

DEGAS  
CEZANNE  
SEURAT

The  
DREAM ARCHIVE  
from the Musée d'Orsay

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## Exhibition facts

Press conference	29 January 2015, 10:00am
Opening	29 January 2015, 6:30pm
Duration	30 January – 3 May 2015
Venue	Bastion Hall
Curators	Prof. Dr. Werner Spies
Exhibits	130
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Supporting program	Matinée: artist's talk with Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Erwin Wurm on Sunday, april 12, 11 o'clock
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1, A-1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83-0 <a href="mailto:info@albertina.at">info@albertina.at</a> , <a href="http://www.albertina.at">www.albertina.at</a>
Opening hours	Daily 10:00am–7:00pm, Wednesdays 10:00am–9:00pm
Guided tours	Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays at 3:30pm, Wednesdays 6:30pm, duration: 60 minutes T +43 (0)1 534 83-540, <a href="mailto:besucher@albertina.at">besucher@albertina.at</a>
Press contact	Sarah Wulbrandt T +43 (01) 534 83 - 511 , M +43 (0)699.12178720, <a href="mailto:s.wulbrandt@albertina.at">s.wulbrandt@albertina.at</a> Barbara Walcher T +43 (01) 534 83 - 512, M +43 (0)699.109 81743, <a href="mailto:b.walcher@albertina.at">b.walcher@albertina.at</a> Ivana Novoselac-Binder T +43 (01) 534 83 - 514 , M +43 (0)699.12178741 <a href="mailto:i.novoselac-binder@albertina.at">i.novoselac-binder@albertina.at</a>

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## Degas, Cézanne, Seurat

# The Dream Archive from the Musée d'Orsay

30 January – 3 May 2015

For a few weeks, the Albertina will afford its visitors a glimpse into an archive of dreams when the Musée d'Orsay opens its vaults to lend the graphic gems of its collection for the first time ever to a museum outside of France from 30 January to 3 May 2015. This major presentation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century French art will feature 130 works.

Delicate pastels by Edgar Degas, Georges Seurat and Odilon Redon, painterly gouaches by Honoré Daumier and Gustave Moreau, fine watercolours by Paul Cézanne, and works by salon artists who were highly esteemed in their day will come together to provide a sweeping look at the French art of drawing.

Politically oriented realism will be seen as realised by its most prominent protagonists: social conflicts dealt with in the era's courtrooms are exaggerated and contorted to the point of caricature by Honoré Daumier, while Gustave Courbet and Ernest Meissonier document barricade battles and significant political turning points on sheets of sketch paper. Giovanni Segantini and Jean-François Millet, on the other hand, bathe monumentally portrayed farmers and fisherfolk in a mystical light and show workers frozen still in poses that aestheticise their repetitive gestures.

These socially motivated compositions will contrast provocatively with works by impressionist painters including Paul Cézanne with his sundrenched landscapes from the south of France, or Eugène Boudin with his airy, atmospheric market depictions. Both artists allow the bright radiance of their paper to shine through in places, and they bring a skilful lightness to bear in constructing their motifs out of nearly geometric surfaces. Light is also a key element in the works by Edgar Degas: his drawings observe dancers from hidden vantage points as they work through their private exercises and play out intimate scenes. And like Aristide Maillol, Degas also devotes himself to the classical genre of the nude, infusing it with seemingly banal everyday activities to give rise to something like a modern feminine divinity, a modern Venus.

Alexandre Cabanel and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, on the other hand, show that despite all modern efforts, the 19<sup>th</sup> century's second half still saw the traditions of the *academie française* held high: Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* represents the zenith of classicism after Ingres or Raphael, celebrating the classical ideal of beauty as well as the rules and tastes of the salon. And literary figures inhabit narrative masterpieces by Edward Burne-Jones, Jean Léon Gérôme, and František Kupka, which this presentation places in dialogue with drawings that were created as book illustrations. These include Jean-Paul Laurens's grisailles for Goethe's *Faust*, a drawing by the Pre-Raphaelite William Holman Hunt for John Keats's *Isabella*, and finally Maurice Denis's illustrations for *Les fiolettis de saint François d'Assise* [Little Flowers of St. Francis].

Odilon Redon conjures up mysterious and puzzling depictions by breathing life into the technique of charcoal drawing: his "noirs" give form to a suggestive, spiritual world akin to the equally dark but pointillist drawings by Georges Seurat. These, done in black Conté crayon, are lent definition not by lines but by the contrast between the subtle nuances of the black drawing utensils and the

# ALBERTINA

whiteness of the paper - resulting in hazy and mysterious silhouettes. Felicien Rops and Gustave Moreau peer into the abysses of the human soul: their works show monsters and chimeras, and their reinventions of Salomé, Medea, and Medusa serve well to illustrate the notions that surrounded the turn-of-the-century *femme fatale*.

The way through this seemingly inscrutable labyrinth of styles, themes, and motifs that simultaneously captivated the 19<sup>th</sup>-century art world will be shown by Werner Spies, former director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne at the Centre Pompidou. Spies compiled the selection of works to be featured in this exhibition.

And for the catalogue being published to mark the occasion, numerous artists, authors, filmmakers and architects have provided personal written contributions and interpretations of individual works as expressions of their bond of friendship with this esteemed curator.

Curator: Prof. Dr. Werner Spies

## Introspection

Closing one's eyes in order to behold one's own self in the dark – this form of introspection caused many artists to portray themselves with their eyes in shadows. The mysterious darkness of their eyes expresses doubt, pain, delusion, and a fear of the unknown, of what lies beyond, of the face of the night – the fear of death. The pain-stricken face of Charles Baudelaire, with its sorrowful eyes, stands out against 'this blackness that produces light' (Victor Hugo). The author of *The Flowers of Evil* sees man torn between an ideal world and world-weariness. Courbet presents himself as a disregarded and offended artist who has been insulted by society and defies the world as a free man, 'un homme libre', firmly holding on to his canvas. Jean-François Millet's face betrays the melancholy accompanying artistic crises. Scrutinising his mirror image, Henri Fantin-Latour weighs it against the portray that appears behind his closed eyes, i.e., before the eye of his mind. In Léon Spilliaert's self-portrait, the eyes lie in deep, dark holes from which the mirror reflects the artist's hallucinations about his own transience. Pain and a fear of death are also written all over the face of the German artist Lovis Corinth in the works from his late period. The older he grew, the more he was plagued with self-doubt and increasingly perceived a threatening infirmity in his mirror image.

## Architectural Visions as the Spawn of Bourgeois Imagination

Delving into a dream in order to soar to the heady heights of unrealisable utopia: around the turn of the century, this was what François Garas was striving for. And because he thought that utility stood in the way of beauty, he refused to actually build things and committed himself entirely to thought experiments. His architecture was only realised on the drawing board and in the form of models. He dedicated his utopian temple complex to the freedom of thoughts and ideas. Unfolding into infinity, they are just as unlimited as the unfinished building itself. At the foot of the temple, Garas envisioned his own house, where he would develop his architecture in seclusion from the world. Other architects were dreaming of the past. Some felt the structure of the Eiffel Tower, a masterpiece of engineering, to be an expression of banality: on the occasion of the 1900 Paris Universal Exhibition, its construction elements were to be hidden. Henri Toussaint contrived a palace of electricity for which the base of the iron lattice tower should be generously concealed. The entire 19th century oscillated between the antipodes of a future-oriented belief in technology and a poetically distorted reality oriented towards the past – between the poles of utopia, realism, and a sense of longing for a lost idyll. The exhibition *Archives of the Dream* traces the 19th century's fault lines between romanticisation and reality, between the Salon and the avant-garde.

## Labour and Time Standing Still

In the art of Jean-François Millet and Giovanni Segantini, farm labourers and peasants returning from work at the fall of darkness bend under their heavy loads. Leaning out of their boats, fishermen throw their traps by moonlight. During the day, they relax in the sun and abandon themselves to daydreams. In such moments, time stands still. At dusk, however, when day and night blend together, movement stirs anew, and the farmer's wife heads for home with her herd.

Millet and Segantini mark the beginning and the end of realism. Their drawings are separated by half a century, but they share the atmospheric and tranquil interpretation of peasants and farmworkers giving in to the cycle of life. These images are devoid of an acute presence, of accusation and pathos. They do not romanticise life in the countryside, in spite of their conciliatory, diffuse light. Neither do they deplore the social misery of the industrial age. These pictures also resemble each other in terms of the rhythmical repetition of movement: most simple gestures become symbols of human existence per se.

## Honoré Daumier

No one pilloried the faces of the bourgeoisie and its double moral standards more fittingly than Honoré Daumier. He exposed these self-righteous and haughty citizens to dazzling light and to the caricaturist's scorn. Daumier's victims were ivory-tower amateurs and collectors who preferred to stick with their own kind and mirror-gazing lawyers who thrust themselves into the limelight with the mendacity of hollow pathos.

Daumier did not spare the privileged social strata. His caricatures extracted the truth from behind the scenes of the Second Empire and unveiled the complacency of its hypocritical upper middle classes. Parliamentarians, judges, barristers, and artists were the profiteers of the authoritarian regime of Napoleon III and a parliament that had deprived itself of control and had placed substantial power in the hands of corrupt courts.

Yet Daumier also parodied the outsiders of society, figures related to the circus. The showman's outcry goes unheard; the spectators remain indifferent, no matter how threatening the monster in the background may appear.

Daumier was the first prominent artist to resort to caricature as a medium of expression in realism, for only the exaggeration of reality allowed him to render its ugliness uncensored.

## Ernest Meissonier

In June 1848, the working class unsuccessfully rose to protest against the abolition of the National Workshops, which had been introduced as a measure against unemployment. The young Second Republic, which had emerged from the demolished barricades in February 1848, brutally smashed the dream of equality and fraternity. An artillery captain in the National Guard, Ernest Meissonier participated in the fights and captured the events on the spot immediately after the barricades in the rue de la Mortellerie in Paris had been stormed. He produced a small, inconspicuous masterpiece, which due to its relentless observation of the revolutionaries' mutilated bodies has been chosen as the historical prelude to *The Archives of the Dream*: an image that would give birth to both the idylls fleeing the cruelty of reality and the resulting nightmares.

## Historicism and the Salon

Year after year, large crowds stormed the huge exhibitions of the Paris Salon in order to admire the latest paintings or pour scorn and derision on them to the critics' applause. Past reviews of the Salon, whether expressing admiration or contempt, and today's assessment of the works in question frequently diverge considerably. In the 19th century, Alexandre Cabanel was a celebrated artist, while Édouard Manet was misunderstood as a provocative agitator. Because of its feminine beauty, Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* aroused enthusiasm, whereas Manet's *Odalisque* was vehemently rejected because of its ugliness. Manet's *Reclining Nude with a Cat* likely depicts a prostitute, who looks at the spectator provocatively: an affront to academic tradition. Yet the poet and 'social reporter' Émile Zola was well aware that Manet's *Odalisque* would pave the way for modernism. Such masters of idealising history painting as Lawrence Alma-Tadema or Jean-Paul Laurens soon fell into oblivion during the long years of the modernist era. Only recently have their works no longer been misunderstood as painted literature, but have been reassessed as autonomous and virtuoso products of visual narration.



## Gustave Moreau

Gustave Moreau was a 'collector of dreams'. Images came naturally to the mind of this shy, learned maverick, fired by myths and literary inspiration. Moreau preferred the jewel-like transparency of watercolour painting. He owed his imagination and inventiveness to his enormous visual memory and erudition. His works stand out against the dark visions of other Symbolists like glittering diamonds.

Like other escapists, Gustave Moreau was an anti-naturalist and vehement opponent of the depiction of modern life. He was fascinated by the poetry of the Old Masters in the Louvre. Far from being a history painter committed to archaeological accuracy, he presented his visions of dreams as an alternative to realism, surprising beholders with his reinterpretations of traditional subject matter. Long before Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss, he had Salome engage in an erotic dialogue with the head of John the Baptist. In his *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, Moreau memorialised 'the mystery of the woman' before Freud appeared on the scene. Moreau's preference for decorative detail and its sensual splendour and sumptuous surfaces derive from his knowledge of oriental weapons, garments, rugs, and jewellery.

## Carlos Schwabe

In his pictures, Carlos Schwabe hallucinates death as the fictitious body of the 'femme fatale' – a woman embodying the male fear of a death brought about by lust. The angel is a deathly female creature that holds the promise of final bliss – not in the guise of satanic depravity like in the case of Félicien Rops, but in the shape of a beautiful woman. The female angel of death, furnished with scythe-shaped wings, appears as a redeemer exonerating the gravedigger from his dreary existence. The angel's smouldering colours recall those of the scarab, the Egyptian symbol of the sun god and of rebirth.

In Schwabe's art, winged female figures are guardian angels – be it that they protect man from adversity in the manner of archangels or that they relieve man from the burden of life through death. In his book illustrations for *Le Rêve [The Dream]* by Émile Zola, the writer's least naturalistic novel, Schwabe, a Symbolist, saw plenty of room for his subjective interpretation of the story and illustrated scenes that cannot even be found in the novel. Zola, a Naturalist, complained about the lack of realism of the Symbolist images, which took the beholder to a phantasmagorical world. Convinced of the artistic merit of his illustrations, Schwabe exhibited them successfully at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts before the book was published.

## Félicien Rops

Rops shocked the public and attacked the Catholic Church. His pornographically drastic illustrations unsettled the prudish sexual morality of the 19th century. In his bizarre and highly inventive works, the artist mockingly and impiously roused the demons of repressed desires, which eventually closed in on society and its tabooed sexuality. Rops reinstated the mysterious force of voluptuousness and restored it to the devilish context to which it had been assigned by religion. According to the Symbolist poet Joris-Karl Huysmans, Rops's designs can be referred to as 'Catholic works' for this very reason.

In 1874, Rops settled in Paris, where he gave free rein to his talents and ideas as a graphic artist. He drew a series of illustrations for Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Les Diaboliques*. On the frontispiece, a nude female figure nestles up against the cold stone of a sphinx and requests to be let in 'on the supernatural secret of new sins and a voluptuousness undreamt of' (Joris-Karl Huysmans). Satan, an elderly gentleman in a dark suit and with a monocle, is seated between the sphinx's wings and listens lecherously. He is the symbol of an aged and exhausted society that has suppressed its sexual desires.

## The Pre-Raphaelites and the Aestheticism of the 19th Century

The dream of art's renewal celebrated the past. William Holman Hunt vehemently rejected academism and its teachings, which relied on the 'classical' art of Raphael. In 1848, Hunt founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in London together with other artists. They pleaded for a return to an aestheticism void of pathos as it had prevailed during the period before Raphael and the Roman High Renaissance. Their drawings, characterised by precise contours and a lack of modelling, resembled those of medieval craftsmen. Outline drawings based on Italian frescoes of the Early Renaissance served as their guide. Nature was their unrelenting teacher and supreme model.

Medieval devotional literature became a moral authority for the Pre-Raphaelites and their themes. They illustrated works by Dante and Petrarch, virtuous poetry of the early modern age, and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In deliberate opposition to early industrial mass production, Walter Crane sought to reassert the status of craftsmanship. In his book illustrations, he gave equal attention and care to the figural elements and to the floral ornaments in the decorative borders.

Edward Burne-Jones aesthetically transfigured the games and intrigues between the sexes. His drawn head of the goddess of Fortune belongs to a 'femme fragile': the idealised yet no less fictitious counterpart of the menacing vamp, the man-devouring 'femme fatale'. Delicately built, anaemic, and frail, she requires male protection.

## Rodolphe Bresdin

Bresdin was an 'artiste maudit' – a misjudged artist who was excluded from the official art scene and would ultimately deliberately choose the way into self-destructive isolation. Bresdin's work relies on Dutch 17th-century art, on Rembrandt and Hercules Seghers. Bresdin's style as a draughtsman is obsessive. He meticulously drew his landscapes with a great sense of precision, losing himself in detail, until a multitude of elements would overgrow a picture. Dense foliage and lush forests spring not from direct observation, but from uncontrolled fantasy. In these scenes, man is small and meaningless. Odilon Redon was Bresdin's student, friend, and future apologist.

## Eugène Boudin and the Landscapes of Gustave Doré and Edgar Degas

Boudin's watercolour brush seems to have swept across the surface spontaneously yet confidently, causing the transparent, scintillating patches and light-suffused silhouettes of a lively, colourful market in Brittany to blend in with the paper. He accurately sketched down the details and later carefully finished his sheets of studies.

Eugène Boudin was one of the first painters to consider a fleeting moment – an 'impression' – worth depicting. What Boudin considered unpretentious souvenirs he had painted in front of the motif for summer visitors paved the way for the future generation of Impressionists, above all for Monet's painting 'en plein air'.

Although Edgar Degas was primarily a figure painter, he also devoted himself to the landscape, this quintessential Impressionist genre. Here, too, he preferred the pastel with its creamy consistency and intensity so as to achieve soft transitions and brilliant colours.

Degas's contemporary Gustave Doré, a prolific illustrator, was also one of the leading landscapists in 19th-century France. In his landscape watercolours, which the enthusiastic mountaineer had painted in the Scottish Highlands in 1873, he dispensed with figures entirely. Drama and narration derive solely from the eloquent twilight, the gloomy sky, and the solitary, mysteriously glittering lake. Doré's landscapes are dream-like, poetic visions inspired by contemporary literature. In their sublimeness, they hark back to works by William Turner and Gustave Courbet.

## **Women at Their Toilette**

In the shadow and out of the limelight of the public stages on which actresses, dancers, and singers radiated with beauty and charisma, women pursued their trade in gloomy bars and dimly lit brothels. It was in the boudoirs of these establishments that Edgar Degas found the models for his pastels. When he went public with his works, the audience was appalled. The true-to-life depictions of these unadorned women and their profane corporeality contradicted the academic beauty ideal mainly because of their realistic postures. People preferred classical renderings of women in mythological guises and elegant poses, clearly composed with the possibility of public exhibition at the official Salons in mind.

Degas, on the other hand, presents women uncompromisingly captured in intimate activities and realistic contortions while washing, combing, or drying themselves. The washbowls and zinc tubs indicate the women's routine of taking a bath before or after a client's visit. Degas chose equally unconventional views, daring perspectives from above, and abruptly cropped motifs in order to emphasise both the women's unselfconsciousness while engaging in their habitual actions and the intimate closeness of the spectator, who remains unnoticed by them.

## **Degas – Pastels and Monotypes**

Degas saw himself not only as a decided draughtsman, but also as a declared colourist: irreconcilable opposites Degas managed to balance in his pastels. The brilliantly bright and colourful appearance of the pastel ideally suited the Impressionists in their 'painting with light'.

The pastel technique, which was highly appreciated by Venetian and French painters because of the matt and velvety surface it produced, had reached its peak in the 18th century. For a pastel, pigments are applied in powdery layers and can then be loosely blended with a brush, which results in soft transitions and shimmering surfaces. Having disappeared almost entirely during the period of Neo-Classicism, the technique was revived and taken to a new zenith by Edgar Degas. With his parallel and cross-hatching, Degas succeeded in lending his pastels intensive surface textures without blending the colours. It is amazing that Degas, the master of light and breezy pastel painting, simultaneously paved the way for black monotype, which he used to render the dreary atmosphere in the dark backrooms of brothels.

## Degas and the Ballet

In countless drawings, studies, and pastels, Degas devoted himself to the subject of dance – the ballet: above all, to the young danseuses' rehearsals and warm-up and stretching exercises. Unlike such Impressionist landscapists as Monet or Renoir, who sought to arrest a fleeting light atmosphere, Degas aspired to capture previously unnoticed movements by constantly varying his unpretentious motifs: 'One must draw the same motif over and over again, ten times, a hundred times, in order to approximate reality as closely as possible.'

In the pastel, light effects and optical stimuli generated by the colours contribute to a great degree of realism. The dance that has been frozen in the picture is brought back to life so as to vividly convey its dynamism.

In his pastels, Degas rarely depicted the public stage and more frequently rendered the world hidden behind it. As an 'abonné', a regular visitor to the Paris Opera, he had free access to the dance studio, where, from 1870 onwards, he observed not so much the stars and protagonists, but rather the pupils, the 'petits rats'. He drew them during their hard training, their exercises at the barre, and their breaks or when they adjusted their costumes. In these private moments Degas caught them in intimate poses, which his contemporaries frequently felt to be unaesthetic and too 'ordinary'.

## Paul Cézanne

Southern light softly caresses the Montagne Sainte-Victoire, whose misty shape rises out of the surrounding land. The blue haze blends in with the white surface of the paper and directs our gaze into the depth. The atmosphere and the wide expanse of the landscape, with its trees, hills, and slopes, flicker and vibrate in pale yellow and green light reflections. Time stands still; neither time of day nor season diverts us from this dazzling play of colours and light.

Paul Cézanne drew and painted by carefully rebuilding nature's structure on the paper with the brush: like an architect. He has rendered the Château Noir, a castle in Provence, with a thin, pointed brush, whereas the rest of the scenery has been captured much more fluidly and generously. The transparent and modulated patches of colour leave large parts of the painting ground uncovered. In spite of all their lightness and brilliance, Cézanne's watercolours are governed by a strict geometric structure. Cézanne responded to the fleetingness and momentariness preferred by his Impressionist friends with an entirely new pictorial stability that would set the trend for modernism.

What appears to be a randomly composed still life or a green jug lost in its surroundings seems to have always existed, since all the elements are firmly rooted in the paper and the picture's structure.

## Georges Seurat and Neo-Impressionism

With his works, Georges Seurat succeeded in pinpointing the dream of eternity, reliability, stability, and universality in the visual arts. He drew and painted against Impressionism's philosophy of coincidence, momentariness, spontaneity, and improvisation, meticulously putting his motifs together from a multitude of tiny dots.

Before Seurat applied his new principles to painting, he exhibited a number of drawings he referred to as 'noirs', just like Odilon Redon. Seurat used greasy chalks in various degrees of hardness, which allowed him to achieve subtle transitions. The silhouettes he created on the paper as if by magic are composed of delicate, yet extremely powerful contrasts of light and shade, which Seurat employed to examine the effects of chiaroscuro.

Seurat's cropping of the motif, by which he took the figures to the picture's margins, was entirely new and unusual. He thus arrested his geometrically shaped figures within the sheet's rectangle. Together with the artist's complete renouncement of realistic detail, this results in the great inner monumentality of his drawings.

Paul Signac was Seurat's closest companion. As Seurat, the inventor of Pointillism and victor over Impressionism, died prematurely, Signac would eventually publicise his theories. The Belgian painter Théo van Rysselberghe also belonged to the Parisian circle of the Pointillists. He acted as a link to the artists of this avant-garde movement in Brussels.

## Odilon Redon

The world of Odilon Redon presents itself to us as a disturbing nightmare, gloomy, mysterious, and enigmatic. Deadly smiling women in the form of spiders, devils wearing masks, underwater monsters, and Caliban, the animalistic slave in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, take the beholder to an anxiety-ridden world of the unconscious that has been repressed by a purpose-oriented sense of reality. The charcoal, which is 'devoid of any beauty' (Redon) and which the artist employs to commit his dark, fantastic world to paper, makes the Symbolist an early explorer of the subconscious mind. He referred to his drawings as 'noirs' – black images – and thus named them after the 'colour' that is used to render the dark aspects of human abysses, similar to Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Redon's bizarre and grotesque phantasmagorias were inspired by Hieronymus Bosch, 'Hell Brueghel', and Goya and made him the forerunner of the Surrealists and their depictions of horror.

## Symbolism

Society had forgotten how to dream. Scientific knowledge, Darwinism, and awakening Freudianism called man's self-concept into question. But what remains when an individual's existence and mind are scrutinised down to the very last nook and cranny and even religion fails to supply answers to the final doubts? Symbolism attempted to offer remedies. Its spokesman, Joseph Péladan, proclaimed: 'The Louvre will act as a substitute for Notre Dame' and 'The artist will rise to the position of priest, king, and magician.' Art and literature were considered capable of expressing the unfathomable mystery, the invisible and unnameable aspects of the world.

The Symbolists were not a homogeneous group, yet they shared an interest in new themes, which they discovered not only in Christian, but also in exotic theologies, as well as in mysticism, esotericism, spiritualism, and occultism.

Léon Spilliaert obtained his inspiration from the port town of Ostend. Darkness, emptiness, dim lights in the city's fine haze, and a bridge rendered in hardly discernible colours convey desolation and loneliness.

William Degouve de Nuncques frequently painted park landscapes in the dark that exhibit confusing visual axes and lights. For his palette, the artist harked back to James McNeill Whistler and the latter's penchant for a combination of painting and music. The Hungarian painter József Rippl-Rónai, on the other hand, sought to imitate the appearance of negatives in photography: the light-coloured trees against the dark background lend his park the ghostly atmosphere of a dubious place.

## Fin de siècle: Between Belle Époque and Classical Revival

Around the turn of the century, Salome and Medea were projection figures of a profoundly unsettled society in whose microcosm raged a war between the sexes: from Oscar Wilde to Otto Weininger and Richard Strauss – the 'femme fatale' lured men to their ruin. In Mariano Fortuny's art, she even catapults the man out of the picture.

Fortuny was a painter and fashion designer who invented new treatments of textile fabrics, including a technique for pleating silk. Salome triumphantly lifts the plate with the Baptist's head to the upper margin of the picture, thus sparing the beholder the ghastly sight. Salome turns her back on us, presenting her sumptuous, elaborately draped robe. Splendour and beauty mitigate the horrible event.

In the work of Alfons Mucha, the applied arts were similarly seized by antique tragedy. On a poster design, the artist stylised the legendary actress Sarah Bernhardt in the guise of the vengeful heroine Medea and the children killed by her to the limits of legibility. Iconography came to be governed by ornament.

As art threatened to be decoratively trivialised, artists sought refuge in the revival of classical art. Aristide Maillol started out as a designer of tapestries; after 1900, he turned his attention to sculpture, lending his monumental figures a statuary stability. After a sojourn in Greece, he was preoccupied with the idea of 'pure sculpture', which he later projected onto drawings for the sake of a more direct sensual experience. He made use of the entire surface of the sheet in order to translate the wonderful linear arabesques into what feels like sculptural monumentality.

## Maurice Denis

In 1893, Maurice Denis embarked on a long, fictional journey into the realm of sensations, desires, and secrets in the company of his friend, the Symbolist writer André Gide. Denis illustrated Gide's *Le Voyage d'Urien*, describing the inner voyage of an intellectual idler with extremely reduced means. 'This journey is but a dream of mine,' wrote Gide, hiding his vision in the first name of his fictitious hero '[U]rien'. Resorting to a simplicity bordering on abstraction, Denis translated the story into a new, radically flat visual language of arabesques and curved lines. The figures, water surfaces, groves, gardens, and ships exist side by side, without any hierarchy.

After 1900, Denis sought to revive religious art, illustrating, among other books, the 'Fioretti [Little Flowers] of Saint Francis of Assisi', which contributed to the legends around the saint through a romanticised account of his life.



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The catalogue accompanying the exhibition – a homage by artists to Werner Spies – offers a unique approach to the works on view in the form of one hundred statements by the most celebrated and influential contemporary visual artists, poets, filmmakers, musicians, and directors:

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*Richard Peduzzi* **Elizabeth Peyton** *Jaume Plensa*  
**Christian de Portzamparc** *Arnulf Rainer* **Neo Rauch** *Yasmina Reza* **Daniel Richter**  
*Gerhard Richter* **François Rouan** *Thomas Ruff* **Boualem Sansal** *Sean Scully*  
**Jean-Jacques Sempé** *Cindy Sherman* **Kiki Smith** *Philippe Sollers* **Botho Strauß**  
*Hiroshi Sugimoto* **Sam Szafran** *Gérard Titus-Carmel* **Jean-Philippe Toussaint**  
*Tomi Ungerer* **Mario Vargas Llosa** *Jacques Villeglé* **Nike Wagner** *Martin Walser*  
**Wim Wenders** *Erwin Wurm* **Yan Pei-Ming**