the opportunity to exercise this principle, and to bring symbolic drama through decorative *déformation* to the landscape of the Cévennes.

The spiritual centre of the narrative — Act II scene III — in which Auferus becomes Saint Christopher, demonstrates this sensibility **[Figure 161]**. Denis set the action within a densely packed pine forest, in defiance of d'Indy's specifications in the libretto, which called for a desolate autumnal landscape.[150] Rather than evoking an atmosphere of barren bleakness, Denis composes a dense sylvan environment, in which the repetitive vertical trunks provide

---

[147] 'non comme l'agrandissement d'un tableau destiné à figurer dans une galerie, mais comme une œuvre décorative.' Ibid. p. 6.

[148] Paul Dukas's *La Péri* (discussed in Chapter 4), performed at Théâtre de Chatelet in 1912, had set designs by Piot.

[149] L'idéal de l'art, c'est de condenser, de résumer en un petit nombre de formes claires et concises les rapports infiniment variés que nous percevons dans la nature'. Denis, 'Aristide Maillol', *Théories,* p. 236.

[150] MMD [Ms 5768], p. 40.

visual balance to the flowing water **[Figure 161]**. An examination of the libretto from which Denis worked reveals a frenzy of inspiration for this scene, in the form of multiple pencil scribbles. (His copy is generally sparsely annotated.) Early sketches demonstrate his bold decorative conceit **[Figure 167]**. At the symbolic centre of action in this scene would have been the *sagesse* of youth (in the form of the Christ child). The decorative *gaucherie* of Denis's design might be said to be a visual analogue to the spiritual character of the scene, in keeping with Rouché's own insistence on complete harmony between 'character and scenery'.[151]

Denis's bold, Symbolist use of colour in these landscapes relies in part on the vibrancy generated by complementary tones (affirming Rouché's observation that 'Maurice Denis ha[s] taught us ... the value of the most delicate colour oppositions).'[152] Purple and yellow dominate Act I, scene III **[Figure 158]**, while Act II, scene II depends on the contrast of blue-green and orange **[Figure 160]**. The character of these colour combinations induces a sensation of being in a not-quite-earthly realm. The play of colours in the very final scene, in which the martyrdom of Saint Christopher is described by witnesses but not shown to the audience (in keeping with the tradition of Greek tragedy), is particularly salient **[Figure 163]**. Denis reduces the play of colour to three principal hues – yellow, violet and russet, not unlike the scheme of Act I, scene III **[Figure 158]**.[153] The tableau in the final scene is concerned more with colour

[151] Rouché, *L'art théâtral moderne*. p. 7.
[152] 'les Vuillard et les Maurice Denis nous ont enseigné … la valeur des oppositions de couleurs les plus délicates'. Ibid., p. 5.
[153] The colours are particularly reminiscent of his painting *Magnificat (de 'Silencio')* (1909) **[Figure 40]**.

combinations than with the realistic architectural details that d'Indy suggested in the libretto. Denis pushes these forms into the distance to allow the simple purple arch structures to dominate against the yellow sky. Relying on this powerful tonal interplay, in combination with decorative abstraction, these tableaux assert themselves as symbolic analogues to the allegory. There is no 'illusory' pretence of landscape or architecture, but rather an evocation of atmosphere.

Act I scene III, the most dramaturgically complex scene, provided Denis with his greatest challenge, and was the probable cause of Rouché's own frustration with d'Indy **[Figure 158]**. The composer's somewhat vague stage directions read as follows: 'Great clouds have risen over the plain … each cloud takes on the appearance of a cortege as it passes with or without order.'[154] Denis noted '*difficile*' in the margins of this passage, and a letter to d'Indy indicates the trouble that the pair had in effectively managing the busy manoeuvring of the groups on and off stage.[155] Following this phantasmagoric sequence, d'Indy set a second challenge: he desired the shadow of the Cross placed atop the cathedral painted on the backdrop to gradually extend, eventually engulfing the Prince of Evil who huddles against the rock to the side of the stage. How exactly this effect was achieved in the final production is not clear, but Denis was committed to at least attempting a convincing materialization of this vision**.**[156] The elaborate mechanisms at play in this scene

---

[154] 'De grands nuages se sont élévés sur la plaine … chaque nuage prend en passant l'aspect d'un cortège qui défile avec ou sans ordre'. MMD [Ms 5768], p. 20.

[155] Denis, letter to d'Indy, (30 April, year omitted). Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Denis family archives.

[156] See Ibid.

were, arguably, inconsistent with both Denis's and Rouché's desire for a union between drama and spectator reliant on the enchantment that came with modestly 'clothing' the production to fit its character. '[The staging] must not waste the attention of the public by the search, always vain, for anecdotal effects', wrote Rouché.[157]

Much of the opera's story relies on narration rather than dramatic action, affording Denis the opportunity to foster a more stable 'spiritual' environment. The opera opens with the narrator (labelled 'historian') telling the back story of Auferus. Behind him stand a group of choristers dressed in white, who provide a commentary on the historian's announcement that Auferus will serve the Queen of Delight: 'Poor Auferus, what an error is his … !'[158] As the chorus, the choir here act in accordance with the conventions of Greek drama. This recalls Wagner's project of reviving the spirit of Greek drama in his operas (see Chapter 4). The music critic Camille Bellaigue described Wagner's *Parsifal* as a 'miracle of theatrical art that is not only religious but also liturgical.'[159] The same reaction was prompted by *Saint-Christophe*: the chorus might well have put the audience in mind of a church choir, lending a liturgical tone to the drama. Moreover, d'Indy's use of Gregorian chant is more prominent in *Saint-Christophe* than in any previous work. Benedikt Lessmann has identified seven chant excerpts that form *leitmotifs* throughout the work: their original liturgical

[157] 'll ne faut point qu'elle gaspille l'attention du public par la recherche, toujours vaine, d'effets anecdotiques'. Rouché, *L'art théâtral moderne,* p.4.
[158] 'Pauvre Auferus, quelle erreur est la tienne …!' MMD [Ms 5768], p. 2-3.
[159] 'le miracle de l'art non seulement religieux, mais liturgique au théâtre'. Camille Bellaigue, 'La musique d'église au théâtre', *Revue des deux mondes,* 64/5 (1 September 1904), p. 224.

function is respected and adapted to the dramatic context.[160] For example, in the prologue to Act 1, scene III (which prefaces the revelation of the Holy Cross), the words sung by the infant choir 'Oh holy Cross, which carries the sanctity of the world…'[161] are set to *Vexilla regis prodeunt.* This chant is sung traditionally at services venerating the Holy Cross on Good Friday, and is the one to which Denis alludes in his decoration for the chapel of the Collège Sainte-Croix in Le Vésinet (discussed in the Introduction).

D'Indy's frequent use of off-stage voices throughout the drama suggests an alternative aural realm of the opera, hinting at a celestial sphere. The invisibility of this decorporealized sound evokes that of the cantor in a Catholic service. One might draw an analogy with the religious processions depicted in works such as Denis's *Mystère de Pâcques,* or 'L'Oratorio' of *L'Éternel Été:* these bodies 'haunt' the canvas as possible allusions to a 'beyond'. It is the privilege of the artist, Denis would argue, to offer such a spiritual intimation. The off-stage chorus is, of course, a dramaturgical technique as old as Greek tragedy, but the specific use of chant here gives it a particularly powerful spiritual resonance. In Act I, scene III, a children's choir is heard off stage '*au loin'* **[Figure 158]**. These infant voices prefigure the voice of the Christ child himself in Act II, Scene III. The angelic choir is heard offstage once more in Act II scene II, quoting an adaptation of Luke 9.23.[162] Their position offstage matters here; it puts us in the place of Saint Christopher, who himself strains to hear the quiet

[160] Benedikt Lessmann, 'Appropriations of Gregorian Chant in *Fin-de-siècle* French Opera: *Couleur locale* – Message-Opera – Allusion?' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 145/1 (2020), p. 56.
[161] 'O sainte Croix qui porte le Salut du monde'. MMD [Ms 5768], p. 18.
[162] Ibid. p. 39.

promptings of chant. We, the audience, are witnessing – through music – the stirrings of divine revelation. By manipulation of the drama's aural dimensions d'Indy introduces the sense of spirituality to transform the secular space. This transfiguration of space through sound makes sense of the frequency of contemporaneous references to the work as a musical 'cathedral.'[163] The acoustic effects of the offstage choir might have brought to mind the tradition of processionals in cathedral spaces, particularly in the opera's final scene, in which the 'earthly' choir singing 'Saint Christopher, pray for us!' is partnered with the off-stage 'heavenly' choir singing 'Glory to God!' [164] The earthly voices stand for the congregation of the faithful, while the heavenly choir plays the part of the church choir, in an antiphonal exchange reminiscent of sections of the Catholic mass.

Denis's set designs were instrumental in managing the audience's spatial awareness within this 'cathedral of sound'. The 'sound event' of the Pope's prophesy in Act II's prologue is made all the more meaningful by the dramaturgical prominence of Denis's stage curtain **[Figure 159]**.[165] Its motif also appeared on the posters and printed invitations for the opera, thereby acting as the opera's principal visual identity. D'Indy's decision to include Prologues before each act, and the lengthy symphonic poem at the beginning of Act II, maximizes the visual presence of the curtain throughout the drama. Although d'Indy had initially requested simply a curtain in a dark colour, Denis

[163] For example, Pioch, 'Au théâtre', p. 2. See also Vallas *Vincent d'Indy,* vol. II, n.p.. He writes : 'Ce vaste édifice artistique … on doit la comparer aux cathédrales de pierre du moyen âge'.

[164] 'Saint-Christophe, priez pour nous!'.... 'Gloire à Dieu!'. MMD [Ms 5768], p. 76.

[165] I borrow the phrase 'sound event' from Andrew Albin, 'Aural Space, Sonorous Presence, and the Performance of Christian Community in the Chester Shepherds Play', *Early Theatre*, 16/2 (2013), p. 35.

designed an imposing scene, which depicts the decisive moment of Saint Christopher's conversion to Christianity. The haloed Saint – bent under the weight of the Christ Child holding up a globe (a symbol of the world) – grips his staff as he makes his way through the torrent. In an article on poster designs published shortly after the opera's premiere, Denis remarked upon the importance of finding 'an expressive silhouette, a symbol … which, by the sole power of its forms and colours, imposes itself on the crowd...'[166] This colossal, visually commanding curtain, and its accompanying poster design (which illustrates the article quoted), functions quite literally as a symbol of the opera's spiritual core **[Figure 168a and b]**. Denis continues in the article: '…the poster is an ensign, an emblem … *In hoc signo vinces* [In this sign thou shalt conquer]. This formula, which served the triumph of Christianity, should remind us that … forms are the signs of ideas'.[167] His allusion to Christianity here implies an understanding of the character of the votive image: with its systematized vocabulary of gestures and non-naturalistic, formalized hierarchism: the icon has an expressive power suitable for the immediate commanding of attention.

For Denis, Byzantine and medieval iconography was the obvious resource for his 'expressive silhouette'. The stage curtain image conforms closely to the iconographical tradition associated with Saint Christopher, an example of which was reproduced on the first edition of the piano score for the opera

[166] 'trouver une silhouette expressive, un symbole…qui par le seul pouvoir de ses formes et des couleurs, s'impose à l'attention des foules'. Denis, 'Réponse à l'enquête sur «l'art de l'affiche»', *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique,* 1/16 (15 July 1920), p. 445.

[167] 'Mais l'affiche est un drapeau, un emblème, un signe. *In hoc signo vinces.* Cette formule qui a servi le triomphe du christianisme doit nous rappeler que l'art est un langage, et que les formes sont les signes des idées'. Ibid, p. 446.

[Figure 169].[168] The principal distinguishing factor in Denis's version is his depiction of pine forests in the distance, and a staff made of pine (rather than the more usual palm tree). This may have been an iconographic nod to d'Indy's desire to set the story in his native Cévennes region, rather than Canaan. Like Denis, d'Indy could make use of these depictions as reminders of the contemplative attitude of worshippers, who revered icons as a means of close communion with the spiritual. Just as chant melody constituted, in his mind, a form of 'prayer', so these icons, in their encapsulation of the single most important moment in the Saint Christopher myth, might serve as vehicles of spiritual contemplation.

Denis's statuesque Saint Christopher imposes itself on the audience, who, in the moment of looking, suspends its appreciation of the stage curtain's role as marking the ontological boundary between the realm of reality and that of art. Denis's careful attention to the construction of a *trompe l'oeil* 'architectural' setting 'within' the curtain design itself (note the elaborate marble-esque pillars on each side of the saint), creates an 'illusion' of architectural solidity. If the purpose of the set designs themselves is to evoke a vista or environment through the 'illusion' of a receding space, the purpose of this curtain is to negate the possibility of such spaces, conjuring instead a new frontier that draws performer and audience closer.

We see this mechanism in the prologue to Act III, during which the chorus interrupts the narration of the historian with sung lines from the Mass ('Glory

---

[168] This illustration was known as the Buxheim Saint Christopher (1423). D'Indy, *La Légende de Saint-Christophe* Op. 67 (Paris, 1918). See Georges Servières, 'La légende de saint Christophe dans l'art', *Gazette des beaux-arts,* 3/63 (1921), pp. 23-40.

to God and on earth peace to people of good will' (Luke 2:14)).[169] The stage directions instruct the chorus to surround the historian. At this point, the audience becomes mutually present with the singers in an atmosphere reminiscent of a church environment. The chorus becomes, in this moment, a church choir, and the audience a congregation. Alternatively, we might think of this interaction, between orator and chorus, in terms of an oratorio: a musical genre that bridges the gap between dramatic (operatic) form and liturgical music. D'Indy held this musical form in the highest regard, discussing it at length in *Cours* (volume III), and identifying Franck's *Béatitudes* as a masterful example of its potential.[170] As spiritual entertainment *not* destined to be performed in an ecclesiastical environment, the oratorio as a genre held an analogous function to *Saint-Christophe* itself.

Denis's designs for d'Indy's *La Légende de Saint-Christophe* are paradigmatic of the capacity for set design to promote the audience's self-awareness of its own presence in the space. Certain scenes could be understood as critiques of the space of the opera's performance, and its concomitant cultural connotations. Others helped to establish the spiritual character that the composer desired. The interior of Denis's private chapel in the grounds of 'Le Prieuré' shows how the ritual act of the Mass could be shaped by and co-ordinated with the decorative elements of the space. This chapter has considered the ways in which Denis demonstrated sensitivity to the orchestrating of decorative environments appropriate to both ecclesiastical and theatrical spaces. In so

[169] MMD [Ms 5768], p. 47.
[170] See D'Indy, *Cours*, vol. III, p. 302.

doing, it has revealed their significance as symbolic spaces directed towards the cultivation of intersubjective unity.

CONCLUSION

The decorative, the alliance and interplay between music and the visual arts, and the sustaining of cultural tradition: these are not three discrete matters that happen all to be relevant to the work of Maurice Denis. As this thesis has shown, consideration of their interdependence helps us to grasp the essential nature of his artistic character. This project, however, is not intended simply to supplement the scant serious Anglophone scholarship on the artist himself. It has demonstrated how Denis's decorative works might be understood to embody an important, but now rather marginalized, strand of French thought at the turn of the century.

The consideration of contemporaneous musicians and their work has been central to this intention. A detailed factual account (as begun by Grivel), of the myriad social interactions between the painter and composers or performers illustrates Denis's immersion in France's musical culture. Reflection on the 'musical' qualities inherent in Denis's work itself enriches interdisciplinary study in academic fields that only rarely engage with each other in any detail. With its particular consideration of the painter's association with d'Indy and his followers, this thesis has acknowledged the importance of both approaches. In the case of Denis, whose work set an example for others outside the visual arts, it is particularly important for the comprehension of his work to be unrestrained by disciplinary boundaries.

Responding to a solo exhibition of Denis's work at the Union centrale des arts décoratifs in 1924, a critic for the journal *L'Art et les artistes* observed:

'Instead of the frou-frou of tutus, the ear will hear only the rustle of angels' wings and, instead of vulgar café-concert songs, the sweet music of organs and the motets of Palestrina'.[1] Though hyperbolic, this remark hints at a particularly evocative quality of Denis's work – a kind of sensory expression that derives from the appropriateness of the interplay of forms and colours to the subject matter. Such musical analogies have appeared throughout the thesis. Rather than dismiss them as mere rhetorical exuberance, I have considered them as a product of the serious 'interdisciplinary' engagement that characterized Denis's milieu, and therefore as being of significant critical value.

This thesis has demonstrated how Denis the *néo-traditionniste* was acutely attuned to contemporary cultural currents that proposed ways out of mere naturalist 'replication'. These currents were of equal interest to certain musicians, such as d'Indy and the *bande à Franck.* Four of my chapters have considered embodiments of the 'decorative', each of which reflected Denis's quest to sustain the foundations (as he understood them) of French culture. The manner in which his aspirations for a renewal of Catholic decorative art were part of wider cultural currents was discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 explored the implications of his turn to classical artistic models, which offered him a paradigm of formal discipline applicable to his mural work. Chapter 4 demonstrated his sensitivity to the patterns of depicted gestural movement, an aspect of his artistic character that was informed by the classical ideal. The

[1] 'Au lieu du frou-frou des tutus, l'oreille ne percevra que le bruissement des ailes des anges et, au lieu des vulgaires chansons de café-concert, la douce musique des orgues et les motets de Palestrina'. [anon.], 'La Actualité et la curiosité', *L'Art et les artistes,* 45 (1 March 1924), p. 323.

artist's 'staging' of decorative environments in accordance with his ambition for a *foi collective* was discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 1 considered the relevance of 'musicality' and decoration to the artist's most important body of theoretical writing – and specifically to the development of his ideas about 'subjective' and 'objective' *déformation.* One of the purposes of this chapter was to offer an alternative way of thinking about musical-artistic correspondences during the modern period — a way that does not replicate the cultural cliché of 'thinking musically' as being a route to painterly 'abstraction'. Although such a line of thought undoubtedly had its place in the work of painters such as František Kupka and Wassily Kandinsky, it is erroneous to think of the work of the Nabis as harbingers of modernist 'abstraction' in this way. Assigning privileged significance to movements towards non-representational art has led not only to a misunderstanding of the endeavours of these artists, but to the marginalization of twentieth-century work which does not 'fit' this supposed teleology of modernism. This is not to say that the urge to return to artistic tradition (principally the classical tradition) in the early twentieth century has been ignored. The *rappel à l'ordre*, that post-First World War avant-garde classical spirit which emerged in Europe during the twenties, is a well-studied field.[2] I have attempted to redress the comparative neglect of artists of more conservative inclinations, whose concerns about national identity gave shape to influential cultural forces in

[2] See Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford, 2009) which follows formative works such as Silver, *Esprit de Corps.*

early twentieth-century France, and Europe more widely.[3] I have suggested that their work was more complex – and more engaged with 'avant-garde' interests – than has generally been recognized.

The cultivation of national cultural identity is a complex matter often fraught with unpleasant political implications. We need only think of Charles Maurras's aggressive nationalism, which was proto-fascistic in nature. Such tendencies, of course, are (regrettably) not confined to history. His far-right royalist movement L'Action Française is now a shadow of its former self, although it still attracts occasional comment (most recently, for example, after the celebrated novelist Michel Houellebecq accepted an invitation to speak to its members).[4] The 'belligerently isolationist and identitarian nationalism' that Maurras espoused still troubles political discourse across the globe, particularly in recent years.[5] But Maurras's extreme creed competed with a spectrum of alternative 'traditionalist' discourses in early twentieth century France, such as Maritain's neo-Scholasticism, or Andre Gide's idiosyncratic classicism. As Chapters 1 and 3 have shown, Denis was never inclined to affiliate himself too closely with any particular credo, preferring instead to borrow and adapt certain vague ideas to suit his artistic purposes. The appeal of his voluminous writing to his contemporaries was its adaptability to a range of ideological inclinations. The same might be said of his painting. A response to Denis's work in *La Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* reads: 'To consider only

[3] Gino Severini, for example, a former Futurist who became a well-known figure in the *rappel à l'ordre,* was indebted to Denis's thought for his own *Du cubisme au classicisme* (Paris, 1921).
[4] Saïd Mahrane, 'Le show Houellebecq devant l'Action française', *Le Point* (3 July 2022). Last accessed 7 September 2022.
[5] Quoted in McWilliam, *The Aesthetics of Reaction*, p. 7.

these variations on a theme of the Odyssey [Nausicaa], one would take M. Denis for the most naïvely pagan of our artists ... The fervent Christianity of M. Denis has nothing incompatible with his candid paganism ... it is a laughing Christianity'.[6] The oft-stated remark that Denis was a 'modern' Puvis de Chavannes arguably derived as much from the comparably 'unfixed' quality of his work, as from his popularity as a decorative painter.

Denis's work thus offers an important insight into the fluidity of pictorial and aesthetic meaning even within a context in which obedience (to tradition, to the nation, to the Church) held sway. What these conservatively-minded artists, thinkers and writers sought, above all, was *discipline* and restraint, a means of consolidating a national identity that was perfectly balanced between a respect for the past and an appeal to contemporary taste. Denis's close friend Ghéon clarified this in his definition of the nature of French 'genius' as 'Harmony of form and content, beauty and idea, lyricism and reason. Strict artistic and intellectual probity … So many classical qualities, so many French qualities … And this does not prejudice innovation'.[7] In 1922 Maritain published a collection of essays under the title *Antimoderne,* which states boldly in its preface: 'What I call here *antimodern* could just as easily have been called *ultramodern.*[8] He continues by claiming that Catholicism is as 'antimodern' in its attachment to tradition as it is 'ultramodern' in its ability to adapt to new

---

[6] 'A ne considérer que ces variations sur un thème de l'Odyssée, on prendrait M. Denis pour le plus ingénument païen de nos artistes ... La christianisme fervent de M. Denis n'a rien d'incompatible avec son paganisme candide ... c'est un christianisme riant …' Louis Reau, 'Le Salon de la Société Nationale', *La Revue de l'art ancien et moderne,* 206 (10 May 1914), p. 372.
[7] Quoted in Alan Sheridan, *André Gide, A Life in the Present* (MA, 1998), p. 236.
[8] 'Ce que j'appelle ici *antimoderne* aurait pu tout aussi bien être appelé *ultramoderne*'. Maritain, *Antimoderne* (Paris, 1922), p. 14.

social conditions.[9] This assertion could equally apply to the central tenets of classicism, as understood by Denis and others, which had been brought to perfection – so they believed – within Western culture. As Chapter 3 has shown, tension between cultural universality and nationalist exceptionalism ran through much contemporaneous social rhetoric. This tension also characterized Duncan's Grecian dancing, and d'Indy's obsession with harnessing the foundations of Wagnerism for the French cause (as discussed in Chapter 4).

The continuity and coherence of Denis's output were born of the decorative imperative, which he considered to be centrally important to his painterly aesthetic. But this understanding of the decorative as an aesthetic quality cannot be detached from decoration as *function,* as Chapter 5 has shown. Denis's concern with the consolidation of a 'style' ('obtained by making certain sacrifices of expression through Simplification ... reducing art to its original architectural principles') underlines the intrinsic interconnection between the two.[10] As John Klein has pointed out in his study of Matisse and decoration: '… as agents of everyday life … [m]ural decoration, whether public or private, is … functional just as surely as monumental sculpture is in the public realm.'[11] Camille Mauclair, assessing the state of French mural art for *La Nouvelle revue* in 1896 wrote: 'There is a philosophy of decorative art and I would even attribute to it a social science.'[12] He later elaborated on this claim, stating that

[9] Ibid.
[10] Quoted in Bouillon, *Earthly Paradise*, p. 271.
[11] John Klein, *Matisse and Decoration* (New Haven, CT and London, 2018), p. 24.
[12] . 'II y a une philosophie de l'art décoratif et je lui attribuerais même une science sociale.' Mauclair, 'La Reforme de l'art décoratif en France', p. 727.

'… it is necessary to form the character of the people to prepare them for art, and certainly not to expect that, by putting the people in direct contact with art, their character will be formed'.[13] We might think of Denis's constant self-promotion in these terms. His public talks and innumerable articles (particularly those published in *Nouvelles Théories*) helped to generate a purported *need* for his work: they were manifestos of a sort which might be of service to a wider conservative intellectual milieu made anxious by the perceived malignancy of Republican ideology.

There is, as Klein argues, a 'phenomenological dimension of direct bodily experience' to the viewing of decorative art.[14] My last chapter has gone some way towards considering this, but further work along more purely theoretical grounds might offer a fruitful line of inquiry for further study. Indeed, there are numerous strands of recent thought that may further illuminate Denis's work. A more thorough consideration of the troubling power that his decorative ensembles exert on modern day audiences could perhaps be supported by a turn to the psycho-biological theories of what has become known as 'affect theory'. Affect theorists have sometimes used music as a paradigm for the circulation of affect, speaking in terms of 'resonant' and 'vibrational' forces.[15] It is tempting, therefore, to relate such theories to the regularity with which Denis's works were discussed in musical terms (Paul

---

[13] 'il sied de former le caractère du peuple pour le préparer à l'art, et non pas du tout d'escompter qu'en le mettant en contact direct avec l'art on lui formera un caractère.' Camille Mauclair, 'Le Besoin d'art du peuple', *Revue bleue,* 4 (September 2 1906), p. 307.

[14] Klein, *Matisse and Decoration,* p. 23.

[15] The affect theorist Brian Massumi's conceptualizing of affective 'intensity' relies on these terms. See Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers,' in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p.1. See also Roger Grant, 'Music Lessons on Affect and Object', *Representations*, 144/1 (2018), pp. 34–60.

Jamot, for example, speaking in terms of 'the coloured orchestration of the symphony' in relation to *Terre Latine*).[16] The art historian Keith Moxey maintains that our fascination with images and 'their capacity to shape our response in the present', argues against treating them as historical documents.[17] But the concerns that pertain to this study of Denis – the seeking of alliances with other art forms, the institutional conditions of art, and anxieties over the nature of cultural identity – remain central today. Denis's articulation of these concerns, both visually and verbally, was particularly direct and candid, and therefore his work had a particular significance for many of his politically-minded contemporaries.

This study has necessarily been selective in its choice of painted subject matter: for every neglected work by Denis on which I have focused, another related work could serve equally well. For example, the ambitious decorative scheme *L'Histoire de l'art français* (1925) for the cupola of the Petit Palais (still *in situ*) is, as its title suggests, a paean to the nation's rich visual culture**.** Other works suggest tangential lines of enquiry. The painter's commission for the Bureau International du Travail in Geneva, *Le Christ parlant aux ouvriers* (1931), is as powerful a religious and political statement as any in his output.[18] An emblem of Christian syndicalism, the work is described by Denis in his journal as 'perhaps the most realistic thing I have done'.[19] Given his frequent disdain for works considered 'realist', what are we to make of such a claim? How was

[16] Jamot, 'Exposition Maurice Denis', p. 125.
[17] Keith Moxey, *Visual Time: the Image in History* (Durham, NC, 2013), p. 139.
[18] See Bernard Delpal, 'Sur le tableau de Maurice Denis: *La Dignité du travail*', *Chrétiens et sociétés*, 9 (2002), pp. 139-177.
[19] 'peut-être ce que j'ai réussi de plus réaliste'. Denis, *Journal III*, 23 August 1931, p. 23.

the work understood by the syndicalists themselves, many of whom were depicted in the work? Such an investigation could extend our understanding of his complex artistic character. There has not been scope to consider all the relationships that the painter formed with contemporary musicians and performers, such as the Alain family, and d'Indy's pupil Réné de Castéra. Further work will be necessary to assess fully the wide cultural network to which Denis belonged.

La musique sacrée, la musique profane

Two objectives of this thesis are to deepen our understanding of the centrality of music to Denis's decorative aesthetic (and to twentieth-century French artistic culture more generally), and to re-evaluate Denis's neglected later work. The contributions to scholarship that I hope to have made in pursuing those objectives may be summarized in the form of a brief discussion of a pair of late works—the twin panels *La musique profane* and *La musique sacrée* (1937). As with most of the artist's very late work, these vast panels **[Figures 170 and 171]** (which remain on display in the vestibule of Paris's Théâtre de Chaillot) have received very little art historical attention. They were completed in time for the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne, in what was a brand new theatre venue (part of the Palais de Chaillot). The new Théâtre was a highlight of the Exposition, replacing the Palais du Trocadéro.[20] Its prestigious position near the Eiffel Tower lent it enormous cultural gravity. Rather like the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, built

[20] See Colette Godard, *Chaillot: un théâtre national et populaire* (Paris, 1998).

over twenty years earlier, this commanding Art Deco building quickly became a centre of Parisian cultural life; it remains among the largest theatres in Europe. Its interior decorations, which also included a *Pastorale* by Bonnard, and work by Roussel and Vuillard, were in keeping with a musically-saturated vision of arcadia. Decorating the main auditorium, for example, were two bas-reliefs depicting 'Rhythm' as a semi-recumbent figure playing the harmonica, and 'Harmony' as a semi-nude reclining woman.[21] Denis's *La musique profane* was thematically resonant with such scenes, while *La musique sacrée* stood apart as a particularly personal adjunct. Within the context of this particular Exhibition devoted to art and modern technology, we might consider the salience of the body as a vehicle for musical expression in terms of a conscious projection of the *humanity* of cultural pursuits.

As we have seen, Denis dreamed of an 'intimate union between Greek form and the Christian spirit' – a fusion which we have seen in the iconography of *L'Histoire de la musique*.[22] Each of the Chaillot panels attempts to condense the essential characteristics associated with these two forms of music, translating into intelligible forms the spirit of each. These distinctive characters are 'performed' bodily; the juxtaposition of a certain hieratic posturing with the exuberant writhing of a bacchanalia conjures up the two opposing cultural impulsions that sustained Denis's creativity. As I have argued in Chapter 4, Denis was fascinated by the 'resurgence of the body as an expressive

[21] As described in Geneviève Profit, 'Le théâtre de Chaillot, les premières traces aux Archives nationales', in Sandrine Gill (ed.) *Chaillot, Lieu de tous les arts* (Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 2020), p. 13.
[22] '…ce rêve d'une union intime entre la forme grecque et l'esprit chrétien …' Denis, 'Les élèves d'Ingres', *Théories,* p. 113.

medium'.[23] The idea of music as being *completed* by bodily movement was an idea espoused by Isadora Duncan, and understood by Denis's friend Natacha Trouhanowa. In June 1912, Trouhanowa choreographed and performed a version of Debussy's work for harp and orchestra *Danse sacrée et Danse profane* as part of her gala series at the Folies-Bergère. Perhaps a memory of this event, which it is likely Denis attended, prompted the vigour inscribed in the bodies of *La musique profane.* Such is the power of movement in these panels that one might think of them, in Dalcrozian terms, as an enactment of the body *becoming* rhythm.

Yet the musical referents act like the modest medallions in *L'Histoire de la musique,* by locating the wider allegory in specific social contexts. *La musique profane* was directly inspired by Mendelssohn's incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which captivated Denis on a trip to Italy in 1933 **[Figure 170]**.[24] A preliminary sketch in 1936 on the theme of Orpheus (which reuses a motif from *L'Histoire de la musique*), suggests a quite different early inspiration **[Figure 172]**; but for the final version, the painter retains only the framing foreground of musicians on either side. The activity takes place in a sylvan environment, and — appropriately enough given the musical inspiration — depicts a form of Greek bacchanalia, albeit one tempered by the sedate presence of an all-female string quartet. Clothed in modern dresses, and being the only figures wearing shoes (Denis seems to have deliberately emphasized this detail, with the additional accent of the buckle on the cellist's shoe), the four women of the quartet belong to a world quite other than that of

[23] Appia, *Music and the Art of the Theatre,* p. 4.
[24] Barazzetti-Demoulin, *Maurice Denis,* p. 205.

their counterpart musician on the right – a female Pan-like figure, whose posture seems angled towards the fleet-footed dancers in the forest. The two violinists and viola player, on the other hand (separated from the action, like Pan, by a neat box hedge), seem to direct their music towards an audience. The light source appears to be somewhere directly above their heads, as if the moon is casting its glow from on high. This seems to fit with Denis's recollection of hearing Mendelssohn's music at the Boboli Gardens in Florence: 'Green dances, without the noise of steps over the delicious music. Pipistrelle bats pass. And the moon, and the majestic trees…'[25] Some of Shakespeare's central figures are recognizable: Duke Theseus and his Queen Hippolyta in the centre, Hermia, Helena and Demetrius or Lysander to their right. Bottom, with the head of a donkey, appears from the foliage in the background. Could it be the mischievous Puck, disguised as Cupid in the foreground?

La musique sacrée does not appear to be indebted to any particular piece of music, but probably to the *mystère catholique* of the solemn ritual of the mass that had intrigued him since his youth **[Figure 171]**. There is a meditative stillness to it that is only enhanced by the strongly rhythmical gestures of its companion piece. It owes something to Puvis de Chavannes's *Inspiration Chrétienne,* which is set within similarly Italianate architectural arcades **[Figure 173]**. Denis was struck by this work of Puvis's, writing in a diary entry from 1920: 'Puvis [is] very superior in *L'Inspiration Chrétienne*, denser subject, less

[25] 'Danses vertes, sans bruit de pas sur la délicieuse musique. Il passe des *pipistrelli.* Et la lune, et les arbres majestueux … 'Denis, *Journal III,* 30 May 1933, p. 166.

arbitrary, not academic and with nature tones, beautiful white, pink walls'.[26] The organist in *La musique sacrée* occupies the same role as the flautist and quartet in *La musique profane*, offering a diegetic musical accompaniment. The female figure of the organist was based on Marie Alain, the daughter of Denis's close friend Albert Alain, the chapel master at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.[27] Here she is surrounded by a small choir of young women; the detritus of regular rehearsals – the small stall and pile of scores by her side – is indicative of quotidian *saint-germainois* musical life. But beyond the peristyle in which the scene takes place is a sun-drenched Fiesole. Perhaps, then, the musical inspiration behind this work is the extensive sacred oeuvre of Chausson, given the composer's close association with Fiesole in Denis's imagination. His nostalgic remarks on his youthful explorations with the composer, published in *Carnets de voyage en Italie*, attest the significance of this association: 'The memories of a happy youth haunt me on the roads of Fiesole. Ernest Chausson, who lived there, kept me under his roof, near the convent of Fra Angelico... Since, his music perpetuates for me the smiling gravity of this landscape'.[28] The youthful choristers of *La musique sacrée* are perhaps embodiments of that very 'smiling gravity' which Denis traced within Fiesole (as discussed in Chapter 3).

The dual theme of sacred and profane music had been taken up in previous decades by French artists, including the Symbolist Adolphe Cossard, and the

---

[26]' Puvis très supérieur dans *L'Inspiration chrétienne*, sujet plus dense, moins arbitraire, pas académique et avec des tons de nature, beau blanc, roses des murs'. Denis, *Journal II*, November 1920, p. 22.

[27] Decourt, *Albert Alain*, p. 143.

[28] 'Les souvenirs d'une heureuse jeunesse me hantent sur les routes de Fiesole. Ernest Chausson, qui y habita, m'y retint sous son toit, auprès du couvent de Fra Angelico … Depuis, sa musique perpétue pour moi la gravité souriante de ce paysage.' Denis, *Carnets de voyages en Italie*, p. 57.

decorative painter Guillaume Dubufe. Dubufe was frequently commissioned by the State, producing grand allegories for the ceiling of the foyer at the Comédie-Française, and the banquet hall of the Élysée Palace. His music-themed diptych was destined for the Conservatoire de Musique in Paris, but shown first to the public at the 1882 Salon, and subsequently circulated as a popular print **[Figure 174]**.[29] Dubufe's 'Musique sacrée' is saturated with mysticism, and reminiscent of the Symbolism of Moreau with its atmospheric use of light. Saint Cecilia, accompanied by an angel, is the focus, bathed in a luminous glow befitting her status as the patron saint of music.[30] Dubufe's 'Musique profane' is populated with diaphanous nymph-like figures in languid poses that prompt a feeling of sensuous immersion. The considerable contrast between Dubufe's images and Denis's vigorously decorative style throw the definitive features of the latter clearly into relief. One might even find more in common between the ideals which underpin Denis's Chaillot murals and those of Matisse's far more famous set of murals *Music* and *Dance* (1910) for Sergei Shchukin. Indeed, finding a resonant modernity in Denis's work, the modernist architect Robert Mallet-Stevens requested his collaboration on the Pavillon de la Solidarité for the 1937 Exhibition.[31] The project did not come to pass, but the list of decorators for other Exhibition pavilions reads like a roll call of modernist artists, from Robert and Sonia Delaunay, to Fernand Léger and Albert Gleizes. The Chaillot interior, by

[29] The work received a mixed reaction, with some finding it to be 'un effort stérile'. Henry Houssaye, 'Le Salon de 1882', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1 May 1882), p. 571.
[30] See Charles Gounod, 'La musique profane et la musique sacrée', *Les Lettres et les arts,* 1 (1 January 1886), pp. 46-50.
[31] Robert Mallet-Stevens, letter to Denis (25 March 1937). MMD [Ms 7486].

contrast, stood as a bastion to a historically-rooted *latinité*, in conformity, in fact, with its exterior. In the words of James Herbert: 'That the Palais de Chaillot connoted Frenchness seems beyond doubt: its austere classicism spoke to many French viewers of 'the glory of some of our most beautiful structures' in 'the classical monumental tradition of French architecture'.[32] Denis's *La musique sacrée*, projecting the solemn, introspective stillness of the liturgy within a sunlit Italian landscape, boldly asserts the compatibility of Catholic worship with this tradition.

'Rising from this charming work … is a … music so pretty and so naive, that one can say …perhaps we will sing one day the alleluia of Christian art.' This was the response of the critic André Pératé to the Le Vésinet chapel murals with which this thesis began.[33] Quoting this assertion in a study of Denis published in 1945, the poet Maurice Brillant described Pératé as 'an unbelieving prophet'.[34] The intervening years had seen Denis and the pupils of the Ateliers d'Art Sacré attempt to revitalize ecclesiastical decoration. Their efforts can still be seen in churches within Paris and beyond today: neglected but important testaments to a vital cultural impetus in early twentieth-century France. Those decorative schemes of Denis's that still adorn prominent secular institutions (such as the commanding homage to music for the Théâtre des

---

[32] James D Herbert, 'The View of the Trocadéro: The Real Subject of the Exposition Internationale, Paris, 1937', *Assemblage*, 26 (April, 1995), p.100.

[33] 'Il monte de cette œuvre charmante … un tel parfum d'art jeune et primitif, une musique si jolie et si naïve, que l'on peut se dire…peut-être chanterons-nous un jour l'alléluia de l'art chrétien.' A. Michel, 'Les Jeunes au Salon', *Le Figaro Illustré* (1899). Pératé's words are quoted by Maurice Brillant, *Portrait de Maurice Denis* (Paris, 1945), p. 44.

[34] Ibid.

Champs-Elysées) are monuments to his commitment to a classicized idiom intended to appeal to a collective national spirit.



Antoine Bourdelle, *Maurice Denis sous la coupole au Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* (c.1913).
Pencil on paper, 22.5 x 17.3 cm. Paris, musée Bourdelle.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Works by Maurice Denis, unless specified

Introduction:

Figure 1. Photograph of the interior of Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet. Postcard. Personal collection.

Figure 2. Preparatory study for *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix et la glorification du sacrifice de la messe*, decoration for the Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet (c.1898). Oil on canvas, 82 x 160 cm. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, musée départemental Maurice Denis (MMD).

Figure 3. Architectural study for *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix et la glorification du sacrifice de la messe,* decoration for the Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet (c.1898). Graphite on paper, 32.1 x 49.4 cm. MMD.

Figures 4a and b. *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix et la glorification du sacrifice de la messe* (two panels), decoration for the Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet (1899). Oil on canvas, 225 x 225 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 5. *Les Harpistes* (c. 1893). Watercolour, pencil and gouache on paper, 65 x 50.3 cm. Private collection.

Figure 6. *Les Musiciennes (*1895). Oil on cardboard, 24.5 x 34.6 cm. The Phillips Collection.

Figure 7. *Album pour enfants petits et grands. Recueil de pièces de Piano, à deux et quatre mains, composés par un groupe de musiciens de la Schola Cantorum,* cover illustration for musical score, *(*1905). Pochoir, 30 x 42 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF).

Chapter 1:

Figure 8. *Arabesque poétique* (1892). Oil on canvas mounted on cardboard, 235 x 172 cm. MMD.

Figure 9. Pierre Bonnard, *Menuet pour Piano*, cover design for music by Claude Terrasse (1892). Pencil and watercolour, 29 x 37 cm. Rejected by publisher, used to illustrate G.-Albert Aurier, 'Les Symbolistes', *La Revue encyclopédique* (1 April 1892). Private collection.

Figure 10. *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine* or *Marthe au piano* (1891). Oil on canvas, 95 x 60cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 11. *Apparition,* cover for sheet music of André Rossignol's setting of Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Apparition' (1894). Colour lithograph, 25.4 x 15.2 cm. MMD.

Figure 12. *La Damoiselle élue,* cover for sheet music of Claude Debussy's setting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1892). Colour lithograph, 45 x 32 cm. Private collection.

Figure 13. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Le Départ* (1897). Oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm. MMD.

Figure 14. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Le Lâcher des chiens* (1897). Oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm. MMD.

Figure 15. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Le bien-aller* (1897). Oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm. MMD.

Figure 16. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Le Miracle* (1897). Oil on canvas, 225 x 212 cm. MMD.

Figure 17. *La Légende de Saint Hubert : Le défaut* (1897). Oil on canvas, 190 x 210 cm. MMD.

Figure 18. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: La chasse infernale* (1897). Oil on canvas, 190 x 210 cm. MMD.

Figure 19. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: L'Arrivée à l'Hermitage* (1897). Oil on canvas, 190 x 210 cm. MMD.

Figure 20. Preparatory studies for *La Légende de Saint Hubert* ensemble (right) and soup tureen (left) (c.1897). Pencil on paper. MMD.

Figure 21. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Les Sonneurs du ciel* (c.1897). Oil on canvas, 488 x 134 cm. MMD.

Figure 22. *Le chemin de la vie* (1895). Stained glass window, realised by Henri Carot from design by Maurice Denis, 305 x 100 cm. MMD.

Figure 23. *Paysage aux arbres verts* (1893). Oil on canvas, 46.3 x 42.8 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 24. *Légende de chevalerie* (between 1893 and 1898). Oil on hessian, 304 x 327 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 25. *Jeu de Volant* ou *Le bois sacré* (1900). Oil on canvas, 128 x 301.5 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 26. *La Vasque de la Villa Medicis* (c.1898). Oil on plywood-backed cardboard, 27 x 46.5 cm. Beauvais, musée de l'Oise.

Figure 27. Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Bois sacré cher aux Arts et aux Muses* (1884). Mounted oil on canvas, 460 x 1040 cm. Lyon, musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon.

Chapter 2:

Figure 28. 'Saint François d'Assise en prière et un ange jouant du violon', illustration for *Petites fleurs de saint François d'Assise*, translated from Italian by André Pératé (Paris: J. Beltrand, 1913). Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.

Figure 29. *Messe matinale* (1890). Oil on canvas, 33 x 19 cm. Rome, Vatican Museums and Galleries.

Figures 30a and b. 'Miroir de Peine' and 'Miroir de Joie', illustrations for *Le Miroir de Jésus, quinze poèmes composés par Henri Ghéon sur les quinze mystères du rosaire* (Paris: L'Art Catholique, 1920). Wood engravings. Paris, BnF.

Figure 31. *Mystère catholique* (1889). Oil on canvas, 97 x 143 cm. MMD.

Figure 32. *Montée au calvaire* (1889). Oil on canvas, 41 x 33 cm. Paris, musée du Louvre.

Figure 33. 'L'âme antique était rude et vaine', illustration for Paul Verlaine's *Sagesse* (Paris: Vollard, 1911). Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.

Figure 34. 'Donnez-leur le silence et le mystère de l'amour', illustration for Paul Verlaine's *Sagesse* (Paris: Vollard, 1911). Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.

Figure 35. Reproduction of 'Donnez-leur le silence et le mystère de l'amour', illustration for the cover of Pierre Hermant's *Douze chansons de Verlaine* (Paris: Enoch & Cie, 1904). Private collection.

Figure 36. Cover illustration for *Petites fleurs de saint François d'Assise*, translated from Italian by André Pératé (Paris: J. Beltrand, 1913). Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.

Figure 37. 'Du miracle que Dieu fit quand saint Antoine, étant à Rimini, prêcha aux poissons de la mer', illustration for *Petites fleurs de saint François d'Assise*. Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.

Figure 38. *Chemin dans les arbres* (1891). Oil on cardboard, 28 x 19 cm. MMD.

Figure 39. *La vocation des apôtres* (1906). Oil on canvas, 81 x 116 cm. MMD.

Figure 40. *Magnificat (de 'Silencio'*) (1909). Oil on canvas, 130 x 104cm. Private collection.

Figure 41. *Le Pardon à Sainte Anne la Palud* (1905). Oil on cardboard, 54 x 80 cm. Private collection.

Figure 42. Eugène Druet, black and white photograph of a portrait of Vincent d'Indy by Théo van Rysselberghe (1908). Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm (original painting). Paris, BnF.

Figure 43. Frontispiece for Albert Alain's *Nos Cantiques Populaires* (Paris: Hérelle & Cie, 1904). Private collection.

Figure 44. *La Chorale des franciscaines* (1923). Oil on canvas, 89.5 x 66.5 cm. Paris, Schola Cantorum.

Figure 45. 'Programme du concert', illustration for a concert on 6th January 1921 at the second Exposition d'art chrétien moderne. Wood engraving. MMD.

Figure 46. Chapelle du Sacré-Cœur by the Ateliers d'Art Sacré, Église du Village Français. Photograph. Paris, centre de documentation des Arts Décoratifs.

Figure 47. Interior of Notre Dame du Raincy. Photograph.

Chapter 3:

Figure 48. *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie: L'Art Plastique* (1907). Oil on canvas, 260 x 466 cm. MMD.

Figure 49. *Terre Latine: La Poésie* (1907). Oil on canvas, 260 x 460 cm. MMD.

Figure 50. *Terre Latine: La Musique* (1907). Oil on canvas, 275 x 400 cm. MMD.

Figure 51. *Terre Latine: Paysage* (black and white photograph) (1907). Oil on canvas, 175 x 363 cm. MMD.

Figure 52. Preparatory study for stained glass window, *Nu aux mimosas* (c. 1907). Oil on canvas. Private collection.

Figure 53. Photograph of *Terre Latine. In situ* prior to 1924.

Figure 54. Chapelle de la Vierge (ceiling), Sainte-Marguerite du Vésinet (1903). Oil on canvas (marouflaged). *In situ*.

Figure 55. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Rêve* (1883). Oil on canvas, 82 x 102 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 56. Frontispiece for Charles Maurras, *L'Avenir de l'intelligence* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1925). Paris, BnF.

Figure 57. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Marseille, Colonie Grecque* (1869). Oil on canvas, 425 x 565 cm. Marseille, musée des Beaux-Arts.

Figure 58. André Derain, *L'Âge d'Or* (1905). Oil on canvas, 175 x 189 cm. Tehran, Museum of Contemporary Art.

Figure 59. *Eurydice* (1904). Oil on canvas, 85 × 111cm. Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie.

Figure 60. *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1907). Oil on canvas, 81 x 116 cm. St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum.

Figure 61. *L'Âge d'Or: La Source, La Vallée, Les Colombes, La Treille, La Plage* (clockwise from bottom left) (1911-12). Oil on canvas glued on plywood. Beauvais, musée de l'Oise.

Figure 62. 'Faire part de naissance de Jean-Dominque' (1909). Wood engraving on paper, 12 x 17.1 cm. Private collection.

Figure 63. *L'Âge d'Or: La Plage* (1911-12). Oil on canvas glued on plywood, 570 (max) x 205 cm. Beauvais, musée de l'Oise.

Figure 64. *Plage à l'epargneul* (1903). Oil on canvas, 78 x 106 cm. Private collection.

Figure 65. *Ils virent des fées débarquer sur les plages* (1893). Oil on canvas, 25 x 40.5 cm. Private collection.

Figure 66. *L'Âge d'Or: La Vallée* (1911-12). Oil on canvas glued on plywood, 437 (max) x 205 cm (?). Beauvais, musée de l'Oise.

Figure 67. *Danse d'Alceste* (1904). Oil on canvas, size unknown. Whereabouts unknown.

Figure 68. *Terrasse à Fiesole: Villa Papiniano* (1899). Oil on canvas, 125 x 244 cm. Private collection.

Figure 69. *Portrait de Mme Chausson en duchesse d'Urbin* (1898). Oil on panel, 46 x 38 cm. Private collection.

Figure 70. Preparatory study for *L'Éternel Eté: Le Chant Choral, L'Orgue, Le Quatuor, La Danse* (1905). Distemper on paper, mounted on a screen, each panel 150 x 78 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 71. Preparatory study for *L'Éternel Eté: L'Oratorio* (1905). Oil on cardboard, 26.5 x 34.5 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 72. Black and white photograph of *L'Éternel Eté: Le Chant Choral.* Reproduced in André Pératé, 'Maurice Denis', *L'Art et les artistes* 8/40 (November, 1923), p. 47. Paris, BnF.

Figure 73. Black and white photograph of *L'Éternel Eté: L'Orgue.* Reproduced in Pératé, 'Maurice Denis', p. 48. Paris, BnF.

Figure 74. *Soir florentin: La Cantate* (1910). Oil on canvas, 218 x 364 cm. Paris, Petit Palais.

Figure 75. *Soir florentin: Baigneuses* (1910). Oil on canvas, 218 x 362 cm. Paris, Petit Palais.

Figure 76. *Soir florentin: Le Poème* (1910). Oil on canvas, 218 x 358 cm. Paris, Petit Palais.

Figure 77. Preparatory drawing for *Soir florentin: La Danse* (1910). Gouache, pencil on tracing paper, 73 x 110 cm. MMD.

Chapter 4:

Figure 78. Black and white photograph of *L'Éternel Eté: La Danse.* Reproduced in Pératé, 'Maurice Denis', p. 46. Paris, BnF.

Figure 79. Preparatory drawing for *L'Histoire de Psyché: Les Parents abondonnent Psyché* (1908). Charcoal on tracing paper, 156 x 132.4 cm. MMD.

Figure 80. Unknown Russian photographer, panels from *L'Histoire de Psyché* in their original location in the music room of Ivan Morozov's house (1912). Black and white photograph. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 81. Aristide Maillol, *Pomona* (1910). Bronze, 164 x 53 x 47 cm. Paris, musée Maillol.

Figure 82. *L'Histoire de Psyché: l'Amour surprend Psyché* (1908). Oil on canvas, 394 x 269.5 cm. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 83. *L'Histoire de Psyché: Les Parents abandonnent Psyché au sommet de la montagne* (1908). Oil on canvas, 200 x 275 cm. St Petersburg, The State

Hermitage Museum.

Figure 84. *L'Histoire de Psyché: l'enlèvement de Psyché* (1908). Oil on canvas, 395 x 267.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 85. *L'Histoire de Psyché: la curiosité de Psyché* (1908). Oil on canvas, 395 x 274.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 86. *L'Histoire de Psyché: la punition de Psyché* (1908). Oil on canvas, 395 x 272 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 87. *L'Histoire de Psyché : le pardon et l'hymen de Psyché* (1908). Oil on canvas, 399 x 272 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 88. *L'Histoire de Psyché: enlèvement de Psyché*, seconde version (1908). Oil on canvas, 180 x 265 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 89. *Cupid,* complementary panel for *L'Histoire de Psyché* (1909). Oil on canvas, 390 x 74 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 90. *Nu à la manière de Lorenzo de Credi* (1898). Oil on canvas, 135 x 63 cm. MMD.

Figure 91. Aristide Maillol, *Nu arrangeant ses cheveux* (1898). Bronze, (h) 27 cm. Baltimore, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

Figure 92. Black and white photograph of 'Psyché: Premier Acte' by Gabriel Mourey. Reproduced in Georges Casella, 'Première representation de Psyché', *Comoedia* (2 December 1913), n.p. Paris, BnF.

Figure 93. *La vague* (1916). Oil on canvas, 100 x 124 cm. Japan, Ohara Museum of Art.

Figure 94. *Jeunesse* or *La vague au ballon rouge* (1935). Oil on canvas, 28 x 56 cm. Private collection.

Figure 95. Perros-Guirec, farandole au bal des Régates (1906). Photograph, 12 x 16cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 96. Study for wallpaper project: *Les fillettes* (1893). Gouache on cardboard, 81 x 51.5 cm. MMD.

Figure 97. *Frauenliebe und Leben: La Farandole* (1895). Distemper on canvas, 48 x 205 cm. Private collection.

Figure 98. *Farandole sur la terrasse de St Germain,* design for a fan (c.1896). Gouache on silk, 30 x 56 cm. MMD.

Figure 99. 'La Farandole', sketch for right-hand section of *Terre Latine: L'Art Plastique* (1907). Gouache, charcoal and chalk on paper, 150 x 162 cm. MMD.

Figure 100. Anonymous, *Loïe Fuller dansant* (c. 1900). Photograph, 16 x 11 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

Figure 101. Cover illustration of André Rossignol's *Douce Vision* (1896). Lithograph, 50 x 32 cm. Private collection.

Figure 102. *Plage aux lutteurs* (1912). Oil on canvas, 65 × 105 cm. Private collection.

Figure 103. *Galatée* (1917). Oil on canvas, 112 x 88cm. Grenoble, musée de Peinture et de Sculpture.

Figure 104. *Nausicaa: Les jeux des laveuses* (1914). Oil on canvas, 160 x 386 cm. Private collection.

Figure 105. *Nausicaa: Tennis I* (1914). Oil on canvas, size unknown. Paris, Musée national du sport.

Figure 106. *L'Histoire de la musique,* decorative scheme for the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1913). Oil on canvas (marouflaged). *In situ.*

Figure 107. Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Bois Sacré (*1889). Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 4.5 x 60 m. Paris, Grand Amphithéâtre de la Sorbonne.

Figure 108. Façade of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, featuring Antoine Bourdelle's *Apollon et sa méditation entourée des neuf muses* (1910-12). Concrete.

Figure 109. Antoine Bourdelle, study for *La Musique* relief on façade of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1912). Plaster, 177 x 152 cm. Montauban, musée Ingres Bourdelle.

Figure 110. Antoine Bourdelle, study for *La Sculpture et l'Architecture* relief on façade of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1912). Plaster, 176 x 150 cm. Montauban, musée Ingres Bourdelle.

Figures 111a and b. Preparatory studies for *Le Chant* and *La Danse* reliefs for the interior of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1911). Modelling clay, 21.1 x 31 cm. MMD.

Figure 112. *Les Mouvements et les Nuances,* sketch for the exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1911-12). Tempera on canvas, 55 x 150 cm. MMD.

Figures 113a and b. Notebook sketches of Isadora Duncan (c.1910). Pencil on paper. Private collection.

Figures 114a and b. Painted studies after Isadora Duncan (c. 1912). Oil on cardboard, 39.7 x 44.7 cm (top), 33.2 x 54.9 cm (below). Private collection.

Figure 115. Notebook sketches of Isadora Duncan (c.1910). Pencil on paper. Private collection.

Figure 116. Black and white reproduction of a plate entitled *Études d'après Isadora Duncan* (c. 1912). Reproduced in José Clara, 'Isadora Duncan', *L'Art décoratif* (1913). Paris, BnF.

Figure 117a. *Largo*, preparatory drawing for exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1913). Charcoal on paper, 85.6 x 75.7 cm. Private collection.

Figure 117b. *Cantabile,* preparatory drawing for exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1913). Charcoal and white chalk on paper, 85.5 x 75.4 cm. Private collection.

Figure 118. 'Gracioso' from *Les Mouvements et les Nuances*, sketch for the exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1911-12).

Figure 119. *Portrait de la danseuse Natacha Trouhanowa* (1912). Oil on canvas, 82 x 61 cm. Private collection.

Figure 120. *Presto*, preparatory drawing for exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1913). Charcoal and white chalk on paper, 86 x 74.5 cm. Private collection.

Figure 121. *L'Enfant qui court sur la plage* (c. 1912). Oil on canvas, 136 x 146 cm. Private collection.

Figure 122. 'Presto' from *Les Mouvements et les Nuances*, sketch for the exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1911-12).

Figure 123. *L'Histoire de la musique: L'Orchestique Grecque*, frieze for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1912-13). Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 372 m. in length. *In situ*

Figure 124. *L'Histoire de la musique: L'Opera*, frieze for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. (1912-13). Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 372 m. in length. *In situ.*

Figure 125. *L'Histoire de la musique: La Symphonie,* frieze for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. (1912-13). Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 372 m. in length. *In situ.*

Figure 126. *L'Histoire de la musique: Le Drame Lyrique*, frieze for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. (1912-13). Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 372 m. in length. *In situ.*

Figure 127. Preparatory study for *L'Histoire de la musique: Le Chœur* (1911-12). Red chalk, charcoal and white chalk on paper, 122 cm in diameter. MMD.

Figure 128. Preparatory study for *L'Histoire de la musique: L'Orgue* (1911-12). Gouache and charcoal, 54 x 42 cm. MMD.

Figure 129. Preparatory study for *L'Histoire de la musique: La Sonate* (1911-12). Red chalk, charcoal and gouache on paper, mounted on canvas, 121 x 141 cm. MMD.

Figure 130. Notebook sketches of Isadora Duncan (c.1910). Pencil on paper. Private collection.

Figure 131. Study for the Figure of 'Ariadne' for *L'Histoire de la musique: L'Orchestique Grecque* (1912). Lithograph enhanced with pastel, 48 x 31 cm. Private collection.

Figure 132. 'Ariadne', detail from *L'Histoire de la Musique: L'Orchestique Grecque.*

Figure 133. 'D'après mon Parsifal du Théâtre des Champs Elysées' (1913). Watercolour, pen on back of green postcard, 14 x 9 cm. Massachusetts, Smith College Museum of Art.

Chapter 5:

Figure 134. Photograph of interior. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 135. *La Vie du Christ,* central window of the 'Le Prieuré' chapel (1918-21), with the collaboration of Marcel Poncet and Charles Wasem. Stained glass, 670 x 250 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 136. *Annonce de la Messe au Prieuré,* poster (c. 1922). Gouache on paper, 34 x 21.5 cm. Private collection.

Figure 137. Frontispiece for the *Bulletin paroissial de Saint-Germain-en-Laye* (June 1915). Black and white reproduction. Paris, BnF.

Figure 138. Memorial plaque to Clément Besse, designed by Denis. Marble. Saint Germain-en-Laye, Chapelle des Franciscaines.

Figure 139. *Sainte Marthe rencontre Christ.* Stained glass, 450 x 240 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 140. *Sacré Cœur [de la Triennale]* (1916). Oil on canvas, 98 x 160 cm. MMD.

Figure 141. Detail of ceiling, featuring 'Le Sacré Cœur'. Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 250 cm in diameter. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 142. *First Station of the Cross: Condamné à mort* (1915). Oil on canvas, 56 x 98 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 143. Detail of ceiling, featuring the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity). Distemper. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 144. *La Foi, l'Espérance et la Charité inspirent les soldats de la France* (1916). Oil on canvas, 56 x 66 cm. Mouilleron-en-Pareds, musée national des Deux Victoires.

Figure 145. Candelabras. Made by Simone Callède to a design by Denis. Wood, (h) 67 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 146. Detail of candelabra, with bas-reliefs in gilded wood. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 147. Tabernacle and altar. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 148. Altar and central window. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 149. *Christ à la Treille* (c. 1922). Oil on cardboard, 37.7 x 24 cm. Private collection.

Figure 150. Study for green chasuble (left); Sabine Desvallières, green chasuble, to a design by Denis (c.1921) (right). Silk taffeta, embroidery (metallic and silk), 114 x 148 cm. MMD.

Figure 151. *Le Messe* (1890). Oil on card, 24 x 19cm. Private collection.

Figure 152. Interior photograph, chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 153. Ceiling vault, chapel of 'Le Prieuré'. Distemper. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 154a and b. 'Heureux les pacifiques car ils seront appelés enfants de Dieu', mural painting for the chapel wall (1923-28). Stic-B, (h) 250 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 155. 'Heureux ceux qui pleurent parce qu'ils seront consolés', mural painting for the chapel wall (1923-28). Stic-B, (h) 250 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.

Figure 156. *Palais de la reine de Volupté* (1920). Maquette for Act 1, scene I of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.

Figure 157. *Palais du Roi d'Or* (1920). Maquette for Act I, scene II of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.

Figure 158. *Un col de haut montagne* (1920). Maquette for Act I, scene III of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.

Figure 159. *Saint-Christophe portant l'Enfant,* stage curtain design for Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe* (c.1919). Used also for Act II, scene I. Pencil, watercolour and gouache on tissue paper, 26 x 34 cm. MMD.

Figure 160. *Le roc surplombant* (1920). Maquette for Act II, scene II of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.

Figure 161. *Le torrent* (1920). Maquette for Act II, scene III of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.

Figure 162. *Une salle au Palais d'Hiver* (1920). Maquette for Act III, scene I of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.

Figure 163 *La Grande Place* (1920). Maquette for Act III, scene III of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.

Figure 164. Exterior of the Palais Garnier Paris.

Figure 165. Auditorium of the Palais Garnier. Postcard (Paris: Lucien Levy & Sons, 1909). Private collection.

Figure 166a. Roi de l'Or, valet du Roi de l'Or, Sathanael: costume designs for Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe* (c.1919). Pencil and watercolour. Paris, BnF.

Figure 166b. Acolyte et dactylo du Roi de l'Or: costume designs Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe* (c.1919). Pencil and watercolour. Paris, BnF.

Figure 167. Preparatory study for *Le torrent* (c.1919). Pencil and watercolour on tissue paper, 38 x 51 cm. MMD.

Figure 168a. *Théâtre national de l'opéra. La légende de Saint-Christophe de M. Vincent d'Indy* (1920). Poster, lithograph, 120 x 80 cm. Paris, BnF.

Figure 168b. *Théâtre national de l'opéra. La légende de Saint-Christophe de M. Vincent d'Indy* (1920). Printed postcard, 10 x 8 cm. Paris, BnF.

Figure 169. Anonymous south German, *Buxheim St. Christopher* (1423). Coloured woodcut, 28.9 x 20.7 cm. University of Manchester, John Rylands Library.

Conclusion:

Figure 170. *La musique profane*, panel for the lateral gallery of the Palais de Chaillot (1937). Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 270 x 435 cm. *In situ*

Figure 171. *La musique sacrée*, panel for the lateral gallery of the Palais de Chaillot (1937). Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 270 x 435 cm. *In situ*

Figure 172. First study for *La Musique profane,* decoration of the Palais de Chaillot (1936). Oil on cardboard, 270 x 45 cm. Private collection.

Figure 173. Puvis de Chavannes, *L'Inspiration Chrétienne* (1887-8). Oil on paper, mounted on canvas, 105 x 130 cm. Washington D.C., Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Figure 174. Guillaume Dubufe, *Musique profane - musique sacrée* (1880). Oil on canvas, 140.3 x 195.6 cm. Private collection. Reproduced in Charles Gounod, 'La Musique sacrée et la Musique profane', *Les Lettres et les Arts* (1 January 1886), p. 46. Paris, BnF.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Archive and Manuscript Sources

Antony, Hauts-de-Seine, Archives familiales Maurice Emmanuel:
Correspondence from Denis to Emmanuel

Beauvais, Musée de l'Oise, Archives and Documentation Centre:
Dossier for *L'Âge d'Or*

La Touche, Drôme, Fonds Blanche Selva:
Correspondence between the pianist Selva and Denis

Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, collections Jacques Doucet:
Autographes 944 (1-5), letters from Denis to Abbé Sertillanges/ Aut. 908 (1-2), letters from Denis to Paul Fort / Aut. 207 (7), letters from Denis to Henry Cochin / BCMN Ms 753, letters from Denis to Achille Segard

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra:
Models and sketches of the costumes and sets by Denis for d'Indy's *La Légende de saint-Christophe*

LAS Denis (Maurice) 1-8, 10-26, 28-36, letters and postcards from Denis to Jacques Rouché

NLAS-704 (1-18), letters from Vincent d'Indy to Natacha Trouhanowa

LAS Trouhanowa (Natacha), pencil drawings by Trouhanowa

Artist dossier for Natacha Trouhanowa, articles and press cutings

Artist dossier for Isadora Duncan, articles and press cuttings

Paris, (BnF) Département de la Musique:
VM BOB-32178, letter from Denis to André Caplet / VM BOB-19310, letter from Denis to Paul Dukas / VM BOB-20196 letter from Denis to Léon Vallas / VM BOB-20196 letters from Denis to Gabriel Astruc

VM BOB-30394, original manscuripts of articles and speeches by Vincent d'Indy / VM BOB-20534 letters from d'Indy to Gabriel Astruc, Pierre de Bréville

VM BOB-19956, letters from Ernest Chausson to Pierre de Bréville and d'Indy

Paris, Musée Bourdelle (MB):
MB_ARCH_BO_AB/B.1.08.C61.01-7, correspondence from Denis to Bourdelle.
Dossier for *Monument à Debussy*

Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs (MAD):
MAD AN-AD, dossier for Ateliers d'Art Sacré

AN-AD Expo 1925, Boîte 1, dossier for the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs de 1925

Album Maciet 309/19, Vol. 1, (photographs of pavillions and architecture at the Exposition internationale, 1925)

Paris, Petit Palais Archives:
Dossiers for *Soir florentin* and *L'Histoire de l'art français*

Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Centre de documentation du musée départemental Maurice Denis (CD):
Dossiers relating to *L'Histoire de Psyché, La Légende de Saint-Christophe, La Légende de Saint-Hubert; L'Éternel Été; L'Histoire de la Musique; La Musique Sacrée, La Musique Profane; Terre Latine;* the chapel of 'Le Prieuré; the Ateliers d'Art Sacré; decorations for the Collège de Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet

Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Maurice Denis family archives:
Personal collection of journals (including the bulletins of the Schola Cantorum) and books owned by the artist

Correspondence from Denis to Gabriel Thomas and Ivan Morozov (copies)

Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée departmental Maurice Denis (MMD) archives:
Correspondence to Denis (see full references in individual footnotes)
MS 5768, typed manuscript of *La légende de Saint-Christophe* with annotations by Maurice Denis for the preparation of the décor

Saint-Germain-en-Laye, municipal archives:

Access to the *Bulletin paroissial de Saint-Germain-en-Laye,* and documents relating to 'Le Prieuré'

Printed Primary Sources

Anonymous Printed Sources ordered by date of publication

'Notes: Interview with Maurice Denis', *La Wallonie*, 7 (1892), p. 75. Reprinted from *L'Écho de Paris*

La Comédie des Champs-Élysées: direction Léon Poirier, 15 Avenue Montaigne (Paris: Office d'éditions d'art, 1913). Publicity leaflet for small stage at Théâtre de Champs-Elysées

'Nécrologie: Mme Maurice Denis', *Bulletin Paroissial de Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, 8/93 (September 1919), p. 105

'La Chapelle St-Louis-St-Marthe des Fonds de l'Hôpital', *Bulletin Paroissial de Saint-Germain-en-Laye,* 11/125 (May 1922), n.p.

'L'Actualité et la curiosité: Maurice Denis au Pavilion de Marsan', *L'Art et les artistes,* 45 (1 March 1924), p. 323

'Programme des Conférences et Excursions', *Bulletin - Société des Amis du vieux Saint-Germain,* 2 (April 1924), p. 26

Authored Printed Works

Agathon [Pseudonym for Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde], *Les Jeunes gens d'aujourdhui,* 11th edn (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1913)

Alberti Battista, L., *On Painting: Book II*, trans. J. Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 1970), www.noteaccess.com/texts/Alberti/2.htm

Alexandre, A., 'Les œuvres et les hommes, II: Sur un calvaire de Maurice Denis', *Les Arts,* 154 (April 1916), pp. 16-17

Alfassa, P., 'Peintures de Sainte-Croix du Vésinet', *Les Musées de France: tome II* (Paris, 1912), pp. 12-14

A.M., 'Chronique', *Annales de l'association de Saint-Joseph,* 30/12 (February 1900), n.p. CD, dossier for *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix*

Apollinaire on Art, Essays and Reviews, 1902-1918, ed. L.C. Breunig, trans. S. Suleiman, (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001). First published Paris 1960

Appia, A., *Music and the Art of the Theatre,* trans. R.W. Corrigan and M.D. Dirks, ed. B. Hewitt (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1962). First published 1898

Aurier, G.A., 'Le *Symbolisme* en peinture— Paul Gauguin', *Mercure de France*, (March 1891), pp. 155-65. Reprinted in Aurier, G.A., *Œuvres Posthumes,* ed. Remy de Gourmont (Paris: A. Savine, 1893)

Aurier, G.A., 'Les Symbolistes', *Revue Encyclopedique,* 2/1(1 April 1892), (pp. 474-86)

Barrès, M., *The undying spirit of France,* trans. M.W.B. Corwin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1917). First published in French 1916

— *Mort de Venise,* Illustrations by Maurice Denis, wood engravings by Jacques Beltrand (Paris: Éditions EOS, 1930).

— *Mes Cahiers III,* (1902-4) (Paris: Plon, 1931)

Baudelaire, C., *Richard Wagner et Tannhauser à Paris* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1994). First published 1861

—'IV: Correspondances' in *Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Ligaran, 2015), p. 17

— 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *The painter of modern life and other essays*, ed. and trans., J. Mayne (New York: Phaidon, 1964), pp. 1-40. First published 1863

Bellaigue, C., 'Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina', *La Tribune de Saint Gervais* 1/1, (January 1895), pp. 1-4. Available on Internet Archive

Bellaigue, C., 'La musique d'église au théâtre', *Revue des deux mondes*, 64/5 (1 September 1904), pp. 218–28

Belville, E., 'Architecture et décoration modernes: un hôtel particulier à Paris', *L'Art decoratif,* 10/2 (August 1908), pp. 41-58

Benois, A., 'Moris Deni', *Mir iskusstva,* no. 7 (1901), reprinted in I Dorontchenkov (ed.) trans. C. Rougle, *Russian and Soviet Views of Modern Western Art: 1890s to Mid-1930s* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 59-61

Benois, A., 'Moscow Impressions', Reprinted in I Dorontchenkov (ed.) trans. C. Rougle, *Russian and Soviet Views of Modern Western Art: 1890s to Mid-1930s* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2009), p.104. First published in *Rech* 1911.

Bernard, É., 'Puvis de Chavannes', *L'Occident,* 25 (December 1903), pp. 273-80

Bernard, É. [Francis Lepeseur], 'Les maladies actuelles de la peinture (d'après les récents *Salons)*', *La Rénovation Esthétique*, 1/9 (September 1905), pp. 256-62

Bidou, H., 'Le Salon d'Automne', *Gazette des beaux-arts* (November 1910), pp. 376-83

Blanc, C., *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, trans. K. Doggett (London: Hurd and Houghton, 1867*)*

Blasis, C. de, *Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse* (Milan: J. Beati et A. Tenenti, 1820)

Bloy, L., *La Femme pauvre* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1962). First published 1897

Borell, E., 'L'Opéra ancien en Italie et en France', *La Revue critique des idées et des livres,* 23/137 (25 December 1913), pp. 671-81

Bouchot, H., 'Préface', *L'exposition des primitifs français: La peinture en France sous les Valois*, exhib. cat. (Paris: Librairie Central des Beaux-Arts, 1904), pp. I-III

Bourgault-Ducoudray, L.A., 'Introduction', *Trente mélodies populaires de Basse-Bretagne,* trans. and ed. F. Coppée (Paris: Henry Lemoine & Cie, 1885), pp. 6-18

Bouyer, R., 'Sur le krach de l'art moderne', *L'Ermitage*, 11 (1895), pp. 81-6

Brillant, M., *L'Art Chrétien en France au XXe siècle* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1927)

Brillant, M., *Maurice Denis* (Paris: G. Crès et Cie, 1929)

Brunetière, F.L., 'La Question du Latin', *La Revue des deux mondes*, 72/4 (15 December 1885), pp. 862-81

Brunetière, F.,'Le symbolisme contemporain', *Revue des deux mondes*, 104 (April 1891), pp. 681-92

Castera, de C. et Sert, J.M., 'Une décoration de Maurice Denis pour une chambre de musique' *L'Occident,* 55 (June 1906) pp. 297-301

Christophe, J., 'Symbolisme', *La Cravache* (16 June 1888), p. 377

Cingria, A., *La Decadence de l'art sacré,* 2nd edn (Paris: Art Catholique, 1930)

Clara, J., 'Isadora Duncan', *L'Art décoratif, Revue de l'art ancien et de la vie artistique moderne,* 15/194-5 (August/September 1913), pp. 103-8

Claudel, P., *The Tidings Brought to Mary: A Mystery,* trans. L. M. Smith Sill (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1916). First published in French 1910

— *Sainte Thérèse* (Paris: Art catholique, 1916)

— *Positions et propositions; art et littérature* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938)

— *Œuvres en prose,* ed. J. Petit (Paris: Pleiade, 1965)

Cochin, H., 'A propos de l'Expo universelle de 1900. Quelques réflexions sur l'art et en particulier sur la peinture', *Notes d'art et d'archéologie de la Société de Saint-Jean,* 12/9 (September 1900), pp. 223-31

— 'Les symboles de Maurice Denis', *La Revue hebdomadaire* (March 1913), pp. 34-57

— 'Maurice Denis', *Revue des jeunes,* 16/8 (25 April 1918), pp. 513-32

— 'Le Président de la Société de Saint-Jean à ses confrères de l'Arche', *La Vie et les arts liturgiques,* 4/46 (October 1918), pp. 501-2

— 'Maurice Denis', *Revue des jeunes,* 16/8 (25 April 1918), pp. 513-32

Coeuroy, A., 'La Musique: bilan de saison et d'époque', *La Revue universelle,* 5 (15 September 1925), pp. 753-6

Collective letter by Croiset, A., Aulard, M. A., d'Indy, V., Denis, M., Trarieux, G., Verhaeren, E., and Claudel, P., to Mowre, S. Published as 'Les Deux Cultures', *L'Opinion*, 9/34 (19 August 1916), pp.153-8

Correspondance 1892-1945 André Gide – Maurice Denis, édition établie, annotée et présentée par Pierre Masson & Carina Schäfer avec la collaboration de Claire Denis, collaboration Les cahiers de la N.R.F. (Paris: Gallimard, 2006)

Correspondance Jacques-Émile Blanche - Maurice Denis (1901-1939), ed. G-P. Collet (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1989, available as electronic resource)

Couturier, M-A., 'Hommage à Maurice Denis', *L'Art Sacré*, 3/25 (May 1937), pp. 156-67

Couturier, M-A., *Dieu et l'art dans une vie* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1965)

Debussy, C., 'Compte-rendu du Concert Colonne du vendredi saint', *La Revue blanche*, (1 May 1901), reprinted in Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. F. Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), pp.34-5

Debussy, C., 'Musique', *Gil Blas* (13 April 1903), p. 2

Delacroix, E. *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. W. Pach (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1980). First published in full in French in 4 vols, 1893-1895

Denis, M., 'Pour les jeunes peintres', *Art et critique*, 4/90 (20 February 1892), p.94-5. [First published under pseudonym Pierre Louis]

— [not publicly attributed] 'Notes: Renaissance latine', *L'Occident,* 3 (February 1903), p. 144.

— 'L'Exposition des élèves d'Ingres', *Notes d'art et d'archéologie de la Société de Saint-Jean,* 20/6 (June 1908), pp. 122-7

— 'Réponse à l'enquête sur «l'orientation de la peinture moderne», *La Revue de temps présent*, 1/6 (2 June 1911), p. 569

— 'Tendances actuelles de l'Art chrétien', *La vie et les arts liturgiques*, 2/13 (March 1914), pp. 21-7

— *L'Art religieux moderne* (Dijon, Darentière, 1920). First published in *Les Arts français*, 39 (1919), pp. 153-72

— 'Réponse à l'enquête sur «l'art de l'affiche»', *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique,* 1/16 (15 July 1920*),* pp. 445-6

— *Théories, 1890-1910: du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique,* 2nd edn (Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1920). Internet Archive https://archive.org/details/theories1890191000deni/page/n283/mode/2up. Last accessed 24 September 2022

— *Nouvelles théories sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré, 1914-1921* (Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1922). Facsimile edition published by Scholar Select, n.d.

— 'Résumé du rapport de Maurice Denis sur les Beaux-Arts', *Revue des jeunes*, 13 (July 1923), pp. 184-7

— 'Les revues d'avant-garde', *Belles lettres: revue Mensuelle des lettres françaises,* 6/62 (December 1924), pp. 135 -6

— 'De l'importance du sujet dans la peinture religieuse', *Notes d'art et d'archéologie* (April 1924), pp. 17-22 and (July 1924), pp. 40-5

— *Aristide Maillol* (Paris: Crès, 1925). First published 1905

—*Carnets de voyages in Italie, 1921-1922* (Paris: J. Beltrand, 1925)

— 'Un humaniste chrétien: Henri Cochin', *La Revue hebdomadaire,* 10/44 (1928), pp. 591-607

—'Gabriel Vicaire', *En Bretagne*, 100 (November-December 1931), pp. 251-2

— *Henry Lerolle et ses Amis, suivi de quelques lettres d'amis* (Paris: Imprimerie Duranton, 1932). First published in *La Revue de Paris*, vi/22 (1930), pp. 91-107

— *Charmes et leçons d'Italie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1933)

— *Histoire de l'art religieux* (Paris: Flammarion, 1939)

— 'Paul Sérusier, sa vie, son œuvre', à la suite de Paul Sérusier *ABC de la peinture'* 2nd edn (Paris: Floury, 1942). Reprinted La Rochelle, Rumeur des Ages, (1995)

— *Journals, 3 vols, 1884-1943* (Paris: La Colombe, 1957-59), vol I 1884-1904; vol. II 1905-1920; vol III. 1921-1943

— *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie. Textes réunis*, présentés et annotés par J-P. Bouillon (Paris: Hermann, 1993)

— *Delacroix est à la mode,* collected writings edited by C. Gaboriau, F. Stahl, and T. Laugée, (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2018)

Desfosses, A., *Maurice Denis au Vésinet* (Saint-Germain-en-Laye: Bibliothèque de l'Occident, 1903)

Desvallières, G., 'Les Expositions', *La Grande revue,* 54 (10 March 1909), pp. 177-83

— 'Reconstitution de danses antiques', *La Grande revue* (1909), pp. 181-3

— 'Reflexions d'un catholique', *L'Arche*, 1 (1915), pp. 51-3

— Conference paper given for *Art Chrétien',* (1912). Partially reprinted in *La Vie et les arts liturgiques*, 4/46 (October 1918), pp. 527-8

— 'Projet d'une école d'art placée sous la protection de Notre-Dame-De-Paris', *Notes d'art et d'archéologie de la Société de Saint-Jean* 24/6 (June 1912), pp. 108-111

Dimier, L., '*Les Grand Artistes: Les primitifs français'* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1929)

Dralin, G., 'Propos', *L'Occident*, 3 (1 Jan 1904), pp. 235-9

Drault, J., 'Les Premières', *La libre parole* (10 June 1920), p. 2

Dujardin, E., 'Le Mouvement Symboliste et la musique', *La Mercure de France,* 72/257 (March, 1908), pp. 5-24

Duncan, Irma, *The techniques of Isadora Duncan* (New York: Kamin Publishers, 1937)

Duncan, Isadora, 'Ce que je pense de la danse', *Femina* (April 1914), p. 189. Accessed BnF Arts du Spectacles, dossier d'artiste 'Isadora Duncan'

— 'Depth', in *The Art of the Dance*, ed. S. Cheney (New York: Theatre Arts, 1928), pp.99-103

— *Isadora Speaks: Writings & Speeches of Isadora Duncan*, ed. F. Rosemont (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1994)

Eliot, T.S., 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Perspecta*, 19 (1982), pp. 36-42. First published in 1919 in *The Egoist*

Emmanuel, M., *Histoire de la langue musicale* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1911)

— *The Antique Greek Dance after Sculptured and Painted Figures*, trans. H.J. Beauley (London: Bodley Head, 1916). First published in French, 1896

— 'Un Chœur au salon', *Le Correspondant,* 243 (25 June 1920), pp. 1035-44

— *César Franck: Étude critique* (Paris: Laurens, 1930)

— *Maurice Emmanuel: Lettres choisies,* ed. C. Corbier (Paris: Éditions Vrin-Musicologie, 2017)

Escholier, R., 'Natacha Trouhanowa', *La Danse* (July 1921), p. 2

Fabre, A., 'Maurice Denis', *Le Mois littéraire et pittoresque*, 174 (June 1913), pp. 498-500

Féneon, F., 'Signac', *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui,* 373 (1890). Reprinted in J. U. Halperin, (ed.), *Félix Fénéon, Œuvres plus que complètes*, vol II (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), pp, 174-9

Fénéon, F., 'Artistes Indépendants', *Le Chat Noir,* 479 (21 March 1891), p. 1716

Fierens, P., 'L'œuvre sacré de Maurice Denis', *L'artisan et les arts liturgiques,* 15/1 (March 1946), pp. 1-18

Fosca, F., 'Sur quelques œuvres récentes de Maurice Denis', *La Revue universelle,* 8 (5 July 1922), pp. 231-6

— 'Une église moderne', *La revue hebdomadaire*, 31 (5 August 1922), pp. 84-91

— *Maurice Denis* (Paris: NRF, 1924)

— *La Chapelle de Maurice Denis à Saint-Germain-en-Laye* (Paris: Art Catholique, 1925)

Foville, de J., 'Artistes Contemporains: Maurice Denis', *La Revue de l'art ancien et moderne,* 33/193 (10 April 1913), pp. 267-86

Fresnois, de A., 'Notes de Théâtre, Psyché de Gabriel Mourey', *La Revue critique des idées et des livres'*, 22/127 (25 July 1913), pp. 230-32

Fry, R., 'Introductory Note to Maurice Denis's "Cézanne"', reprinted in C. Reed, (ed.), *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 76-80. First printed in *The Burlington Magazine*, (January 1910), pp. 207-8.

Garnier, C., *Le nouvel Opéra de Paris,* vol I (Paris: Ducher et Cie, 1878)

Geffroy, G., 'Salon de 1884,' *La Justice* (7 May 1884), p. 2

Germain, A., 'Puvis de Chavannes et son esthétique,' *L'Ermitage*, 2/1 (March 1891), pp. 140-44

Ghéon, H., 'Isadora Duncan et M. Pierre Lalo', *La Nouvelle revue française,* 27 (March 1911), pp. 473-6

Ghéon, H., *Le Miroir de Jésus: quinze petits poèmes* (Paris: À L'Art Catholique, 1920)

Gide, A., *Morceaux choisis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1921)

— *Œuvres complètes tome IV*, ed. L. Martin-Chauffler (Paris: Gallimard, 1935)

— *Journal 1889-1893,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948)

G.L., 'A l'Opéra', *Comoedia,* 14/2730 (7 June 1920), p. 1

Gounod, C., 'La musique profane et la musique sacrée', *Les Lettres et les arts,* 1 (1 January 1886), pp. 46-50

Gourmont, de R., *Les Petites Revues* (Paris: Libraire de Mercure, 1900)

Gourmont, de R., *Le Latin Mystique (*Paris: G. Crès et Cie, 1922)

Hallays, A., 'La maison de Schola', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 6/12 (December 1900), pp. 335-49

Hanotaux, G., 'La Renaissance Latine', *La Renaissance Latine,* 1/1 (May 1902), pp. 1-7

Hanslick, E., *The Beautiful in Music,* trans. G. Cohen, ed. M. Weitz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957). First published in German 1854 and in English in 1891

Hazard, P., 'Le Souvenir de Henri Cochin', *Revue des deux mondes*, 38/1 (1 March 1927), pp. 202-5

Henry, C., 'Introduction to a Scientific Aesthetics' trans. N. Polonsky, in *Art in Translation,* 10/2, pp. 198-222. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17561310.2018.1480447. First published as 'Introduction à une esthétique scientifique,' *La Revue contemporaine* (2 August 1885), pp. 441–69

Hepp, P., 'L'Atelier d'art sacré', *Revue des jeunes*, 13/22 (25 November 1923), pp. 404-9

Hepp, P., 'Notes sur Maurice Denis', *Revue hebdomadaire,* 33/6 (1 June 1924), pp. 445-60

Hogarth, W., *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: J. Reeves, 1753)

Houdard, G., *L'Art dit Gregorien et la rhythme du chant, dit Gregorien d'après la notation neumatique* (Paris: Fishbacher, 1897)

— *Cours libre d'histoire musicale professé à la Sorbonne. Leçon d'ouverture donnée le 15 avril 1902. L'Évolution de l'art musical et l'art grégorien* (Paris: Fishbacher, 1902)

— *La richesse rythmique musicale de l'antiquité* (Paris: A. Picard, 1903)

Houssaye, H., 'Le Salon de 1882', *Revue des deux mondes,* (1 May 1882), pp. 560-586

Indy, d' V., *Chansons populaires du Vivarais* Op. 52 (Paris: Durand et fils, 1900)

— 'Une école d'art répondant aux besoins modernes', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 6/11 (November 1900), pp. 303-14

— *César Franck,* trans. R. Newmarch (London: John Lane, 1909). First published Paris, 1906

— *Beethoven: A Critical* Biography, trans. T. Baker (Boston, MA: Boston Music Company, 1913). First published in French 1911

— *Cours de Composition Musicale,* 3 vols: vol I, 2nd edn (1912); vol II, pt I (1909); vol II, pt II (1933); vol III (1950). (All published Paris: A. Durand et Fils).

— *La légende de Saint-Christophe,* Op. 67, Piano Score (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1918). Facsimile edition printed by Scholar Select. n.d

— *La Schola cantorum: son histoire depuis sa fondation jusqu'en 1925* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1927)

— *Richard Wagner et son influence sur l'art musical français* (Paris: Delagrave, 1930)

— *Ma Vie: journal de jeunesse, correspondance familiale et intime, 1851-1931.* ed. M. d'Indy (Paris: Séguier, 2001)

Jamet, Père, 'Allocution, prononcée par le R.P. Jamet, c.s.c. à l'inauguration des peintures de M. Maurice Denis dans la chapelle de l'École Sainte-Croix du Vésinet', *Annales de l'association de Saint-Joseph,* 30/12 (February 1900), pp. 356-61

Jamot, P., 'Les Salons de 1906', *Gazette des beaux-arts,* 587/3 (1 May 1906), pp. 353-92

— 'Exposition Maurice Denis', *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité'*, 15 (13 April 1907), p. 125

— 'Une illustration des *Fioretti* par Maurice Denis', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 53/649 (July 1911), pp. 5-18

— 'Le Théâtre des Champs-Élysées', *Gazette des beaux-arts,* 55/670 (April 1913), pp. 264-93 and 55/671 (May 1913), pp. 291-322

—'Maurice Denis', *Revue de Paris,* 16 (15 August 1924), pp. 901-20

— *A. G. Perret et l'architecture du béton armé* (Paris: G. Vanoest, 1927)

— 'Maurice Brillant, la religion et l'art, d'après un livre récent', *L'art vivant,* 3/65 (September 1927), pp. 682-3

— *Maurice Denis: texte de Paul Jamot* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1945). Compiled from four articles published earlier, by Jamot's niece, Thérèse Bertin-Mourot

Jaques-Dalcroze, É., *Méthode de Jaques-Dalcroze: La Rhythmique, enseignement pour le developpement de l'instinct rhythmique et métrique, du sens de l'harmonie plastique et de l'équilibre des mouvements, et pour la régularisation des habitudes motrices* (Lausanne: Jobin, 1916-1917)

Jaques-Dalcroze, É., *Eurhythmics, Art and Education,* trans. F. Rothwell (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930). First published 1920. Accessed via Internet Archive

Jouanny, C., (ed.) *Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin* (Paris: Archives de l'art français, 1911)

Jourdain, F., 'La Peinture décorative moderne', *L'Art et industrie,* 2 (December 1910), n.p.

Kahn, G.,'Réponse des symbolistes', *L'Événement* (28 September, 1886), p. 3

Kahn, G., *Symbolistes et Décadents* (Paris: Messein, 1902)

Labande, L.H., 'Notice sur la vie et les travaux de M. Henry Cochin (1854-1926)', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 72/4, (1928), pp. 436-54

Lafitte, J-P., *Les Danses d'Isadora Duncan* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1910)

Laloy, L., 'Le Drame musical moderne. Les Véristes: Zola-Bruneau', *Le Mercure musical* (1 June 1905), pp. 75-84

— 'Claude Debussy et le debussysme', *S.I.M*, 6/8-9 (August-September 1910), pp. 507-19

— 'La Légende de Saint-Christophe', *Comoedia*, 14/2731 (8 June 1920), p. 1

Le Brun, G., 'Maurice Denis: Les Chapelles de Vésinet', *L'Art Moderne,* 9 (January 1904), pp. 66-8

Lefebvre, L., *Une grande figure du Symbolisme: Charles Morice, le poète et l'homme* (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1926)

Legrand, M.E., 'Psyché', *Écho de Paris* (31 August 1913), n.p. BnF, département Arts du spectacle, 8-Rf-68061

Lhoumeau, A., 'Musique et Chant Grégorien', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais,* 1/1 (January 1895), pp. 7-10

Mallarmé, S., 'Crayonné au théâtre', in *Divigations* (Paris: Paris Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1897), pp. 153-231

Mallarmé, S., *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951)

Mariotte, A., 'La Semaine Musicale' *Le Ménestrel: journal de musique,* 82/25 (18 June 1920), pp. 252-3

Maritain, J., *Antimoderne* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue des jeunes 1922)

Maritain, J., *Art and Scholasticism,* trans. J. F. Scanlan, 4th impression (London: Sheed & Ward, 1934). First published in French 1920)

Marraud, Abbé L., *Imagerie religieuse et art populaire* (Abbeville: F. Paillard, 1913)

Marx, R., 'Le Vernissage du Salon d'automne', *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité,* 32 (8 October 1910), pp.251-4

Masseron, A., 'Dante 1321-1921', *Almanach catholique française pour 1922* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1922) pp. 86-9

Massis, H., 'Pour un Parti de l'Intelligence', *Le Figaro, supplément littéraire* (19 July 1919), p.1

Mauclair, C., 'La Réforme de l'art décoratif in France, *La Nouvelle revue*, 98 (February 1896), pp. 725-46

— *L'art en silence 2nd edn (Paris:* Soc. d'éd. littèraires et artistiques, 1901)

— *De Watteau à Whistler* (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1905)

— 'Le fluide musical', *Le Courrier musical* (1 January, 1905), pp. 2-5

— 'Le Besoin d'art du peuple', *Revue bleue*, 4 (2 September 1905), pp. 306-10. Expanded version printed in *Trois Crises de l'art actuel* (1906) and reprinted in N. McWilliam, C. Méneux and J. Ramos (eds), *L'Art social de la Révolution à la Grande Guerre: Anthologie de textes sources*, (Paris: Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2014). https://books.openedition.org/inha/6128

— 'Le Salon d'Automne', *Revue Bleue* (October 1908). CD *Psyché* dossier

Maud, C.E., *Sparks among the stubble* (London: Allan, 1924)

Maurel, A., 'La Chapelle de Maurice Denis à Saint-Germain-en-Laye', *La Renaissance de L'art français et de l'industrie de luxe* (May 1923), pp. 244-8

Maurras, C., 'Barbares et romans', *La Plume,* 53 (1 July 1891), pp. 229-30.

— 'Pour Psyché', *La Syrinx*, 1 (January 1892), pp. 4-7

— 'Le Goût de Puvis de Chavannes', *La Gazette de France* (28 January 1895), pp. 1-2

— 'Paul Verlaine', *Le Soleil* (9 January, 1896), p. 2

— *Préface à La Musique intérieure*, First published Paris, 1905. (Édition électronique réalisée par Maurras.net, 2007), http://maurras.net/textes/38.html#note1. Last accessed 2 September 2022

— *L'Avenir de l'Intelligence* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1905)

— *Enquête sur la Monarchie,* 2nd edn (Paris: Nouvelle librairie nationale, 1909)

— 'Poussin et I'Occident', *Quand les français ne s'aimaient pas* (Paris: Librairie Nationale 1916), pp. 354-55

— *L'Étang de Berre* (Paris: Flammarion, 1928)

— *Mes idées politiques,* ed. P. Chardon, 16th edn (Paris: Fayard, 1937)

Mirbeau, O., 'Paul Gauguin', *L'Écho de Paris,* 8 (16 February 1891), p. 1.

Mithouard, A., *Paul Verlaine ou Le Scrupule de la Beauté* (Brussels: Le Spectateur Catholique, 1897)

— *Le Tourment de l'unité* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1901)

— 'De 1'Occident,' *L 'Occident*, I/1 (December 1901), pp. 3-7

— 'Le classique de demain', *L'Occident*, 1 (March 1902), pp. 289-300

— *La Traité de l'Occident* (Paris : Perrin, 1904). Facsimile edition (London: Forgotten Books, 2017)

— 'Maurice Denis', *Art et décoration*, XXII (July 1907), pp. 1-12

— *La majesté du temps* (Paris: G. Crès et Cie, 1922)

Mocquereau, Dom A., 'L'Art grégorien, son but, ses procèdes, ses caractères, *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 3/2 (1897), pp. 17-22

Mocquereau, Dom A., *La Paléographie musicale* (Solesmes, St-Pierre, 1889). Internet Archive

Moréas, J., 'Manifeste du Symbolisme', *Le Figaro, Supplément littéraire*, (18 September 1886), pp. 150-1

Moréas, J., *Le pèlerin passionné* (Paris: L. Vanier, 1893)

Morice, C., *La littérature de tout à l'heure* (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1889)

Morice, C., 'Enquête dans les tendances actuelles des arts plastiques', *Mercure de France* (1 August 1905), pp. 346-49

Müntz, E., *Les précurseurs de la Renaissance* (Paris: Librairie de l'art, 1882)

Muris, de J., 'Compte rendu de la séance d'inauguration de l'École de Chant liturgique', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 2/10 (October 1896), pp. 145-52

Natanson, T., *Peints à leur tour* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1948)

Pératé, A., 'Préface', *Petites fleurs de Saint-François d'Assise,* trans. A. Pératé [*Les Fioretti*] (Paris: Jacques Beltrand, 1913)

— 'L'Exposition d'Art Chrétien Moderne de la Société de Saint-Jean', *Revue des Jeunes*, 6/10 (25 December 1920), pp. 704-711

— 'Maurice Denis', *L'Art et les artistes*, 41 (November, 1923), pp. 40-80

— 'Préface', *Exposition Maurice Denis 1888-1924, 11 April – 11 May 1924* (Paris: Union Central des Arts décoratifs, 1924), pp. i-viii.

Perruchot, L'Abbé, 'Nos concours de mai et juin', *La Tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 1/6, (June 1895), pp. 12-13

Peugniez, P., 'Hommage à Denis: «je voudrais tant vous appris quelque chose»', *L'Art Sacré*, 3/25 (1937), pp. 161-4

Pichard, J., *L'Art Sacré Moderne* (Paris: NB Arthaud, 1953)

Pioch, G., 'Au théâtre', *Le Populaire,* 2/775 (9 June 1920), p. 2

Pothier, Dom J., *Les Mélodies grégoriennes* (Tournai: Impr. liturgique de Saint Jean L'évangéliste, Desclée Lefebvre, 1882)

Rawlinson, G.E., *Recent French Tendencies: From Renan to Claudel, A Study in French Religion* (London: Robert Scott, 1917)

Reau, L., 'Le Salon de la Société Nationale', *La Revue de l'art ancien et moderne,* 206 (10 May 1914), pp. 365-84

Retté, A., 'Maurice Denis', *La Plume,* 57 (September 1891), p.301

Richard, A., 'Un drame social', *La Revue socialiste,* 24/143 (November 1896), pp. 554-74

Riegel, A., *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament,* trans. E. Kain, ed. D. Castriota (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. Available online via de Gruyter. First published in German 1893

R. M., 'Petites Expositions', *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité,* 37 (26 November 1904), p. 2

Rodin, A., 'Sur Isadora Duncan', *L'Œuvre* (1 November 1911), pp. 10-11. Part of special issue on Duncan

Rolland, R., *Musiciens d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Libraire Hachette, 1908)

Ropartz, G., 'Les œuvres symphoniques de Paul Dukas', *Revue Musicale*, 16 (May-June 1936), pp. 61-8

Rouché, J., *L'art théâtral moderne* (Paris: E. Cornély, 1910)

Ruskin, J., *The Stones of Venice* vol. II (New York: John Wiley, 1873). Accessed online Hathi Trust Digital Library, 2020 version

Saix, de G., 'Le Théâtre', *La France* (9 June 1920), p. 2.

Schopenhauer, A. *The World as Will and Representation*, vols 1 & 2, trans. E. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966 & 1967), available via Ebook central

Schopfer, J., *Voyage idéale en Italie* (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1899)

Segard, A., *Peintres Aujourd'hui: Les Décorateurs*, 2nd ed (Paris: Librairie Ollendorff, 1914)

Sertillanges, A.G., *Prière de la femme française pendant la guerre* (Paris: Librairie de l'Art Catholique, 1916)

— *Aux morts de la guerre prière à ceux qui sont partis* (Paris: Libraire de l'Art Catholique, 1916)

— *Prière et Musique* (Paris: Éditions Spès, 1935)

Sérusier, P., *ABC de la peinture suivi fragments de lettres et propos sur l'histoire, la théorie et la technique artistiques,* 2nd edn (Paris: Floury, 1942). Reprinted La Rochelle, Rumeur des Ages, 1995

Servières, G., 'La légende de saint Christophe dans l'art', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* 3/63 (1921) pp. 23-40

Severini, G., *Du cubisme au classicisme* (Paris : Povolozky et Cie, 1921)

Sizeranne, de R., 'L'Art religieux et les Salons de 1920', *La Revue des deux mondes,* 6/57 (1920), pp. 586-600

Souvestre, É., *Popular Legends of Brittany* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols & Co, 1854)

Taine, H., *Philosophie de l'art. «Corpus des œuvres de philosophie en langue française»* (Paris: Fayard, 1985)

Tardieu, E., 'M. Paul Gauguin', *Écho de Paris,* 4003 (13 May 1895), p. 2

Tiersot, J., 'Historic and National Songs of France', *Musical Quarterly,* 6/4 (October 1920), pp. 599-632

Vachon, M., *Puvis de Chavannes* (Paris: Braun, Clément et Cie, 1895)

Vallas, L., 'Société des Grands Concerts', *Revue Musicale de Lyon*, 3/22 (11 March 1906), pp. 644-6

— 'Le peintre religieux et le maître de «Pelléas»', *Le Présent* (22 November 1943) n.p.

— *Vincent d'Indy: vol II, La maturité, la vieillesse, 1886-1931*, (Paris: Albim Michel, 1950)

— *César Franck*, trans. H. Foss (London: Harrap, 1951)

Vauxcelles, 'Le Salon d'Automne de 1910', *L'art décoratif*, 24 (October 1910), pp. 113-76

— 'Le Salon d'Automne, supplément gratuit', *Gil Blas*, 13,409 (7 November 1913), pp. 1-8

Verkade, J., *Le tourment de Dieu: étapes d'un moine peintre* (Paris: L'Art Catholique, 1926)

Verlaine, P., *Sagesse: Images en couleurs de Maurice Denis*. Wood engraving by Jacques Beltrand, ed. A. Vollard (Paris: Vollard, 1911)

Verneuil, M-P., 'Un intérieur moderne', *L'Art et décoration*, 17/1 (January 1913) pp. 53-61

Visan, de T. [pseudonym used by Vincent Bietrix], 'Adrien Mithouard et l'Occident', *L'attitude du lyrisme contemporain* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1911), pp. 152-219

Visan, de T. [pseudonym used by Vincent Bietrix], *Essais sur la tradition française* (Paris: Rivière, 1922)

Udine, d', J., 'Isadora Duncan', *Le Courrier musical*, 7/10 (15 May 1904), p. 340

Udine, d' J., *L'art et la geste*, ed. F. Alcan (Paris: Libraire Félix Alcan et Guillaumin Réunies, 1910)

SECONDARY SOURCES

Books and Articles

Abastado, C. 'The Language of Symbolism', in A. Balakian (ed.), *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages* (Budapest: Akademi Kladó, 1982), pp. 85-100

Abbate, C., *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001)

Adorno, T. and Gillespie, S. 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting', *The Musical Quarterly*, 79/1 (Spring 1995), pp. 66-79

Albin, A., 'Aural Space, Sonorous Presence, and the Performance of Christian Community in the Chester Shepherds Play', *Early Theatre*, 16/2 (2013), pp. 33-57

Albright, D., *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and other Arts* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

Albright, D. (ed.), *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

Al-Maraty, S., 'Des rayons et des ombres. Latinité, littérature et réaction en France (1880-1940)', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 95 (2017), pp. 15-29. https://doi.org/10.4000/cdim.8812

Amblard, P. *Maurice Denis*: *Le Chemin de Croix de Jésus* (Paris: Artège, 2015)

Ambroselli de Bayser, C., Hornus, P. and Lequeu, T. (eds), *George Desvallieres: l'œil, le cœur, et l'esprit* (Paris: Somogy, 2015)

Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition (London, Verso, 2006)

Anderson, J.A. and Dyrness, W.A., *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016)

Anger, J. 'Modernism at Home', in D. Johnson, and D. Ogawa (eds), *Seeing and Beyond: Essays on Eighteenth to Twenty-first Century Art in Honour of Kermit S. Champa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 211-45

Anquetil, M., 'Peintres et musiciens de concert, au temps des Nabis', *RIdIM-RCMI newsletter*, 21 (1996), pp. 46-57

Antliff, M., *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007)

Arguëlles, J., *Charles Henry and the Formation of a Pychophysical Aesthetic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972)

Bakhtin, M., 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', trans. C. Emerson, in M. Holquist (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-259

Baldassari, A. (ed.), *The Morozov Collection, Icons of Modern Art*, exhib. cat., Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris, September 22nd 2021-April 3 2022. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2021)

Balibar, E., *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities,* trans. C. Turner (London: Verso, 1991)

Ball, S., 'The Early Figural Paintings of André Derain, 1905-1910: A Re-Evaluation', *Zeitschrift für kunstgeschichte*, 43/1 (1980), pp. 79-96

Barazzetti-Demoulin, S., *Maurice Denis* (Paris: Grasset, 1945)

Barbe, M., (ed.), *Musique et arts plastiques: analogies et interférences* (Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2006)

Barricelli, J-P. and Weinstein, L., *Ernest Chausson: The composer's life and works* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955)

Barrie, T., *Sacred Place: Myth, Ritual, and Meaning in Architecture* (Boston: Shambhala, 1960)

Barruel, T., 'Maurice Denis et Ernest Chausson: Correspondance inédite et catalogues des œuvres de Denis ayant appartenu à Chausson', *Revue de l'art*, 98 (1992), pp. 66-76

Barruel, T., 'La Coupole de Maurice Denis', in T. Barruel and C. Loupiac (eds), *1913: Théâtre des Champs-Élysées,* exhib. cat. (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion de Musées Nationaux, 1987), pp. 72-88

Baxandall, M., *Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974)

Beaupuy, de A., Gay, C. and Top, D. (eds), *Réné de Castéra (1873-1955), un compositeur landais au cœur de la musique française* (Paris: Séguier, 2003)

Becker, A., *The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-1930* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1998)

Becker, A. and McPhail, H., *War and Faith: The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-1930* (Oxford: Berg 1998)

Bednarek, A. and Ames-Lewis, F. (eds), *Decorum in Renaissance Narrative Art: Papers delivered at the Annual Conference of the Association of Art Historians, London, April* 1991 (London: Birkbeck College, 1992)

Beecham, R., 'Appia, Jaques-Dalcroze, and Hellerau, Part Two: Poetry in Motion', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 1/3 (August 1985), pp. 245-61

Begbie, J., *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Begbie, J., *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Bellow, J., *Modernism on Stage: The Ballets Russes and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)

Bellow, J., 'Drawing a Line with the Body', in A. Leonard (ed.), *Arabesque Without End* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 173-202

Benitez, V.P., *Olivier Messiaen's Opera, Saint-François d'Assise* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019)

Berger, J., 'Chapter 3 of *Ways of Seeing* (1972)' in Robinson, H., (ed.), *Feminism– Art Theory: An Anthology 1968-2014*, 2nd edn, (Chichester: Wiley and Blackwell, 2015), pp. 293-9

Bergeron, K., *Decadent Enchantment: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1998)

Bernadini, M.G. (ed.), *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche: Myth in Art from Antiquity to Canova*, exhib. cat. (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2012)

Bhogal, G. K., *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music and Art in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Binde, P., 'Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 74/1 (2001), pp. 15-27

Birkett, J., *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France, 1870-1914* (London: Quartet, 1986)

Blackburn, S., *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Bouillon, J-P., 'Situation de Denis', in *Maurice Denis 1870-1943*, exhib. cat., Musée des beaux-arts, Lyon 1994-5 (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994), pp. 13-20

— 'Politique de Denis', in *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*, exhib. cat., Musée des beaux-arts, Lyon 1994-5 (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994), pp. 95-109

— 'Maillol und Denis, Künstlerischer Bund und historischer Augenblick', in U. Berger and J. Zutter (eds), *Aristide Maillol* (Munich: Prestel, 1996), pp. 127–44

— 'Maurice Denis: Four Stages in the History of French Landscape, 1889-1914', in R. Thomson (ed.) *Framing France: The Representation of Landscape in France, 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 145-64

— 'Bibliographie', in *Maurice Denis, Le Ciel et l'Arcadie. Textes réunis*, présentés et annotés par Jean-Paul Bouillon (Paris: Hermann, 1993), pp. 223-32

— *Maurice Denis: six essais* (Paris : Somogy, 2006)

— '«Pour un plafond: ô ces voix d'enfants chantant sous la coupôle!» Maurice Denis au Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, 1908-1913', *Revue de l'Art*, 187/1 (2015), pp. 69-81)

Bouillon, J.P. (ed.), *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943, Earthly Paradise*, exhib. cat., Paris and Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2006 (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2006)

Boulet, F., *Leçon d'histoire de France: Saint-Germain-en-Laye: des antiquités nationales à une ville internationale* (Paris: Les Presses Franciliennes, 2006)

Boxall, I., *Matthew through the centuries* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2019)

Boyer, P. E. and Prelinger, E. (eds), *The Nabis and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988)

Brandstetter, G., *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015)

Briscoe, J., 'Debussy, Franck and the "idea of sacrifice"', *Revue belge de musicology*, 45 (1991), pp. 27-39

Brody, E., *The Musical Kaleidoscope 1870-1925* (London: Robson, 1988)

Brüderlin, M. and Beyeler, E., *Ornament and Abstraction (*New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001)

Burke, J., *The Italian Renaissance Nude* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018)

Cachin, F. and Nonne M., (eds), *Mediterranée, De Courbet à Matisse*, exhib. cat., Galeries Nationales Du Grand Palais, 19 September 2000–15 January 2001 (Paris: Réunion Des Musées Nationaux, 2000)

Carden-Coyne, A., *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Caron S., 'André Caplet et Jacques Maritain: une résonance du paradigme médiéval entre la musique et les idées', in Caron, S. and Duchesneau, M. (eds), *Musique, art et religion dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009), pp 43-55.

Carter, T.P, 'Les Petites Revues and the Embattled Periodical: Art et Critique (1889-1892)', *The French Review*, 46/3 (February 1973), pp. 475-83

Chapin, M.W., 'Music *chez soi*', in M.W. Chapin and H.L. Brown (eds), *Private Lives: Home and Family in the Art of the Nabi,* exhib. cat. Cleveland Museum of Art, July 1–September 19 2021 (New Haven, CT and London: The Cleveland Museum of Art, distributed by Yale University Press), pp. 143-86

Charle, C., 'Opera in France, 1870–1914: Between nationalism and foreign imports', trans. J. Boitin, in V. Johnson, J. Fulcher and T. Ertman (eds), *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 243-66

Chartrain-Hebbelinck, M-J., 'Les lettres de Paul Signac à Octave Maus', *Bulletin of the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Beligique* (1969), pp. 52-95

Chassé, C., *Le Mouvement symboliste dans l'art du XIX siècle, Gustave Moreau — Redon — Carriere; Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven: Maurice Denis* (Paris: Floury, 1947)

Chassé, C., *The Nabis and Their Period*, trans. M. Bullock (London: Lund Humphries, 1969)

Chastel, A. 'L'art du geste à la Renaissance', 75, *Revue de l'Art (*1987), pp. 9-16

Cheetham, M.A., *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Chenebaux-Sautory, M., 'De Sainte-Marguerite du Vésinet (1903) à la chapelle du Prieuré de Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1922)', actes du colloque St-Germain-en-Laye, 8 mars 2014, *Bulletin des Amis de Vieux-Saint-Germain* (2014), pp. 199-217

Chesterton, G.K., *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton,* vol. II, eds. G. Marlin and R. Azar, *St Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986)

Chimènes, M.,'Vincent d'Indy dans la société parisienne', in M. Schwartz, (ed.) *Vincent d'Indy et son temps* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2006), pp. 65-85

Chipp, H.B., Seiz, P., and Taylor, J. (eds), *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press: 1969)

Chua, D., *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Cladel, J. *Aristide Maillol, sa vie —son œuvre – ses idées* (Paris: Grasset, 1937)

Clark, K., *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (London: Penguin Books, 1956)

Cogeval, G. (ed.), *Edouard Vuillard,* exhib. cat. (Washington, D.C: National Gallery of Art, and Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in association with Yale University Press, 2003)

Cohen, J-L, Abram, J. and Lambert, G. (eds), *Encyclopédie Perret* (Paris: Éditions du Patrimoine Centre des monuments nationaux, 2022)

Combe, P., *The Restoration of Gregorian Chant: Solesmes and the Vatican Edition* (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 2003)

Corbier, C., *Maurice Emmanuel* (Paris: Bleu nuit, 2007)

— 'Continuité, Tradition, Nouveauté: essai sur l'esthétique de Maurice Emmanuel' in *Tradition et innovation en histoire de l'art*. Actes du 131 Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques, Grenoble, 2006 (Paris, Éditions du CTHS, 2009), pp. 202-12

— *Maurice Emmanuel et l'hellénisme, Poésie, musique et danse (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021)*

Cramer, C., *Abstraction and the Classical Ideal 1760-1920* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2006)

Cronk, N., The *Classical Sublime: French Neoclassicism and the Language of Literature* (Charlottesville, VA: Rookwood Press, 2003)

Curtis, M., *Three Against the Third Republic: Sorrel, Barrès and Maurras* (Princeton. NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959). Available online de Gruyter & Co.

Dale, J. (ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, repr. 2007)

Daly, A., *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002). First published 1995

Dard, O., 'Charles Maurras, le fascisme, la latinité et la Méditerranée', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* [online], 95 | 2017, published online 15 June 2018. https://doi.org/10.4000/cdim.8880

Dardel, A., 'Le thème de l'âge d'or dans la peinture', *La Gazette du hôtel Drouot*, 9 (3 March 1989), pp. 104-5

Daydé, E., 'Qui a peur de Maurice Denis?', *Art Absolument* (Winter 2006/7), pp. 36-44

Dayez, A., 'Introduction', *Maurice Denis,* exhib. cat. Orangerie des Tuileries, 3 June-31 August, 1970 (Paris: Musée de L'Orangerie, 1970)

Decourt, A., *Un Musicien Dans La Ville: Albert Alain à Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1880-1971)* (Paris: Valhermeil, 2001)

Decourt, A., *Albert Alain (1880-1971), organiste et compositeur français* (Paris: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2000)

Decourt, A. (ed.), *Jehan Alain, Livre du Centenaire* (Saint-Germain-en-Laye: Les Presses Franciliennes, 2005)

Delannoy, A., (ed.), *Maurice Denis 1870-1943. Lumières de sable, plages de Maurice Denis*, exhib. cat., Musée départmental Maurice Denis, June-September 1997 (Paris: Somogy, 1997)

Delannoy, A., Barbey, M, Bouillon, J-P. et al, *Maurice Denis: La Légende de Saint Hubert, 1896-1897* (Paris: Éditions Cercle d'art, 2004)

Delonibus, G. *Charles Maurras's Classicizing Aesthetics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000)

Delpal, B., 'Sur le tableau de Maurice Denis: «*La Dignité du travail*»', *Chrétiens et sociétés*, 9 (2002). https://doi.org/10.4000/chretienssocietes.4187

De Mille, C., *Music and Modernism, c. 1849-1950* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011)

Denizeau, G., Le Visuel Et le Sonore: Peinture Et Musique au XX siècle: Pour Une Approche Épistémologique (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998)

Dénizot, A., *Le Sacré-Coeur et la Grande guerre* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1994)

Deruchie, A., *The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle: Style, Culture, and the Symphonic Tradition* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2013)

Deruchie, A., 'Saint-Saëns's Cyclic Forms', in S. Vande Moortele, J. Pedneault-Deslauriers, J. and J.M. Martin (eds), *Formal Functions in Perspective, Essays on Musical Form from Haydn to Adorno* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press: 2015), pp. 123-64

Dessy, C., 'Staging and Writing the Arabesque: The Aesthetics of Line in Nabi Painting and Avant-Garde Theatre in the Late Nineteenth Century', in C. Moran (ed.), *The Art of Theatre: Word, Image and Performance in France and Belgium, c. 1830-1910* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 307-26

Didi-Huberman, G., *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance & Figuration*, trans. J. M. Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)

Didi-Huberman, G., 'Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time', *Common Knowledge*, 9/2 (2003), pp. 273-85

Donnellon, D., 'Debussy as musician and critic', in J. Cross and S. Trezise (eds), *Cambridge Companion to Debussy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 43-61

Doran, M., *Conversations with Cézanne: Émile Bernard, Jules Borély, Maurice Denis* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2000)

Doss-Davezac, S., 'Schopenhauer according to the Symbolists: The Philosophical roots of late nineteenth century aesthetics', in D. Jacquette (ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 249-76

Dymond, A., 'A Politicized Pastoral: Signac and the Cultural Geography of Mediterranean France', *The Art Bulletin,* 85/2 (June 2003), pp. 353-70

Eliade, M., *The Sacred and the Profane: the nature of religion,* trans. W. R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959)

Eliade, M. *Myth and Reality*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963)

Elkins, J., *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004)

Ellis, K., *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth Century France* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Ellis, K., *The Politics of Plainchant in Fin-de-siècle France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)

Emery, E.N., *Romancing the Cathedral: Gothic Architecture in Fin-de-siècle French Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001)

Emery, E.N. and Morowitz, L., (eds), *Consuming the Past: the Medieval Revival in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003)

Exhibition leaflet for 'Les Nabis et le décor', musée de Luxembourg, Paris, 13 March-30 June 2019. https://museeduluxembourg.fr/sites/luxembourg/files/Guide_Visite_NABIS.GB.pdf. Last accessed 21 September 1922

Facos, M., *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2009)

Fagerberg, D.W., *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology? (Chicago, IL: Hillenbrand Books, 2004)*

Farago, C. and Zwinjenberg, R., (eds), *Compelling Visuality, The Work of Art in and out of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

Faure, M., *Du néoclassicisme musical dans la France du premier XXe siècle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997)

Ferraton, Y., *Vincent d'Indy, 1851-1931: dessins et aquarelles: images de l'Ardèche et d'ailleurs* (Langres: D. Guéniot, 2003)

Fischer-Lichte, E., *Tragedy's Endurance: Performances of Greek Tragedies and Cultural Identity in Germany since 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Foucault, M., 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias', trans. J. Miskowiec of 'Des espaces autres', *Architecture/ Mouvement/ Continuité*, 5 (1984), pp. 46-9, available at https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf, p. 3.

Francis, E., 'Event to Monument: Modernism, Feminism and Isadora Duncan', *American Studies*, 35/1 (Spring 1994), pp. 25-45

Frèches-Thory, C. and Terrasse, A. (eds), *The Nabis: Bonnard, Vuillard, and Their Circle*, trans. M. Pardoe (Paris: Flammarion, 1991)

Fry, R., 'Introductory Note to Maurice Denis's "Cézanne"' in C. Reed, (ed.), *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 76-80

Fulcher, J., 'Vincent d'Indy's "Drame Anti-Juif" and Its Meaning in Paris, 1920', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2/3 (November, 1990), pp. 295-319

— 'Musical Style, Meaning, and Politics in France on the Eve of the Second World War', *The Journal of Musicology*, 13/4 (1995), pp. 425-53

— *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

— *The Composer As Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

— 'The effect of a bomb in the hall: The French "opera of ideas" and its cultural role in the 1920s', in V. Johnson, J. Fulcher and T. Ertman (eds), *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 115-32

Gamboni, D., *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art*, trans. M. Treharne (London: Reaktion Books, 2002)

Garafola, L. (ed.), *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005)

Garafola, L., 'Soloists Abroad: The Pre-War Careers of Natalia Trouhanova and Ida Rubinstein', in L. Garafola (ed.), *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), pp. 148-70

Gardiner, P., *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963)

Gargiani, R., *Auguste Perret 1874–1954: Teoria e opere* (Milan: Electa, 1993)

Genova, P., 'A Collective Experiment in Literary Journalism: The Case of the *Revue Wagnérienne*', in S. A. Whidden (ed.), *Models of Collaboration in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 137-52

Genty, G., 'Maurice Denis après 1900, "le bonheur classique" in *Maurice Denis 1870–1943*, exhib. cat., Musée des beaux-arts, Lyon 1994-5 (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994), pp. 51-60

Gilroy-Ware, C., *The Classical Body in Romantic Britain* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press)

Gilson, E., *Painting and Reality*, 2nd edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968)

Giocanti, S., 'Vincent d'Indy, est-il un compositeur religieux?', in M. Schwartz (ed.) *Vincent d'Indy et sons temps* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2006), pp. 255-62

Godard, C., *Chaillot: un théâtre national et populaire* (Paris: Éditions Norma, 1998)

Golan, R., *Modernity and Nostalgia. Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1995)

Gombrich, E.H., 'Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 11 (1948), pp. 163-92

Gombrich, E.H., *Means and Ends: Reflections on the History of Fresco Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976)

Grant, R.M., 'Music Lessons on Affect and Object', *Representations*, 144/1 (2018), pp. 34–60

Griffiths, R., *The Reactionary Revolution: the Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870-1914* (London: Constable, 1966)

Grivel, D., 'Convergences esthétiques : Camille Saint-Saëns, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Maurice Emmanuel, Maurice Denis', *Bulletin des Amis de Maurice Emmanuel*, 3 (Spring 2007), pp. 39-52

— 'Maurice Denis et les musiciens suisses,' *Revue musicale de Suisse romande*, 55/4 (December 2002), 32–41

— *Maurice Denis et la musique* (Lyon: Symétrie, 2011)

Groom, G., *Édouard Vuillard, Painter-Decorator: Patrons and Projects, 1892-1912* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press

Groom, G., 'Coming of Age: Patrons and Projects', in *G. Groom, Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930,* exhib. cat. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2001 (New Haven, CT, and London, Yale University Press, 2001)

Groom, G., *Gauguin: Artist as Alchemist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017)

Guedj, J., 'Judaïsme, fascisme et latinité: France-Italie, 1919-39', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée,* 95 (2017), pp. 173-98

Guerini, E., Codazzi, P. and Bertrand, S. (eds), *Latin et latinité dans l'œuvre d'André Gide* (Paris: Classiques Garniers, 2020)

Guichard, L. *La France au temps du wagnérisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963)

Hargrove, J. and McWilliam, N. (eds), *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870–1914* (Washington, DC: Centre for the Advanced Study in the Visual Arts: New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2005)

Harrison, C., (ed.), *Art in Theory, 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003)

Haskell, H., *The Early Music Revival: A History* (London: Dover Publications, 1996)

Herbert, J.D., 'The View of the Trocadéro: The Real Subject of the Exposition Internationale, Paris, 1937', *Assemblage*, 26 (April 1995), pp. 94-112

Heynickx, R., *The Maritain Factor: Taking Religion into Interwar Modernism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010)

Hocking, E., *Ferdinand Brunetière: The Evolution of a Critic* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1936). Open Access. Last accessed 8 August 2022

Homer, W.I., *Seurat and the Science of Painting* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1964)

Huebner, S., 'After 1850 at the Paris Opera: institution and repertory' in D. Charlton, (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 291-330

— *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

— 'Vincent d'Indy et le «drame sacré»: de *Parsifal* à *La Légende de Saint-Christophe',* in J-C Branger and A. Ramaut (eds), *Opéra et religion sous la IIIème République* (Saint-Étienne: L'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006), pp. 227-56

Hurcombe, M. 'From the Grand Tour to the Political Tourist: Italy and the Encounter with *homo fascista',* in M Hurcombe, A. Kershaw and M. Cornick (eds), *French Political Travel Writing in the Inter-war Years* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 26-64

Isaac, B., *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004)

Ives, C.F., *The Great Wave: the Influence of Japanese Woodcuts on French Prints* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974)

Johnson, D., *France and the Dreyfus Affair* (London: Blandford, 1966)

Johnson, J., *Georges Rouault and Material Imagining*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2020)

Jones, L., *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000)

Jullian, R.M, '192e séance: Delacroix et la musique du tableau', *Revue d'ésthetique*, 19 (1966), pp. 214-6

Jumeau-Lafond, J-D., 'Maurice Denis and Music', in *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943: Earthly Paradise*, exhib. cat. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2006), pp. 286-9

Kaplan, C., 'En quête de l'Arcadie: Gide lecteur de Poussin', *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide,* 25/116 (October 1997), pp. 425-38

Kaplan, C., 'Peindre le portrait d'Alissa: Gide en train de «lire» Amour de Maurice Denis', *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide,* 38/166 (April 2010), pp. 189-204

Kean, B.W., *French Painters, Russian Collectors: The Merchant Patrons of Modern Art in Pre-revolutionary Russia* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994)

Kearns, J., *Symbolic Landscapes: The Place of Painting in the Poetry and Criticism of Mallarmé and his Circle* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1989)

Kelkel, M., *Naturalisme, vérisme et réalisme dans l'opéra de 1890 à 1930* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, J.Vrin, 1984)

Kelly, B., *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870-1939* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008)

Kelly, B., 'Common Canon, Conflicting Ideologies: Music Criticism in Performance in Interwar France', in Kelly B. and Moore, C. (eds), *Music criticism in France: Authority Advocacy, Legacy (1918-1939)* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018)

Keym, S., 'De la "Divine Bonté" à l'Antichrist?' in M. Schwartz (ed.), *Vincent d'Indy et son temps,* pp. 195-210

Kieffer, A., *Debussy's Critics: Sound, Affect, and the Experience of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

Klein, J., *Matisse and Decoration* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2018)

Klein, M. L. *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005)

Kloss, J., *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota, 2009)

Kostenevich, A.G., *The Nabis* (New York: Parkstone International, 2012)

Krauss, R., *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (London: MIT Press, 1985)

Kuenzli, K., 'Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus: Maurice Denis's *Homage to Cézanne*', *Art History*, 30/5, (2007), pp. 683-711

Kuenzli, K., *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010)

Ladet, P. (ed.), *Vincent d'Indy: un musicien aux sources de l'Ardèche*, Cahiers de mémoire d'Ardèche et de Temps Présent, 53 (Privas: Association Mémoire d'Ardèche et temps présent, 1997)

Laffon, J. (ed.), *Isadora Duncan: Une Sculpture Vivante* (Paris: Paris Musées, Actes Sud, 2009)

Langham-Smith, R., 'Liner notes *for Dukas: Symphony in C major / Polyceute Overture* ', BBC Philharmonic, Yan Pascal Tortelier (Colchester: Chandos Records Ltd, 1994). www.chandos.net/chanimages/Booklets/CH8765.pdf. Last accessed 1 September 2022

Lanzoni, S., *Empathy: A History* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2018)

Le Doussal, F., 'Maurice Denis et Ernest Chausson: Deux âmes fraternelles éprises d'absolu', *Music in Art*, 25, 1/2 (2000), pp. 103-13

Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space,* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

Leggio, J., *Music and Modern Art* (London: Routledge, 2002)

Lehmann, A.G., *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968)

Leonard, A. (ed.), *Arabesque without End* (London: Routledge, 2021)

Lepage J. and Cahours-d'Aspry J-B. (eds), L'univers pictural de Déodat de Séverac, exhib. cat., Musée d'art et d'histoire de Narbonne, 5 July–30 September 1991 (Narbonne: La Ville, 1991)

Lepdor C., and Cahn, I. (eds), *Maurice Denis Amour*, exhib. cat., Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, 12 February-16 May 2021 (Paris: Éditions Hazan, 2021)

Leppert, R., *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (London: University of California Press, 1993)

Leppert, R., *The Nude: The Cultural Rhetoric of the Body in the Art of Western Modernism* (New York: Westview Press, 2007). Online resource: Routledge 2018

Lessmann, B., 'Appropriations of Gregorian Chant in *Fin-de-siècle* French Opera: *Couleur locale* – Message-Opera – Allusion?', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 145/1 (2020), pp. 37-74

Lesure, F. and Langham Smith, R., (eds), *Debussy on Music: Critical Writings of the Great French Composer* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998)

Levin, M., *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth Century France* (London: D.B. Kuspit, 1986)

Levy, R., 'Action Française' in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution* , vol. I (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2005), pp. 1-2

Lévy-Bruhl, L., *Primitive Mentality* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1923)

Lindemann, A. *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank) 1894-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Lockspeiser. E., *Debussy; His Life and Mind,* 2nd edn (London: J.M. Dent, 1951 repr. 1966)

Lockspeiser, E., *Music and Painting: A Study in Comparative Ideas from Turner to Schoenberg* (London: Cassell, 1973)

Loevgren, S., *The Genesis of Modernism: Seurat, Gauguin, Van Gogh & French Symbolism in the 1880's,* rev. edn (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1983)

Lopez-Morillas, J., 'Ortega y Gasset: Historicism vs. Classicism', *Yale French Studies*, 6 (1950) France and World Literature, pp. 63-74

Lorquin, B., *Aristide Maillol* (Geneva: Skira, 1994)

Lowenthal, L., *The search for Isadora: The Legend & Legacy of Isadora Duncan* (Pennington, NJ: Princeton Book Co., 1993)

MacDonald, N., 'Isadora re-examined: Lesser known aspects of the great dancer's life', *Dance Magazine* (July 1977), pp. 51-64

Macdougall, A.R., 'Isadora Duncan and the artists', *Dance Index,* 5/3 (March 1946), pp. 61-83

McGuinness, P., *Poetry and Radical Politics in Fin de siècle France: From Anarchism to Action Française* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

McMutrie, R., *The Semiotics of Movement in Space* (New York: Routledge, 2016)

McNamer, S., *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

McWilliam, N., *The Aesthetics of Reaction: Tradition, Faith, Identity & the Visual Arts in France, 1900-1914* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021)

McWilliam, N., 'Opposing Strands: The Mediterranean as Site of Cultural Conflict Around 1900', *Artl@s Bulletin*, 10/2 (Fall 2021), pp. 21-36. https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/

Macksey, R., 'Proust on the Margins of Ruskin', in J.D. Hunt and F.M. Holland (eds), *The Ruskin Polygon* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 172-91

Magriel, P. (ed.), *Isadora Duncan* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1947)

Maillol and Dina: For Dina Vierny, exhib. cat. Marlborough Fine Art 3, May-June 2001 (London: Marlborough Fine Art, 2001)

Malingur, M., *Paul Gauguin: Letters to his Wife and Friends*, trans. H.J. Stenning (London: Saturn Press, 1946), accessed via Internet Archive

Mallgrave, H.F. and Ikonomou, E. (eds), *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893,* (Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994)

Marion, J-L., 'Christ as Saturated Phenomenon: The Icon of the Invisible', in *Givenness and Revelation,* trans. S.E. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 61-88

Marlais, M., *Conservative Echoes in Fin-de-siècle Parisian Art Criticism* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1992)

Marlais, M., 'Conservative style/conservative politics: Maurice Denis in Le Vésinet', *Art History*, 16/1 (1993), pp. 125-46

Marrus, M., *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)

Martin, J., 'Isadora Duncan and basic dance', in P. Magriel, (ed.) *Isadora Duncan* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1947), pp. 1-17

Marx, W., 'Eliot and Maurras on Classicism', in B. Lockerd (ed.), *T. S. Eliot and Christian Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), pp. 77-88

Masurel-Murray, C., 'Conversions to Catholicism among Fin de Siècle Writers: A Spiritual and Literary Genealogy', *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, 76 (Autumn 2012), pp. 105-25

Matthews, P., *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

Mattiato, E., 'Paul Claudel et Maurice Denis face à la décadence de l'art sacré', *Bulletin de la Société Paul Claudel*, 161/1 (2001), pp. 17-21

Maurer, N.M., *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom, The Thought and Art of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin* (London and Madison, WI: Associated University Presses, 1998)

Maurice Denis et la Bretagne, exhib. cat. musée de Morlaix, du 13 juillet au 29 septembre 1985 (Morlaix: musée de Morlaix, 1985)

Maurice Denis 1870-1943, exhib. cat., musée des beaux-arts, Lyon 1994-5 (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994)

Maurice Denis dessinateur, l'oeuvre dévoilé, exhib. cat., ed. A. Delannoy, musée départemental Maurice Denis (Paris: Somogy, 2006)

Maurice Denis, 1870-1943, *Earthly Paradise*, exhib. cat., Paris, musée d' Orsay (Paris: R.M.N. 2006)

Maurice Denis à Saint-Germain et au Vésinet. L'éclosion d'une vocation artistique, Conference proceedings in St-Germain-en-Laye, 8 March 2014. Essays by Decourt, A., Denis, C., de Finance, L., Patry, S., Martine-Sautory, I., Sciama, C., Stahl, F., Prévotat, J., Rowley, N., *Bulletin des Amis Saint-Germain*, 51 (2014)

Maurice-Chabard, B., *Un nouveau regard sur Maurice Denis*, La collection Eugène Chevalier, exhib. cat., Autun, Musée Rolin, 22 juin-21 octobre 1996 (Paris: Société nouvelle Adam Biro, 1996)

Messiaen, O., *Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel*, trans. E. Thomas (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1994)

Metzger, F. and Tertünte, S. (eds), *Sacred Heart Devotion. Memory, Body, Image, Text—Continuities and Discontinuities* (Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2020)

Meyers, G., 'Vitruvius and the Origins of Roman Spatial Rhetoric', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 50 (2005), pp. 67-86

Miller, S., *The Word made Visible in the Painted Image: Perspective, Proportion, Witness and Threshold in Italian Renaissance Painting* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016)

Minor, R., 'Wagner's Last Chorus: Consecrating Space and Spectatorship in "Parsifal"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 17/1 (March, 2005), pp. 1-36

Minors, H., 'Paul Dukas' *La Peri* as interpreted by two balletic collaborators', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22/1 (2006), pp. 117-35

Mirzoeff, N., *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (New York: Routledge, 1995)

Moran, C. (ed.), *The Art of Theatre: Word, Image and Performance in France and Belgium, c. 1830-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Morehead, A., 'Defending Deformation: Maurice Denis's Positivist Modernism', *Art History*, 38/5 (2015), pp. 890-915

Morowitz, L., 'Anti-Semitism, Medievalism and the Art of the Fin-de-Siècle', *Oxford Art Journal*, 20/1 (1997), pp. 35-49

Morowitz, L. and Vaughan, W. *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century,* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000)

Morton, M., '"From the Other Side": An Introduction', in M. Morton and P. Schmunk (eds), *The Arts Entwined: Music and Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Garland, 2000), pp. 1-22

Moxey, K., *Visual Time: the Image in History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013)

Mras, G., 'Ut Pictura Musica: A Study of Delacroix's Paragone', *The Art Bulletin,* 45/ 3 (September, 1963), pp. 266-71

Nead, L., *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1995)

Nectoux, J-M., *Harmonie en bleu et or: Debussy, la musique et les arts* (Paris: Fayard, 2005)

Neginsky [Nezhinskaia], R. (ed.), *Symbolism, Its Origins and Its Consequences* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) Accessed via Proquest 2015

Nochlin, L., 'Degas and the Dreyfus Affair: A Portrait of the Artist as an anti-Semite', in N. Kleeblatt (ed.), *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth and Justice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 96-116

Nochlin, L. and Garb, T. (eds), *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995)

Noiray, M. and Serre, S. (eds), *Repertoire de L'Opera de Paris 1671-2009: Analyse et interprétation* (Paris: École nationale des chartes, 2010)

Ouston, P., *The Imagination of Maurice Barrès* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974). Accessed online via De Gruyter, 2019. Last accessed 8 August 2022

Panofsky, E., *Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936)

Pasler, J., 'Deconstructing d'Indy, or the Problem of a Composer's Reputation', *Nineteenth Century Music*, 30/3 (Spring 2007), pp. 230-56

Pasler, J., *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009)

Passini, M., 'Louis Dimier, L'Action française et la question de l'art national', in O. Dard, M. Leymarie, and N. McWilliam (eds), *Le maurrassisme et la culture. Volume III: L'Action française. Culture, société, politique (*Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2010*), pp. 209-18.* https://books.openedition.org/septentrion/4442#ftn9

Pichard, J., *L'Art Sacré Moderne* (Paris: NB. Arthaud, 1953)

Plett, H., *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004)

Podro, M. *The Manifold in Perception: Theories of Art from Kant to Hildebrand* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972)

Pointon, M., *Naked Authority, The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Prettejohn, E., *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture: Greek Sculpture and Modern Art from Winckelmann to Picasso* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012)

Profit, G., 'Le théâtre de Chaillot, les premières traces aux Archives nationales', in Gill, S. (ed.), *Chaillot, Lieu de tous les arts* (Pierrefitte-sur-Seine: Publications des Archives nationales, 2020)

Proksch, B., (2009) 'Vincent d'Indy as Harbinger of the Haydn Revival', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 28/2-3 (2009), pp. 162-188

Reff, T., 'Cézanne and Poussin', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23/1-2 (January-June 1960), pp. 150-74

Rewald, J., *Cézanne, Geoffroy et Gasquet, suivi des Souvenirs sur Cézanne de Louis Aurenche et de lettres inédites* (Paris: Quatre chemins-éditart, 1959)

Reyes, H., 'The Rhetorical Frame of Poussin's Theory of the Modes', *Intellectual History Review,* 19 (2009), pp. 287–302)

Reynolds, D., *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Riding, A., 'Arts Abroad; Opera House is Cleansed, and 1875 Paris Comes to Life,' *The New York Times* (June 21 2000) via www.nytimes.com . Accessed 6 September 2022

Roberts, D., *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011)

Roberts, P., *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996)

Rogerson, M., 'Medieval Mystery Plays in the Modern World: A Question of Relevance?', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 43 (2013), pp. 343-66

Rookmaaker, H.R., *Gauguin and 19th Century Art Theory* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1972)

Roslak, R., 'The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony: Neo-Impressionism, Science, and Anarchism', *The Art Bulletin,* 73/3 (September 1991), pp. 381-90

Roslak, R., *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-siècle France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

Ross, J., 'D'Indy's "Fervaal": Reconstructing French Identity at the Fin de siècle', *Music & Letters*, 84/2 (May 2003), pp. 209-40

Rowden, C., 'Whose/who's Salome? Natalia Trouhanowa, a Dancing Diva', in C. Rowden (ed.), *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 71-98

Roy-Gerboud, F., *La musique comme art total au XX siècle* (Paris: Éditions Harmattan, 2009)

Rubin, J. and Mattis, O. (eds), *Rival Sisters, Art and Music at the Birth of Modernism, 1815-1915* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

Ruprecht, L., *Gestural Imaginaries: Dance and Cultural Theory in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019)

Russell, C.T., *Four French Symbolists, A Sourcebook on Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon and Maurice Denis* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1996)

Saint-Martin, I., *Art chrétien/art sacré. Regards du catholicisme sur l'art. France, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014)

Salmon, M-J., *L'Age d'Or de Maurice Denis,* Musée départmental de l'Oise (Nantes: S. Chiffoleau, 1982), pp. 25-8

Schäfer, C., M*aurice Denis et le comte Kessler (1902-1913)* (Franckfurt: Peter Lang, 1997)

Schechner, R., *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985)

— 'The Future of Ritual', *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 1/1 (Winter 1987), pp. 5-33

— *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988)

Schloesser, S., 'Maritain on Music: His Debt to Cocteau', in A. Ramos (ed.), *Beauty, Art and the Polis* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), pp. 176-189

— *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005)

— *Visions of Amen: The Early Life and Music of Olivier Messiaen* (Michigan: W.B. Erdmann, 2014)

Schmid, H., *Uchronia: Designing Time* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2020)

Schwartz, M., (ed.), *Vincent d'Indy et son temps* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2006)

Segel, H., *Body Ascendant: Modernism and the Physical Imperative* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998)

Seigworth, G. J. and Gregg, M., 'An Inventory of Shimmers,' in G.J. Seigworth and M. Gregg (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1 -25

Shaw, J. L.,'Imagining the Motherland: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism and the Fantasy of France', *The Art Bulletin*, 79/4 (1997), pp. 586-610

Shaw, J. L., *Dream States: Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002)

Shaw-Miller, S., *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000)

Shephard, T. and Leonard, A., (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Music and Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2014)

Sheridan, *André Gide, A Life in the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998)

Shiff, R., *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984)

Shiff, R.,'Ingemination', in P. Druro (ed.), *Theorizing Imitation in the Visual Arts, Global Contexts* (Chichester: Wiley, 2016), pp. 166-86

Shryock, R., 'Reaction within Symbolism: The École Romane', *The French Review,* 71/4 (March 1998), pp. 577-84

Silver, K.E., *Esprit de Corps the Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989)

Silver, K. E. *Chaos and Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918-1936* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010)

Silverman, D.L., *Art Nouveau in Fin de Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1989)

Simpson, J., 'Symbolist *Aesthetics* and the *Decorative* Image/Text', *French Forum*, 25/2 (May 2000), pp. 177-204

Smith, J., *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987)

Smither, H., *A History of the Oratorio,* vol. IV (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000)

Spector, I., *Rhythm and life: the work of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1990)

Spector, T., 'Anti-Semitism and the English Mystery Plays', *Comparative Drama* 13/1 (Spring 1979), pp. 3-16

Spivey, N., 'Pathos by Formula, Horror by Decree' in *Enduring Creation: Art, Pain, and Fortitude* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 112-36

Stahl, F., 'Maurice Denis (1870-1943) et le Stic B', *Histoire de l'art*, 58 (2006), pp. 93-103

— 'La chapelle du Prieuré: testament artistique de Maurice Denis', unpublished conference paper delivered at *Maurice Denis, moderne et anti-moderne*, musée d'Orsay, 17-18 November 2006

— 'Maurice Denis dans la Grande Guerre', *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, 10/1 (2012). doi : https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.4814

— 'Un art religieux alliant tradition et modernité: l'exemple du décor de Maurice Denis dans la chapelle des franciscaines de Rouen', *Études Normandes*, 62 (2013), pp. 53-60

— 'L'Orgue dans l'œuvre de Maurice Denis' in A. Decourt (ed.), *Jehan Alain, Livre du Centenaire* (Saint-Germain-en-Laye: Les Presses Franciliennes, 2005), pp. 219-299

Stock, K., 'Maurice Denis's Mission: To Reveal the Continuity between Byzantinism and Modernism', in D. Slootjes and M. Verhoeven (eds), *Byzantium in Dialogue with the Mediterranean: History and Heritage* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 245-66

Stove, R.J., 'Franck After Franck: the composer's posthumous fortunes', *The Musical Times*, 152/1914 (Spring 2011), pp. 44-60

Stove, R.J., *César Franck: His Life and Times* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2012)

Strehlke, C.B. and González Mozo, A. (eds), *Fra Angelico and the birth of the Florentine Renaissance*, exhib. cat. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2019)

Stroik, D., *The Church Building as a Sacred Place* (Chicago,IL*: Hillenbrand Books*, 2012)

Struever, N., *Language and the History of Thought* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 1995)

Sudreau, V.B., 'Maurice Denis à l'hôtel Rouché: *Terre Latine,* inspiratrice des arts', *L'Atelier: Bulletin de l'association "Le Temps d'Albert Besnard"*, 5 (December 2009), pp. 32-46

Sutton, M., *Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics, 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

Taylor, J. *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press: 1987)

Terrasse, A., *Maurice Denis*: *intimités* (Geneva: Presses De Roto-Sadag, 1970)

Tester, K., *The Flaneur* (London: Routledge, 1994). E-book 2014

Thomas, K., 'Introduction', in J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (eds), *A Cultural History of Gesture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 1-14

Thomson, A., *Vincent d'Indy and his World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)

Thomson, R., *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France 1889-1900* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2004)

— *Art of the Actual: Naturalism and Style in Early Third Republic France, 1880-1900* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2012)

— *The Presence of the Past in French Art, Modernity and Continuity* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2021)

Thomson, R. (ed.), *Framing France: Essays on the Representation of Landscape in France, 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

Thomson, R. and Thomson, B., 'Maurice Denis, '"Définition du néo-traditionnisme" and anti-naturalism (1890)', *The Burlington Magazine*, 15/1309 (April 2012), pp. 260-67

Tilley, C.Y., *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berg, 2005)

Tillier, B., *Les artistes et l'affaire Dreyfus: 1898-1908* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2009)

Tompkins, J., *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Trachtenberg, M. and Hyman I. (eds), *Architecture, from Prehistory to Post-modernism* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2002)

Trapani, J., *Truth Matters: Essays in Honour of Jacques Maritain* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005)

Trapani, J., *Poetry, Beauty, and Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011)

Troy, N.J., *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991)

Turner, H., *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979)

Turner, V., *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974)

Vaisse, P., *La Troisième Republique et les Peintres* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995)

Van der Leeuw, G., *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, trans. J. E. Turner (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938)

Van der Linden, A., 'Deux Lettres d'Ernest Chausson', *Revue Belge de Musicologie*, 3/2 (1949), pp. 116–117

Van Vechten, C., 'The new Isadora', in P. Magriel (ed.), *Isadora Duncan* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1947), pp. 27-33

Van Tilburg, M., 'The Figure in/on the Carpet: Félix Vallotton and Decorative Narrativity', *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 83/3 (2014), pp. 211-227. DOI:10.1080/00233609.2014.933250

Vaughan G., 'Maurice Denis and the Sense of Music', *Oxford Art Journal*, 7/1, (1984), pp. 38-48

Vaughan, G., 'André Gide and Maurice Denis "Le Voyage d'Urien"', *Print Quarterly*, 1/3 (September 1984), pp. 173-87

Vergo, P., *That Divine Order: Music and the Visual Arts from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Phaidon, 2005)

Vergo, P., *The Music of Painting: Music, Modernism, and the Visual Arts from the Romantics to John Cage* (London: Phaidon, 2012)

Verleysen, C., *Maurice Denis et la Belgique 1890-1930* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 2010)

Véron-Denise, D., 'Sabine Desvallières (1891-1935): itinéraire d'une artiste brodeuse dans le premier tiers du XXe siècle', *Patrimoines du Sud,* 14 (2021). https://doi.org/10.4000/pds.6945

Walker, J., *Sacred Sounds, Secular Spaces: Transforming Catholicism through the Music of Third-Republic Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)

Wampole, C., *Rootedness: The Ramifications of a Metaphor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016)

Ward, M., *Pisarro, Neo-Impressionism and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago and London, University of London, 1996)

Waters, R., *Déodat de Séverac: Musical Identity in Fin de Siècle France* (London: Routledge, 2016)

Watkins, G., *Proof Through the Night: Music, and the Great War* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2003)

Watkins, N., 'The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic', in G. Groom, *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis and Roussel, 1890-1930,* exhib. cat. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2001 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 1-28

Weber, E., *L'Action française, Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-century France* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962)

Weber, E., *France, Fin-de-siècle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988)

Werth, M., *The Joys of Life: the Idyllic in French Art circa 1900* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002)

Wheeldon, M., 'Anti-Debussyism and the Formation of French Neoclassicism', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 70/2 (2017), pp. 433–74

Wheeldon, M., *Debussy's Legacy and the Construction of Reputation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Wiles, D., *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Wilson, S., 'History and Traditionalism: Maurras and the Action Française', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29/3 (July-September 1968), pp. 365-80

Wittkower, R., *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 5th edn (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 1998)

Wood, C. and Nagel, A., *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010)

Wright, A., *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004)

Zelvenskaia, A., 'Maurice Denis et la Russie' in J-C. Marcadé (ed.), *Le Dialogue des arts dans le symbolisme russe: actes du colloque, Bordeaux, (12-14 May 2000)* (Lausanne: Éditions L'Age de l'Homme, 2008), pp.50-71

Zimmerman, M., 'Seurat, Charles Blanc, and Naturalist Art Criticism', *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, 14/2, (1989), pp. 199-247

Unpublished Theses

Brion, K., 'Decorative Painting and Politics in France, 1890 – 1914' (Ph.D thesis, University of Michigan, 2014)

Burnham, F., 'Vision and Visionaries: 19th Century Psychological Theory, the Occult Science and the Formation of the Symbolist Aesthetic in France (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1979)

Chenebaux-Sautory, M., *La décoration de la Chapelle du Prieuré à Saint-Germain-en-Laye'* (maîtrise en histoire de l'art, sous la direction du professeur Pierre Vaisse, Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 1986)

Epstein, L.K, 'Toward a Theory of Patronage: Funding for Music Composition in France 1918-1939' (Ph.D thesis, Harvard University, 2013)

Flint, C., The Schola Cantorum, Early Music and French Political Culture, from 1894 to 1914' (Ph.D thesis, McGill University, 2006)

Hobbs, A.L 'Calvary Or Catastrophe? French Catholicism's First World War', (Ph.D thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2016)

Kenel, S., 'Bodies, Statues, Machines: Dance and the Visual Arts in France, 1900-1925' (Ph.D thesis, University of California, 2003)

Kuenzli, K., 'The Anti-heroism of Modern Life: Symbolist Decoration and the Problem of Privacy in Fin-de-siècle Modernist Painting' (Ph.D thesis, University of California, 2002)

Moore, S. 'The writings of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze: Toward a Theory for the Performance of Musical Rhythm' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Indiana, 1992)

Musk, A.N.,'Aspects of Regionalism in French Music during the Third Republic: the Schola Cantorum, d'Indy, Séverac and Canteloube' (D.Phil. thesis: University of Oxford, 1999)

Orenduff, L-K. C. 'Father Marie-Alain Coututrier and the Sacred Art Movement', (Ph.D thesis, City University of New York, 2002)

Seto, M., 'Symphonic Culture in Paris, 1880-1900: The Bande à Franck and Beyond' (Ph.D thesis, Columbia University, 2012)

Stahl, F., Les décorations religieuses de Maurice Denis (1870-1943) entre les deux guerres (1914-1943), (Doctoral thesis sous la direction du professeur Jean-Paul Bouillon, Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, 2009).

Stevens, E., 'Striking an Attitude: Tableaux Vivants in the British Long Nineteenth Century' (Ph.D thesis, University of Southampton, 2017)

Websites

Beck, E., 'The Decameron and Music' (Brown University, 2010). https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/arts/music/muprelu.php. Last accessed 12 September 2022

Bouillon, J-P. and Stahl, F., avec le concours de C. Gaboriau 'Bibliographie sur Maurice Denis', in M. Gispert and C. Méneux (eds), *Bibliographies de critiques d'art francophones*. Published online 15 December 2016. http://critiquesdart.univ-paris1.fr/maurice-denis. Last accessed 4 August 2022

Mahrane, S., 'Le show Houellebecq devant l'Action française', *Le Point* (3 July 2022). https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/le-show-houellebecq-devant-l-action-francaise-03-07-2022-2481912_20.php. Last accessed 7 September 2022

Martel, de C., 'Les processions des Béatitudes: un thème original de Maurice Denis' (July 2015). https://www.narthex.fr. Last accessed 6 September 2022



Figure 1. Photograph of the interior of Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet. Postcard. Personal collection.



Figure 2. Preparatory study for *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix et la glorification du sacrifice de la messe*, decoration for the Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet (c.1898). Oil on canvas, 82 x 160 cm. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée départemental Maurice Denis (MMD).

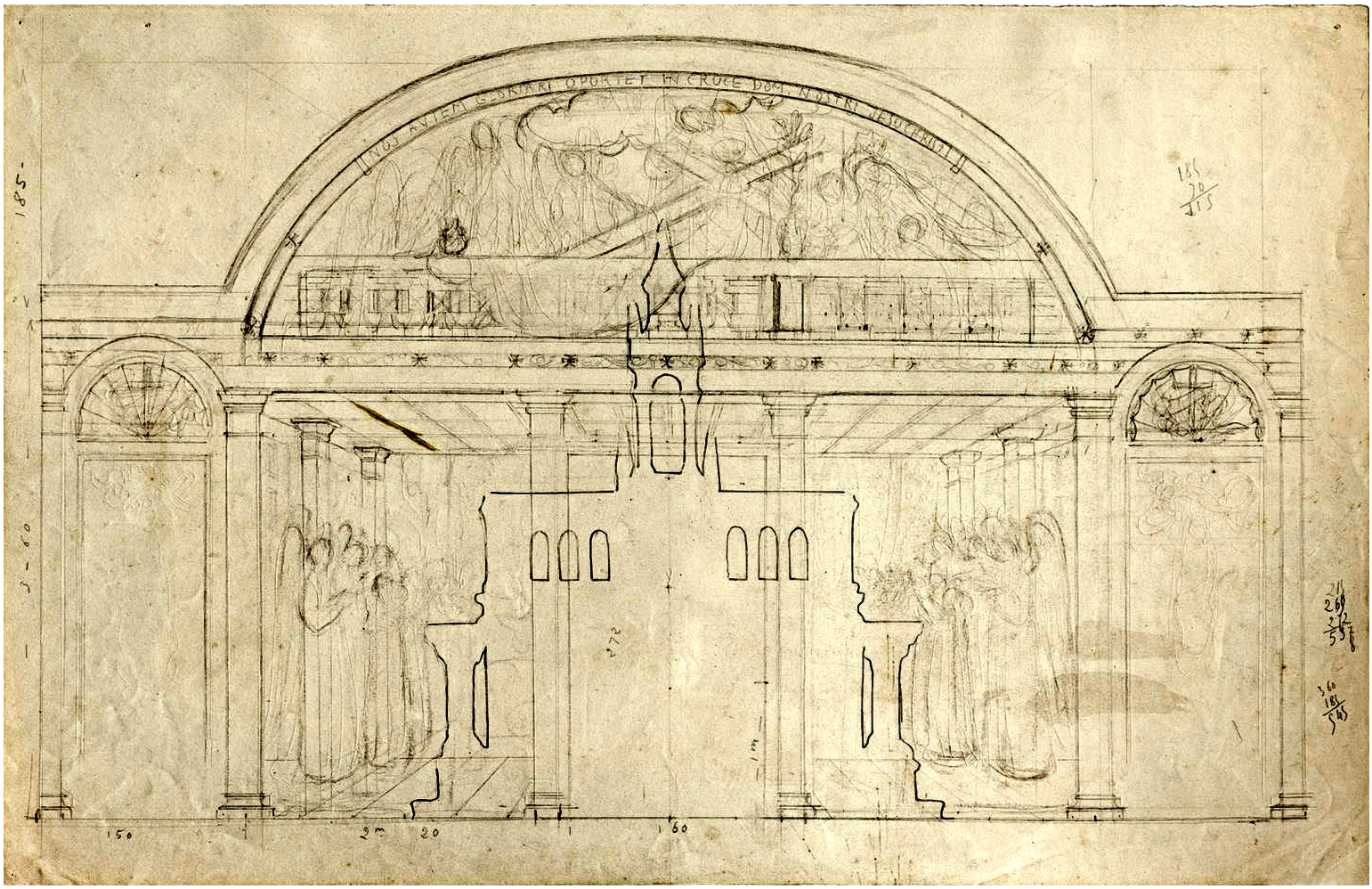


Figure 3. Architectural study for *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix et la glorification du sacrifice de la messe,* decoration for the Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet (c.1898).
Graphite on paper, 32.1 x 49.4 cm. MMD.



Figure 4a (and b). *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix et la glorification du sacrifice de la messe* (two panels), decoration for the Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet (1899). Oil on canvas. 225 x 225 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.



Figure (4a and) b. *L'exaltation de la sainte Croix et la glorification du sacrifice de la messe* (two panels), decoration for the Collège Sainte-Croix, Le Vésinet (1899).
Oil on canvas. 225 x 225 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.



Figure 5. *Les Harpistes* (c. 1893).
Watercolour, pencil and gouache on paper, 65 x 50.3 cm. Private collection.

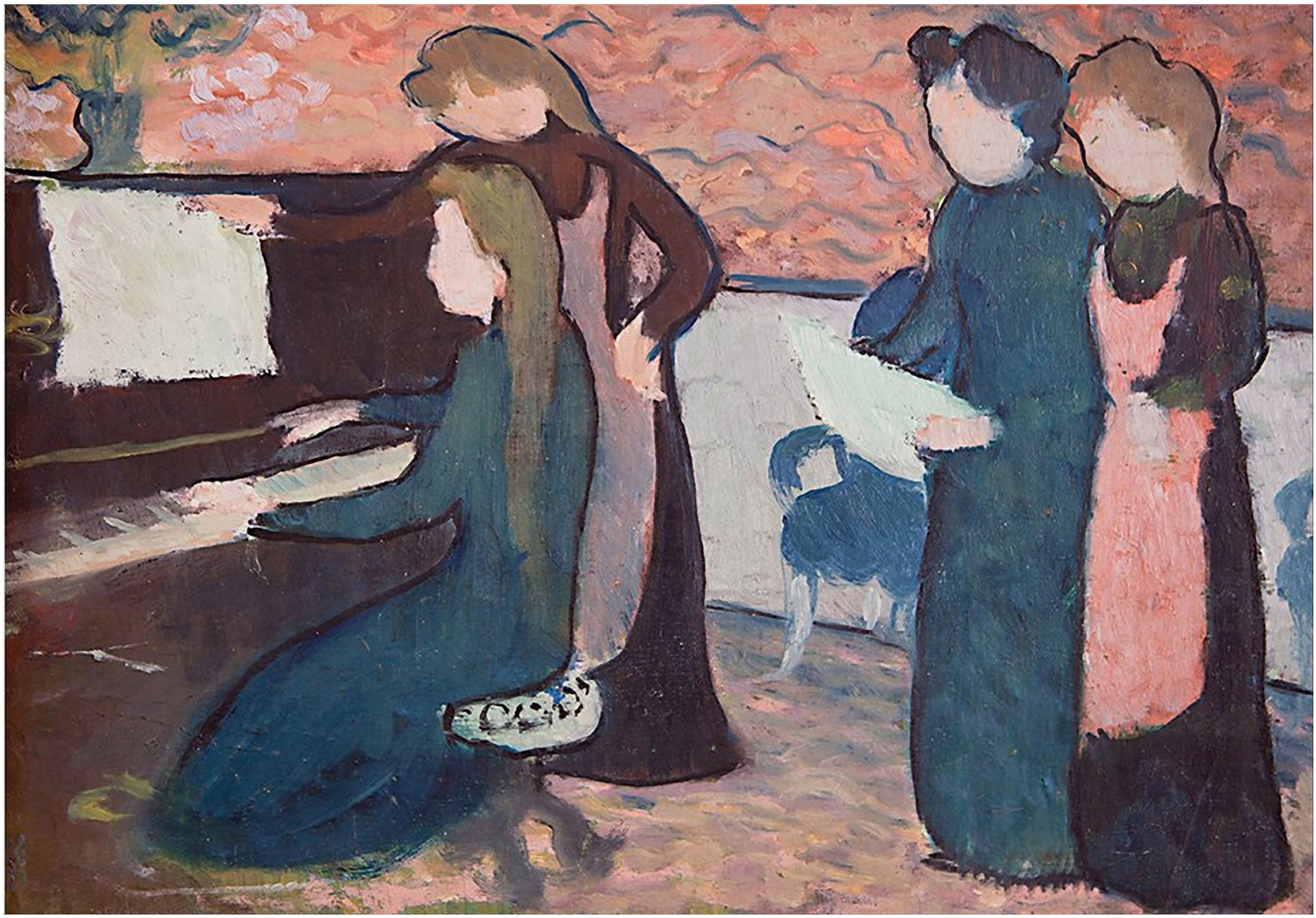


Figure 6. *Les Musiciennes (*1895). Oil on cardboard, 24.5 *x* 34.6 cm.
The Phillips Collection.



Figure 7. *Album pour enfants petits et grands. Recueil de pièces de Piano, à deux et quatre mains, composés par un groupe de musiciens de la Schola Cantorum,*
cover illustration for musical score, (1905). Pochoir, 30 x 42 cm.,
Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF).



Figure 8. *Arabesque poétique* (1892).
Oil on canvas mounted on cardboard, 235 x 172 cm. MMD.



Figure 9. Pierre Bonnard, *Menuet pour Piano*, cover design for music by Claude Terrasse (1892). Pencil and watercolour, 29 x 37 cm. Rejected by publisher, used to illustrate G.-Albert Aurier, 'Les Symbolistes', *La Revue encyclopédique* (1 April 1892). Private collection.



Figure 10. *Le Menuet de la princesse Maleine* or *Marthe au piano* (1891).
Oil on canvas, 95 x 60cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.



Figure 11. *Apparition,* cover for sheet music of André Rossignol's setting of Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Apparition' (1894). Colour lithograph, 25.4 x 15.2 cm. MMD.



Figure 12. *La Damoiselle élue,* cover for sheet music of Claude Debussy's setting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1892).
Colour lithograph, 45 x 32 cm. Private collection.



Figure 13. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Le Départ* (1897).
Oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm. MMD.



Figure 14. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Le Lâcher des chiens* (1897).
Oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm. MMD.



Figure 15. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Le bien-aller* (1897).
Oil on canvas, 225 x 175 cm. MMD.



Figure 16. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Le Miracle* (1897).
Oil on canvas, 225 x 212 cm. MMD.



Figure 17. *La Légende de Saint Hubert : Le défaut* (1897).
Oil on canvas, 190 x 210 cm. MMD.



Figure 18. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: La chasse infernale* (1897).
Oil on canvas, 190 x 210 cm. MMD.



Figure 19. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: L'Arrivée à l'Hermitage* (1897).
Oil on canvas, 190 x 210 cm. MMD.



Figure 20. Preparatory studies for *La Légende de Saint Hubert* ensemble (right) and soup tureen (left) (c.1897). Pencil on paper. MMD.



Figure 21. *La Légende de Saint Hubert: Les Sonneurs du ciel* (c.1897). Oil on canvas, 488 x 134 cm. MMD.



Figure 22. *Le chemin de la vie* (1895). Stained glass window,
realised by Henri Carot from design by Maurice Denis, 305 x 100 cm. MMD.



Figure 23. *Paysage aux arbres verts* (1893).
Oil on canvas, 46.3 x 42.8 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.



Figure 24. *Légende de chevalerie* (between 1893 and 1898).
Oil on hessian, 304 x 327 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.



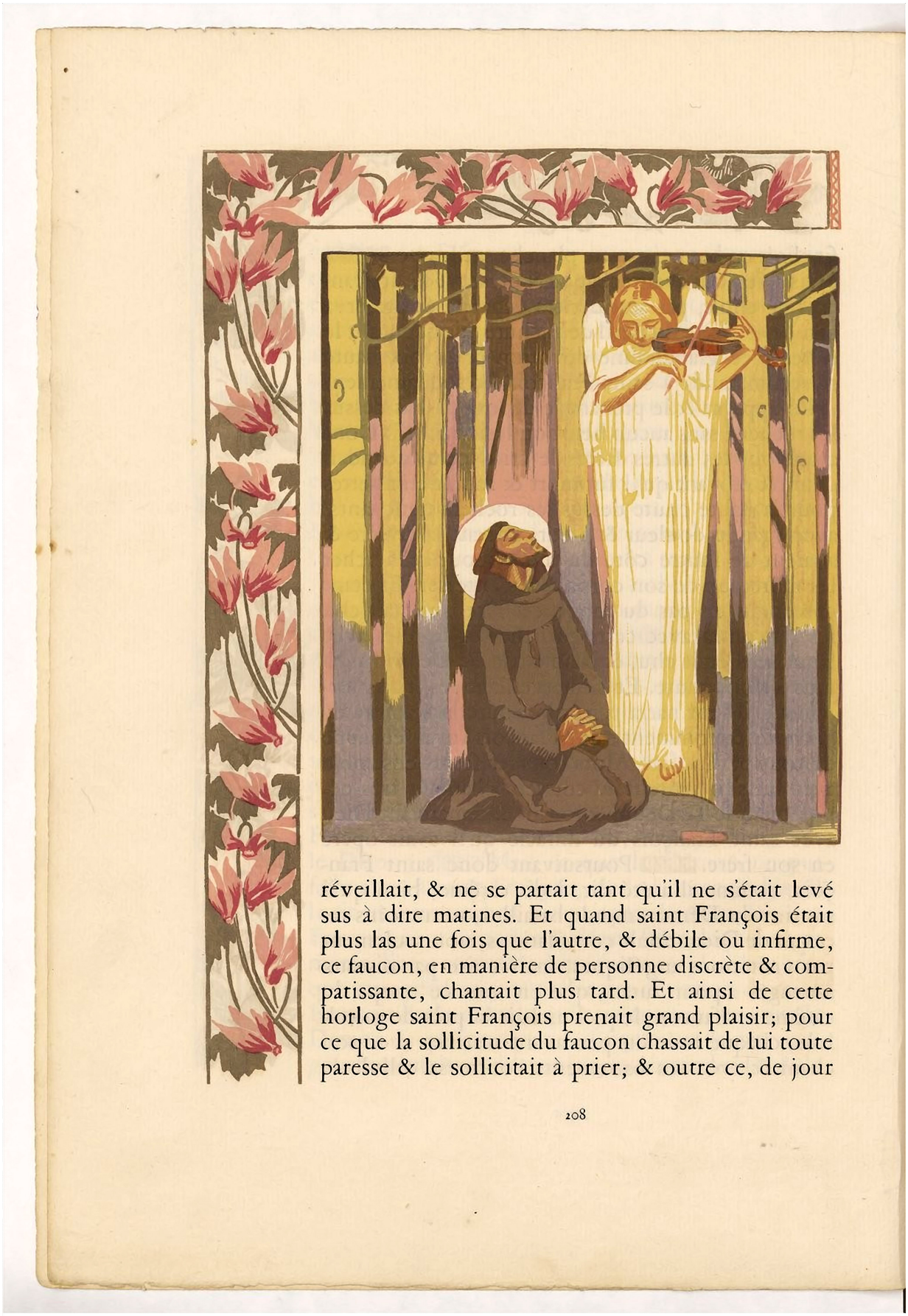
Figure 25. *Jeu de Volant* ou *Le bois sacré* (1900). Oil on canvas, 128 x 301.5 cm.
Paris, musée d'Orsay.



Figure 26. *La Vasque de la Villa Medicis* (c.1898).
Oil on plywood-backed cardboard, 27 x 46.5 cm.
Beauvais, musee de l'Oise.



Figure 27. Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Bois sacré cher aux Arts et aux Muses* (1884).
Mounted oil on canvas, 460 x 1040 cm.
Lyon, musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon.



réveillait, & ne se partait tant qu'il ne s'était levé sus à dire matines. Et quand saint François était plus las une fois que l'autre, & débile ou infirme, ce faucon, en manière de personne discrète & compatissante, chantait plus tard. Et ainsi de cette horloge saint François prenait grand plaisir; pour ce que la sollicitude du faucon chassait de lui toute paresse & le sollicitait à prier; & outre ce, de jour

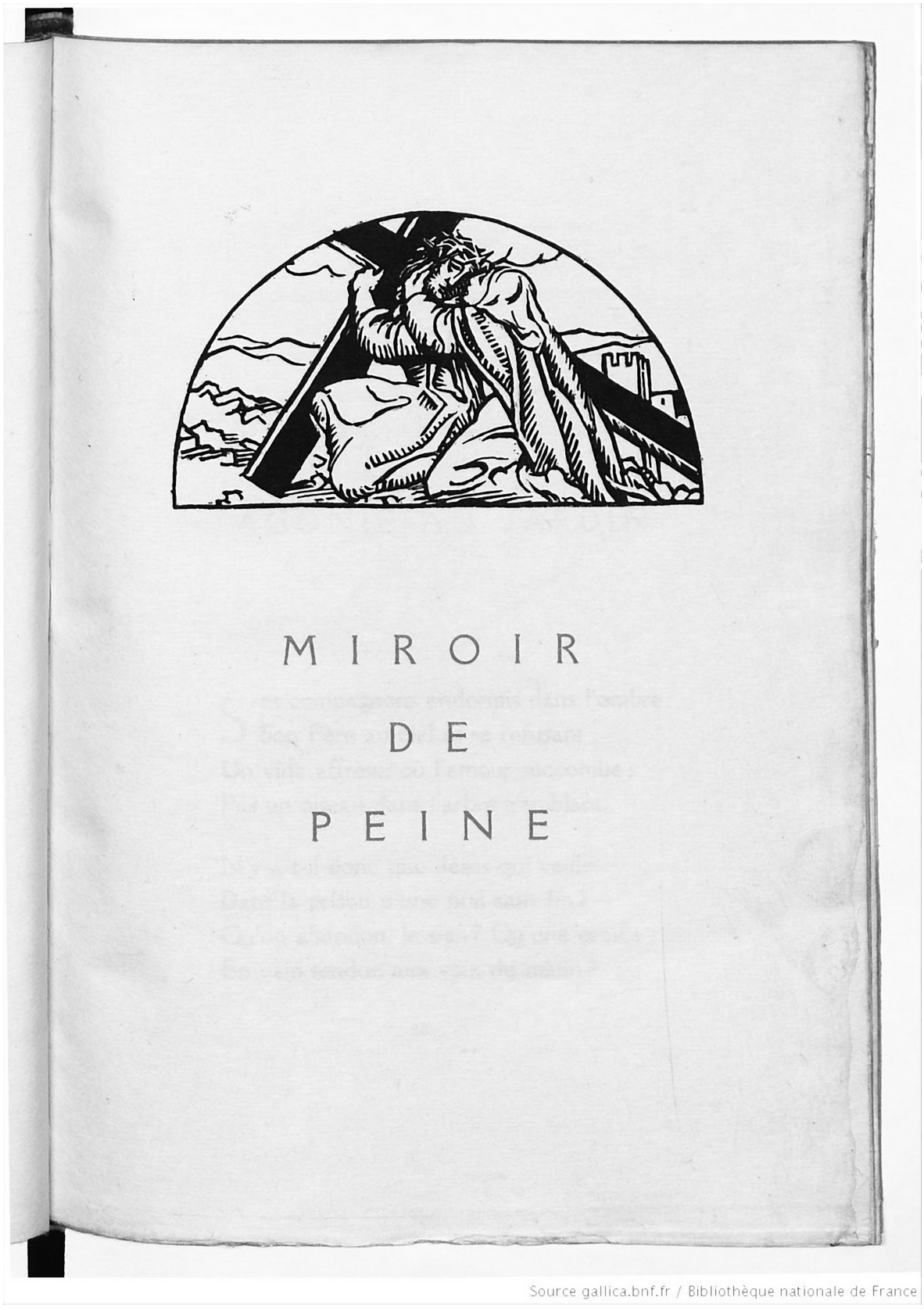
208

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

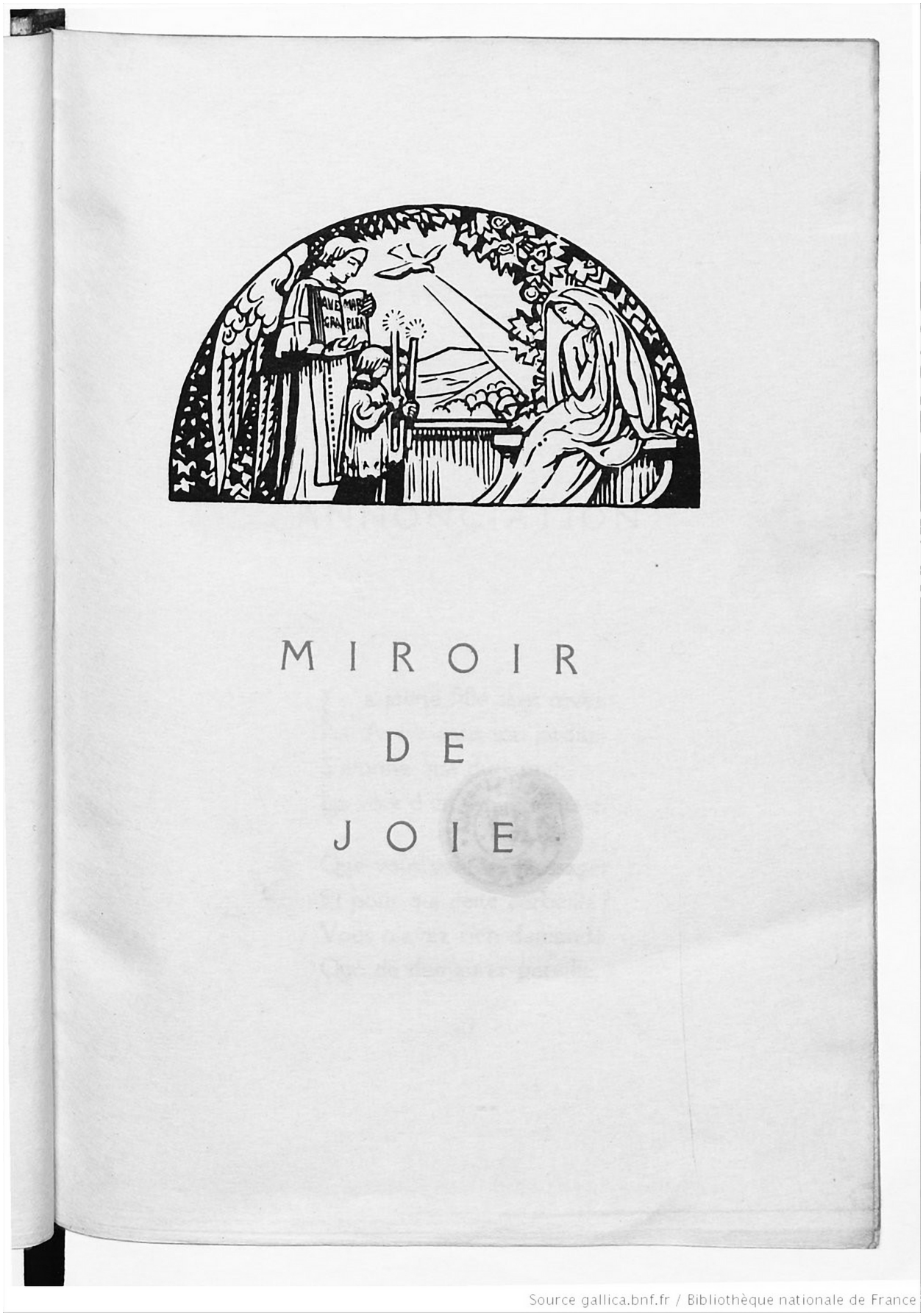
Figure 28. 'Saint François d'Assise en prière et un ange jouant du violon', illustration for *Petites fleurs de saint François d'Assise*, translated from Italian by André Pératé (Paris: J. Beltrand, 1913). engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.



Figure 29. *Messe matinale* (1890). Oil on canvas, 33 x 19 cm.
Rome, Vatican Museums and Galleries.



Figures 30 a (and b). 'Miroir de Peine' and 'Miroir de Joie', illustrations for *Le Miroir de Jésus, quinze poèmes composés par Henri Ghéon sur les quinze mystères du rosaire* (Paris: L'Art Catholique, 1920). Wood engravings. Paris, BnF.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figures 30 (a and) b). 'Miroir de Peine' and 'Miroir de Joie', illustrations for *Le Miroir de Jésus, quinze poèmes composés par Henri Ghéon sur les quinze mystères du rosaire* (Paris: L'Art Catholique, 1920). Wood engravings. Paris, BnF.



Figure 31. *Mystère catholique* (1889).
Oil on canvas, 97 x 143 cm. MMD.



Figure 32. *Montée au calvaire* (1889).
Oil on canvas, 41 x 33 cm. Paris, musée du Louvre.



XXIV

L'ame antique était rude et vaine,
Et ne voyait dans la douleur
Que l'acuité de la peine
Ou l'étonnement du malheur.

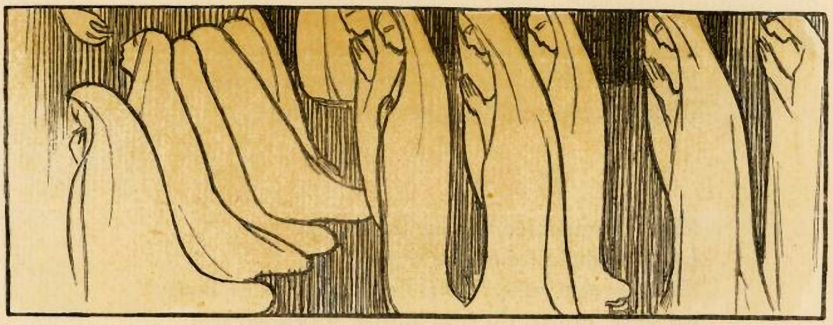
L'art, sa figure la plus claire,
Traduit ce double sentiment
Par deux grands types de la Mère
En proie au suprême tourment:

C'est la vieille reine de Troie;
Tous ses fils sont morts par le fer;
Alors ce deuil brutal aboie
Et glapit au bord de la mer.

Elle court le long du rivage,
Bavant vers le flot écumant,
Hirsute, criarde, sauvage...
La chienne, littéralement!...

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 33. 'L'âme antique était rude et vaine',
illustration for Paul Verlaine's *Sagesse* (Paris: Vollard, 1911).
Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.



III

Vous êtes calme, vous voulez un vœu discret,
Des secrets à mi-voix dans l'ombre et le silence,
Le cœur qui se répand plutôt qu'il ne s'élance,
Et ces timides, moins transis qu'il ne paraît.

Vous accueillez d'un geste exquis telles pensées
Qui ne marchent qu'en ordre et font le moins de bruit.
Votre main, toujours prête à la chute du fruit,
Patiente avec l'arbre et s'abstient de poussées.

Et si l'immense amour de vos commandements
Embrasse et presse tous en sa sollicitude,
Vos conseils vont dicter aux meilleurs et l'étude
Et le travail des plus humbles recueillements.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 34. 'Donnez-leur le silence et le mystère de l'amour', illustration for Paul Verlaine's *Sagesse* (Paris: Vollard, 1911). Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.

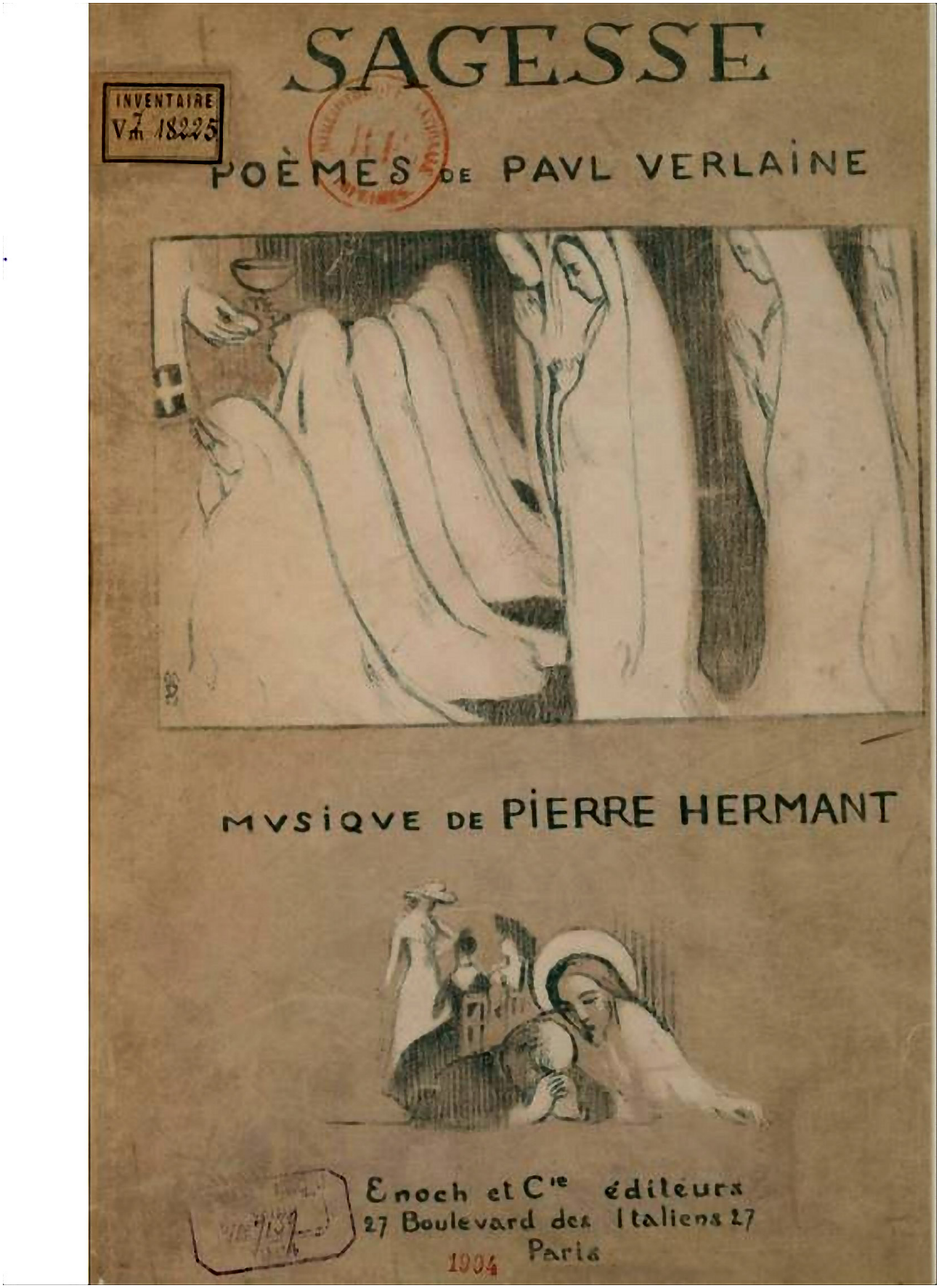


Figure 35. Reproduction of 'Donnez-leur le silence et le mystère de l'amour' illustration for the cover of Pierre Hermant's *Douze chansons de Verlaine* (Paris: Enoch & Cie, 1904). Private collection.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 36. Cover illustration for *Petites fleurs de saint François d'Assise*, translated from Italian by André Pératé (Paris: J. Beltrand, 1913). Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.



vous a donné tant & tels bienfaits plus qu'aux autres créatures. A ces & autres semblables paroles & enseignements de saint Antoine, commencèrent les poissons d'ouvrir la bouche & incliner le chef, & avec ces & autres signes de révérence, selon les moyens qu'ils pouvaient, louaient Dieu. Alors saint Antoine, voyant telle révérence des poissons envers Dieu leur Créateur, se réjouissant en esprit, à haute voix dit : Béni soit Dieu éternel, pour ce que plus l'honorent les poissons aquatiques que ne font les hommes hérétiques; & mieux oyent sa parole les animaux non raisonnables que les hommes infidèles. Et

137 18

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 37. 'Du miracle que Dieu fit quand saint Antoine, étant à Rimini, prêcha aux poissons de la mer',
illustration for *Petites fleurs de saint François d'Assise*.
Wood engraving printed in colour. Paris, BnF.



Figure 38. *Chemin dans les arbres* (1891).
Oil on cardboard, 28 x 19 cm. MMD.

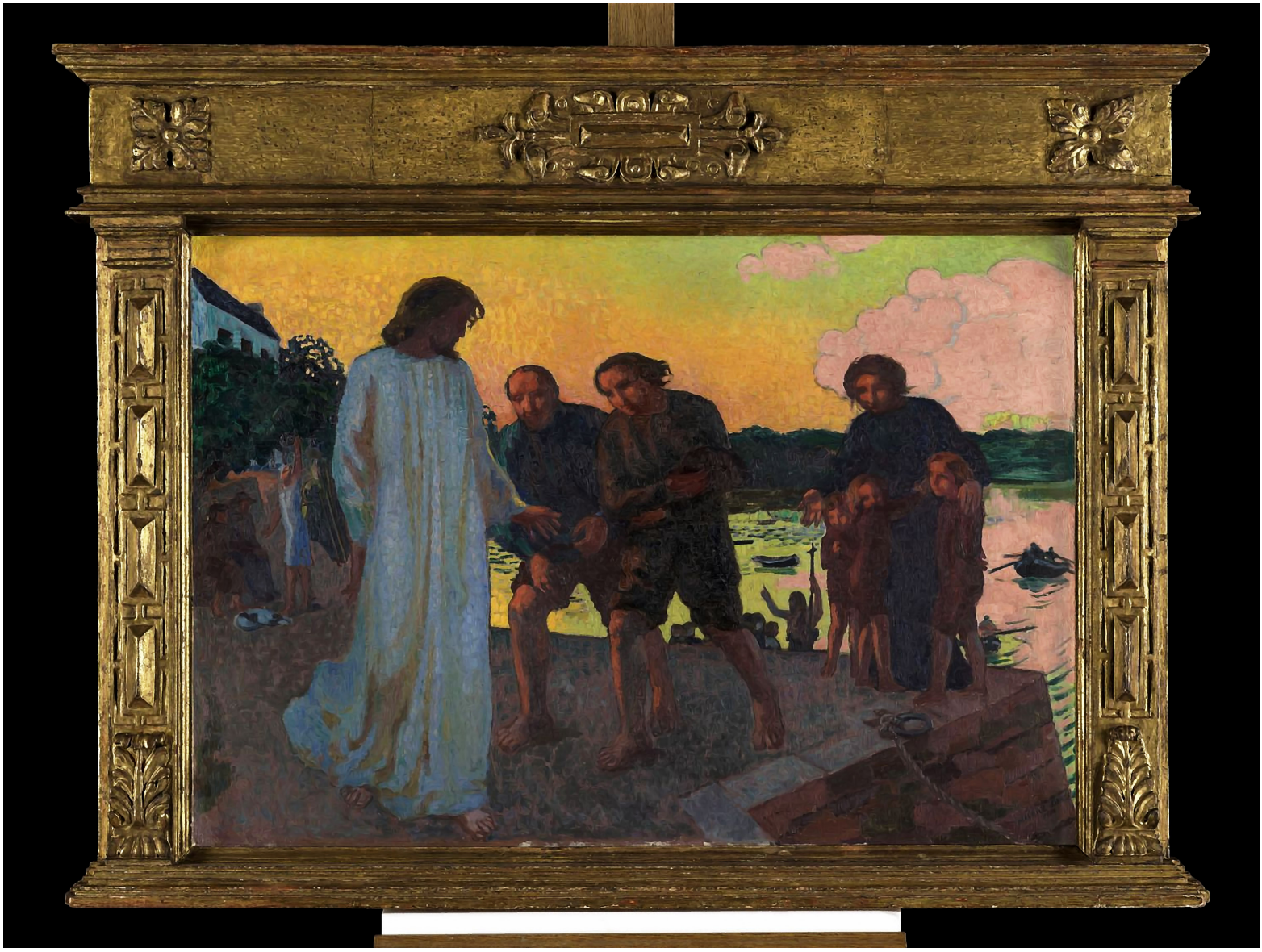


Figure 39. *La vocation des apôtres* (1906).
Oil on canvas, 81 x 116 cm. MMD.



Figure 40. *Magnificat (de 'Silencio')* (1909).
Oil on canvas, 130 x 104cm. Private collection.



Figure 41. *Le Pardon à Sainte Anne la Palud* (1905).
Oil on cardboard, 54 x 80 cm. Private collection.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 42. Eugène Druet,
black and white photograph of a portrait of Vincent d'Indy by Théo van Rysselberghe (1908).
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm (original painting). Paris, BnF.

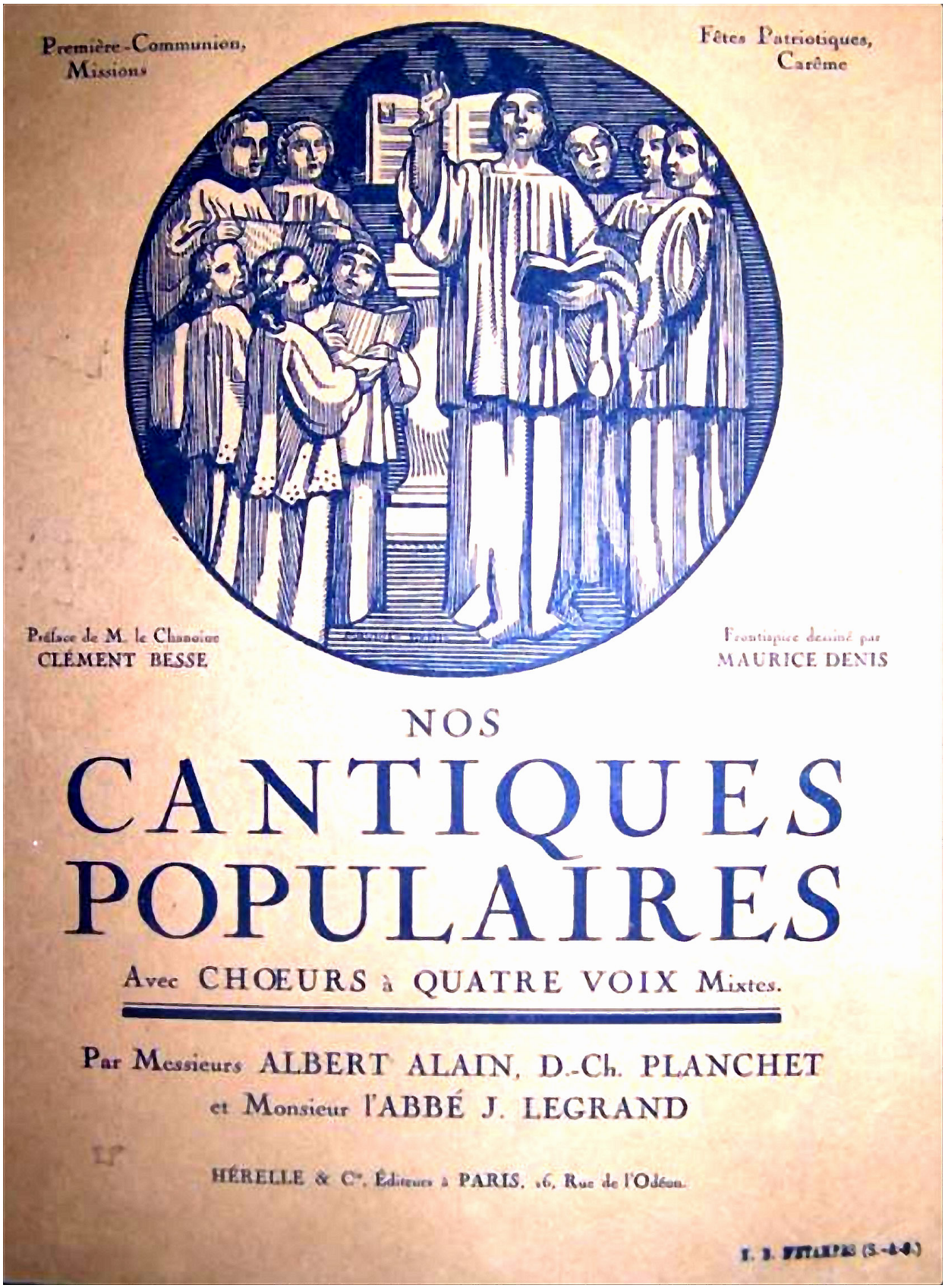


Figure 43. Frontispiece for Albert Alain's *Nos Cantiques Populaires* (Paris: Hérelle & Cie, 1904). Private collection.



Figure 44. *La Chorale des franciscaines* (1923).
Oil on canvas, 89.5 x 66.5 cm. Paris, Schola Cantorum.



Figure 45. 'Programme du concert',
illustration for a concert on 6th January 1921 at the second Exposition d'art chrétien moderne.
Wood engraving. MMD.

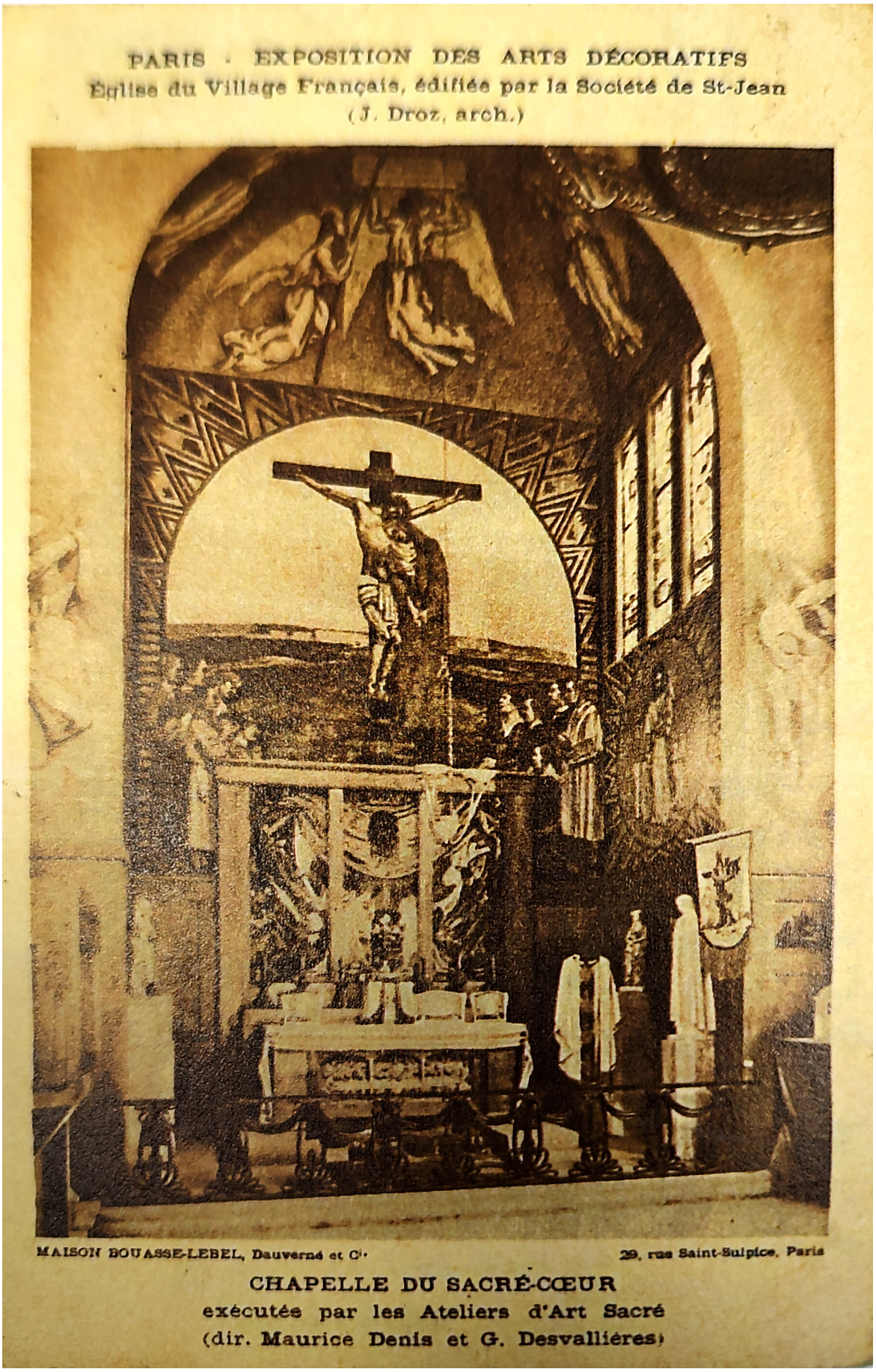


Figure 46. Chapelle du Sacré-Cœur by the Ateliers d'Art Sacré,
Église du Village Français.
Photograph. Paris, centre de documentation des Arts Décoratifs.



Figure 47. Interior of Notre Dame du Raincy. Photograph.



Figure 48. *Terre Latine, inspiratrice d'art et de poésie: L'Art Plastique* (1907).
Oil on canvas, 260 x 466 cm. MMD.



Figure 49. *Terre Latine: La Poésie* (1907).
Oil on canvas, 260 x 460 cm. MMD.



Figure 50. *Terre Latine: La Musique* (1907).
Oil on canvas, 275 x 400 cm. MMD.



Figure 51. *Terre Latine: Paysage* (black and white photograph) (1907).
Oil on canvas, 175 x 363 cm. MMD.

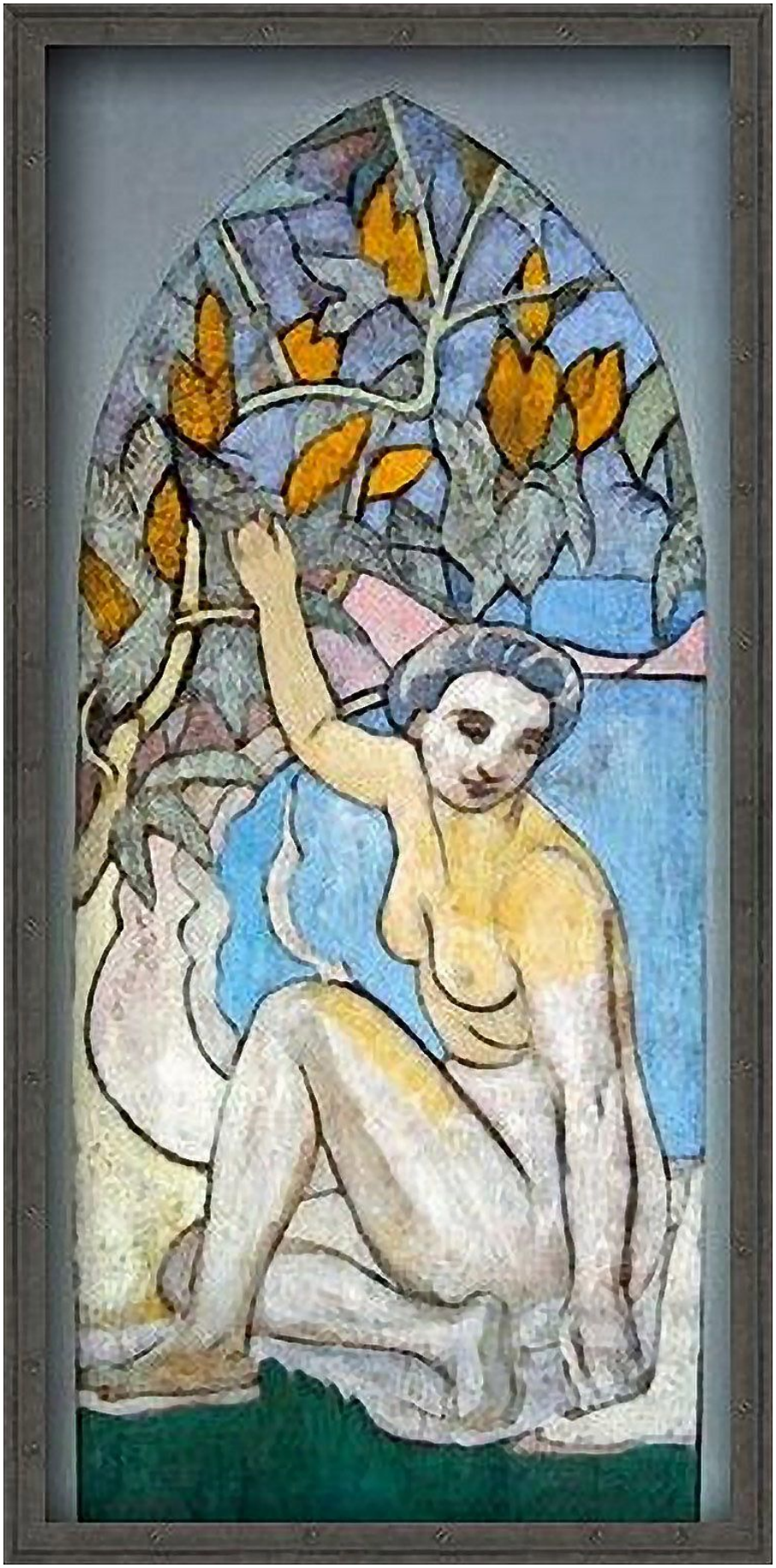


Figure 52. Preparatory study for stained glass window, *Nu aux mimosas* (c. 1907). Oil on canvas. Private collection.



Figure 53. Photograph of *Terre Latine. In situ* prior to 1924.



Figure 54. Chapelle de la Vierge (ceiling),
Sainte-Marguerite du Vésinet (1903). Oil on canvas (marouflage). *In situ*.



Figure 55. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Rêve* (1883).
Oil on canvas, 82 x 102 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.



Figure 56. Frontispiece for Charles Maurras, *L'Avenir de l'intelligence* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1925). Paris, BnF.



Figure 57. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *Marseille, Colonie Grecque* (1869).
Oil on canvas, 425 x 565 cm. Marseille, musée des Beaux-Arts.



Figure 58. André Derain, *L'Âge d'Or* (1905). Oil on canvas, 175 x 189 cm.
Tehran, Museum of Contemporary Art.



Figure 59. *Eurydice* (1904). Oil on canvas, 85 × 111cm. Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie.



Figure 60. *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1907). Oil on canvas, 81 x 116cm. St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum.



Figure 61. *L'Âge d'Or: La Source, La Vallée, Les Colombes, La Treille, La Plage* (clockwise from bottom left) (1911-12).
Oil on canvas glued on plywood. Beauvais, musée de l'Oise.



Figure 62. 'Faire part de naissance de Jean-Dominque' (1909).
Wood engraving on paper, 12 x 17.1 cm. Private collection.



Figure 63. *L'Âge d'Or: La Plage* (1911-12).
Oil on canvas glued on plywood, 570 (max) x 205 cm. Beauvais, musée de l'Oise.

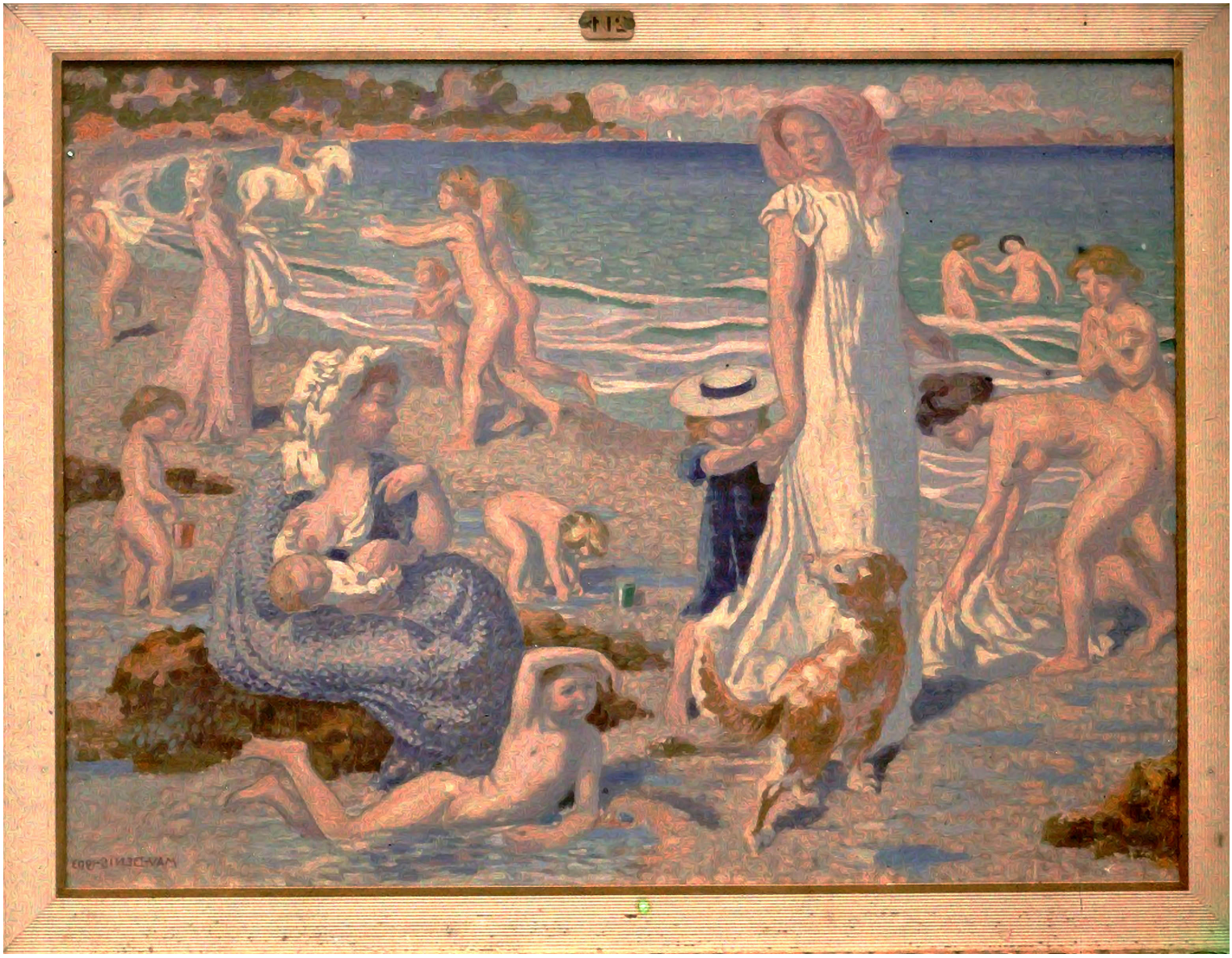


Figure 64. *Plage à l'epargneul* (1903). Oil on canvas, 78 x 106 cm.
Private collection.



Figure 65. *Ils virent des fées débarquer sur les plages* (1893).
Oil on canvas, 25 x 40.5 cm. Private collection.



Figure 66. *L'Âge d'Or: La Vallée* (1911-12). Oil on canvas glued on plywood, 437 (max) x 205 cm (?). Beauvais, musée de l'Oise.



Figure 67. *Danse d'Alceste* (1904). Oil on canvas, size unknown. Whereabouts unknown.



Figure 68. *Terrasse à Fiesole: Villa Papiniano* (1899).
Oil on canvas, 125 x 244 cm. Private collection.



Figure 69. *Portrait de Mme Chausson en duchesse d'Urbin* (1898).
Oil on panel, 46 x 38 cm. Private collection.



Figure 70. Preparatory study for *L'Éternel Eté: Le Chant Choral, L'Orgue, Le Quatuor, La Danse* (1905). Distemper on paper, mounted on a screen, each panel 150 x 78 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

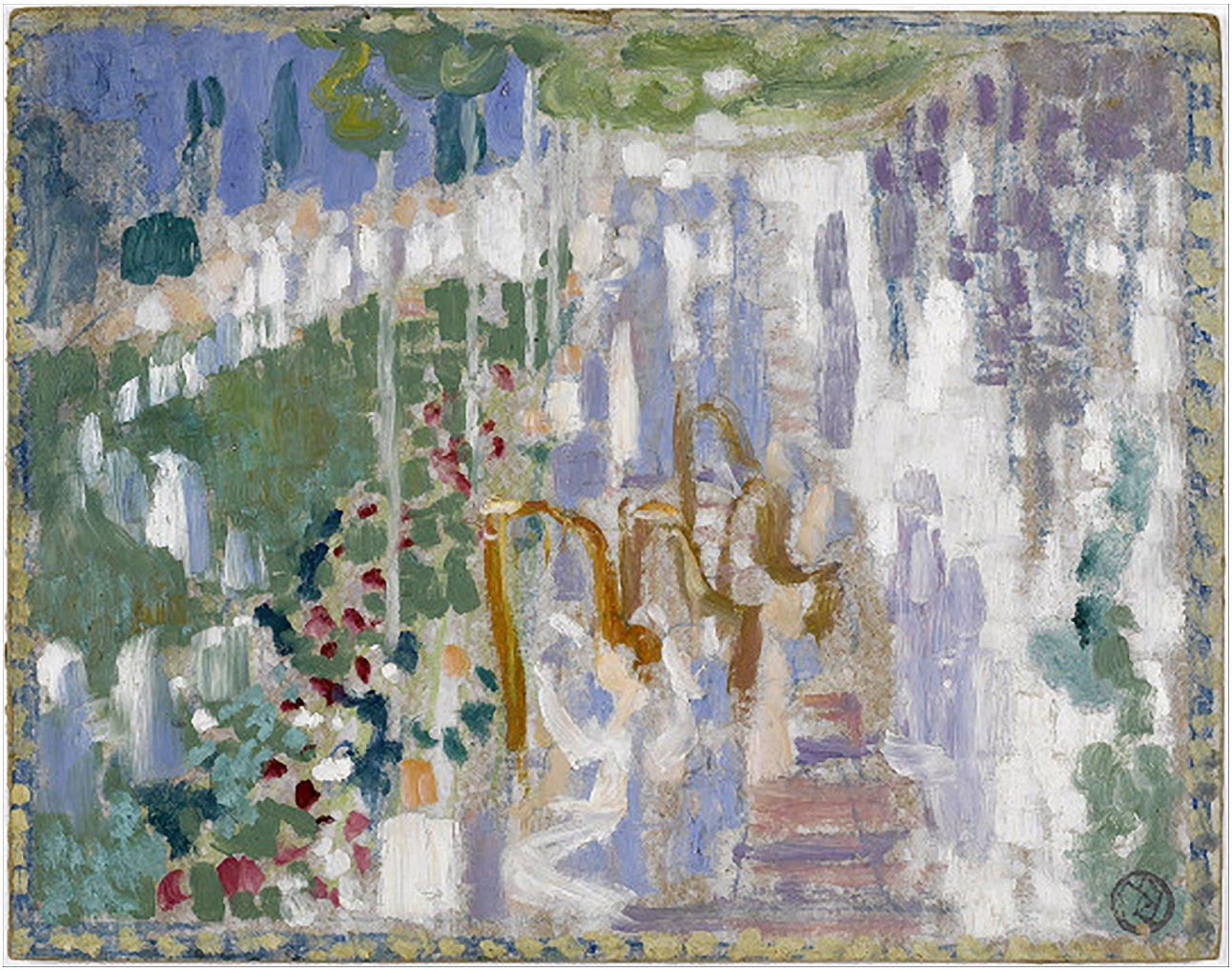


Figure 71. Preparatory study for *L'Éternel Eté: L'Oratorio* (1905). Oil on cardboard, 26.5 x 34.5 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.

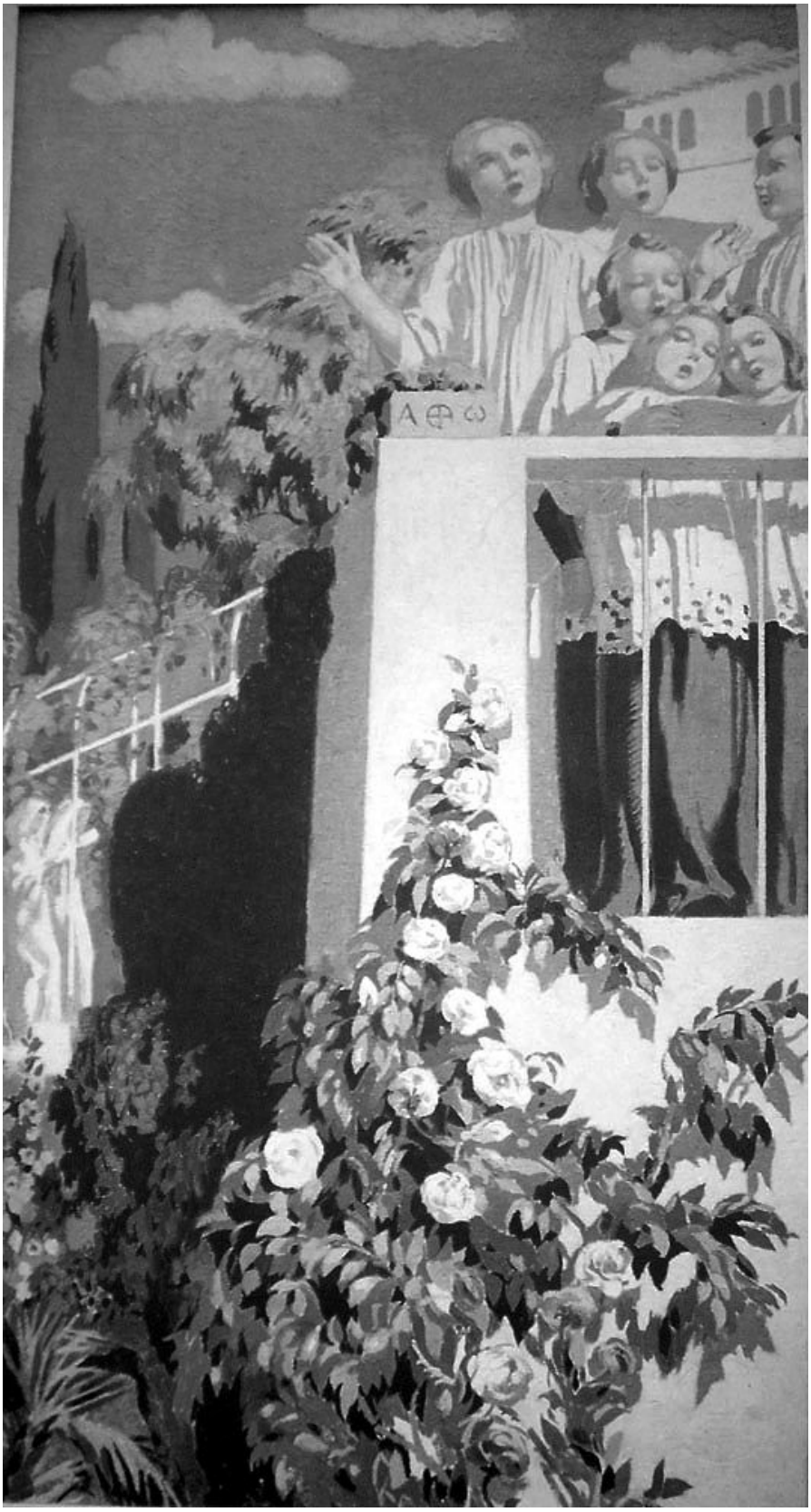


Figure 72. Black and white photograph of *L'Éternel Eté: Le Chant Choral.*
Reproduced in André Pératé, 'Maurice Denis', *L'Art et les artistes* 8/40 (November, 1923), p. 47. Paris, BnF.

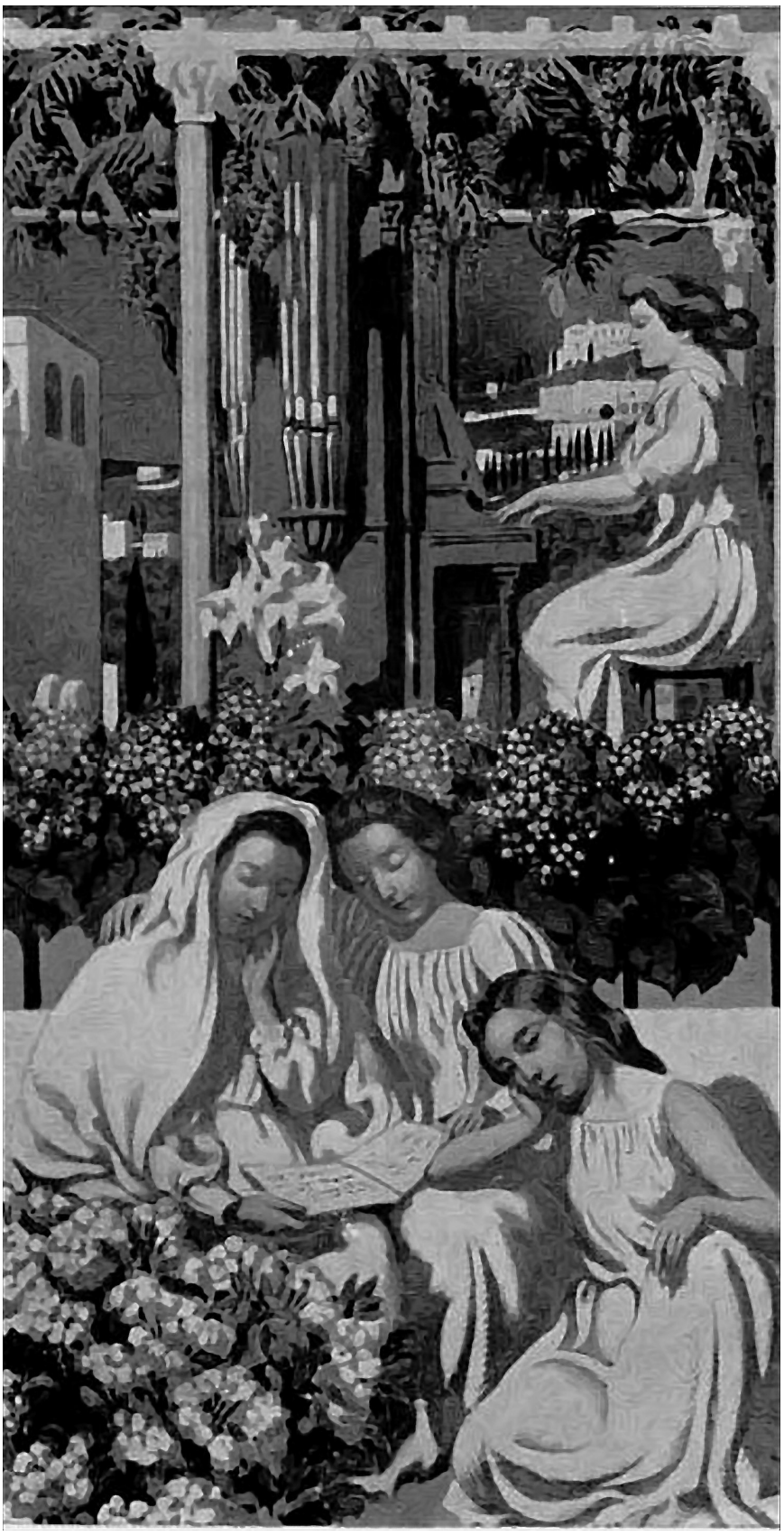


Figure 73. Black and white photograph of *L'Éternel Eté: L'Orgue.* Reproduced in Pératé, 'Maurice Denis', p. 48. Paris, BnF.



Figure 74. *Soir florentin: La Cantate* (1910). Oil on canvas, 218 x 364 cm. Paris, Petit Palais.

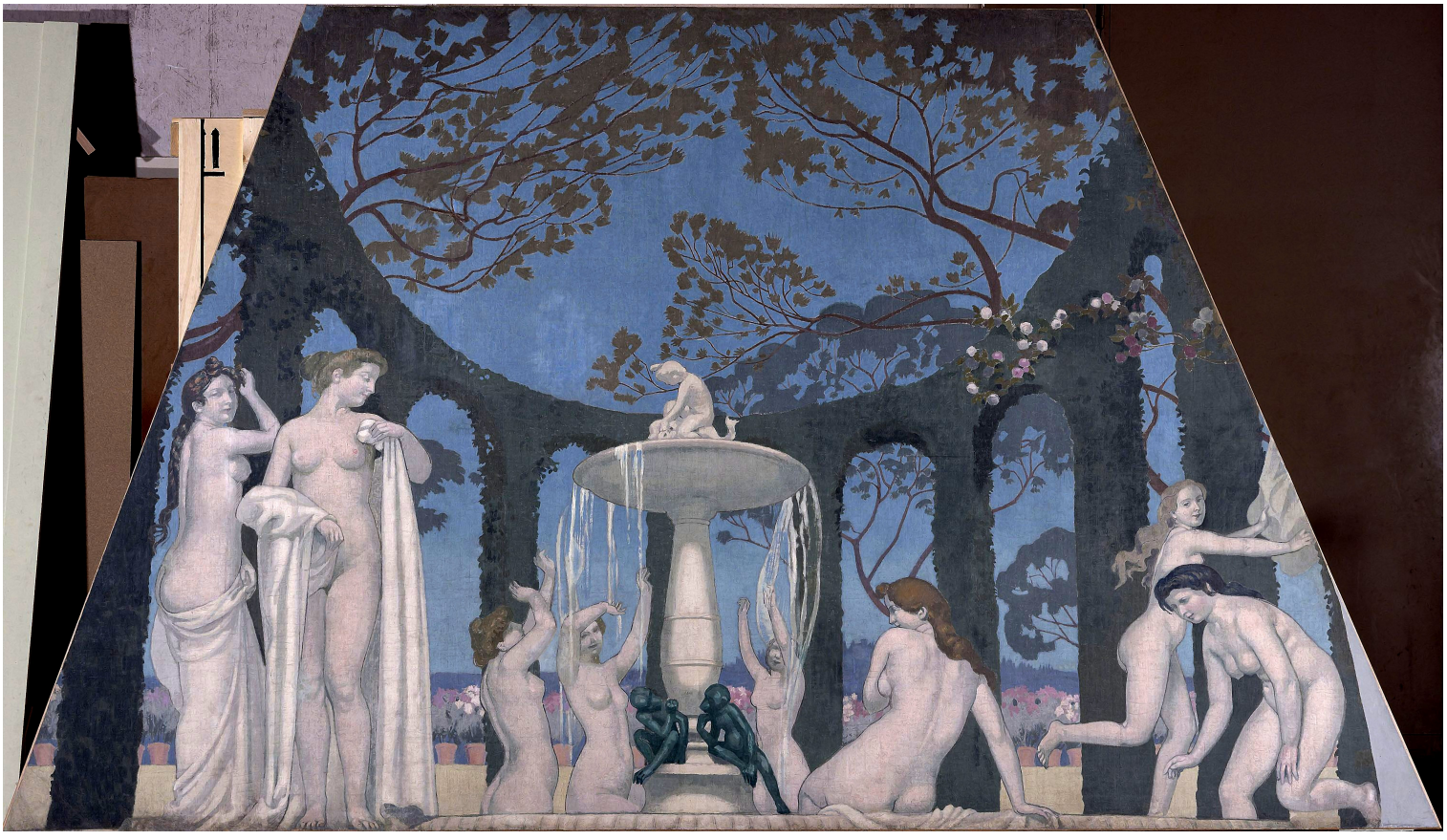


Figure 75. *Soir florentin: Baigneuses* (1910). Oil on canvas, 218 x 362 cm. Paris, Petit Palais.



Figure 76. *Soir florentin: Le Poème* (1910). Oil on canvas, 218 x 358 cm. Paris, Petit Palais.



Figure 77. Preparatory drawing for *Soir florentin: La Danse* (1910).
Gouache, pencil on tracing paper, 73 x 110cm. MMD.



Figure 78. Black and white photograph of *L'Eternel Eté: La Danse.* Reproduced in Pératé, 'Maurice Denis', p. 46. Paris, BnF.



Figure 79. Preparatory drawing for *L'Histoire de Psyche: Les Parents abondonnent Psyché* (1908). Charcoal on tracing paper, 156 x 132.4 cm. MMD.



Figure 80. Unknown Russian photographer, panels from *L'Histoire de Psyché* in their original location in the music room of Ivan Morozov's house (1912). Black and white photograph. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum.



Figure 81. Aristide Maillol, *Pomona* (1910). Bronze, 164 x 53 x 47 cm. Paris, musée Maillol.

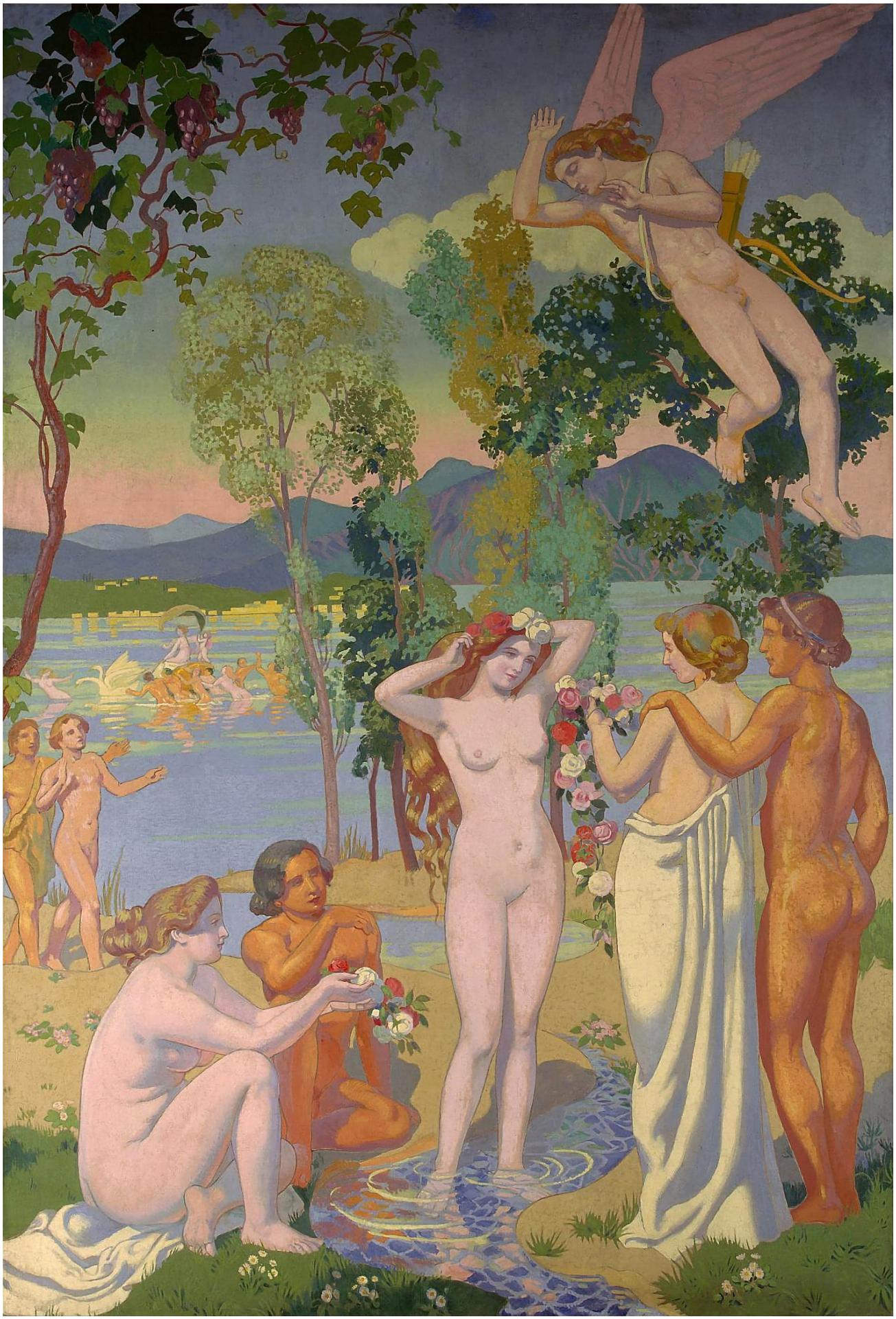


Figure 82. *L'Histoire de Psyché: l'Amour surprend Psyché* (1908).
Oil on canvas, 394 x 269.5 cm. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum.



Figure 83. *L'Histoire de Psyché: Les Parents abondonnent Psyché au sommet de la montagne* (1908). Oil on canvas, 200 x 275 cm. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum.

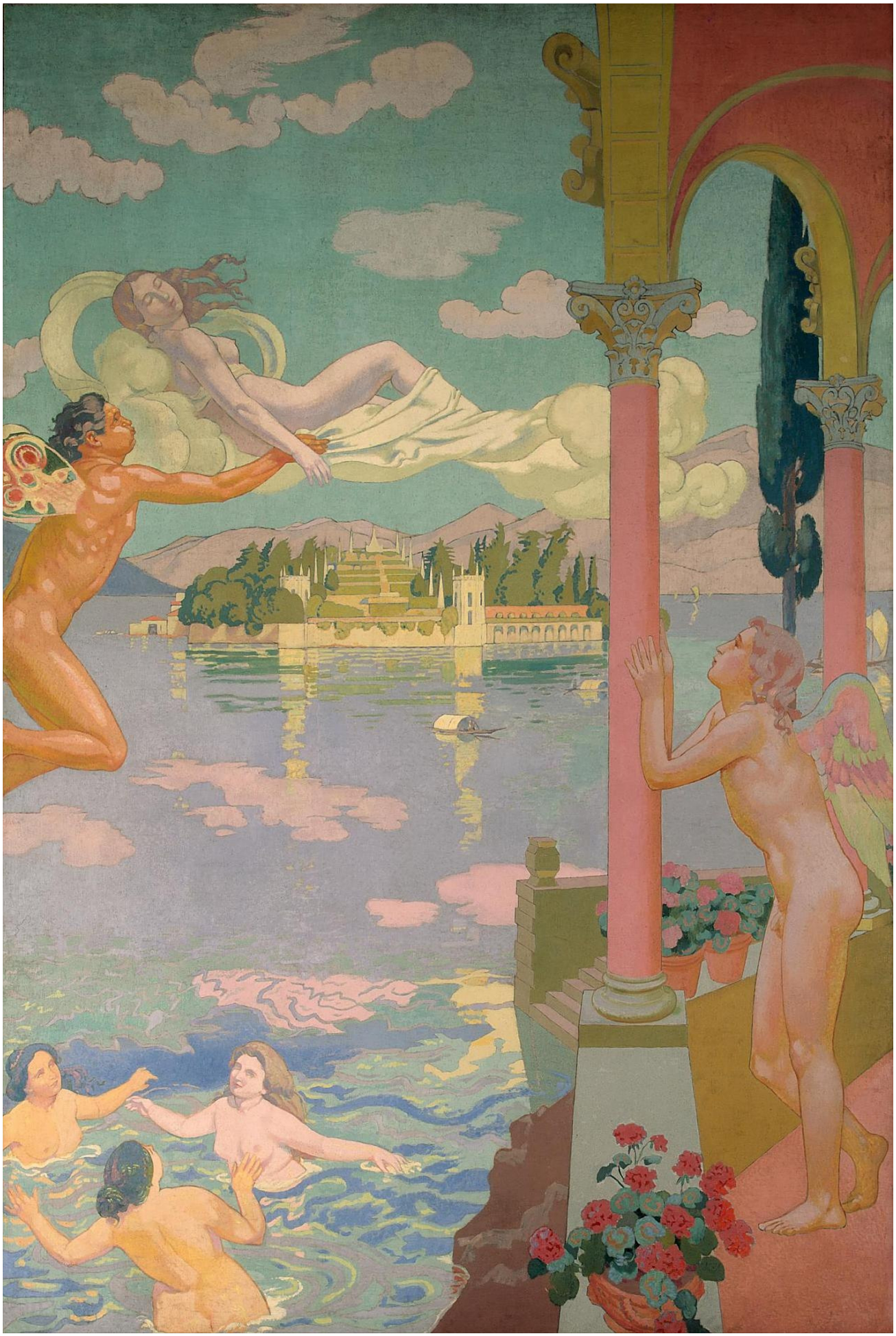


Figure 84. *L'Histoire de Psyché: l'enlèvement de Psyché* (1908). Oil on canvas, 395 x 267.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.



Figure 85. *L'Histoire de Psyché: la curiosité de Psyché* (1908).
Oil on canvas, 395 x 274.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.



Figure 86. *L'Histoire de Psyché: la punition de Psyché* (1908).
Oil on canvas, 395 x 272 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.



Figure 87. *L'Histoire de Psyché : le pardon et l'hymen de Psyché* (1908). Oil on canvas, 399 x 272 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

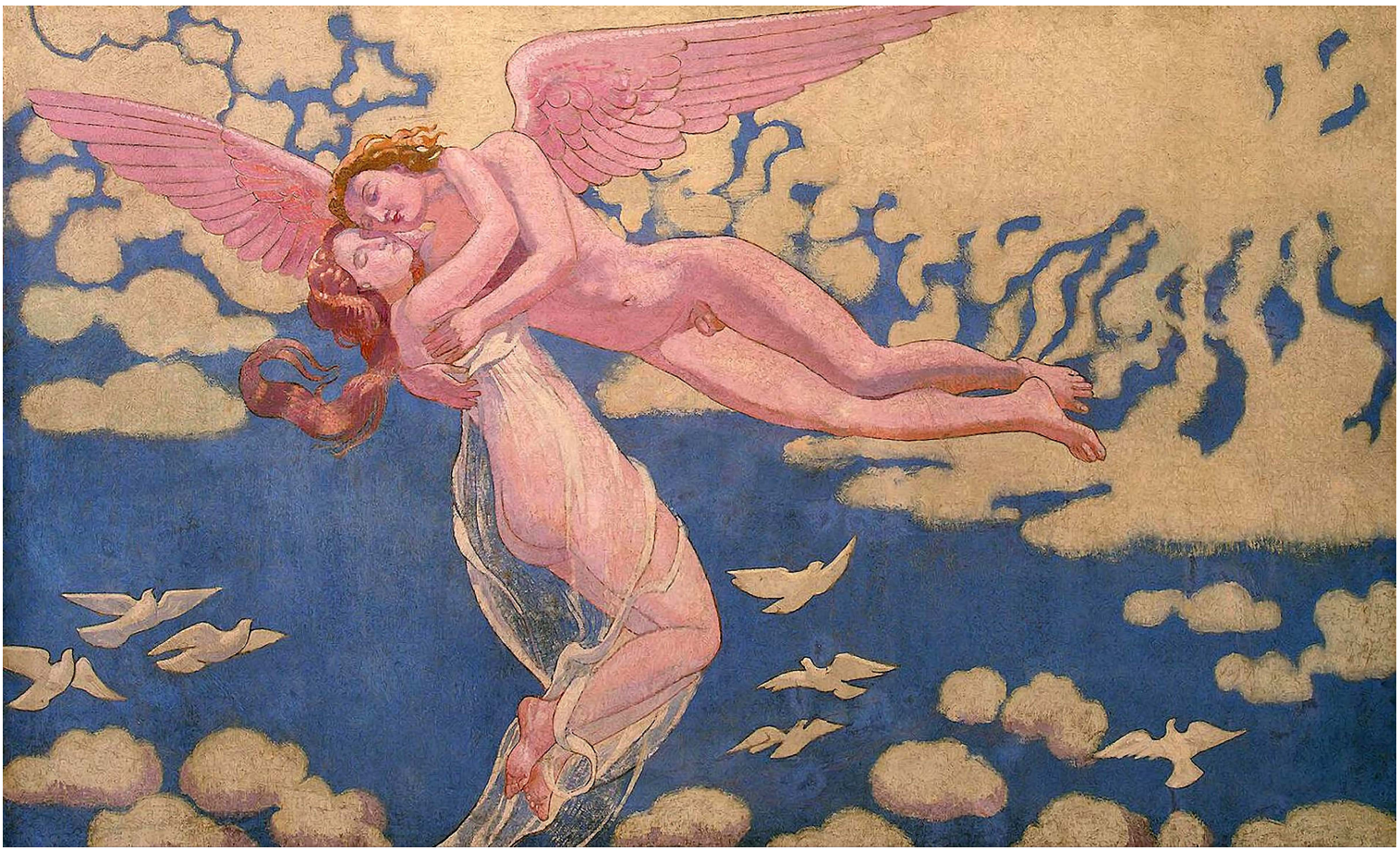


Figure 88. *L'Histoire de Psyché: enlèvement de Psyché*, seconde version (1908). Oil on canvas, 180 x 265 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

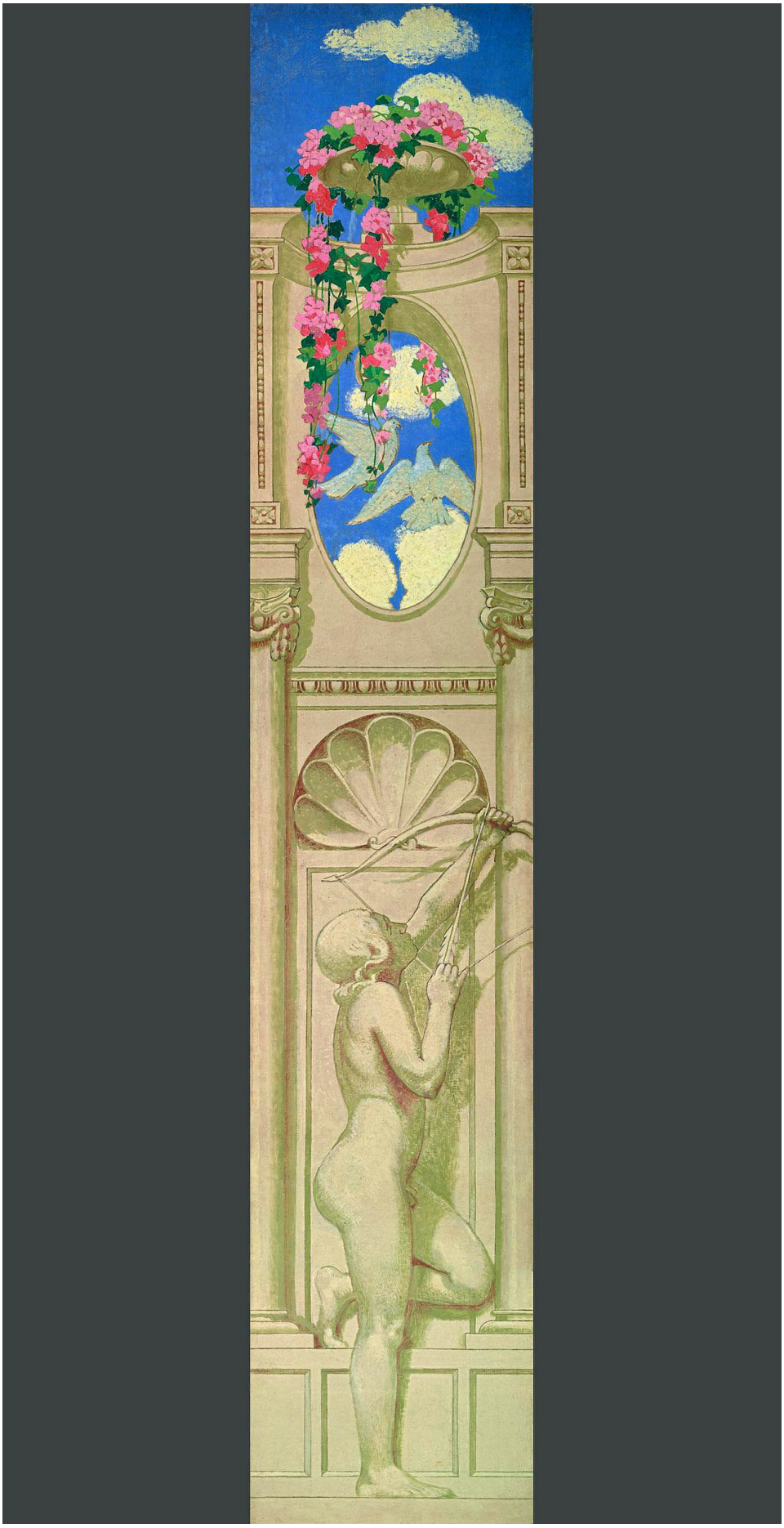


Figure 89. *Cupid,* complementary panel for *L'Histoire de Psyché* (1909). Oil on canvas, 390 x 74 cm. The State Hermitage Museum.

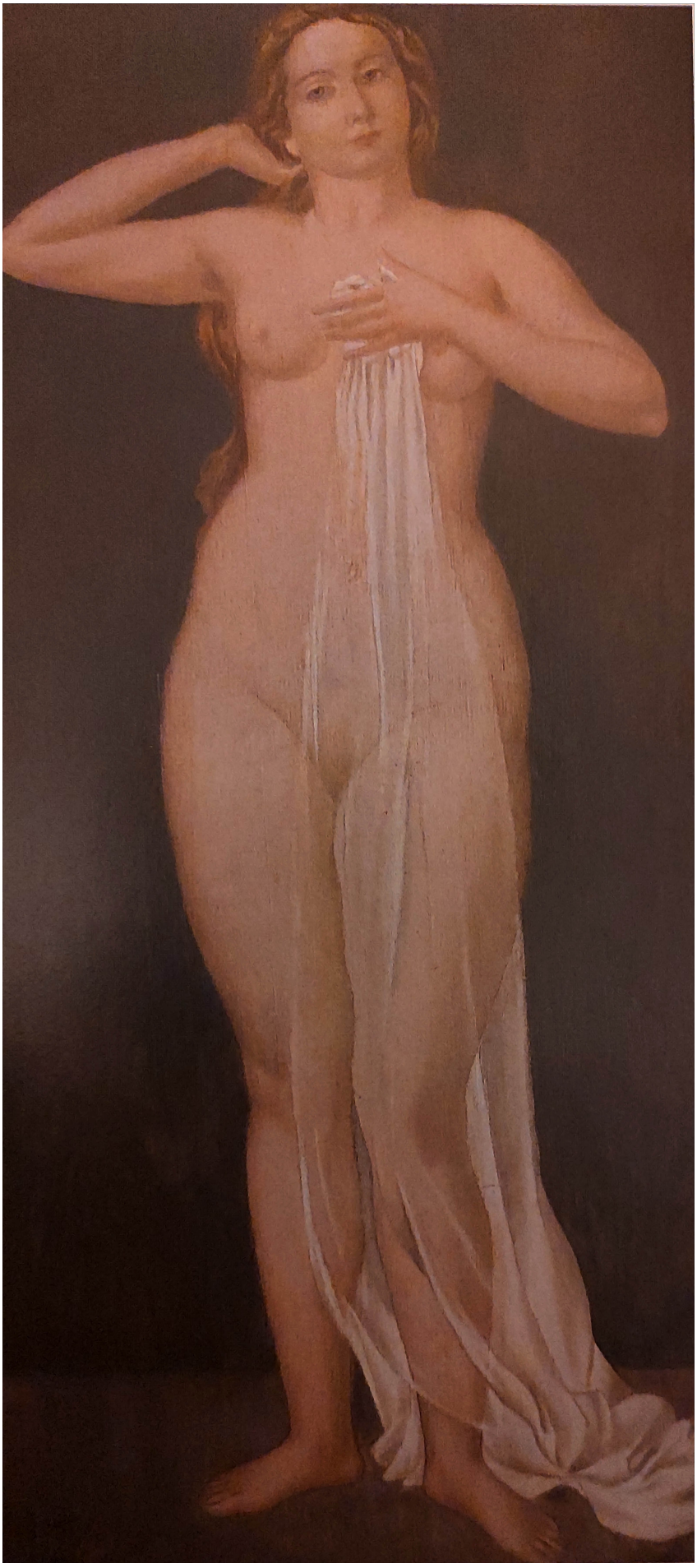


Figure 90. *Nu à la manière de Lorenzo de Credi* (1898).
Oil on canvas, 135 x 63cm. MMD.



Figure 91. Aristide Maillol, *Nu arrangeant ses cheveux* (1898). Bronze, (h) 27 cm. Baltimore, The Baltimore Museum of Art.



Figure 92. Black and white photograph of 'Psyché: Premier Acte' by Gabriel Mourey. Reproduced in Georges Casella, 'Première representation de Psyché', *Comoedia* (2 December 1913), n.p. Paris, BnF.

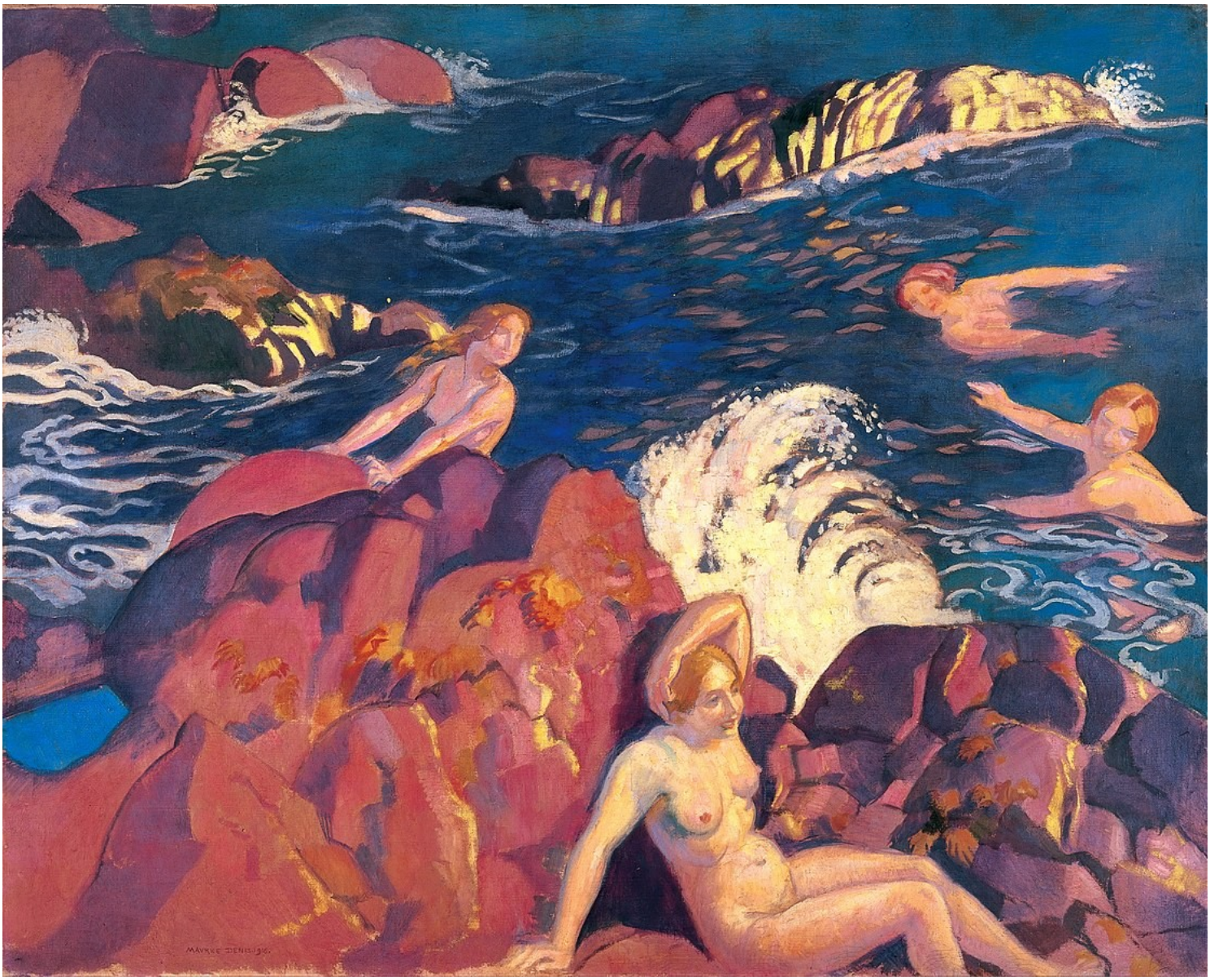


Figure 93. *La vague* (1916). Oil on canvas, 100 x 124 cm.
Japan, Ohara Museum of Art.



Figure 94. *Jeunesse* or *La vague au ballon rouge* (1935).
Oil on canvas, 28 x 56 cm. Private collection.



Figure 95. Perros-Guirec, farandole au bal des Régates (1906).
Photograph, 12 x 16cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.



Figure 96. Study for wallpaper project: *Les fillettes* (1893).
Gouache on cardboard, 81 x 51.5 cm. MMD.



Figure 97. *Frauenliebe und Leben: La Farandole* (1895).
Distemper on canvas, 48 x 205 cm. Private collection.



Figure 98. *Farandole sur la terrasse de St Germain,* design for a fan (c.1896).
Gouache on silk, 30 x 56 cm. MMD.



Figure 99. 'La Farandole', sketch for the right-hand section of *Terre Latine: L'Art Plastique* (1907). Gouache, charcoal and chalk on paper, 150 x 162cm. MMD.



Figure 100. Anonymous, *Loïe Fuller dansant* (c. 1900).
Photograph, 16 x 11 cm. Paris, musée d'Orsay.



Figure 101. Cover illustration of André Rossignol's *Douce Vision* (1896). Lithograph, 50 x 32 cm. Private collection.



Figure 102. *Plage aux lutteurs* (1912). Oil on canvas, 65 × 105 cm.
Private collection.



Figure 103. *Galatée* (1917). Oil on canvas, 112 x 88cm.
Grenoble, musée de Peinture et de Sculpture.

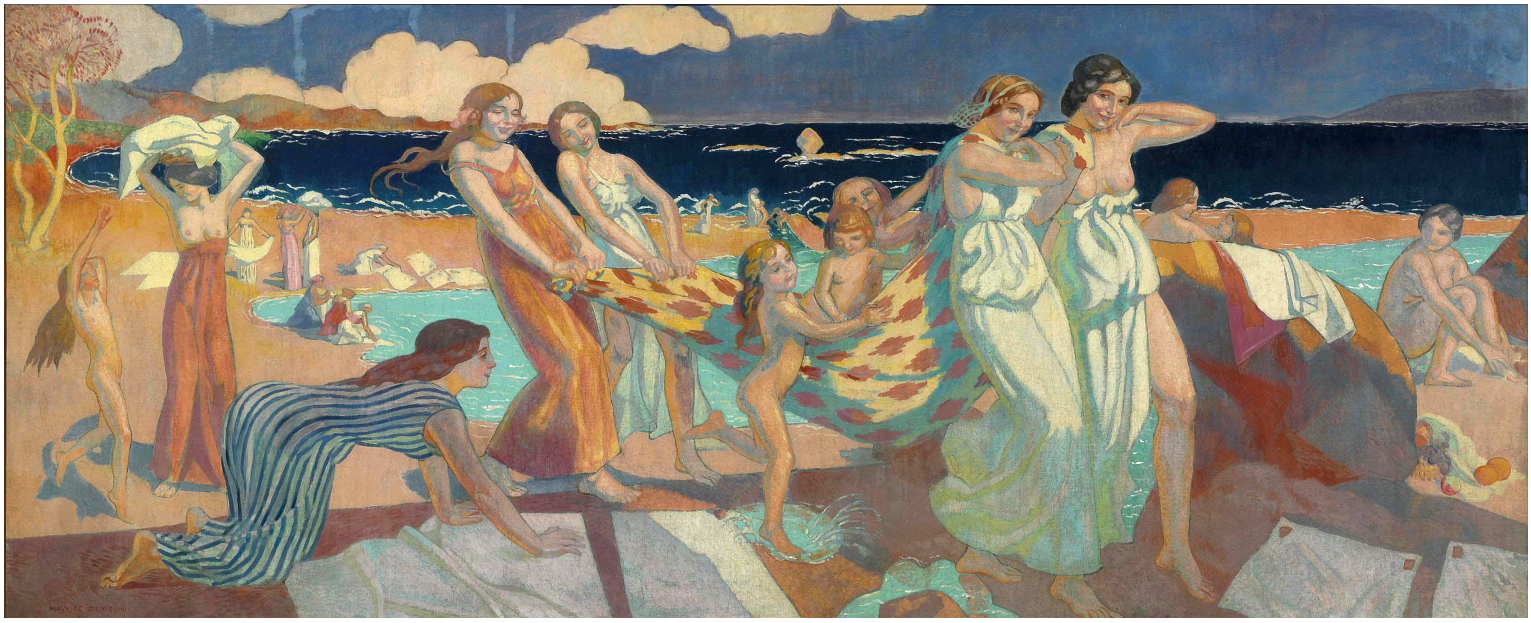


Figure 104. *Nausicaa: Les jeux des laveuses* (1914). Oil on canvas, 160 x 386 cm. Private collection.



Figure 105. *Nausicaa: Tennis I* (1914). Oil on canvas, size unknown.
Paris, Musée national du sport.



Figure 106. *L'Histoire de la musique,* decorative scheme for the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1913). Oil on canvas (marouflaged). *In situ.*

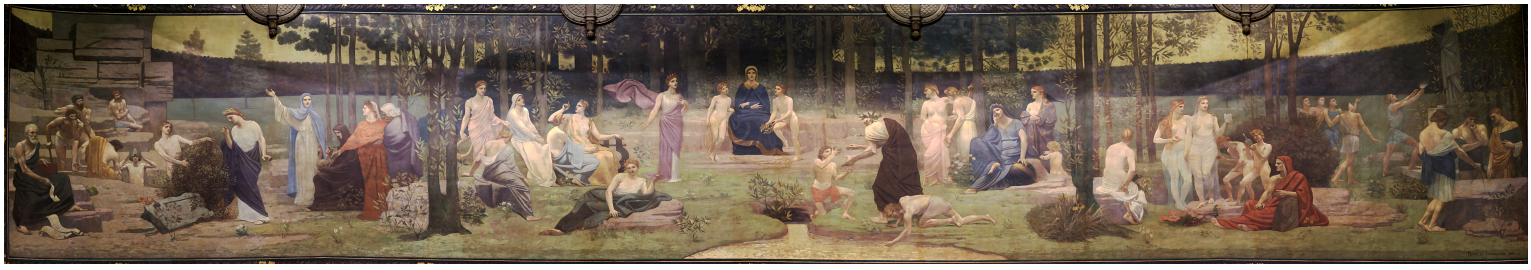


Figure 107. Puvis de Chavannes, *Le Bois Sacré (*1889). Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 4.5 x 60 m. Paris, Grand Amphithéâtre de la Sorbonne.

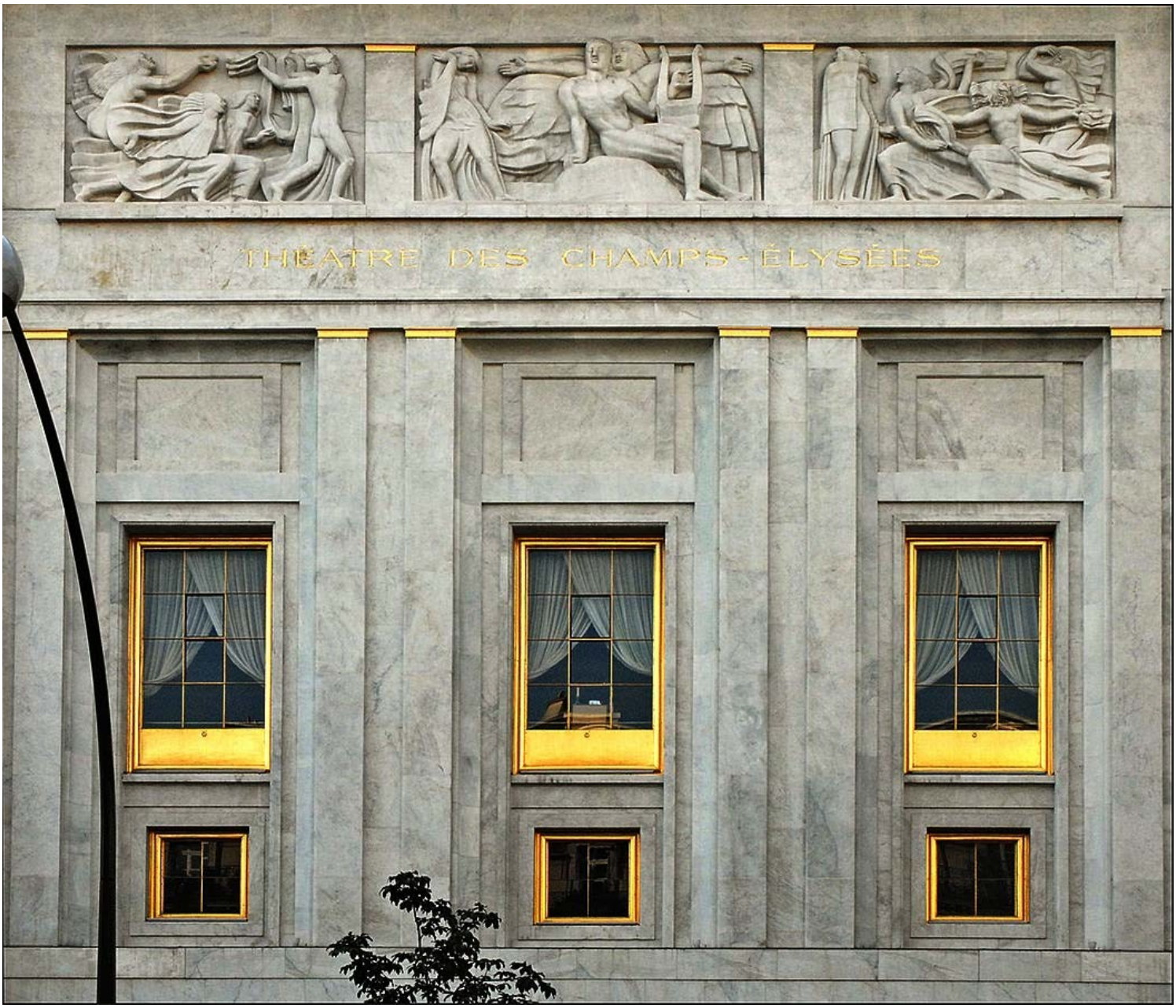


Figure 108. Façade of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées,
featuring Antoine Bourdelle's *Apollon et sa méditation entourée des neuf muses* (1910-12).
Concrete.



Figure 109. Antoine Bourdelle,
study for *La Musique* relief on façade of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1912).
Plaster, 177 x 152cm. Montauban, musée Ingres Bourdelle.

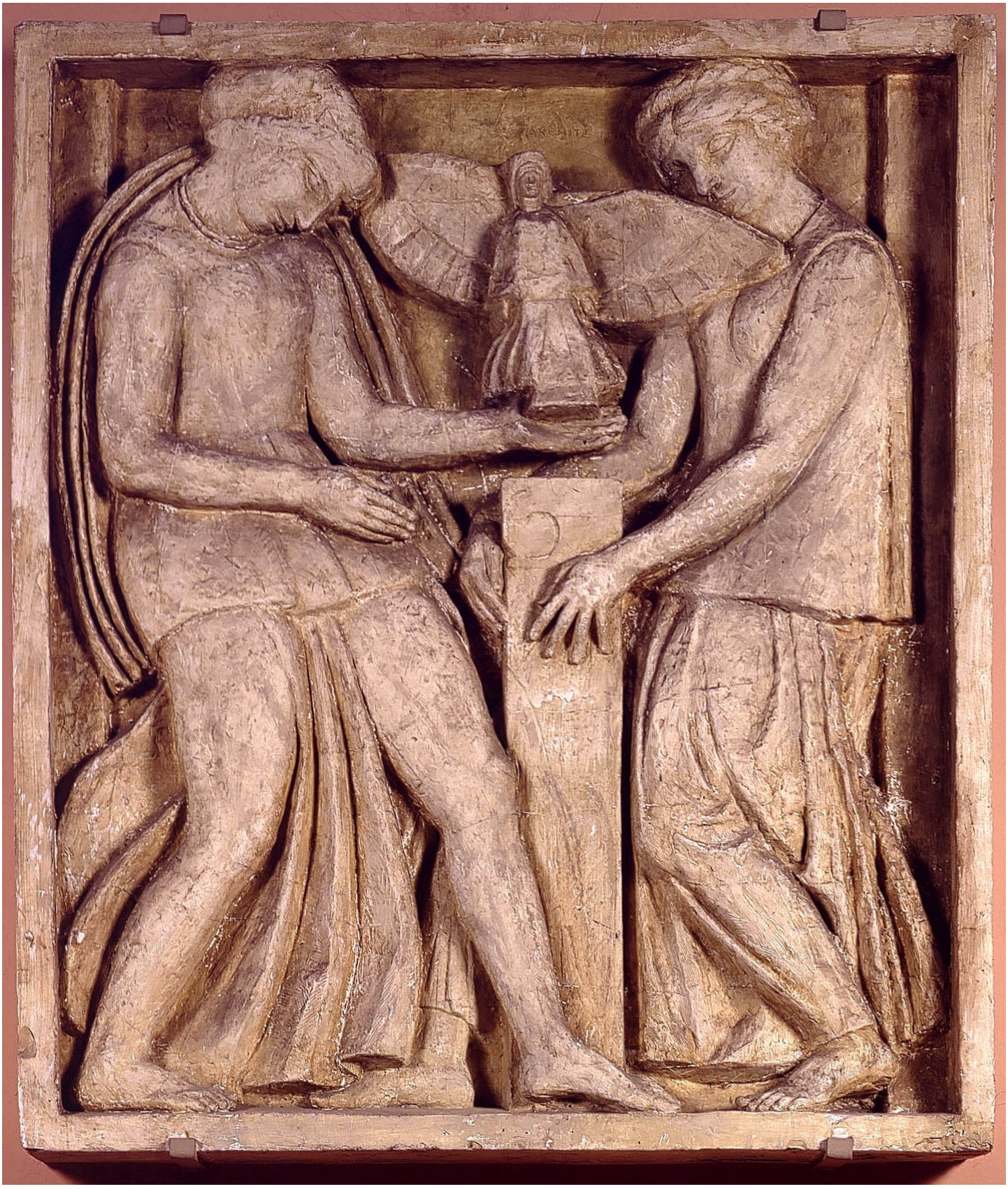


Figure 110. Antoine Bourdelle, study for *La Sculpture et l'Architecture* relief on façade of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1912). Plaster, 176 x 150cm. Montauban, musée Ingres Bourdelle.

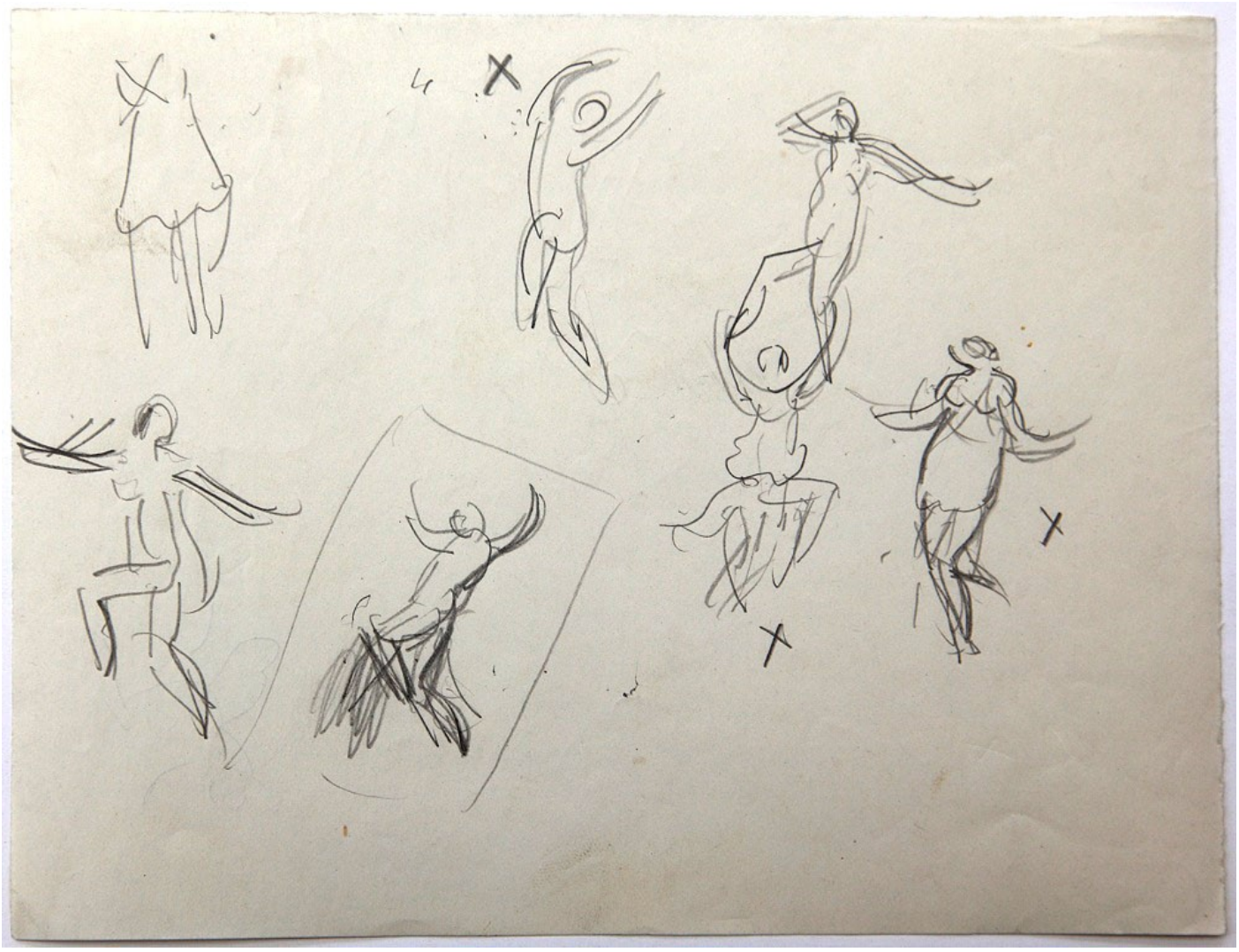


Figures 111a and b. Preparatory studies for *Le Chant and La Danse*, reliefs for the interior of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1911). Modelling clay, 21.1 x 31cm. MMD.





Figure 112. *Les Mouvements et les Nuances,*
sketch for the exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1911-12).
Tempera on canvas, 55 x 150 cm. MMD.



Figures 113a (and b). Notebook sketches of Isadora Duncan (c.1910).
Pencil on paper. Private collection.



Figures 113(a and) b. Notebook sketches of Isadora Duncan (c.1910).
Pencil on paper. Private collection.



Figures 114a and b. Painted studies after Isadora Duncan (c. 1912).
Oil on cardboard, 39.7 x 44.7 cm (top), 33.2 x 54.9 cm (below). Private collection.



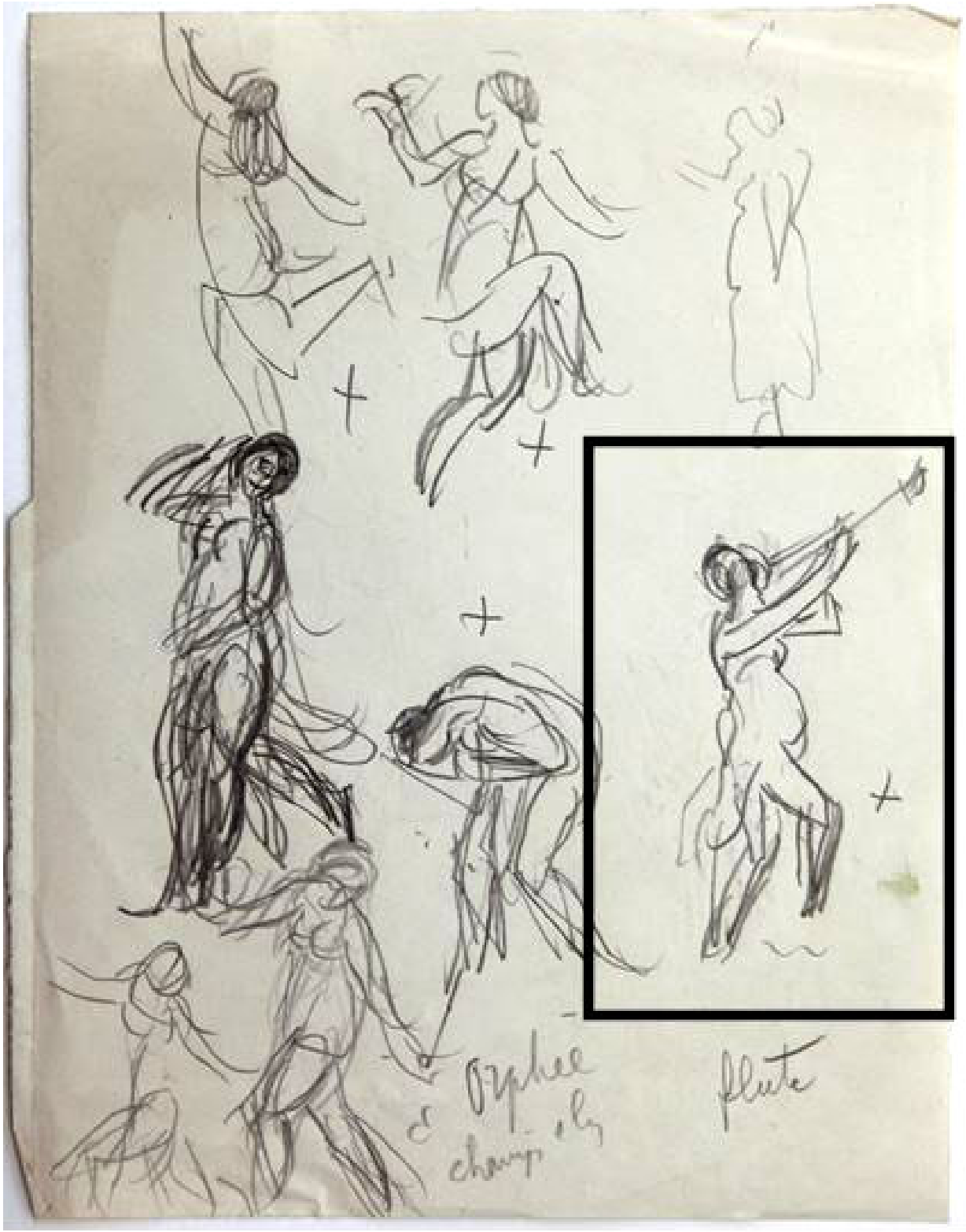


Figure 115. Notebook sketches of Isadora Duncan (c.1910).
Pencil on paper. Private collection.



Figure 116. Black and white reproduction of a plate entitled *Études d'après Isadora Duncan* (c. 1912). Reproduced in José Clara, 'Isadora Duncan', *L'Art Décoratif* (1913). Paris, BnF.



Figure 117a. *Largo*, preparatory drawing for exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1913). Charcoal on paper, 85.6 x 75.7 cm. Private collection.



Figure 117b. *Cantabile,* preparatory drawing for exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1913).
Charcoal and white chalk on paper, 85.5 x 75.4 cm. Private collection.

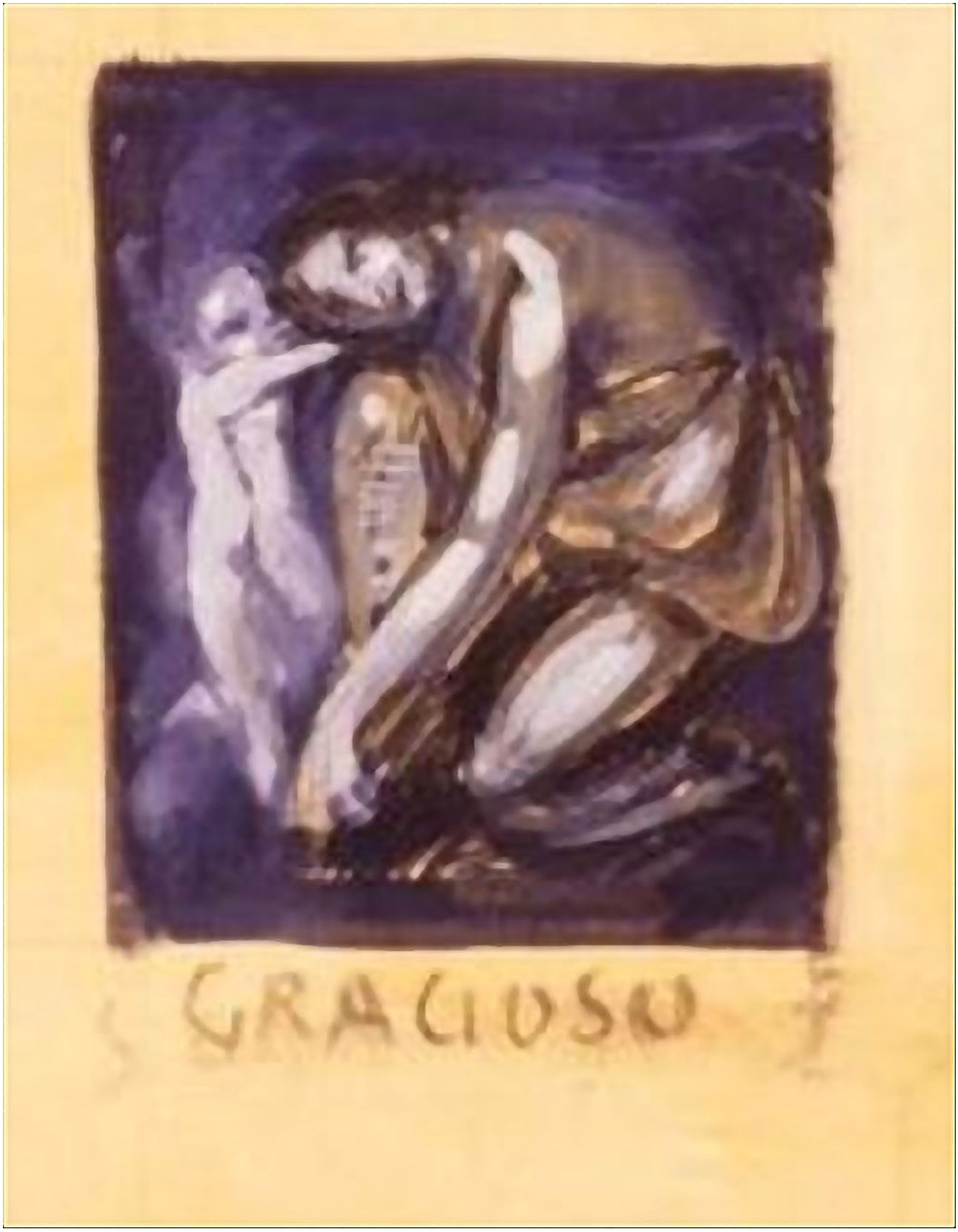


Figure 118. 'Gracioso' from *Les Mouvements et les Nuances,*
sketch for the exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1911-12).

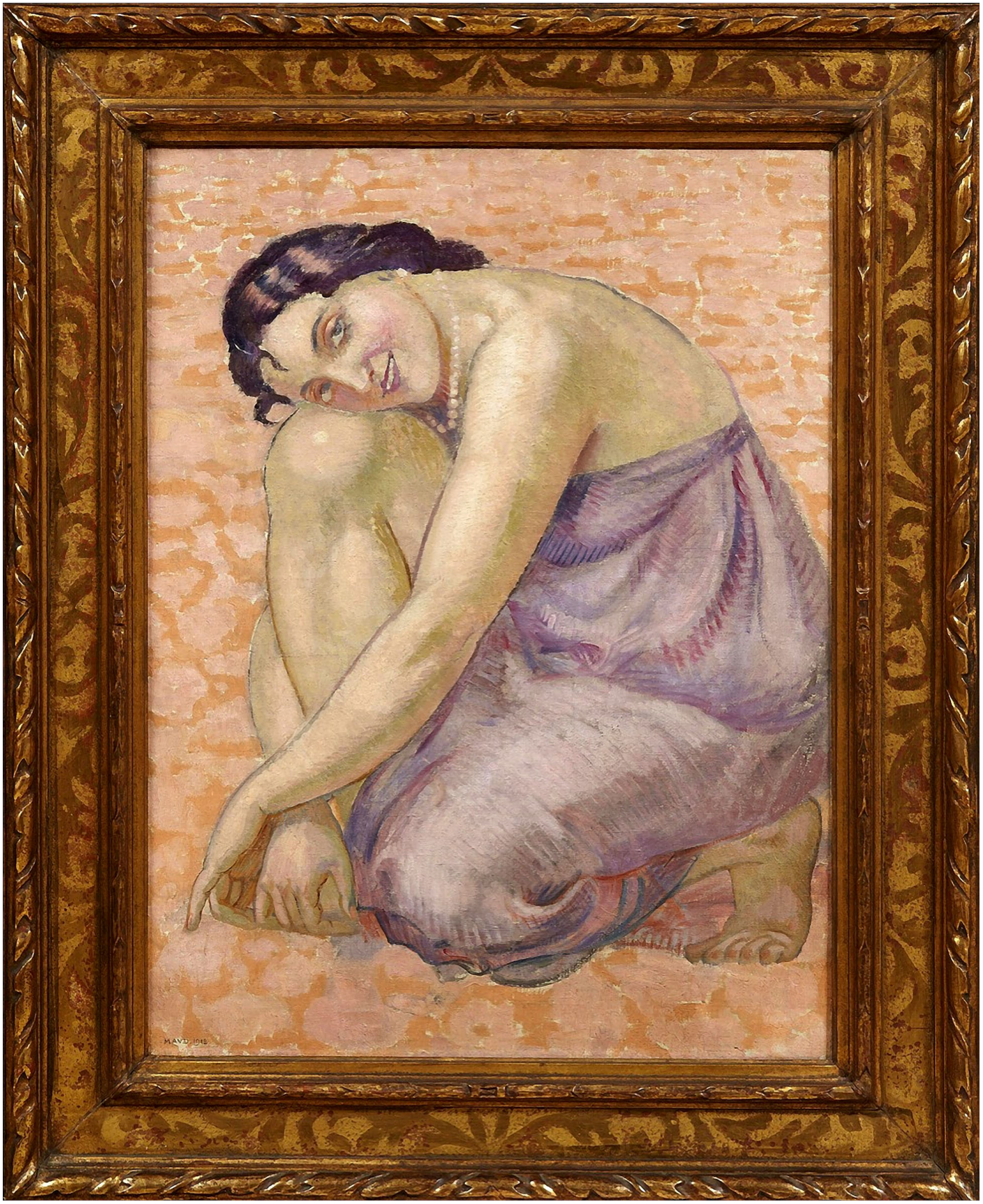


Figure 119. *Portrait de la danseuse Natacha Trouhanova* (1912).
Oil on canvas, 82 x 61 cm. Private collection.



Figure 120. *Presto,* preparatory drawing for exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1913). Charcoal and white chalk on paper, 86 x 74.5 cm. Private collection.



Figure 121. *L'Enfant qui court sur la plage* (c. 1912).
Oil on canvas, 136 x 146 cm. Private collection.



Figure 122. 'Presto' from *Les Mouvements et les Nuances,*
sketch for the exedra of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1911-12).



Figure 123. *L'Histoire de la musique: L'Orchestique Grecque,*
for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (1912-13).
on canvas (marouflaged), 372 m. in length. *In situ*



Figure 124. *L'Histoire de la musique: L'Opera,*
frieze for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. (1912-13).
Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 372 m. in length. *In situ.*



Figure 125. *L'Histoire de la musique: La Symphonie,*
frieze for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. (1912-13).
Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 372 m. in length. *In situ.*



Figure 126. *L'Histoire de la musique: Le Drame Lyrique,*
frieze for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. (1912-13). Oil on
canvas (marouflaged), 372 m. in length. *In situ.*



Figure 127. Preparatory study for *L'Histoire de la musique: Le Chœur* (1911-12). Red chalk, charcoal and white chalk on paper, 122 cm in diameter. MMD.



Figure 128. Preparatory study for *L'Histoire de la musique: L'Orgue* (1911-12). Gouache and charcoal, 54 x 42 cm. MMD.



Figure 129. Preparatory study for *L'Histoire de la musique: La Sonate* (1911-12). Red chalk, charcoal and gouache on paper, mounted on canvas, 121 x 141 cm. MMD.

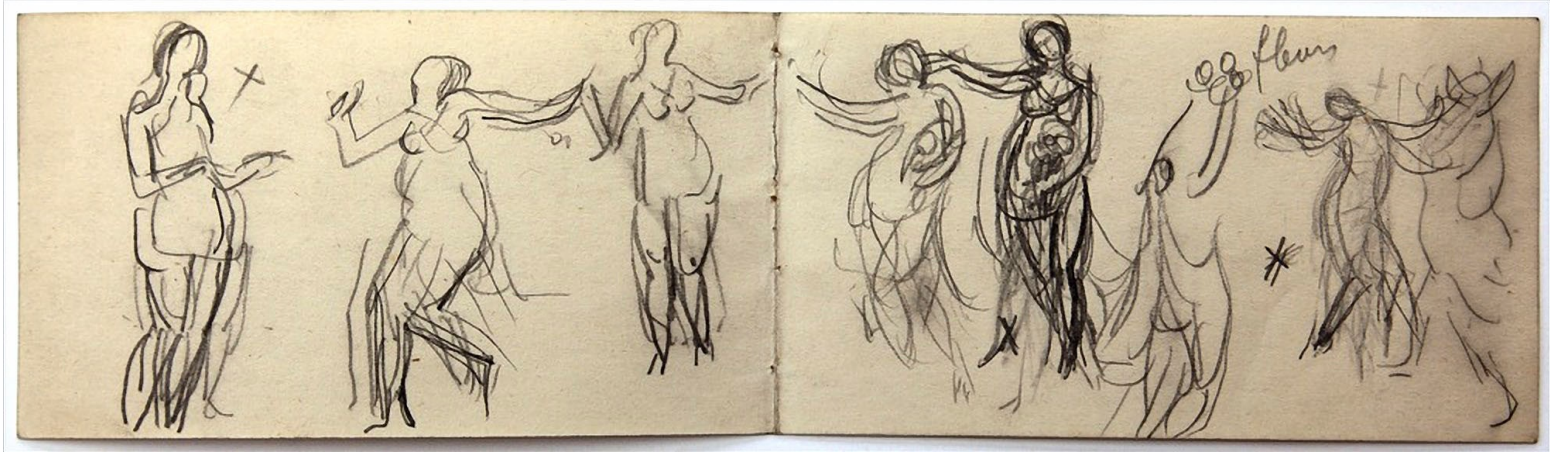


Figure 130. Notebook sketches of Isadora Duncan (c.1910).
Pencil on paper. Private collection.



Figure 131. Study for the Figure of 'Ariadne' for *L'Histoire de la musique: L'Orchestique grecque* (1912).
Lithograph enhanced with pastel, 48 x 31 cm. Private collection.



Figure 132. 'Ariadne', detail from *L'Histoire de la Musique: L'Orchestique grecque.*

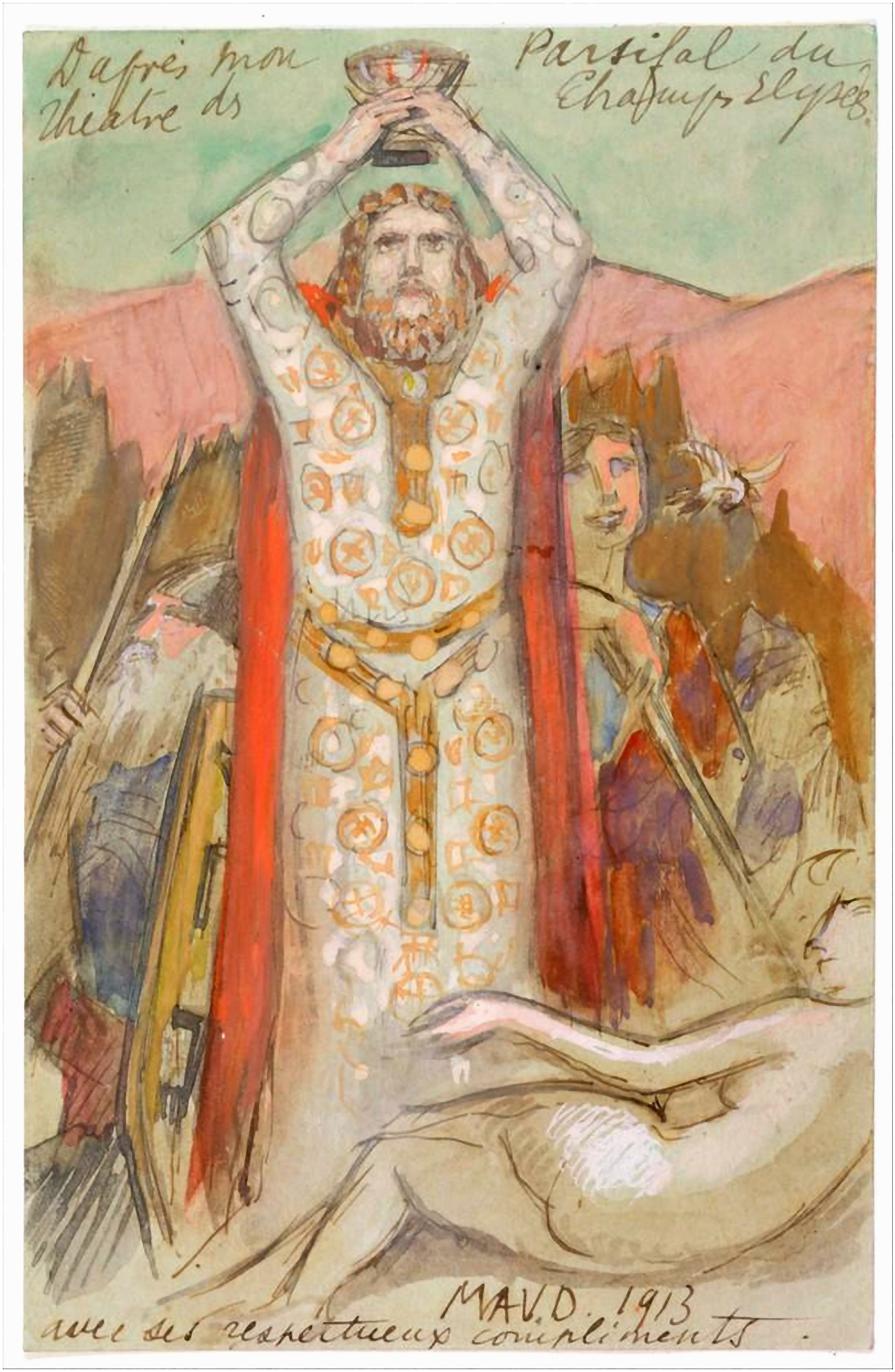


Figure 133. 'D'après mon Parsifal du Théâtre des Champs Elysées' (1913).
Watercolour, pen on back of green postcard, 14 x 9 cm.
Massachusetts, Smith College Museum of Art.



Figure 134. Photograph of interior. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 135. *La Vie du Christ,* central window of the 'Le Prieuré' chapel (1918-21), with the collaboration of Marcel Poncet and Charles Wasem. Stained glass, 670 x 250cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 136. *Annonce de la Messe au Prieuré,*
poster (c. 1922). Gouache on paper, 34 x 21.5cm. Private collection.

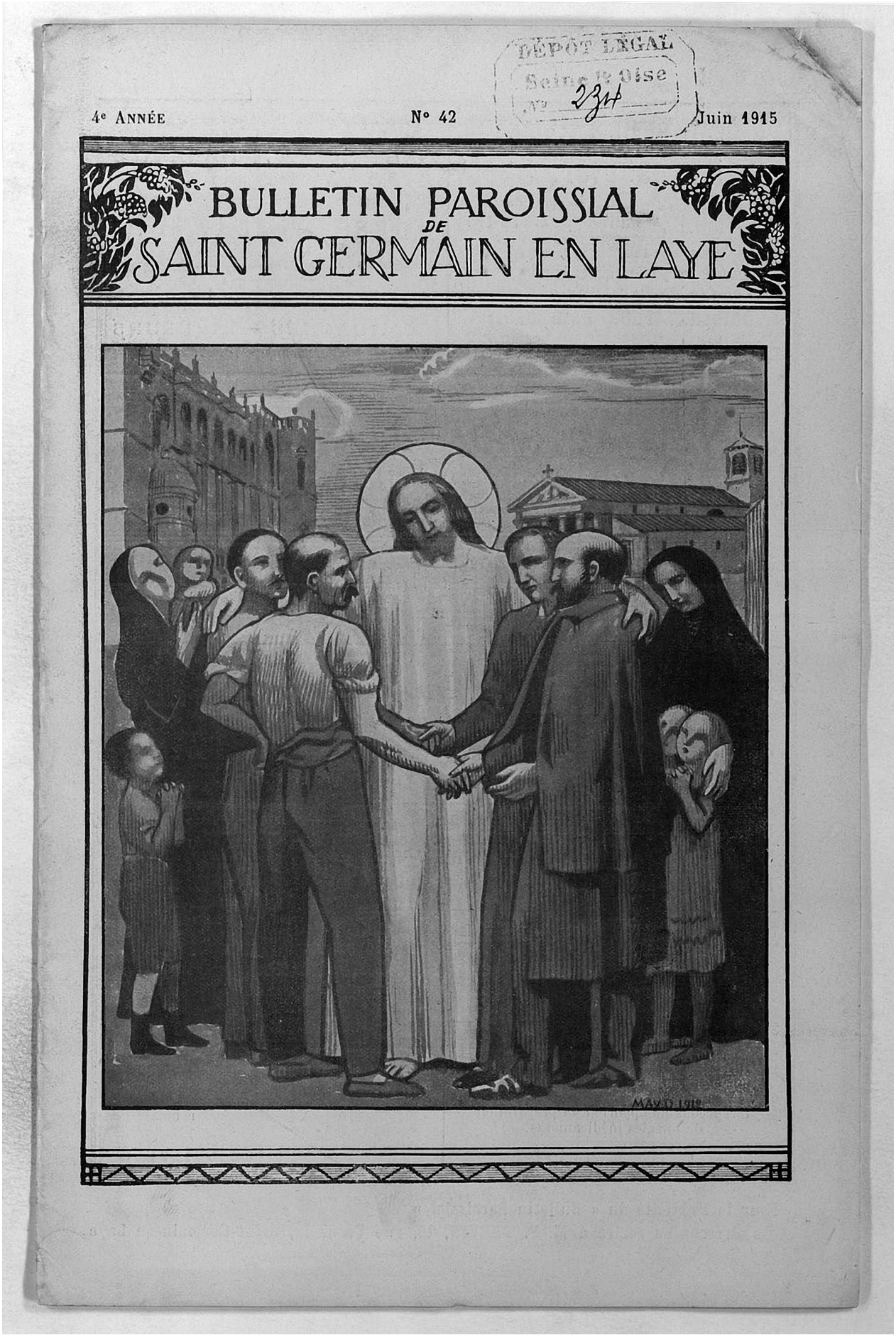


Figure 137. Frontispiece for the *Bulletin paroissial de Saint-Germain-en-Laye* (June 1915). Black and white reproduction. Paris, BnF.



Figure 138. Memorial plaque to Clément Besse, designed by Denis. Marble. Saint Germain-en-Laye, Chapelle des Franciscaines.



Figure 139. *Sainte Marthe rencontre Christ,*
with the collaboration of Marcel Poncet and Charles Wasem.
Stained glass, 450 x 240 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 140. *Sacré Cœur [de la Triennale]* (1916).
Oil on canvas, 98 x 106.5 cm. MMD.



Figure 141. Detail of ceiling, featuring 'Le Sacré Cœur'.
Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 250 cm in diameter.
Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 142. *First Station of the Cross: Condamné à mort* (1915).
Oil on canvas, 56 x 98 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 143. Detail of ceiling, featuring the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity).
Distemper. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 144. *La Foi, l'Espérance et la Charité inspirent les soldats de la France* (1916).
Oil on canvas, 56 x 66 cm. Mouilleron-en-Pareds, musée national des Deux Victoires.



Figure 145. Candelabras. Made by Simone Callède to a design by Denis. Wood, (h) 67 cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 146. Detail of candelabra, with bas-reliefs in gilded wood.
Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 147. Tabernacle and altar. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 148. Altar and central window. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 149. *Christ à la Treille* (c. 1922).
Oil on cardboard, 37.7 x 24 cm. Private collection.



Figure 150. Study for green chasuble (left); Sabine Desvallières.
Green chasuble, to a design by Denis (c.1921) (right).
silk taffeta, embroidery (metallic and silk), 114 x 148 cm. MMD.

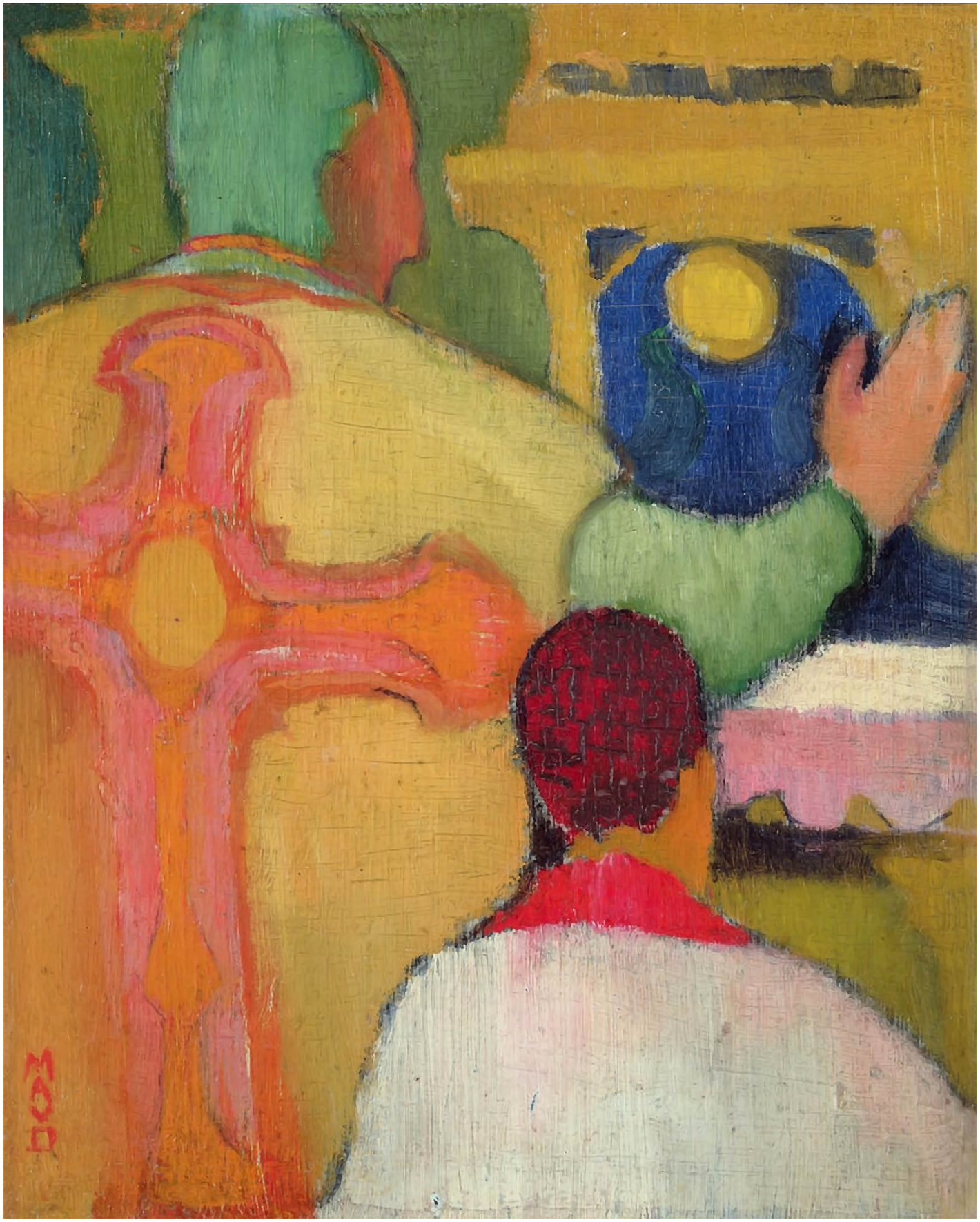


Figure 151. *Le Messe* (1890). Oil on card, 24 x 19cm. Private collection.



Figure 152. Interior photograph, chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 153. Ceiling vault, chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.
Distemper. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 154a. 'Heureux ceux qui pleurent parce qu'ils seront consolés', mural painting for the chapel wall (1923-28). Stic-B, (h) 250cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 154b. 'Heureux ceux qui pleurent parce qu'ils seront consolés', mural painting for the chapel wall (1923-28). Stic-B, (h) 250cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 155. 'Heureux les pacifiques car ils seront appelés enfants de Dieu', mural painting for the chapel wall (1923-28).
Stic-B, (h) 250cm. Chapel of 'Le Prieuré'.



Figure 156. *Palais de la reine de Volupté* (1920).
Maquette for Act 1, scene I of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.



Figure 157. *Palais du Roi de l'Or* (1920).
Maquette for Act I, scene II of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.



Figure 158. *Un col de haut montagne* (1920).
Maquette for Act I, scene III of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*. Paris, BnF.



Figure 159. *Saint-Christophe portant l'Enfant,*
stage curtain design for Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe* (c.1919).
Used also for Act II, scene I. Pencil, watercolour and gouache on tissue paper, 26 x 34 cm. MMD.



Figure 160. *Le roc surplombant* (1920).
Maquette for Act II, scene II of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*.
Paris, BnF.



Figure 161. *Le torrent* (1920).
Maquette for Act II, scene III of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*.
Paris, BnF.



Figure 162. *Une salle au Palais d'Hiver* (1920).
Maquette for Act III, scene I of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*.
Paris, BnF.



Figure 163 *La Grande Place* (1920).
Maquette for Act III, scene III of Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*.
Paris, BnF.



Figure 164. Exterior of the Palais Garnier Paris.

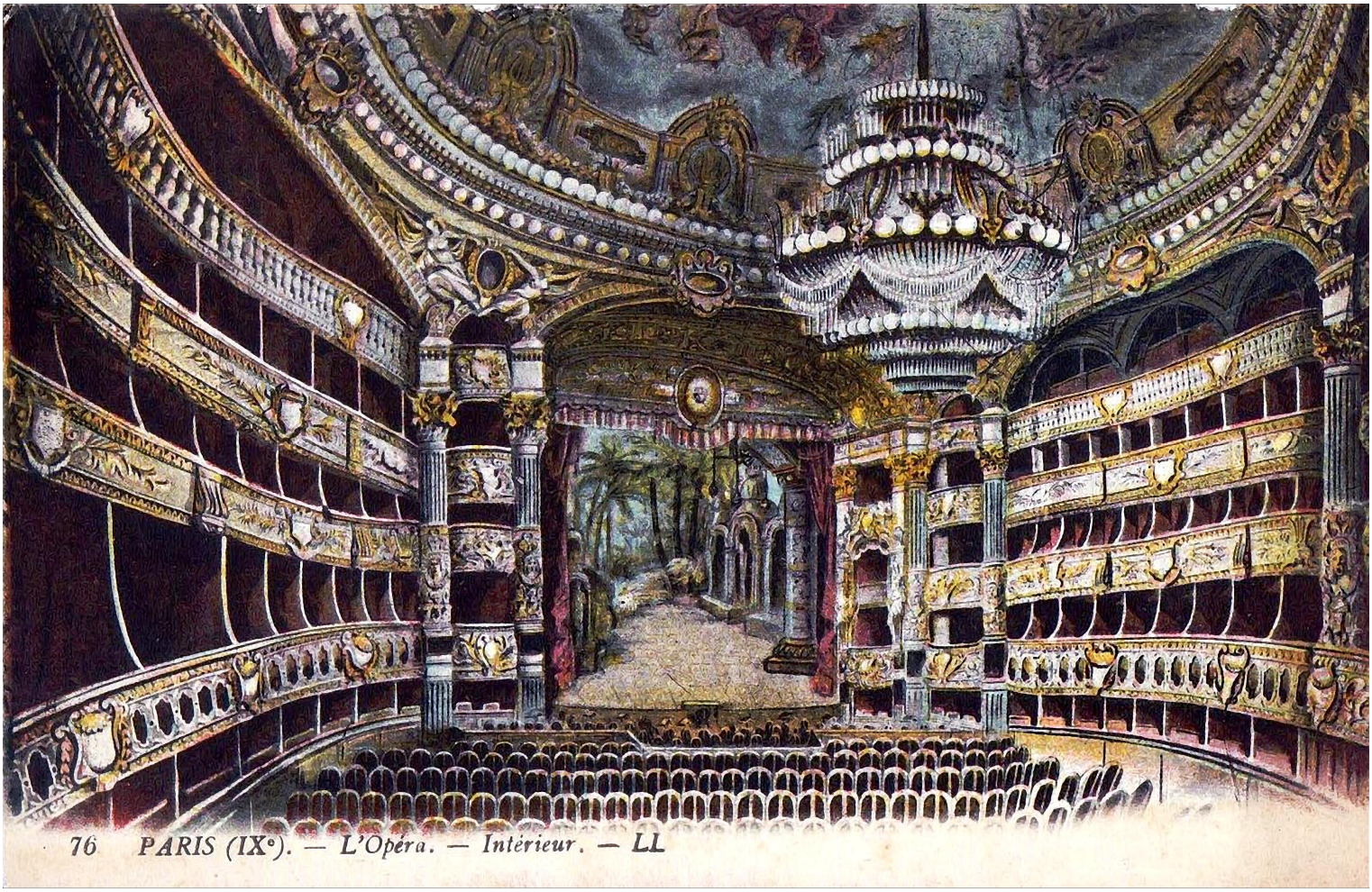


Figure 165. Auditorium of the Palais Garnier.
Postcard (Paris: Lucien Levy & Sons, 1909). Private collection.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 166a. Roi de l'Or, valet du Roi de l'Or,
Sathanael: costume designs for Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe*.
Pencil and watercolour. Paris, BnF.

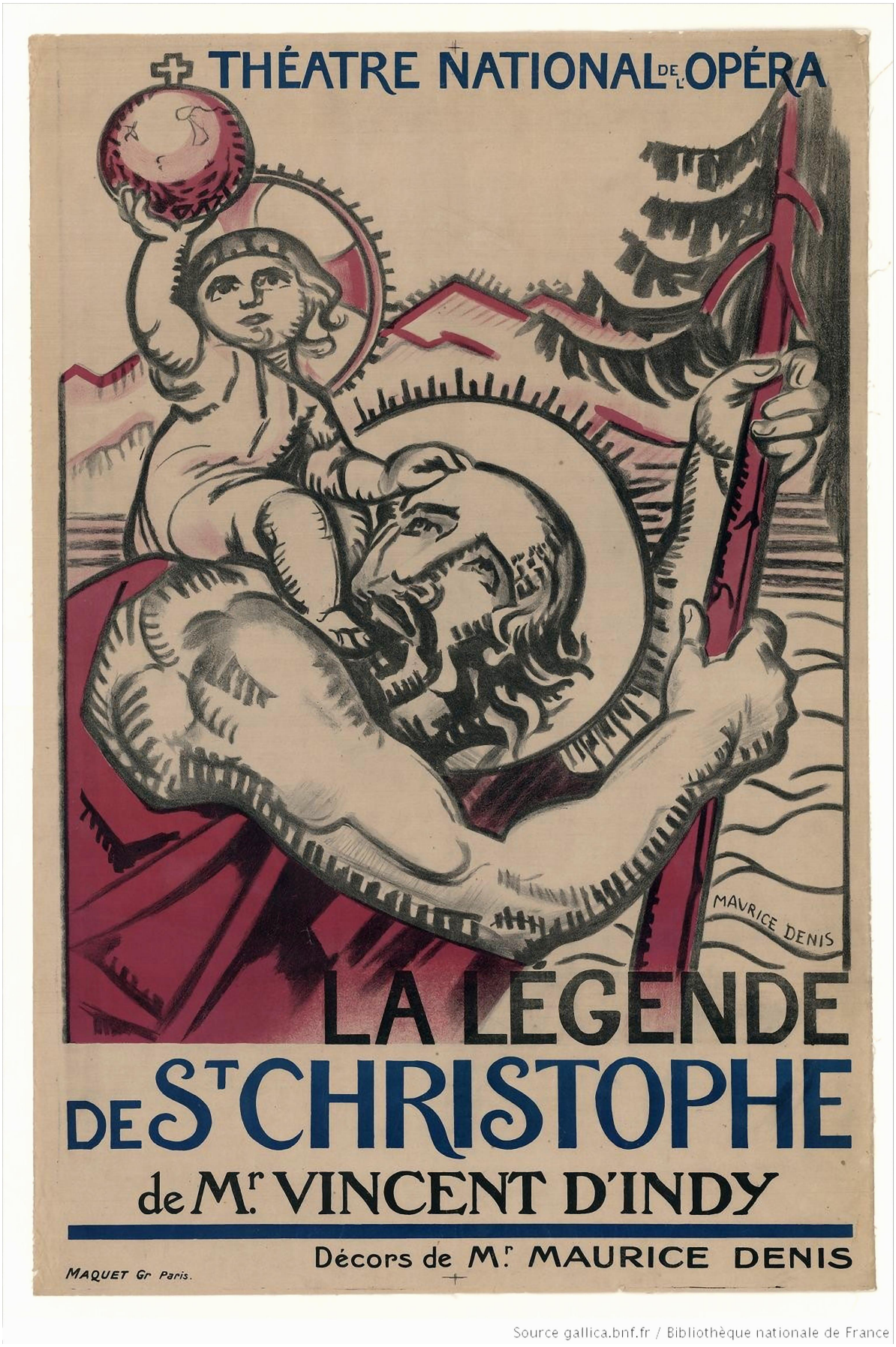


Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 166b. Acolyte et dactylo du Roi de l'Or:
costume designs Vincent d'Indy's opera *La légende de saint-Christophe* (date).
Pencil and watercolour.
Paris, BnF.



Figure 167. Preparatory study for *Le torrent* (c.1919).
Pencil and watercolour on tissue paper, 38 x 51 cm. MMD.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 168a. *Théâtre national de l'opéra. La légende de Saint-Christophe de M. Vincent d'Indy* (1920).
Poster, lithograph, 120 x 80 cm.
Paris, BnF.



Figure 168b. *Théâtre national de l'opéra. La légende de Saint-Christophe de M. Vincent d'Indy* (1920).
Printed postcard, 10 x 8 cm.
Paris, BnF.



Figure 169. Anonymous south German, *Buxheim St. Christopher* (1423).
Coloured woodcut, 28.9 x 20.7 cm.
of Manchester, John Rylands Library.



Figure 170. *La musique profane*,
panel for the lateral gallery of the Palais de Chaillot (1937).
Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 270 x 435cm. *In situ*.



Figure 171. *La musique sacrée,*
panel for the lateral gallery of the Palais de Chaillot (1937).
Oil on canvas (marouflaged), 270 x 435cm. *In situ.*



Figure 172. First study for *La Musique profane,* decoration of the Palais de Chaillot (1936). on cardboard, 270 x 45 cm. Private collection.



Figure 173. Puvis de Chavannes, *L'Inspiration Chrétienne* (1887-8).
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas, 105 x 130 cm.
Washington D.C., Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Figure 174. Guillaume Dubufe, *Musique profane - musique sacrée* (1880).
Oil on canvas, 140.3 x 195.6 cm. Private collection.
Reproduced in Charles Gounod, 'La Musique sacrée et la Musique profane',
Les Lettres et les Arts (1 January 1886), p. 46.
Paris, BnF.