

Wallflowers:  
Tapestry, Painting, and the Nabis in Fin-de-siècle France

by

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Linda Nochlin

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the dialogue between painting and tapestry that developed in late nineteenth-century France, specifically at the Manufacture nationale des Gobelins, and in the work of the avant-garde artists known as the Nabis. Nineteenth-century tapestry remains an obscure subject in scholarship and its influence on painting is thus not well-known or understood. This study aims to recover the symbiotic relationship that existed between tapestry and painting, and demonstrate the importance of studying the fine and decorative arts in tandem. It furthermore presents an evaluation of tapestry's place in the history of modern art, as well as a study of the socio-cultural anxieties that accompanied rapid industrialization and technological progress in the late nineteenth century, examined through the luxury craft of tapestry.

Part I outlines a history of the Manufacture Nationale des Gobelins, the state tapestry manufactory, from the birth of the Third Republic in 1871, to the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris. It is divided into three chapters following the tenure of three directors: Alfred Darcel, Édouard Gerspach, and Jules Guiffrey. Part II examines the needlepoint hangings of the Nabi circle in the 1890s. With a chapter each on Aristide Maillol, Paul Ranson, and József Rippl-Rónai, this section compares and contrasts the approaches of these three artists to needlepoint “tapestry,” in order to elucidate the issues of art's relationship to industry, nationalism, ideals of patronage, and gendered labor. With regard to the last issue, it was the artists' wives/ companions—Clotilde Narcisse, France Ranson, and Lazarine Boudrion—who executed the majority of their designs. Part III analyzes how Édouard Vuillard drew from tapestry to re-conceptualize modern painting through two monumental decorative commissions: *The Album* (1895), and the Vaquez panels (1896). These are exemplary of his so-called “tapestry aesthetic.”

I go beyond the general scholarly assessment that his paintings resemble tapestry to argue that tapestry provided him a haptic model for painting, and explore how his painting engaged with tapestry in the wider circulation of material culture of the fin-de-siècle. An epilogue follows Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic into the twentieth century and examines how it was buried and replaced by Henri Matisse's re-definition of the decorative in modernist painting.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
GRI	Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA
MMD	Musée départemental Maurice Denis “Le Prieuré,” Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Documentation Center
MN	Mobilier National, Paris

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation began as an investigation of the Nabi artist Édouard Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic in his monumental decorative paintings. I was captivated by their dazzling yet muffled beauty, how they resembled densely woven cloth, or layer upon layer of patterned fabric, snug and suffocating, cluttered and harmonious, all at once. I wanted to understand how and why Vuillard created this metaphoric materiality, this slippage between wool and paint. Why was he looking to tapestry for inspiration? What was the context for this revived attention to a seemingly obscure medium? What did tapestry have to offer painting? In pursuit of the answers to these questions, the dissertation became an evaluation of tapestry's place in the history of modernism, as well as a study of the socio-cultural anxieties that accompanied rapid industrialization and technological progress in the late nineteenth century, examined through the ostensibly retrogressive medium of tapestry.

I also began this study with the broader art historical aim of demonstrating the intimate connections between the fine and decorative arts. Academic and museological practice tends to separate art objects into these discrete categories, with an implicit hierarchy that devalues the decorative and functional. I hope this dissertation serves as a counterbalance, restoring the symbiotic relationship between the fine and the decorative, between tapestry and painting, in a way that exposes the drawbacks of the standard approach.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this goal, Jenny Anger's *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) serves as a precedent for my project, especially in the way she resuscitates the role of embroidery in Klee's work.

Vuillard's works remain the heart of this study, providing its chronological focus (the fin-de-siècle) and inspiring its title (discussed in Chapter 8). The tapestry aesthetic of his decorative commissions developed and culminated in the 1890s, along with the brotherhood of artists to which he belonged, the Nabis. The Nabis took over the reins of the Parisian avant-garde from the Post- and Neo-Impressionists after their first exhibition in 1891 at the gallery of Le Barc de Boutteville. As a group, they were stylistically and politically heterogeneous and therefore hard to define, embracing both the Neo-Catholic reactionary, Maurice Denis, and the anarchist sympathizer, Félix Vallotton; the primitivist/spiritual sculpture of Georges Lacombe and the witty urban themes of Pierre Bonnard; the graphic clarity of Paul Ranson and the obfuscating brushwork and inchoate forms of Édouard Vuillard. Although they dovetailed with the Symbolists, they fit rather awkwardly within a movement that included the mystical Rose + Croix group, whom they disdained. The Nabis, however, were united in their mission to revive and revalue the decorative.

For the Nabis, this implied both subscribing to a formalist, painterly definition of the term as a two-dimensional arrangement of colors, lines, and forms; and an interest in creating works of decorative art. These two ideas were connected of course—the Nabis reconceived, or as they would have seen it, returned painting to its purpose as a decorative art. Painting, whose flatness was tied to its function as mural ornament, was conceived as just one part of a cohesive interior that might include architectural framing, textiles, furniture, etc.; it was thus subordinate to an overarching scheme and, ultimately, philosophy of decoration. Most radically, the Nabis revalued decoration as a function, as the purpose of a work. Reacting to the increasingly commodified status of the easel picture, the Nabis wanted to create art that was meaningfully

integrated into daily life. Decorative objects, whether they served a utilitarian purpose or not, affected the psyche and well-being of their owners, users, and viewers.

Tapestry presents a privileged site to investigate the potency of the avant-garde project because it acted as painting's decorative double. It followed the same exigencies of flatness, of articulating yet dissimulating the wall surface, and added a utilitarian function of warmth, a material aspect of pliability and tactility, and the labor-intensive craft process. It also came with a particular set of historical associations. The renewed interest in tapestry at the fin-de-siècle was tied to concurrent historicist revivals of the medieval and rococo eras.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the Franco-Prussian war, a defeated France looked back to both the Middle Ages and the reign of Louis XV with his mistress, Madame de Pompadour, as high points in Gallic history. The Middle Ages were seen as the origin point of France as a nation, and the rococo era represented a time when France was the undisputed European leader in art, culture, and taste. In both of these historical time periods, tapestry was considered one of the premier art forms.

Consequently, collecting of and scholarship on tapestry flourished during the late nineteenth century. Several foundational books on the history of tapestry were published, including the magisterial, three-volume *Histoire générale de la tapisserie* by Jules Guiffrey, Eugène Müntz, and Alexandre Pinchart, issued between 1878 and 1885; Müntz additionally published a shorter volume, *La tapisserie* (1884) as did Guiffrey, *Histoire de la tapisserie depuis le Moyen Age jusqu'à nos jours* (1886); and Henry Havard published a volume dedicated to tapestry as part of his series, *Les arts de l'ameublement (La tapisserie, vol. 10, 1893)*. Guiffrey

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<sup>2</sup> For the fin-de-siècle medieval revival, see Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past* and for the rococo revival, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau*.

also wrote two studies of Nicolas Bataille, who directed the weaving of the fourteenth-century masterpiece known as the Anger Apocalypse.<sup>3</sup> This epic set depicting St. John's vision from the Book of Revelations was rediscovered and restored to the cathedral of Angers in 1870. Furthermore, one of the most celebrated art acquisitions of the time was the medieval tapestry set *The Lady and the Unicorn (La Dame à la Licorne)* by the Musée de Cluny in 1882.

Tapestry can also be placed within the larger framework of art's changing relationship to industry. The late nineteenth century was marked by a technological revolution; mechanization and electricity transformed the way people communicated, how information was spread, and the way goods were made and used. Debora Silverman has argued that industrialization, and France's stagnating pace as an industrial producer during the fin-de-siècle, resulted in a nationalist turn towards luxury craft. She constructs a narrative beginning in 1889 of technological optimism and ends in 1900 with technological disillusionment. This compelling account of the relationship between the decorative arts and mechanical production forms the backdrop to my own analysis of the case of tapestry. Tapestry, nonetheless, presents a unique instance in its close relationship to painting, in its status as an alternative or substitute for painting.

Thus, my study asks two intertwined questions: what is modern tapestry, and how did tapestry modernize painting? The dissertation is divided into three parts. In keeping with the project's origin in Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic, I first lay out the context for this aesthetic, discussing official and avant-garde tapestry production during the late nineteenth century. I then

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<sup>3</sup> Jules Guiffrey, *Nicolas Bataille, tapissier parisien du xive siècle, auteur de la tapisserie de l'apocalypse d'Angers, (Paris, 1877)* and *Nicolas Bataille, tapissier parisien du xive siècle. Sa vie, son œuvre, sa famille* (Paris, 1884).

discuss exactly how Vuillard engaged with tapestry as a medium to re-conceptualize painting. An epilogue follows Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic into the twentieth century and examines how it was buried and replaced by Matisse's re-definition of the decorative in modernist painting.

Part I outlines a history of the Manufacture Nationale des Gobelins, the state tapestry manufactory, from the birth of the Third Republic in 1871, to the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris, via the tenure of three directors: Alfred Darcel, Édouard Gerspach, and Jules Guiffrey. Founded in 1662 as a royal manufactory, the Gobelins was the privileged site of official French tapestry production, as opposed to the private manufactories of Beauvais and Aubusson also founded in the seventeenth century. When the Nabis turned their attention to the current state of tapestry, it was to the Gobelins that they looked. I therefore focus my study on the Gobelins and do not discuss contemporary production at Beauvais or Aubusson.

The history of nineteenth-century French tapestry is ripe for examination. There has been very little in-depth, sustained scholarly work in this area. Fernand Calmettes (1912) established the basic catalogue and documentation behind state tapestry commissions from 1794-1900 as part of the Gobelins' official, multi-volume history of its production. Chantal Gastinel-Coural (1996) provided a short but valuable overview of Gobelins history during the nineteenth-century as part of an exhibition catalogue, while Pascal-François Bertrand (1995) contributed an informative chapter on tapestry production throughout Europe in the nineteenth century to a general volume on tapestry history. Only Pierre Vaisse (1973) has published specifically on the early Third Republic, with an incisive article on the tapestry vs. painting debate plaguing the Gobelins at this time.

My dissertation thus provides the first rigorous scholarly analysis of the activities, aesthetic issues, and political embroilments of the manufactory during the late nineteenth century. Other recent work in this field by emerging scholars attest to its growing relevancy for art and European history: Caroline Girard completed a thesis in 2003 on the history of the Gobelins during the first half of the nineteenth century;<sup>4</sup> and Barbara Caen defended a dissertation entitled, “Renaissance d'un médium artistique. La tapisserie au XIXe siècle en France et en Belgique” at the University of Zurich in 2012.

My analysis concentrates on selected new models woven at the Gobelins, as they are representative of the manufactory's attempts to define modern tapestry. For much of their time, however, the weavers were occupied with re-weavings of ancient models (Raphael, Charles Le Brun, Claude III Audran, François Boucher) because modern cartoons could not always be obtained. The reasons for the dearth of new models are manifold, including lack of funds, bureaucratic obstacles, and lack of skill or interest among artists; these have been touched upon by other scholars and I unfortunately do not have the room to expand upon them here.<sup>5</sup> Of course, given the lack of new models, the choice of which ancient models to reproduce is significant in itself. However, as Part I of this dissertation does not endeavor to provide a complete history of the manufactory during the early Third Republic, that subject must be left for future consideration.

Before moving on to part II, some technical information might be helpful. Tapestry is made with warp threads, which are the undyed threads held in tension between the rollers of a

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<sup>4</sup> Caroline Girard, “La manufacture des Gobelins du Premier Empire à la monarchie de Juillet,” master's thesis, École nationale de Chartres, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Vaisse, “La querelle de la tapisserie,” 77; Bertrand in Joubert, *Histoire de la tapisserie*, 275, 277.

loom; and weft threads, which are the dyed threads woven through the warp threads with a shuttle to create the design. Support and design are thus one and the same in tapestry. The loom can either be of high-warp or low-warp construction. High-warp looms hold the warp threads vertically, perpendicular to the ground. In order to facilitate the passing of the shuttle through the warp threads, the weaver pulls all the alternate warp threads forward with the help of a drawstring, making a space between odd- and even-numbered warps; this space is called the shed. Thus, on a high-warp loom, the weaver has only one hand free to weave while the other one creates the shed. Furthermore, the weaver weaves from the reverse side of the tapestry. The cartoon is placed behind the weaver, who checks it periodically with the help of a mirror hung in front of him.

Low-warp looms hold the warp threads horizontally, parallel to the ground. The drawstrings for the shed are controlled by foot pedals, leaving the weaver both hands free to weave. With the low-warp loom, the weaver also weaves from the reverse side of the tapestry; the cartoon in this case is cut into strips and placed beneath the warp threads for the weaver to follow. The finished tapestry thus presents the design of the cartoon in reverse. Medieval Franco-Flemish tapestries were generally produced on low-warp looms while the Gobelins used exclusively high-warp looms in the nineteenth century.

The high-warp technique preserved the cartoon and was considered more “artistic” during the nineteenth century because the weavers were not copying a cartoon directly in front of them. Tapestries woven on a high-warp loom, however, are technically indistinguishable from those woven on a low-warp loom. The low-warp technique was faster, as the weaver could weave with both hands, which made it appropriate for a time when tapestry was in great demand

by a wide range of society. The Gobelins, being state-owned and operated, had no incentive to weave faster to keep up with market demand. In fact, the weavers had too little work rather than too much work as new models were hard to come by, and the Gobelins became infamous in the nineteenth century for their “proverbial slowness.”<sup>6</sup>

Part II examines the needlepoint hangings of Aristide Maillol, Paul Ranson, and József Rippl-Rónai, the three Nabis who were actively engaged with making “tapestry” in the 1890s when Vuillard was developing his tapestry aesthetic. In this section, I focus solely on the wall hangings that these artists designed and exclude other textile works, such as screens or cushion covers, as they do not share the goals of tapestry that this study is investigating. Technically, Maillol began working with tapestry before he became part of the Nabi orbit. However, his work was aligned with Nabi medievalism, which made him a natural fit for the group when Rónai introduced him to them in 1894.

This section compares and contrasts the approaches of Maillol, Ranson, and Rónai to needlepoint “tapestry,” in order to elucidate issues of art’s relationship to industry, nationalism, ideals of patronage, and gendered labor. With regard to the last issue, it was the artists’ wives/companions—Clotilde Narcisse, France Ranson, and Lazarine Boudrion—who executed the majority of their designs. The practice of the Nabis bears comparison with that of William Morris, both at his Merton Abbey Tapestry Works and the embroidery workshop of Morris & Co. Although my study emphasizes the French roots and internal motivations for the fin-de-siècle tapestry revival, Morris and the English Arts & Crafts movement certainly formed a major

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<sup>6</sup> Press clipping from *The Builder*, June 4, 1892, MN G.278.

precedent. Nonetheless, the dissemination of Morris's work and ideas in France was belated, occurring after the Nabis had already begun working in tapestry and the decorative arts. Morris was thus not so much a catalyst or model for the Nabis as a source of confirmation and encouragement of their mission. Furthermore, the Gallic interpretation of Morris significantly diverged from the original source.

Morris's writings were first translated and published in France in socialist/anarchist journals beginning in 1893, including *La Révolte*, *La Société Nouvelle*, and *Les Temps Nouveaux*.<sup>7</sup> However, the socialist Morris remained on the fringes of French mainstream consciousness; he soon gave way to a tamer version of Morris as a lover of beauty, especially after his death in 1896. The poet Jean Lahor and the art critic Gabriel Mourey were instrumental in creating and promoting this image of Morris in France at the fin-de-siècle,<sup>8</sup> an image that was more in keeping with French ideas of the decorative arts and its relationship to society.

Morris rejected the machine and passionately promoted handcraft for the well-being of the worker, and consequently, society. Among the design reformers in France, there was more equivocation about the artist's relationship to industry.<sup>9</sup> Some followed the Morrisian creed of the artist-as-artisan, designing and making their own work. Others believed that the artist should

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert, *Artist and Social Reform*, 16 and Herbert, "Art and the Machine," 37. See also Alfred Métin, "De John Ruskin à William Morris, Art et Socialisme," *La Revue blanche* 10 (September 1896): 22-33. For the dissemination and interpretation of Morris's writings and ideas in France see also, Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 138-39; Herbert, *Nature's Workshop*, 29-34, 38; Froissart-Pezone, *Art dans Tout*, 81-86 and Georges Vidalenc, *La transformation des arts décoratifs au XIXe siècle: William Morris—son oeuvre et son influence* (Caen, 1914).

<sup>8</sup> Jean Lahor, "M. William Morris et l'art décoratif en Angleterre" *Revue encyclopédique*, no. 89 (August 15, 1894): 349-59; Gabriel Mourey, *Passé le Détroit La vie et l'art à Londres* (Paris, 1895); Mourey, "William Morris," *Revue encyclopédique*, no. 168 (November 21, 1896): 805-10; Lahor, *W. Morris et le Mouvement nouveau de l'art décoratif* (Geneva, 1897).

<sup>9</sup> Scholars give several reasons for this equivocation. The division of labor was part of French luxury craft making and mechanization was seen as an aid for the repetitive tasks of a skilled craftsman (see Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 59-62 and Herbert, *Nature's Workshop*, 38). Additionally, French positivism bequeathed a strong faith in science and technology as instruments of progress (Froissart-Pezone, *Art dans Tout*, 16).

be integrated into the industrial production chain, designing artistic products that would improve the taste and lives of the French public. The latter was a key point for the French context: the French emphasis was on the artistic product improving the consumer's life, and not on changing conditions of labor to improve the worker's life. The varying attitudes of the Nabis towards handcraft and industry that I discuss in Part II are evidence of the French latitude on this issue.

Part III analyzes two of Vuillard's monumental decorative commissions, *The Album* (1895) and the Vaquez panels (1896), as exemplary of his tapestry aesthetic. The connection between tapestry and avant-garde painting was, if not a common trope, not unprecedented in art criticism before Vuillard exploited this comparison for his own artistic ends. In 1886, Félix Fénéon wrote that Georges Seurat's *La Grande Jatte*, "unrolls, a monotonous and patient tapestry," likening the myriad little dots to the regular crossings of warp and weft.<sup>10</sup> Gustave Geffroy, an influential art critic who would later become the director of the Gobelins, made tapestry his code word for successful avant-garde art. In 1892, Geffroy praised Edgar Degas's landscape monotypes exhibited at Durand-Ruel as "tapestries hung in secret boudoirs."<sup>11</sup> He also admiringly wrote of Cézanne's landscapes in 1894, "His painting then takes on the muted beauty of tapestry, arrays itself in a strong, harmonious weft."<sup>12</sup>

In my study of Vuillard, I move beyond the superficial observation that these paintings resemble tapestry in their composition and facture and explore other ways in which the artist was

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<sup>10</sup> Cited in Stumpel, "Grande Jatte," 211.

<sup>11</sup> Geffroy, *La vie artistique*, vol. 1, 177.

<sup>12</sup> Cited and translated in Nochlin, *Impressionism*, 106. The comparison of Cézanne's work to tapestry would continue in the early twentieth century. See Anger, "Modernism at Home," 216 and Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 123, 173, 285n58.

drawing from the textile medium. One of my main arguments is that tapestry provided Vuillard with a haptic model that he then imported into his painting. The haptic and tactile experience of art is receiving increasing attention in scholarship. In fact, the consideration of the sense of touch in literature, intellectual history, cultural history, and in fields as far flung as alternative medicine and computer engineering is a thriving site of inquiry.<sup>13</sup> Clearly the loss of the haptic sense in today's digital world, or even the strange divorce of touch from texture characteristic of mobile devices, has encouraged a renewed engagement with (and revealed the human need for) the tactile sense. The haptic and the tactile, though related, are not interchangeable terms and here it would be useful to distinguish them. Tactility can be considered as a subset of the haptic, as a haptic sense. Haptic perception, besides tactility, includes other senses such as proprioception, which refers to the body's sense of itself in and moving through space.

In art history, the ocularcentrism of modern art and modern art scholarship seems to have reached a saturation point, such that scholars have begun turning their attention to art's relationship with the other senses, especially touch.<sup>14</sup> The turn towards the haptic has been a turn towards a foundational text of the discipline, Alois Reigl's *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901). Reigl constructed ancient art history as a progression from the haptic to the optic, terms that he

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affect, and Technologies* (New York: Berg, 2007). Interestingly, in computer simulation technology, textiles have become the paradigmatic model for haptic interaction in virtual reality systems. See Dennis Allerkamp, *Tactile Perception of Textiles in a Virtual-Reality System* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2010) and Guido Böttcher, *Haptic Interaction with Deformable Objects: Modelling VR Systems for Textiles* (New York: Springer, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> See for example Patrizia Di Bello and Gabriel Koureas, eds. *Art, History and the Senses: 1830 to the Present*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010; Janine A. Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects after the Readymade* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2010); T' Ai Smith, "Limits of the Tactile and the Optical: Bauhaus Fabric in the Frame of Photography," *Grey Room*, no. 25 (Fall 2006): 6-31. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth's article, "Pompadour's Touch" is an early precedent of this trend.

associated with distance, or near versus far. While the optic was conceived as a “higher” perceptual mode, Reigl demonstrated that the haptic and the optic were in fact interdependent, that they formed a dialectic. Touch was a necessary precursor to vision; it defined the viewer’s sense of objects in space, or confirmed the tangible reality of the object in space. The current academic attentiveness to touch, or the imbrication of sight and touch, is also indebted to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological concept of embodied perception; as well as Luce Irigaray’s theory of touch as the female counterpart to the male gaze. Although I don’t “apply” any of these theories to Vuillard, they do form the foundation for my interest in and understanding of the haptic and tactile.

Another main goal of this section is to place Vuillard within the wider context of material culture, and consider how his works intersected with and participated in the marketplace. This goal is not as disconnected from the previous one as it may seem: touch was newfound sensory territory for the late nineteenth-century consumer. The rise of the department store transformed the concept and practice of shopping from a chore to a pleasure; it became a leisure activity in which the sumptuous textures of the store’s interiors and the act of touching the merchandise became part of an elaborate consumer seduction. Vuillard’s attraction to the tactile is perhaps related to its consumer appeal; certainly the same associations of pleasure, comfort, and connectivity that made touch a winning sales strategy for department stores made it appealing to Vuillard. In any case, I focus my study on how Vuillard’s tapestry-like paintings fit within the array of choices for bourgeois mural decoration on the market, including wallpaper and imitation tapestry.

This dissertation thus recovers the dialogue between tapestry and painting in the late nineteenth century, both at the Gobelins and amongst the Nabis; a dialogue that attempted to define modern art and art's role in modern society. The fragility of tapestry—its extreme sensitivity to light, to pests, etc.—along with its monumentality have made these objects difficult to store and display. Lack of public exposure has only aided and abetted the lack of knowledge and appreciation of these works. Yet they were and are integral to our understanding of a changing technological world and how private individuals and the state sought to maintain a sense of groundedness in the face of a new century.

**PART I.**  
**Looming Change: The Gobelins at the End of the Nineteenth Century**

The history of French tapestry during the nineteenth century is often dismissed by scholars as a period of severe decline; in fact, few scholars outside of specialists in textiles and tapestry are even aware that the Manufacture nationale des Gobelins continued producing at this time. Tapestry's relevance as an art form had seemingly disappeared along with the *ancien régime*. Pascal François Bertrand's overview of the nineteenth century in the co-authored volume, *Histoire de la Tapisserie en Europe, du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, presents one of the more generous assessments of the period. While acknowledging that the general scholarly attitude towards nineteenth-century tapestry as "one of the worst errors of the art of weaving" is perhaps too harsh, he does not attempt to rectify this judgment, which he believes contains "a background of truth."<sup>15</sup> Instead, his chapter seeks "to give to the art of this century its rightful place in a general history of tapestry."<sup>16</sup> Bertrand's equanimous treatment of this period befits the goal of a survey volume and opens up the field of inquiry on more neutral ground.

My study focuses on the Gobelins in the late nineteenth century, specifically after 1871 when parts of the manufactory were burned during the Paris Commune. This period of reconstruction was characterized by multiple if halting attempts to redefine and revitalize the mission and identity of the Gobelins, and concomitantly, the art of tapestry. While like Bertrand, I would not seek to overturn the generally negative estimation of the artistic merit of the Gobelins' nineteenth-century production, I would like to go one step further than his rectification

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<sup>15</sup> "celui des pires errements de l'art des lices"; "un fond de vérité," Bertrand in Joubert et al., *Histoire de la Tapisserie*, 264. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French are mine.

<sup>16</sup> "rendre à l'art de ce siècle la part qui lui revient dans une histoire générale de la tapisserie," *ibid.*

of scholarly neglect. In Part I of this dissertation, I recover or uncover what was at stake in these intensely interesting, sometimes beautiful, and sometimes blunderingly awkward works.

Tapestry histories cite the central problem of the nineteenth century as the devolvement of tapestry into reproduction of painting. I argue, however, that the underlying issue was the anxiety surrounding industrialization and technological change in a new republican nation.

The Gobelins, a hangover from the *ancien régime* that practiced an archaic handcraft, struggled to find a place in the Republican and bourgeois world of steam-powered machines, the Eiffel Tower, and mass production. The Gobelins in the late nineteenth century was thus caught in a tug-of-war between trying to adapt to and incorporate this new technological world, and reinvesting or taking pride in old artisanal ways as a reaction to the former. This conflict is evident in the see-sawing of the manufactory's activities over the course of three directorships, that of Alfred Darcel (1871-1884), Édouard Zacheire Gerspach (1885-1892), and Jules Joseph Guiffrey (1893-1908). I will examine a selection of major new works undertaken during these three tenures (as opposed to re-weavings of ancient models)<sup>17</sup> in order to explore the questions of art's relationship to industry, and industry's relationship to French patrimony.

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<sup>17</sup> For a complete list of the Gobelins' production from 1871-1900, see Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, 456-60.

## CHAPTER 1. Alfred Darcel: Reconstruction and Experimentation

The night of May 23, 1871, the Manufacture nationale des Gobelins erupted in flames that consumed the manufactory's galleries, its school for apprentices, a tapestry atelier, countless reams of documents, thread samples, equipment, and of course, finished and unfinished tapestries. Personnel of the manufactory spent three days and two nights stamping out all the fires.<sup>18</sup> Transformed into a communard base, the Gobelins became a casualty of revolution in a way that it had avoided during the first French Revolution less than one hundred years earlier.<sup>19</sup> For six months, the manufactory was in chaos, directionless. The head of the dye laboratory, the renowned chemist Eugène Chevreul, served as the manufactory's interim director until Alfred Darcel, a curator at the Louvre, was appointed in November 1871.

Darcel had the challenging responsibility of physically rebuilding the Gobelins, yet his tenure was not bogged down solely by brick-and-mortar concerns. It was in fact marked by creative experiments that, though not all successful, revealed an interest in exploring new technical and technological possibilities. Darcel pushed in both directions—reverting to ancient ways and incorporating contemporary science—as if testing out new identities for the Gobelins. Indeed, Darcel was ultimately seeking to answer the question, what is modern tapestry? And what role does it play in modern society? To begin to find an answer, his first new commission for the Gobelins seems to have had the primary goal of returning tapestry to its decorative tradition and rediscovering its original function.

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<sup>18</sup> Comptroller to the Director of Fine Arts, June 10, 1871. AN F21/677

<sup>19</sup> For a history of the buildings and site of the manufactory during the nineteenth century, see Gastinel-Coural, *La Manufacture des Gobelins*, 9-11.

Soon after being appointed director (*administrateur*) of the Gobelins,<sup>20</sup> Darcel met with Charles Garnier, architect of Paris's new opera house still under construction, to find a suitable place for a new set of tapestries within the building. They settled on the eight narrow panels between the doors and windows of the rotunda, which was projected to house a restaurant for opera subscribers. Garnier apparently requested a design of ornamental flowers and animals; Darcel, however, looking for a prestigious project worthy of the skill of the Gobelins weavers and worthy of being the first new commission of the resurrected manufactory, advocated for a figural ensemble.<sup>21</sup> The result was a set of eight allegorical figures personifying various beverages and foodstuffs designed by the academic painter Alexis-Joseph Mazerolle (Plates 1a-d). The figures, representing Wine, Fruits, Hunting, Fishing, Pastry, Ice Cream, Coffee, and Tea, are all perched on an openwork ledge of twisting branches and placed against a blank background, like Rococo arabesques. Their volumetric, weighty presence, however, belies the decorative flatness of their framework and the conceit of spatial insubstantiality. They instead recall Renaissance and Baroque sculptures in which figures step out of their niches towards the viewer, or twist and turn to invite the viewer's circumnavigation. In a way, the stylistic contradiction of Mazerolle's design matched the stylistic heterogeneity and sensuous plasticity of Garnier's Opéra. Like the tapestries' future surrounding décor of gilded mouldings, trophies, cartouches, and grotesque heads that burst out in high relief from the two-dimensional paneled wall (Plates 2a-b), Mazerolle's tapestry figures veer towards the sculptural.

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<sup>20</sup> The title changed from *directeur* in the eighteenth century to *administrateur* during the First Empire, a modification that signaled a gradual shift in the authority held by the director of the Gobelins. By the Third Republic, the *administrateur* had no official authority to spend money, commission models, etc. Every expense and every decision had to be approved by the Director of Fine Arts. This bureaucratic encumbrance was one reason for the Gobelins' difficulties during the nineteenth century.

<sup>21</sup> Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, 155

Some critics were ambivalent about this quality of the tapestries. Discussing them alongside contemporary Gobelins works like Diogène Ulysse Maillart's *Penelope at her Loom* (*Pénélope à son métier*) (Plate 3), Alexandre Denuelle protested, "The figures of Mr. Mazerolle destined for the Opera are also too real, although they are more frankly decorative; the modeling is pushed to excess."<sup>22</sup> Denuelle seems to have been responding to the confusing incongruity between the decorative background of flattened space and ornamental flora, and the three-dimensionality of the figures; Mazerolle's designs are at once decorative and illusionistic. Granted, the tapestries, although finished by 1875, were not yet installed when Denuelle wrote his report in 1877.<sup>23</sup> He therefore could not see how they responded to the space. Nevertheless, others were able to imagine them ensconced at the Opera and praised the new tapestries as a triumph of the medium. One reviewer from *Le Gaulois* who witnessed them still on the loom declared, "[The Gobelins] have understood that the art of tapestry should not be used to reproduce, without purpose, the paintings of Old Masters, by seeking to servilely imitate the tones of oil paint. [...] We will see at the Opera the first victories of the great art of tapestry returned to its original vocation, the decoration of walls."<sup>24</sup>

To contextualize this reviewer's comments, Gobelins production earlier in the century largely consisted of reproductions of paintings. For example, Antoine-Jean Gros's *Pesthouse of Jaffa* (*Les Pestiférés de Jaffa*) was woven from 1806-14; or during the Second Empire, a series

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<sup>22</sup> "Les figures de M. Mazerolle destinées à l'Opéra on aussi trop de réalité bien qu'elles soient plus franchement décoratives; le modelé est poussé à l'excès." Denuelle, *Rapport adressé...l'Exposition Universelle de 1878*, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Due to administrative delays and budget issues, the tapestries were not installed until 1889, at which point the space was no longer slated to be a restaurant. See Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opéra*, 195.

<sup>24</sup> "On a compris que l'art du tapisier ne devait pas être employé à reproduire, sans but, les tableaux de maîtres, en cherchant à imiter servilement les tons de la peinture à l'huile [...] Nous verrons à l'Opéra les premières victoires du grand art de la tapisserie rendue à sa destination originaire, la décorations des murailles." Fervacques, "Notes sur Paris," *Le Gaulois*, March 18, 1873, MN G.277.

of twenty-four portraits of great French painters, sculptors and architects was woven and hung in the Apollo Gallery at the Louvre. What the *Gaulois* reviewer celebrated was the commissioning of models explicitly for tapestry set within a particular architectural framework. The cartoons could then be conceived to respond to their intended surroundings, as Mazerolle's tapestries did. The reviewer's comments reveal that by the late nineteenth century, the practice of the *tapisserie-tableau*, or a woven reproduction of a painting with no relationship to an architectural interior, was falling out of favor. Although during the mid-nineteenth century, tapestry copies after paintings were acclaimed as evidence of the Gobelins' technical virtuosity, a reversal of taste ensued after the advent of the Third Republic.<sup>25</sup> Critics and reformers instead began to call for a sense of medium specificity, for a distinction of approach and aesthetic between these two genres of art.

The idea of medium specificity of course forms the origin point of the modernist painting narrative and here we can see a kind of prefiguration of it at the Gobelins.<sup>26</sup> The scholar Joseph Masheck has tied painting's march toward flatness to the design reform movement in England, where medium specificity dictated that textiles should feature perfectly flat compositions.<sup>27</sup> The intersection of the debates at the Gobelins with those in England are not surprising as both were a reaction to industrialization, however, they were not wholly analogous. The Gobelins' concerns centered around the French notion of the "decorative," which as we have already seen was a protean term that meant different things to different people. In the case of the Mazerolle

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<sup>25</sup> Pierre Vaisse, however, points out that the backlash against the *tapisserie-tableau* already began under the Second Empire and only became more vociferous during the Third Republic. Vaisse "La Querelle de la Tapisserie," 70.

<sup>26</sup> This narrative was laid out by Clement Greenberg in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 34-49.

<sup>27</sup> Masheck, "Carpet Paradigm."

tapestries, “decorative” implied the use of ornamental motifs and flattened space, but more importantly, the way the works were designed to coordinate with an architectural interior.<sup>28</sup>

The architectural destination of Mazerolle’s tapestries, however, was a point of contention. Several critics lamented the choice of site and what it represented. François Duclos asked scathingly:

Have we had enough of cafés, masquerades, libertine suppers (*souper-régence*), and contemporary civilization? And how well is the musical and social genius of the architect represented by this pending refreshment bar of high taste, hung with original and splendid tapestries that the smoke of cigars will have ruined in the space of six months? There is only one thing missing in our view: a seventh panel, the best situated of all, that we should commission of Mr. Mazerolle and that would represent...  
*Tobacco.*<sup>29</sup>

Duclos condemned the frivolous, commercial nature of a restaurant in the Opera as a site for the high art of tapestry. Earlier in his article, he criticized the design of the new opera house as more concerned with the spectators’ activities at intermissions than with the music. Tapestry, like music, was being unfairly sidelined in Garnier’s monument to consumerism and the ephemeral commodity. Ironically, Duclos predicted that tapestry will be made into just such an ephemerality by its placement; not only would its surroundings confer commodity status, but the exposure to products of bourgeois leisure (ie., cigar smoke) would physically ruin the works.

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<sup>28</sup> Some critics still praised Mazerolle’s Opera tapestries in terms of the *tapisserie-tableau*, demonstrating that standards of taste were in transition. For example, “Les six panneaux de tapisserie qui doivent orner le restaurant du nouvel Opéra imitent la peinture avec une saisissante vérité,” “*Courrier Parisien*,” *La Concorde*, September 3, 1874; or “Ce sont tout simplement des chefs d’oeuvres de tapisserie où la laine et la soie ont reproduit l’oeuvre du peintre, sans altérer en rien ni l’éclat de couleurs, ni la finesse du dessin, ni l’expression des physionomies” *Le Figaro*, July 9, 1874, press clippings from MN G.277. I take these comments to mean that the weavers remained faithful to the cartoons. The point remains that the tapestries were conceived to complement a specific architectural space.

<sup>29</sup> “Est-ce assez café, bal masqué, souper-régence et civilisation contemporaine? Et que le génie à la fois musicale et social de l’architecte est bien attesté par cette réserve d’une buvette de haut goût, tendue en tapisseries originales et splendides que la fumée du cigare aura perdues au bout de six mois? Il n’y manque à notre sens qu’une chose: une septième panneau le plus en situation de tous, qu’on devrait commander à M. Mazerolle, et qui représenterait... le *Tabac*.” François Duclos, “Exposition de l’Union Central des Arts Industriels et des Manufactures nationales,” *Le Figaro*, August 22, 1874. MN G.277.

Another critic also regretted that the Mazerolle tapestries, installed in the restaurant, would become mere café decoration; he warned that it was “better not to compete with private industry.”<sup>30</sup> The Gobelins’ relationship to private industry would later be censured by Édouard Gerspach, but during Darcel’s period of reconstruction, the manufactory remained open to all possibilities and was therefore open to media criticism as well.

Given this negative reception on the part of some critics, why did the Gobelins choose Garnier’s Opéra as the site of its first post-Commune commission? Why not other public buildings, like the twenty district town halls (*mairies*), which were being renovated and redecorated during that time?<sup>31</sup> After the Commune, the government of the Third Republic embarked on a major rebuilding campaign and commissioned scores of artists to execute mural paintings for the civic buildings being remodeling in their own ideological image.<sup>32</sup> The rhetoric of empire was replaced by the rhetoric of the Republican state, which included ideals such as civic duty, universal suffrage, mandatory and free secular education, etc. The Gobelins would not execute a tapestry for a *mairie* until 1902, and then it was for its own district of the thirteenth.<sup>33</sup> This lack of involvement with the *mairies* perhaps speaks to the manufactory’s uncertain and undefined position vis-à-vis the new Republic. Founded as a royal manufactory, the Gobelins had largely produced work for a monarchic or imperial purpose. The short-lived First and Second French Republics were not active periods for the Gobelins; the very existence

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<sup>30</sup> “mieux valait ne pas faire concurrence à l’industrie privée,” “Expositions (IVe) de L’Union centrale des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l’Industrie. - Exposition des Manufactures nationales (Sevres, les Gobelins, Beauvais).” *L’Illustration*, August 22, 1874. MN G.277.

<sup>31</sup> Paris was officially divided into twenty *arrondissements* in 1860; eight new *arrondissements* were created from annexing the suburbs to the twelve original *arrondissements*.

<sup>32</sup> See Buroillet et al., *Triomphe des Mairies*.

<sup>33</sup> *The Glorification of Colbert*, designed by Jean-Paul Laurens, woven 1902-06, Salle des fêtes, *mairie* du XIII<sup>e</sup> *arrondissement*.

of the manufactory was in fact threatened under the latter.<sup>34</sup> The manufactory thus had to negotiate a new role for itself in a democratic state. Moreover, the political turmoil of the nineteenth century made it clear that republics were not “sure bets.” Darcel seemed to have prudently adopted a wait-and-see approach before engaging with the Republican regime.

The new opera house was a far more politically ambiguous edifice than the programmatic mairies. Begun under the Second Empire, it was completed under the Third Republic.

Christopher Mead has argued that the building, through the structure and style of its façade and due to its institutional history, possessed a certain political and representational mobility; in other words, it represented neither or either administration.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the indeterminate classicism of the Opéra served as an empty signifier to be filled and mobilized by each passing regime. In the case of the Third Republic, it was touted as a symbol of French nationalism, of continued cultural triumph after the defeat of the Franco-Prussian War. Furthermore, Mead argues, the architecture of the Opéra, in its relationship to the surrounding buildings, embodied a general idea of luxurious Parisian urbanity, and the odd mixture of public and private inherent in bourgeois urbanism. Garnier himself described his opera house in terms of domestic architecture, an intimate home in which to enjoy a public spectacle. In this way, the architecture reflected the institutional character of the opera itself as a publicly subsidized institution that also depended on private funds in the form of ticket sales and subscriptions.

I suggest that the indeterminacy of the Opéra suited it for the Gobelins’ first commission after the fire. Circumventing either imperial or republican associations, it was simply a high-

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<sup>34</sup> Vaisse, “La Querelle de la tapisserie,” 73

<sup>35</sup> The following discussion is taken from Mead, *Charles Garnier’s Paris Opéra*, 5, 118, 194-95 and Mead, “Urban Contingency,” 140-42, 164-69.

profile, luxurious showcase for the achievements of French culture. Its public yet private status perhaps appealed to Darcel, not only as a setting that combined the sumptuous home with the public monument, both fitting environments for tapestry, but also as a model for the future of the Gobelins. The Gobelins operated solely on government funds and was not allowed, by its tradition as a royal manufactory that worked exclusively for the king, to independently produce for the private market. This of course severely limited the manufactory financially. Although there is no evidence that Darcel moved to change this custom, in the 1870s he was open to engaging with private industry. He wrote in his hometown newspaper, the *Journal de Rouen*, “The national manufactories, as we have seen, have followed, if they have not sometimes instigated, the movement that is bringing modern industry towards a broader and more accurate understanding of the laws of decoration.”<sup>36</sup> Darcel’s comment reveals that the Gobelins was at least paying attention and responding to the developments of private industry. The commercial yet institutional setting of a subscribers’ restaurant at the Opéra was thus possibly intentional, a cautious foray into associating or exposing the Gobelins to a private market. The commercial appeal of the tapestries was confirmed in 1886, when the firm of Hamot et Cie requested permission to reproduce Mazerolle’s designs and sell them on the open market.<sup>37</sup>

The Opéra held other, more culturally and emotionally resonant, associations that marked it as a suitable location for a new Gobelins commission. It was first and foremost a space of theater, both on and off the stage. Garnier’s design of the grand staircase, the foyers, the

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<sup>36</sup> “Les manufactures nationales, on le voit, ont suivi, si parfois elles ne l’ont pas provoqué, le mouvement qui porte l’industrie modern vers une comprehension plus large et plus exacte des lois de la décoration.” Alfred Darcel, “Lettres sur l’Exposition. Les Manufactures nationales,” *Journal de Rouen*, July 29, 1878.

<sup>37</sup> MN GOB Box 51, dossier 24. Permission was granted provided that the tapestries were reproduced on a notably different scale than the originals and that they were clearly marked as the products of Hamot et Cie.

viewpoints across the balconies and through the corridors, all served to frame the spectating public as their own theatrical entertainment.<sup>38</sup> Theater, in turn, was tapestry's original function. From the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century, tapestry was an integral part of royal and religious pageantry. Unrolled and hung both indoors and out for coronations, state marriages, feasts of saints, reliquary processions, tapestry set the stage for secular and sacred dramaturgy. Even when the monumental size of tapestry sets were scaled back to fit into Rococo *hôtel particuliers*, they still served as the requisite backdrop to the performance of rank and status among the aristocracy.<sup>39</sup> In a way, Darcel's choice of the Opéra as the architectural site of the Gobelins's commission returned tapestry to its historical roots in order to modernize it. Mazerolle's designs became the backdrop of bourgeois performance, the stage set in a theater of consumerism. As the bourgeois state replaced the monarchy/empire, tapestry had to change what and how it represented. Instead of the monolithic figure of the ruler, tapestry here embodied the proliferating desires of an urban bourgeoisie. Garnier's Opéra became an even more resonant site when the old opera house on the Rue Lepelletier burned down in October of 1873. Like the Gobelins, the Paris Opéra was in a sense also rising from the ashes of a fire. It opened for its inaugural performance on January 5, 1875, ready to be redefined in the new Third Republic.

Darcel's second new commission continued this mode of reflection on the history of tapestry and the Gobelins. *Penelope at her Loom* designed by Maillart was alternately titled *The Symbolic Representation of the Manufactory (La figuration symbolique de la manufacture)*.

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<sup>38</sup> Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opéra*, 113-27

<sup>39</sup> See Scott, *Rococo Interior*, 114-15.

Woven between 1873 and 1875, this self-reflexive tapestry depicts the personification of the Gobelins in the guise of Penelope, Odysseus's faithful wife. Penelope, a mythic origin figure of the art of weaving, here represents a new beginning for the Gobelins. As she weaves, unravels, and re-weaves, she mirrors or prefigures the Gobelins' stops and starts over the course of the nineteenth century to create modern tapestry. Penelope awaits Odysseus perhaps as the Gobelins awaits the return of the grand decorative tradition, the return of tapestry as the highest expression of art. The shroud of Odysseus, the death of tapestry as a great decorative art, will not be realized. Aside from this somewhat heavy-handed metaphor, the overriding theme of this composition is tapestry technique. Maillart lavishes attention on the details of the warp-weighted loom, a reconstruction based on an Attic vase painting,<sup>40</sup> as well as the multiple colorful shuttles in Penelope's basket (Plate 4). It is a tapestry about the making of tapestry.

*Penelope* was in fact intended to be a pure exercise in technical experimentation. It was not commissioned with any architectural interior in mind. Instead, Darcel used it as a test case for his idea of uniting high-warp tapestry and Savonnerie carpet technique. The Savonnerie manufactory was incorporated into the Gobelins in 1826. By the advent of the Third Republic, it had lost any sense of independent production and was in steady decline. New weavers ceased to be recruited as the colossal carpets that were the hallmark of the Savonnerie were no longer in demand. The Savonnerie workshop, in order to remain active, reverted to producing folding

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<sup>40</sup> "Des vases grecs montrent en effet, dans leurs peintures, Pénélope devant son métier ... Ce métier grec a été restitué dans la tapisserie de Pénélope, d'après M. D. Maillart," Alfred Darcel, "Exposition Universelle. La Tapisserie." *Le Temps*, October 31, 1878. MN G.277. Gastinel-Coural specifies that the loom was copied from a Vulci cup (*La Manufacture des Gobelins*, 87). See also, Henry Havard, *Les arts de l'ameublement*, vol. 10, *La tapisserie* (Paris: Charles Delagrave, 1893), 73 Plate 43. A vase painting of Penelope at her loom is used as evidence of the construction of ancient Greek looms. Havard deduces that they were vertical structures in which the warp threads were held down by weights and weaving commenced at the top.

screens and other small decorative panels. With the idea of giving otherwise idle Savonnerie weavers work, Darcel proposed that Maillart design borders for his tapestry to be woven as pile carpet. The result was not only a way to utilize the skills of the Savonnerie weavers, but it also presented a microcosm of the manufactory's production.

*Penelope at her Loom* was exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, undoubtedly as a demonstration of the virtuoso technical capabilities of France's state manufactories. It attests to Darcel's keen interest in creative research to expand the possibilities of the textile arts. His experiment, however, was not greeted enthusiastically by the Ministry of Fine Arts. In 1878, when *Penelope* was sent to the Universal Exposition in Paris, the Savonnerie borders were replaced by a gilded wooden frame. Stripped of its carpet borders, the work lost its *raison d'être*. In a review of the Gobelins' exhibition, G. d'Olby dismissed *Penelope at her Loom* as a "painting in wool ... that we will be very embarrassed to put up as a decorative work."<sup>41</sup> Maillart's design was converted into a tapisserie-tableau when it was placed within a frame conventionally used for painting. Darcel would try to revive his idea in 1879 when the Gobelins was working on a commission to decorate the grand central staircase of Luxembourg Palace, the seat of the Senate (to be discussed in the next chapter). He proposed giving the work of creating the borders to the Savonnerie workshop, as the Gobelins had more work than it could handle at the moment. Edmond Turquet, undersecretary in the ministry of Fine Arts, quickly rejected the idea, however, and told Darcel that he hoped he would find work that was more worthy of the Savonnerie weavers' wages.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "tableaux en laine ... qu'on sera fort embarrassé de caser comme pièce decorative," G. d'Olby, "Exposition Universelle de 1878" *Le Pays*, October 15, 1878. MN G.277.

<sup>42</sup> Darcel to Turquet, April 24, 1879 and Turquet to Darcel May 1, 1879, MN GOB Box 51, dossier 15.

Darcel persisted in his experimentations and in 1875, he ordered a “trial of textile simplification” in the form of a small, vertical panel depicting Saint Agnes (Plate 5).<sup>43</sup> If the Mazerolle Opéra tapestries brought the medium back to its original function as theatrical architectural ornament, *Saint Agnes (Sainte Agnès)*, designed by Louis-Charles-Auguste Steinheil and woven by Émile Maloisel, brought tapestry back to its technical origins, to a simplicity reminiscent of the fifteenth century. Darcel made the unusual and inspired decision to give Maloisel, one of the most skilled and respected senior weavers at the Gobelins, a cartoon in black and white. Maloisel had the directive to choose the colors himself and employ the minimum amount possible in his execution of the work, especially with regard to the modeling of the figure. Thus, the palette is dominated by Saint Agnes in a blue robe standing against a uniform red background. Maloisel furthermore used coarse carpet wool to execute everything except for the flesh of Saint Agnes, which was woven in fine tapestry wool. To understand the significance of these choices and how they were a reversal of nineteenth-century practices, we must turn again to the tapisserie-tableau.

Tapestry had always been a translation of a painted cartoon into woven thread. The perceived problem of the tapisserie-tableau of the nineteenth-century however, was that it was a copy and not a translation.<sup>44</sup> In pursuit of the perfect copy, the Gobelins instituted two new practices over the course of the century: a weaving technique called the Deyrolle system in 1820; and modern chemistry research to create thousands of new dyes, the better to approximate any shade in any painting. The Deyrolle system was a way to transition almost imperceptibly from

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<sup>43</sup> Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, 159

<sup>44</sup> See Vaisse, “La Querelle de la Tapisserie,” 68.

light to dark tones, or from one color to another through optical mixing: two or more weft threads of the same saturation would be superposed across the warps in the desired section. For example, in Mazerolle's *Wine*, the shadow of the figure's robe is created by juxtaposing rose and green weft threads, the complementary colors creating a vibrating grey effect when seen from a distance. Traditionally, when transitioning from light to dark, the weaver would simply superpose the light and dark threads in decreasing/ increasing proportions. If, for instance, the desired section consisted of fifteen warp threads, the light-colored thread would be woven through all fifteen threads at the first pass, then ten at the second pass and five at the third.

The Deyrolle system allowed the weaver to transcend tapestry's inherent materiality and imitate the effects of oil paint. Oil paints can be blended to create translucent layers that transmit and reflect light; dyed wool threads, by contrast, can only be juxtaposed or superposed. Furthermore, the structure of tapestry, which inherently includes gaps or channels between warps and wefts, as well as the fibrous nature of wool, work to absorb light. A nuanced approach to coloring and shading was therefore unnatural to the tapestry medium. The Deyrolle system overcame these obstacles to achieve an oil-painting-like effect of subtle modulation and transparency.

The Deyrolle technique's basis on the principle of optical mixing prefigured the arrival of the new director of dyes in 1824, Eugène Chevreul.<sup>45</sup> Chevreul was a celebrated chemist who had analyzed the chemical composition of several natural dyes when he was appointed director of the Gobelins dye workshop, a post he retained until 1883. Although he was hired to work on

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<sup>45</sup> The Deyrolle system can thus be added to Joseph Masheck's citations of craft/design practices that prefigured modern painting's investigation of the optics of color. "Carpet Paradigm," 82-83.

the solidity of the manufactory's dyes, he is best known today as a catalytic figure in the history of modern art for his 1839 publication, *On the Simultaneous Contrast of Colors (De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs...)*. Briefly put, Chevreul discovered that the perceived intensity of a color depended on the hues of its neighboring colors and not on the value or saturation of the color itself. The law of simultaneous contrast, and the chromatic circles Chevreul devised to help illustrate it, are most famous for spurring Georges Seurat to develop his theory of chromoluminarism (ie., Neo-Impressionism). Indeed, Chevreul's discoveries seem to have had more impact on the practice of avant-garde painting than they did on the practice of weaving at the Gobelins.

As the rhetoric against the tapisserie-tableau intensified in the late nineteenth century, however, Chevreul was blamed for the exponential increase in availability of colors and the subsequent decline of tapestry into servile imitation of painting. In a report on the industrial products sent by France to the 1871 London Exposition, Chevreul was held responsible for the poor artistic quality of the Gobelins' contributions: "The illustrious inventor of the chemistry of fats has impeded rather than advanced our manufactories through his erudite research on color. In composing his chromatic keyboards in which the tones are counted no longer by halves but by infinitesimal differentials, so to speak, he has put tapestry in the state of rivaling...oil painting, which is detestable."<sup>46</sup> However, just as Chevreul had nothing to do with the Deyrolle system which predated him, this report's accusation was misinformed.

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<sup>46</sup> "L'illustre inventeur de la chimie des corps gras a plutôt entravé qu'avancé nos manufactures par ses savants recherches sur les couleurs. En composant ces claviers chromatiques où les tons se comptent, non plus par demi, mais par des différentielles pour ainsi dire infinitésimales, il a mis la tapisserie en état de rivaliser [...] avec la peinture à l'huile, ce qui est detestable." "Académie des Sciences. Séance du 28 octobre," *Le Temps*, November 2, 1872. MN G.277.

Since the eighteenth century, when the Gobelins sought to replicate the pastel colors of the Rococo palette, the manufactory had pursued an ever expanding repertory of colors. This pursuit took the form of seeking new dyestuffs from South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. The nineteenth century continued this trend, however, the innovations in dyeing were now sought through chemistry rather than in exotic plant and animal materials. For example, Jean-Louis Roard, the director of the dye workshop before Chevreul, experimented with new chemical mordants (the substance used to set dyes into the fabric) to create new colors.<sup>47</sup> During his tenure, the manufactory utilized a palette of over 30,000 colors; in the seventeenth century, by contrast, the Gobelins worked with about seventy colors. Chevreul, therefore, did not instigate the move towards the expanded palette; this directive preceded him and he was required to follow it. Nor was his research into the simultaneous contrast of colors used to expand the palette. Chevreul's chromatic circles in fact proposed a reduced selection of 14,400 colors.

What then did Chevreul do at the Gobelins? As mentioned earlier, Chevreul was hired to solve the problem of dyes that faded too quickly. The consequences of creating tens of thousands of new colors with untested substances was that many did not hold fast, leaving a labor-intensive, expensive tapestry ruined within a lifetime or earlier. In point of fact, the backgrounds of the Mazerolle tapestries were originally a brilliant blue; today they appear to be a washed-out beige.<sup>48</sup> Over the course of three decades, Chevreul performed hundreds upon hundreds of experiments testing the solidity of dyes in water, light, heat, on different fibers, as

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<sup>47</sup> Roard was the first chemist to run the dye workshop and marked the introduction of science to dyeing at the Gobelins. He set up the first dye school at the manufactory. For Roard see Joubert et al., *Histoire de la Tapisserie*, 275; Gastinel-Coural, "Chevreul à la Manufacture," 69; Caroline Girard, "La manufacture des Gobelins du Premier Empire à la monarchie de Juillet," (master's thesis, École nationale de Chartres, 2003), Part I, Ch. 2.

<sup>48</sup> When Fernand Calmettes described them in 1912, they were still blue, so the fading must have happened subsequently. Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, 152.

well as different methods of treating wool fibers to accept dyes.<sup>49</sup> While conducting these experiments, Chevreul found that in order to measure fading and other changes of color, he needed a standard classification system of colors to which he could refer. This predicament led to his development of the chromatic circles based on the simultaneous contrast of color.

The principle of simultaneous contrast was thus ultimately used at the Gobelins as a way to organize the wools and silks in the manufactory's store rooms so that weavers could find the exact colors they needed.<sup>50</sup> This was no small feat, but it did not impact the actual weaving of tapestries nor the number of colors used.<sup>51</sup> Chevreul, in fact, found the organizational problem of the store rooms personally motivating; he complained constantly that having to dye every single quantity of thread the requested color—as opposed to having the weavers go look for previously dyed, leftover threads—was a waste of his time and took away from his research.<sup>52</sup> It was this attitude that eventually created a rift between Chevreul and the Gobelins administration, which perhaps led to a climate in which a famed pillar of French science could be vehemently criticized and attacked.

As director of the dye workshop, Chevreul's main responsibility was to match the color samples sent from the weaving workshop and supervise the dyeing of the correct quantity of material. By the 1870s, however, he didn't simply complain about this responsibility, he openly

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<sup>49</sup> These experiments and their conclusions were recorded in fourteen different memoirs to the Academy of Science. See Emptoz, "Aperçu des recherches," 92-95.

<sup>50</sup> A letter from Darcel to the Director of Fine Arts dated June 1873 substantiates this. AN F21/673.

<sup>51</sup> Gerspach confirmed this in a handwritten note responding to Arsène Alexandre's article, "Chroniques d'aujourd'hui. La Question des Gobelins," *Paris*, October 17, 1892: "les théories de Chevreul n'ont jamais été mettre en pratique dans la fabrication, les tapissiers ne les connaissent pas." MN G.278

<sup>52</sup> Gastinel-Coural, "Chevreul à la Manufacture des Gobelins," 75.

ignored it. In a letter from January 1873, Darcel expressed his disdain and frustration with Chevreul in no uncertain terms:

it's no secret to anyone that the work he pursues there has nothing to do with dyeing and that the budget of the manufactory pays for research that doesn't benefit them in any way. [...] The honorable director of dyes occupies himself these days with fat from cadavers and photography. [...] As for his work on the contrast of colors, the factory has benefitted from it indirectly, as the author has been careful to say in a memoir read to the Academy of Sciences that he only undertook it for Lyon's Chamber of Commerce. [...] For dyeing at the Gobelins, Mr. Chevreul is like the waters of the Bièvre;<sup>53</sup> a prejudice.

Although exaggerated, Darcel's withering mention of the contrast of colors confirms that Chevreul's famed breakthrough was not highly regarded or utilized at the Gobelins.<sup>54</sup> Darcel's letter also confirms that during the Third Republic, Chevreul was no longer involved with dye research, much less creating new colors for the Gobelins. He was busy conducting research of personal interest and avoiding professional responsibility.<sup>55</sup> In comparing him to the Bièvre, Darcel was likening him to a polluted river that had long ceased to be used by the Gobelins for dyeing, but which the public still believed was essential to the process. Darcel tried to force

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<sup>53</sup> "ce n'est un secret pour personne que les travaux qu'il y poursuit n'ont aucun rapport avec la teinturerie, et que le budget de la manufacture paie des recherches qui ne lui profiteront en rien ... M<sup>f</sup> le directeur des teintures s'occupe aujourd'hui des graisses des cadavres et de photographie ... Quant à ses travaux sur le contraste des couleurs, la fabrique en a profité indirectement, car l'auteur a en soin de dire dans un mémoire lu à l'académie des sciences qu'il ne les avait entrepris que pour la chambre de commerce de Lyon... Pour la teinture des Gobelins, M<sup>f</sup> Chevreul est comme l'eau de la Bièvre; un préjugé." AN F21/679.

<sup>54</sup> Darcel refers to the work that Chevreul undertook at the invitation of Lyon's Chamber of Commerce. In 1842-43, Chevreul taught a course on simultaneous contrast as applied to the textile industry in Lyon. The Chamber of Commerce then offered to pay for not only a publication of the course, but also the production of Chevreul's ten chromatic circles in porcelain. These were never realized and the Gobelins instead produced his chromatic circles before he retired. See Gastinel-Coural, "Chevreul à la Manufacture," 76-77, 79.

<sup>55</sup> As another example of the latter, an angry exchange of letters between Darcel and Chevreul in 1877 reveals that the yellow wool Chevreul had delivered to the weavers was the wrong shade, rendering the architectural motifs green instead of grey. Chevreul responds curtly and evasively that he doesn't see any problem with the shade of yellow. MN GOB Box 57, Dossier: Teinture de 1849 à 1884.

Chevreur into retirement in 1879 on grounds of his uselessness,<sup>56</sup> however, the Ministry of Fine Arts rejected this proposal for reasons of political delicacy.

As Chevreul would imply in his own defense from the report on the 1871 exhibition cited above, the number of colors used was the fault of the model. As director of dyes, he had no say in the choice of tapestry models and his job was simply to replicate the colors called for.<sup>57</sup> His own expertise in chemistry, specifically in the properties of dyestuffs and their interaction with fibers, allowed him to respond to any color demand, however he was not the one advocating for ever more tints and hues.

*Saint Agnes*, understood within this context, was a radical response to the mounting criticism of the tapisserie-tableau. Maloysel was effectively given a *tabula rasa*, a black outline of a figure with some accoutrements to work with. A handful of colors, dominated by a basic scheme of blue on red, signaled a stripped-down aesthetic that shunned the subtle colorations of oil paint. Maloysel did not use the Deyrolle technique and his deliberately large and visible hatching, particularly in the modeling of Saint Agnes's robe, are nevertheless executed with such sophistication that the archaicizing intent is palpable (Plate 6). The use of thick wool (six threads per cm versus ten threads per cm in *Penelope*, for example) as well as stylistic elements such as the heavy black contour lines, were further archaicizing techniques that evoked rather than replicated medieval tapestry weaving. *Saint Agnes* was an attempt to capture the imagined

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<sup>56</sup> Darcel to Director of Fine Arts, November 6, 1879: "Maintenant il est de notoriété aux Gobelins, et dans les bureaux de votre ministère, que depuis de longues années M. le directeur des teintures s'occupe de tout autre chose que de ce qui est sa fonction. Les connaissances générales peuvent progresser par ses travaux, qui sont une des honneurs de la science française, mais notre atelier de teinture n'en tiré aucun profit. Toutes les observations, toutes les plaintes relatives à ce qui sort de cet atelier reçoivent de lui des réponses évasives, et rien n'est fait pour y satisfaire. Cet état de choses préexiste à mon entrée aux Gobelins..." MN GOB Box 57, dossier: Teinture de 1849 à 1884. Darcel would eventually succeed in pushing Chevreul out by creating a sort of emeritus position for him in 1883, director of the laboratoire supérieur de recherches sur la théorie et la constitution des couleurs.

<sup>57</sup> "Académie des Sciences," *Le Temps*, November 2, 1872. MN G.277.

purity of the fifteenth-century when, it was thought, tapestry was a decorative medium that obeyed medium-specific principles. These included the use of a limited number of “frank” colors and clearly outlined forms to counteract the light-absorbing and blurring effect of fibrous wool; and a planar or two-dimensional approach to composition, including a lack of aerial perspective, corresponding to tapestry’s function as mural decoration and as a pliable wall.

Along with the greater simplicity and coarseness of the work, Maloisel’s role as a full collaborator in his weaving was a purposeful allusion to alleged fifteenth-century practices. On this subject, Darcel himself wrote, “what freedom was left to the weavers [of the Middle Ages] to pick out colors and handle the work following the special necessities of their art.”<sup>58</sup> Darcel and others believed that medieval weavers had more agency than nineteenth-century weavers and hence, tapestry in the Middle Ages was an independent and significant art form. During the ascent of the tapisserie-tableau in the nineteenth century, the weaver and the weaving became less and less an interpreter/interpretation and more and more of a mechanical producer/product.

Not that Darcel was categorically opposed to the tapisserie-tableau. The year before and the year after undertaking *Saint Agnes*, he commissioned tapestry reproductions of Domenico Ghirlandaio’s *Visitation* (1491) and Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin’s *The Attributes of Military Music* (*Musique guerrière*) and *The Attributes of Civilian Music* (*Musique champêtre*) (1767), all paintings at the Louvre. He also, of course, supported the use of the Deyrolle system in Mazerolle’s Opéra tapestries as well as other commissions of the period. Darcel took an impartial position towards the issue of the tapisserie-tableau. In an 1878 article, he attributed the

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<sup>58</sup> “quelle liberté était laissée aux tapissiers [du Moyen Age pour remonter le tons et traiter l’oeuvre suivant les necessities s[é]ciales à leur art.” Darcel, “Union central des beaux-arts appliqués à l’industrie. Exposition de l’histoire de la tapisserie.” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 2 (1876): 430. MN G.277.

contrast in technique between *Saint Agnes* and these other projects to the requirements of the model; he rationalized that the Deyrolle system was necessary for works like Mazerolle's, but as models become more simplified, the technique would be abandoned. In the meantime, Darcel argued, the execution of extremes was a testament to the range and skill of the weavers who could carry out anything asked of them.<sup>59</sup>

This claim was not totally true. Although highly praised for returning tapestry to the decorative simplicity of the fifteenth century, *Saint Agnes* remained an isolated experiment and was shelved in the manufactory as an exemplary "specimen of fabrication."<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the artistic ingenuity required on the part of the weaver was too much to expect of the average weaver at the Gobelins. Maloysel did receive a hundred-franc bonus, the highest bonus possible for a weaver, for "demonstrat[ing] initiative and ability" with *Saint Agnes*.<sup>61</sup> In any case, just as the *Saint Agnes* experiment didn't mean that Darcel was unconditionally against the tapisserie-tableau, its reversion to simple, medievalist ways didn't mean that he was opposed to modern technology and industry.

In 1878, after one of the oldest looms in the manufactory broke, Darcel advocated for the design and construction of a metal high-warp loom according to the latest advances in technology.<sup>62</sup> He proposed commissioning it from Albert Piat, who had just won a grand prize for mechanics at the Universal Exposition. The current looms at the Gobelins dated to the late eighteenth century, were made of wood, and featured a mobile lower cylinder and a fixed upper

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<sup>59</sup> Darcel, "Exposition Universelle. La Tapisserie." *Le Temps*, October 31, 1878. MN G.277.

<sup>60</sup> Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, 160

<sup>61</sup> "a fait preuve d'initiative et d'habilité" AN F21/673

<sup>62</sup> Darcel to Director of Fine Arts, November 28, 1878. AN F21/677. See also Darcel, *Manufactures nationales des tapisseries*, 40-41.

cylinder. These cylinders held the warp threads in tension as the weavers worked from bottom to top. The drawback of the mobile lower cylinder was that there was a greater risk of tearing the warp threads when the weaver rolled up the tapestry to adjust the tension and work on a new section. The proposed new loom featured a mobile upper cylinder and fixed lower cylinder, which minimized the risk of tearing; but more importantly for our purposes, the cylinders were made of sheet steel and the frame of the loom of cast iron. These two materials became pervasive in modern industry and construction in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Especially in sites such as textile mills, which were filled with highly combustible materials, cast iron replaced wood in both the machinery and structure of the buildings. It seems logical that Darcel who, as I've argued, kept an eye on developments in private industry, would investigate switching the Gobelins' looms from wood to metal. He was supported in this endeavor by the inspector of Fine Arts, who wrote in his report seconding Darcel's request, "There is moreover interest for the Manufacture des Gobelins to keep abreast of the progress obtained by science for similar industries."<sup>63</sup>

Metal looms did not ultimately replace wooden ones, perhaps because of the inertia of tradition or perhaps because of sheer practicalities. Cast iron is an extremely heavy material and Piat's loom weighed almost five tons.<sup>64</sup> Darcel had to order extra structural work in the walls, floors, and ceiling of the tapestry workshop just to install it.<sup>65</sup> In 1886, when Jules Guiffrey (not yet the director of the Gobelins) published his *Histoire de la Tapisserie du Moyen âge à nos jours*, he cautiously and tersely wrote of the metal loom, "Its installation is too recent for us to

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<sup>63</sup> Anatole Gruyer to Director of Fine Arts, December 15, 1878. AN F21/677

<sup>64</sup> 4,600 kilos. Contract between Alfred Piat and the Manufacture nationale des Gobelins, January 21, 1879. AN F21/677

<sup>65</sup> For a total cost of 958.65 francs. Darcel to Director of Fine Arts, January 9, 1880. AN F21/677.

decide on its merits.”<sup>66</sup> The metal loom venture thus presented yet another case of an adventurous and experimental, if not wholly successful, project that attempted to stake out a claim of modernity for the manufactory.

Each of Darcel’s undertakings that I’ve discussed—the Mazerolle Opéra tapestries, *Penelope at Her Loom*, *Saint Agnes*, and Piat’s loom—endeavored, in sometimes opposite ways, to explore a new direction for the Gobelins, to work towards a new identity for the manufactory. That Darcel was this open and creative in his leadership of the Gobelins was not particularly appreciated during his time nor today, as none of his initiatives actually produced any effective change. Darcel left the manufactory back on its feet, but not yet striding. The Gobelins would be in a vulnerable position for attack when Édouard Gerspach took over the reins.

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<sup>66</sup> “Son installation est trop récente pour qu’on puisse se prononcer sur ses mérites.” Guiffrey, *Histoire de la tapisserie*, 470.

## CHAPTER 2. Édouard Gerspach: The Gobelins under Siege

Gerspach's tenure was marked by an active movement to shut down or at least irrevocably change the manufactory. Suggestions of this nature had been made in the mid nineteenth century and also during Darcel's tenure. Alexandre Denuelle, whose criticism of Mazerolle's tapestry was cited in the previous chapter, wrote a report in 1877 at the request of the newly established Commission de perfectionnement de la manufacture des Gobelins;<sup>67</sup> this committee was responsible for reviewing and advising on all artistic questions at the manufactory. Denuelle's report became a base line for suggestions of reform, including allowing the Gobelins to seek private commissions and engage with private industry. Thus, when the Chamber of Deputies was voting on the budget of the Ministry of Fine Arts in 1883, several deputies argued against maintaining government support of the national manufactories. They proposed that the Gobelins be converted into a commercial enterprise that procured private commissions and/or sold its products to the public.<sup>68</sup> In 1884, after the Gobelins's recent production was displayed at an exhibition of the Union Central des Arts Décoratifs, the critic Marc Gaida lamented the expense and uselessness of tapestry. He suggested that the Gobelins be turned into a technical school for the service of private industry.<sup>69</sup> These two propositions for the future of the Gobelins—a school and a for-profit enterprise—would be put forward more vociferously, frequently, and urgently during Gerspach's directorship in the early 1890s.

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<sup>67</sup> Denuelle, *Rapport adressé à M. le Ministre par M. Denuelle, au nom de la Commission de la Manufacture nationale des Gobelins*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1877.

<sup>68</sup> Cl. Gillot, "Le Budget des Beaux-Arts," *L'Événement*, December 27, 1883. MN G.277.

<sup>69</sup> Gaida, *Les nouvelles tentures*, 32. See also Henry Havard's similar and earlier suggestion of turning the Gobelins into a "conservatoire de la technique et de haute école de dessin et de servir par là d'exemple et de modèle à l'industrie." Havard, "Les Gobelins," *Le Siècle*, January 11, 1880, cited in Vaisse, "La Querelle de la tapisserie," 74.

The 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris served as the catalyst. This World's Fair featured the newly constructed, iron Eiffel Tower as its grand entrance, and the awe-inspiring Gallery of Machines. In other words, it was an exposition rife with optimism in the progress of science and industry, as well as a declaration of France's position as a technological leader of the world.<sup>70</sup> In this ideological framework, the Gobelins exhibited a selection of traditionally academic, insipid, retrograde tapestries and tapisseries-tableaux. These included the weavings after Chardin mentioned in the previous chapter, *Musique guerrière* and *Musique champêtre*; a tapestry reproduction of a Salon nude by the academic painter Urbain Bourgeois; a portrait of Henri IV to add to the tapestry portraits in the Louvre's Apollo Gallery; an allegorical representation of Literature, Sciences, and the Arts in Antiquity; and a Neo-Rococo/Neo-Classical set of ornamental tapestries featuring the muses, porphyry vases, and other motifs from antiquity.<sup>71</sup> These works seemed out of place within the "tech" climate of the exposition. Nor did they overtly revalue ancient artisanship, as in the *Saint Agnes* experiment, which would at least have taken a stance with regard to the exposition's emphasis on industry. Instead, the Gobelins appeared to be obliviously out-of-step with the times.

It is not surprising then that the media pounced on the disappointing showing of the manufactory on the global stage. One critic declared, "The Gobelins manufactory ... has come to make tapestry that is inferior to everything that is currently produced ... what's being made today is a combination of little fragments, of petty, garish details; no inspiration, no view of the

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<sup>70</sup> Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 2-3.

<sup>71</sup> For the complete list of tapestries exhibited, see Müntz, *Rapport sur les tapisseries*, 31.

whole ... all is reduced to impotence.”<sup>72</sup> Alfred Darcel even commented that “of the tapestries exhibited today, the great majority already belong to a distant past.”<sup>73</sup> He did not mean this as a compliment, given the negative remarks in the rest of his review. This public display of the artistic mediocrity, obsolescence, even impotence of the Gobelins in comparison with the rest of the world led to a heightened call for its eradication.

A deputy from Lyon, Edouard Aynard, who was also president of the city’s Chamber of Commerce, led the attack. In advance of the meeting of the Budget Commission for the Fine Arts, Aynard publicly condemned the national manufactories in April 1890 as “national superstitions.”<sup>74</sup> He was followed by another deputy, Henry Fouquier, who advocated closing down the Gobelins in the name of economic progress and popular opinion.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, in a nod to preserving French culture, Fouquier also proposed moving the teaching of high-warp tapestry weaving to Lyon, which had opened a weaving school a few years earlier, or to the *École des arts et métiers* in Paris. He was perhaps proceeding from the suggestion of Antonin Proust, head of the budget commission. Proust proposed at the budget meeting that the Gobelins be turned into a secondary school for weaving, an *École supérieur de tissage*.<sup>76</sup> In the end, the budget commission voted to get rid of other national manufactories, but to keep the Gobelins and only cut its subsidies.

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<sup>72</sup> "La manufacture des Gobelins...en est arrivée à fabriquer de la tapisserie inférieure à tout ce qui se fait couramment... ce qui se fait aujourd'hui est une combinaison de petits morceaux, de détails mesquins, criards; pas d'inspiration, pas de vue d'ensemble ... tout réduit à l'impuissance." Paul de Katow, "L'Exposition Universelle. Les Gobelins, Sèvres, L'Ecole Grecque," *Gil Blas*, October 17, 1889. MN G.183.

<sup>73</sup> "des tentures exposées aujourd'hui, la grande majorité appartient déjà à un passé lointain." Darcel, "Exposition Universelle de 1889. LXXI. Les manufactures nationales de tapisserie." *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, October 7, 1889. MN G.183. We could speculate that a thorny political relationship between Darcel and Gerspach contributed to the gratuitously critical tone of this review in such a public, official forum.

<sup>74</sup> "Chronique Limousine. A propos de la 'Manufacture'," *Petit Centre*, April 28, 1890. MN G.183

<sup>75</sup> P.P., "Causerie," *La Liberté*, June 16, 1890. MN G.183.

<sup>76</sup> Fernand Xau, "Chez M. Antonin Proust," *Echo de Paris*, May 29, 1890. MN G.183.

These decisions still had to be ratified by the full Chamber of Deputies. In November of 1890, when the chamber met to vote on the fine arts budget, Aynard gave a well-publicized and impassioned speech for closing down the Gobelins unless it was significantly reformed.<sup>77</sup> He accused the manufactory of “no longer being of its time,” of being a relic of the ancien régime that no longer responded to the realities of industry.<sup>78</sup> Aynard claimed that if the Gobelins was still producing work that was worthy of its past, or even good copies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tapestries, it would be worth saving, but it presently produced nothing but reproductions of paintings.<sup>79</sup> Lamenting the tapisseries-tableaux at the Universal Exposition, he stated, “the Gobelins exhibited, as if it was a wonder, a tapestry that undoubtedly cost a hundred thousand francs and had no artistic value whatsoever.”<sup>80</sup> Here Aynard alludes to the argument also made by Gaida, mentioned above: that the tapestries cost more to make than they were worth on the market and therefore made no economic sense. Aynard furthermore pointed out the economic irrationality of producing a tapestry at the cost of 25,000 to 35,000 francs, for example, only to reproduce a mediocre painting worth 2,000 to 3,000 francs.

It is no coincidence that this strident opponent of the manufactory was the head of the Chamber of Commerce in Lyon, the center of the silk trade in France. Throughout his speech, he contrasted the artistic quality, innovation, and vigor of the textile industry with the moribund,

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<sup>77</sup> Speech given November 22 and 24, 1890, published in Aynard, *Discours prononcés*, 345-83. Excerpts were also reprinted in "La Chambre. Les Beaux-Arts." *Le Figaro*, November 24, 1890; "Discours de M. Aynard sur le budget des Beaux-Arts. - Les Gobelins." *Le Journal de Bordeaux*, November 26, 1890; "Discussion du Budget des Beaux-Arts," *Journal des Arts*, November 28, 1890; "Les Gobelins," *Journal des Artistes*, December 7, 1890. MN G.183

<sup>78</sup> Aynard, *Discours prononcés*, 350, 354.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 356. As evidence of the Gobelins' decline into servile imitation of painting, Aynard states that the weavers reproduce the *touche* of the model. He seems to be unaware of the contradiction of his position as in the eighteenth century, the reproduction of François Boucher's *touche* in tapestry was quite celebrated and coveted.

<sup>80</sup> "les Gobelins avaient exposé comme une merveille une tapisserie qui revenait sans doute à une centaine de mille francs, et qui n'avait aucune espèce de valeur d'art." *Ibid.*, 357.

irrelevant Gobelins. Aynard was protesting state-sponsored textile production that seemed to disfavor private industry. Notably, he launched his campaign after Chevreul had died in 1889, severing any lingering ties of goodwill between the Gobelins and Lyon industry. Proust responded to Aynard by declaring his firm support for the maintenance of the manufactory, “provided that they cease to be guardians of tradition to become an instrument of progress.”<sup>81</sup> Progress, in this case, undoubtedly meant the ideas cited above that had been floating around since the beginning of the Third Republic—that is, making the Gobelins useful to private industry, either through converting it into a technical school, or changing its focus to research, creating models and dyes that would serve as examples for industry to adopt and follow.

Where was the Gobelins amidst all of this debate about its future? The administration did not enter into any public discussions, however several internal memos outline Gerspach’s arguments against the proposals of transforming the manufactory into a school or a commercial enterprise. With regard to the former, Gerspach pointed out that high-warp tapestry is made nowhere else but the Gobelins. Therefore, turning the manufactory into a school to train high-warp weavers would be pointless as there would be no jobs available for the students when they finished.<sup>82</sup> He further argued that converting the Gobelins into a more general textile school would be a very costly endeavor that would not be filling any need, as many textile schools already existed in France and there was no demand for another one.<sup>83</sup> The scarcity of high-warp production was also precisely why commercializing the Gobelins would be impractical.

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<sup>81</sup> “à condition qu’elles cessent d’être des conservatoires des traditions pour devenir un instrument de progrès.” *Le Soleil*, November 26, 1890. MN G.183.

<sup>82</sup> “Note remise à M. le Directeur des Beaux-Arts sur sa demande. Le Rapport du Budget de 1891 & les Manufactures Nationales,” October 1890. MN GOB Box 5, dossier 1891.

<sup>83</sup> Gerspach to Director of Fine Arts, October 1890. MN GOB Box 5, dossier 1891.

Gerspach asserted that the manufactory's products were too large and complex, and therefore that the production was too slow and meticulous, to be commercially viable. If the Gobelins were to simplify its weaving and create smaller, less intricate, and therefore cheaper tapestries, it would lose its *raison d'être*.<sup>84</sup>

Although the Gobelins survived the budget vote, these proposals to radically reform or eradicate the manufactory persisted throughout the 1890s,<sup>85</sup> even though they made little sense. The Gobelins did not make products that were useful to private industry, yet if they switched to making some other kind of textile hanging, like low-warp tapestry or Jacquard-woven works,<sup>86</sup> they would cease to be the Gobelins. Many recognized this conundrum and argued for the cultural, if not economic, utility of the manufactory. One journalist compared the Gobelins to the Louvre in its centrality to French culture and patrimony.<sup>87</sup> He implied that just as the French would never dream of getting rid of the Louvre, it should preserve the Gobelins. Another journalist argued for the utility of beauty, and by extension, of the Gobelins: "to be beautiful, to please, to delight the eyes, that is to be useful to the highest degree."<sup>88</sup> And still another commentator inverted the valuing of usefulness versus uselessness, arguing in favor of the latter: "Attachment to the superfluous, is that not precisely one of the highest claims to nobility of our

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> See for example A. Guignard, "Les Manufactures de l'Etat," *L'Étendard*, December 18, 1891; "Les Gobelins. La Question des Manufactures Nationales," *Le Matin*, March 6, 1893 ; A. du Cournau, "Les Gobelins & Beauvais," *Le Messager de Paris*, March 13, 1898.

<sup>86</sup> The former suggestion was made by Jean Régnier, "Les Gobelins et La Savonnerie" *Le Gaulois*, July 7, 1892; the latter by Philippe Burty in 1866, see Vaisse, "La Querelle de la tapisserie," 74.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Grimm, "Les Manufactures nationales," *Petit Journal*, June 21, 1890. MN G.183.

<sup>88</sup> "être beau, plaire, réjouir les yeux, c'est au plus haut degré être utile," G. Stiegler, "Aux Gobelins," *Echo de Paris*, July 29, 1892. MN G.278.

nature?"<sup>89</sup> The uselessness of the Gobelins was thus a mark of France's elegance, dignity, even superiority.

If the Gobelins was so critical to the cultural identity and morale of France, why were the suggestions of reform or eradication so attractive and compelling to the French government and public at this time? I argue that there were two main overarching factors: France's pace of industrialization and the Republican government's idea of democracy. To start with the former, France dropped from being the second-best industrial producer in 1885 to the fourth in 1896.<sup>90</sup> The 1889 Universal Exposition therefore represented the apogee of French industry's reputation. One reaction to this decline was to re-focus the country's resources and efforts on improving French industry. From this point of view, the Gobelins was seen as a waste of state funds, funds that should somehow be re-directed to helping industry. This was Aynard's underlying motivation for advocating for the manufactory's suppression.<sup>91</sup> In effect, Aynard argued in his speech to the Chamber that the state should cut subsidies to the national manufactories and increase its support of industrial drawing schools, which would presumably benefit his primary interest of improving the textile trade. There was, as he discussed, no economic rationale behind supporting the Gobelins' tapisseries-tableaux. It would, hypothetically, be more cost effective to mechanically produce textile copies of paintings.

The late 1880s and 1890s were in fact a period when the status of weavers as mechanical copyists, as opposed to artists, was avidly debated. In 1888, one commentator dismissively

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<sup>89</sup> "L'attachement au superflu n'est-il pas précisément un des meilleurs titres de noblesse de notre nature?" *Journal de Bordeaux*, "Discours de M. Aynard" (see n. 59).

<sup>90</sup> See Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 52.

<sup>91</sup> He stated in his speech to the Chamber, "Je veux rechercher... s'il n'y aurait pas d'intérêt à augmenter les ressources attribuées à certains chapitres et à diminuer celles qui sont affectées à d'autres." Aynard, *Discours prononcés*, 348.

referred to the Gobelins workers as “Monsieurs weavers, who are not creators—in which art resides—but who are very patient and very conscientious copyists.”<sup>92</sup> Comparing tapestry to painting and weavers to artists, another critic warned that painters supplying tapestry models had to create very finished cartoons because the Gobelins’ weavers were not capable of filling in the gaps of sketchily drawn models: “Unfortunately, they usually do poorly, despite the pride they put into it; firstly because they are not artists of the first order, next because it is impossible for them, given the mechanical way in which they accomplish their work, to judge the latter as a whole.”<sup>93</sup> Employing the language of both of these citations, the prominent art critic Arsène Alexandre wrote in one of a series of articles on the “question” of the Gobelins: “They are very conscientious and very skilled, this personnel, but they are also very limited. They don’t like to hurry themselves; they are *functionaries!* [...] You would think you were watching the movements of a family of automata.”<sup>94</sup>

Proponents of the Gobelins responded in defense of the artistry of the weavers. Henry Havard, who served on various committees in the ministry of Fine Arts, declared in a newspaper interview, “The artisans who execute these beautiful works are veritable artists. [...] they are also

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<sup>92</sup> “MM. les tapissiers, qui ne sont pas créateurs,- ce en quoi réside l'art - mais qui sont de très patients et très consciencieux copistes,” “La Revue de la Teinture,” *Paris*, August 15, 1888. MN G.183. Interestingly, Aynard would appropriate this rhetoric for his pro-industry standpoint: “des artistes industriels qui n’étaient plus seulement de bons copistes, mais véritablement des artistes chercheurs...” Aynard, *Discours prononcés*, 353.

<sup>93</sup> “Malheureusement, ils le font généralement mal, malgré l'amour-propre qu'ils y mettent; d'abord, parce qu'ils ne sont pas toujours des artistes de premier ordre, ensuite parce qu'il leur est impossible, étant donnée la façon mécanique dont ils accomplissent leur travail, de juger ce dernier d'ensemble.” Jules Delval, “M. Puvis de Chavannes et Les Gobelins,” *L'Événement*, July 31, 1892. MN G. 278.

<sup>94</sup> “Il est très consciencieux et très habile, ce personnel, mais il est aussi très borné. Il n'aime pas à se presser; il est *fonctionnaire!* [...] On croirait assister aux mouvements d'une famille d'automates,” Arsène Alexandre, “Chroniques d'aujourd'hui. La Question des Gobelins,” *Paris*, October 17, 1892. MN G.278.

functionaries, and as such, they bring to their work a wise slowness and profound meditation.”<sup>95</sup>

Here Havard gamely, but perhaps unconvincingly, flipped the terms of Alexandre’s criticism into the basis for praise, much like the Bordeaux journalist did with the arguments about the uselessness of the Gobelins. Nonetheless, the criticism of the weavers as mere robots and government bureaucrats was such that by 1898, the Gobelins inaugurated an annual exhibition of the paintings and sketches of its weavers to prove to the public that they were indeed artists. The anxiety over the artistic status of the Gobelins’ weavers was, I propose, ultimately related to anxieties about industrialization. If the weavers were mere copyists, couldn’t they be replaced with machines? It was this line of thinking that led dangerously to the suggestion of the termination of the manufactory and hence, the termination of a French luxury craft that was, at one time, essential to French art and culture. In other words, industry was destroying art.

Nevertheless, from the standpoint of industry, the Gobelins could be saved if it had a role in helping to improve it. Instead of closing the manufactory to save money, it could be instrumental in the struggle against foreign competition. In 1885, when Gerspach was appointed director, the journalist Jean Frollo commented, “the new director of the manufactory must have the heart to contribute, by means of vulgarization, to allowing us to triumph in the battle we are fighting at this time against foreign industry.”<sup>96</sup> By “vulgarization”, Frollo meant that the Gobelins should work for private industry by providing it perfected models to execute.

Unfortunately, the 1889 Universal Exposition made it clear that French art industry was still

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<sup>95</sup> "Les artisans qui exécutent ces beaux ouvrages sont de véritables artistes. [...] ils sont aussi des fonctionnaires, et qu'à ce titre, ils apportent dans leur travail une sage lenteur et une profonde médiation." "Les Gobelins. La Question des Manufactures Nationales," *Le Matin*, March 6, 1893. MN G. 278.

<sup>96</sup> "le nouveau Directeur de la Manufacture devra avoir à coeur de contribuer, par des moyens de vulgarisation, à permettre de triompher dans la lutte que nous soutenons en ce moment contre l'industrie étrangère." Jean Frollo, "Les Gobelins," *Petit Parisien*, March 18, 1885. MN G.183.

losing this battle, devolving into eclectic imitation of its own past, while England, Germany, and the United States were displaying an unexpected capacity for artistic innovation.

Another tactic for improving France's industry was improving education. Before, during, and after the 1889 Exposition, the French government sent delegates to study its foreign rivals' schools, as well as its museums and associations for industrial arts. Marius Vachon, who conducted an exhaustive study of Western Europe and Russia, compiled a five-volume report completed soon after the closing of the Universal Exposition. Given the efflorescence of art industry that he witnessed internationally, he concluded, "today the organization of our artistic and industrial instruction is a work of national defense, of the same degree as the organization of our army."<sup>97</sup> The idea of converting the Gobelins into a school to train industrial artists for the textile trade was thus part of an economic, nationalist imperative. Especially given that Vachon singled out the weaving school in Krefeld, Germany as one of the best professional industrial schools in Europe, France must have felt the pressure to outdo its historic adversary. In 1886, the Municipal School of Weaving of the Red Cross (*École municipale de tissage de la Croix-Rousse*) opened in Lyon and in 1887, a school of weaving and spinning was founded in Tourcoing. Opening another, perhaps higher or more prestigious school of weaving in Paris at the Gobelins would thus have been in line with this trend.

Intertwined with this anxiety over industrialization and foreign competition were Republican ideas about democracy and freedom that also underlay the proposals for reforming the Gobelins. Returning to Frolo's article, he concluded his piece with the declaration that the

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<sup>97</sup> "aujourd'hui l'organisation de notre enseignement artistique et industriel est une oeuvre de défense nationale, au même degré que l'organisation de notre armée." Marius Vachon, *Rapport...sur les musées*, 249.

manufactory “no longer works for the pleasure of a sovereign, [...] but for the profit of the country!”<sup>98</sup> Frolo makes explicit that for the Gobelins, the changeover from a royal to a republican regime should entail opening itself up to commerce. In other words, to be commensurate with Republican values, the Gobelins should be required to operate under their *laissez-faire* capitalist policy. The Republican regime in the 1880s was an advocate of private initiative, ending state privileges, and above all, of individual liberty as the basis of democracy.

Aynard in particular was a strong proponent of these values. In his speech to the Chamber, he argued for diminishing the role of the state as he believed it intervened too much in the artistic life of the country.<sup>99</sup> Aynard’s colleagues described him as a defender of “commercial freedom”, as one who “believed firmly that individual initiative and the admirable strength of voluntary association were more effective than all the constraints and all the millions spent by the State.”<sup>100</sup> From this standpoint, the Gobelins was indeed a bastion of state privilege, an institution that was anti-commercial enterprise and therefore anti-liberty, and as such, had no place in the Third Republic. A Bordeaux journalist recognized the whiff of irrational Revolutionary rhetoric in Aynard’s position; he compared Aynard’s suggestion of closing down the Gobelins to the barbaric act of the Jacobins, who burned 30,000 tapestries during Revolution to extract 60,000 francs worth of gold from a collection worth more than a million.<sup>101</sup> Individual liberty and state-sponsored art were apparently incompatible.

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<sup>98</sup> “On ne travaille plus, maintenant, pour le plaisir d’un souverain, [...] mais pour le profit du pays!” Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Aynard, *Discours prononcés*, 349, 380-81.

<sup>100</sup> “la liberté commercial”; “il croyait fermement que l’initiative individuelle et l’admirable force de l’association volontaire étaient plus efficaces que toutes les contraintes et tous les millions dépensés par l’État.” Paul Beauregard and Alexandre Ribot respectively on the occasion of Aynard’s funeral, June 29, 1913, cited in Musée historique des Tissus, *Édouard Aynard*, 85 and 87.

<sup>101</sup> *Journal de Bordeaux*, “Discours de M. Aynard” (see n. 59).

Republican principles also lay behind the idea of converting the manufactory into a technical school. One of the major initiatives of the Republican regime in the 1880s was the expansion of education through the Ferry Laws, named after Jules Ferry, the minister of Public Instruction. The Ferry laws are most famous for establishing mandatory, free, and secular primary education in a move to create a population inculcated in Republican values (the Catholic Church had previously overseen most French primary education). However, the Ferry laws also included a statute passed on December 11, 1880 that created a new category of schooling to train industrial workers, the *écoles manuelles d'apprentissage*.<sup>102</sup> These schools could apply for funding from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to support technical education. The Ferry Laws created what the scholar Xavier Darcos has called a “mystique of instruction”; they formed the cornerstone of Republican values in that they emblemized an ideal of equality and advancement through a meritocracy.<sup>103</sup> If all classes could receive schooling, everyone had a chance to better themselves economically, morally, and socially. The proposal of a school was therefore, by 1890, a euphemism for creating opportunity, a Republican rhetorical reflex in its advocacy of equality.

Remaking the Gobelins in the name of commerce and/or education was thus equally tied up with anxieties over industrialization as with the values of the new Republic. A third suggestion made post-1889 for the reform of the Gobelins similarly demonstrates how industrial competition and democratic freedom were intertwined. Beginning in 1890, several commentators proposed that since giving grants to historically favored institutions was

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<sup>102</sup> Darcos, *L'école Jules Ferry*, 251; Prost, “Jules Ferry,” 163; Day, *Education for the Industrial World*, 39-44.

<sup>103</sup> Darcos, *L'école Jules Ferry*, 46.

undemocratic, the government should instead use that same money to mount nation-wide, public competitions for new tapestry designs.<sup>104</sup> The state could then choose the best of these works and have them executed for its collections. Such a model would permit unknown, talented young people to come to light, thereby promoting innovation; for, as one commentator put it, “Official art, as everyone knows, is the enemy of progress; it permits less initiative, it offers less stimulation.”<sup>105</sup> Initiative was a key word in the Republican rhetoric. It lay at the center of Ferry’s pedagogical philosophy (running counter to the previous emphasis on memorization of rules),<sup>106</sup> likely because it was a quality valued in commercial enterprise. Initiative was a requirement for successful global industrial competition.

The concept of the open competition (*concours libre*) was supposed to not only encourage initiative, but also represent a democratic leveling of the playing field, a short circuiting of state favoritism and institutional nepotism. The system was used to select many of the artists who executed decorations for the *mairies*. Furthermore, the results and not just the process of open competitions reflected ideas of republican individualism. The selection of a group of unrelated, mismatched artists to execute various murals in the same building, as in the *mairies*, ran counter to the monarchical ideal of a unified style that conveyed a sovereign message. Instead, these decorative “programs” celebrated the eclectic collection and mixing of unique individuals.

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<sup>104</sup> "Beaux-Arts. L'art et la démocratie," *La Bataille*, July 4, 1890; J.S. "Les Manufactures de l'Etat" *Moniteur des Arts*, July 11, 1892.

<sup>105</sup> L'art officiel, on le sait, est ennemi du progrès; il laisse moins d'initiative, il offre moins de stimulant." J.S. "Les Manufactures de l'Etat" *Moniteur des Arts*, July 11, 1892. MN G.278.

<sup>106</sup> See Prost, "Jules Ferry," 165.

The Gobelins never did adopt the open competition as a standard system for obtaining new models,<sup>107</sup> but it did attempt to mirror the civic decorating campaigns of multi-artist commissions. The republican individualism of the multi-artist format, however, proved to be a difficult match with the anachronistic Gobelins. Two unsuccessful commissions in particular occupied much of Gerspach's tenure: eight verdurees for the grand staircase of Luxembourg Palace (Plates 7-8); and ten projected panels for the foyer of the Comédie-Française, of which only two were fully realized. The Luxembourg Palace commission provides an especially illuminating example of the manufactory's awkward relationship with Republicanism as it was begun during Darcel's tenure in the conservative 1870s, and completed under Gerspach during the left-leaning Ferry years of the 1880s. I will compare the Luxembourg project to two major mural campaigns that bookended it: the decoration of the Panthéon, begun in 1874; and that of the Hôtel de Ville, begun in 1889.

In February 1878, Philippe de Chennevières, the Director of Fine Arts, commissioned eight artists to design landscape tapestries to decorate the panels between the windows lining the grand staircase of the seat of the Senate. He initiated the Luxembourg commission without consulting either the director of the Gobelins or the manufactory's Commission de perfectionnement. This kind of autocratic, high-handed behavior was typical of the marquis de Chennevières, whose questionable noble lineage resulted in such symptoms of overcompensation.<sup>108</sup> As a further example, Chennevières was an amateur in the aristocratic, ancien régime sense who avidly collected prints and drawings in the tradition of illustrious

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<sup>107</sup> The Gobelins did sponsor a *concours* once, in 1879, to obtain a model for a tapestry on the theme of the arts, sciences, and letters in antiquity to decorate the Bibliothèque nationale. The Prix de Gobelins, as it was called, was meant to be an annual competition; however, it was not renewed.

<sup>108</sup> Roos, "Aristocracy in the Arts," 53, 59.

eighteenth-century antiquarians like Jean-Paul Mariette or the Comte de Caylus. His commission can thus perhaps be understood as analogous to Rococo interior decorations or print portfolios. In other words, the ensemble created a collection of the work of the patron's favored artists, all around a similar theme. This was not a democratic model that encouraged individual initiative or a sense of public collectivity; rather, it was an arrangement based on the intimate bond between collector and object, designed to foster connoisseurial visual comparisons between a pre-selected cadre of artists. Such a model was, obviously, ill-suited to a commission for a federal building.

Four years earlier, Chennevières had initiated a much larger and more ambitious decorative campaign at the Panthéon, then known as the Church of Ste. Geneviève. The genesis of this project offers context and comparison for the Luxembourg tapestries. At the Panthéon, the marquis also single-handedly chose a collection of artists to paint prescribed murals on Paris's history and patron saints. In his letter proposing and requesting approval for his plan from the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Chennevières makes it clear that his intention was to find a project that would glorify the fine arts administration (versus the Office of Civic Buildings or the Municipality of Paris), one that would make its mark for posterity.<sup>109</sup> As the marquis was the Director of Fine Arts, he was in effect seeking personal glorification. Tellingly, Chennevières used the word "*concours*" to describe his collection of artists.<sup>110</sup> Instead of being a competition that resulted in selection, Chennevières's *concours* was a competition after the fact, a visual rivalry between his chosen artists. In recounting his commission of the

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<sup>109</sup> Chennevières, "Souvenirs d'un directeur des Beaux-Arts. Les decorations du Panthéon," *L'Artiste* 54, no. 2 (September 1884), 197.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 204 and Chennevières, *Souvenirs d'un directeur*, I, 106.

Luxembourg verdure, the marquis again used the word *concours* in the same fashion.<sup>111</sup> Like the Panthéon murals, the tapestries for the seat of the Senate were originally conceived as the personal selection of an erudite amateur dictating his taste.

The unpopular Chennevières was pressured to resign as Director of Fine Arts in May 1878, a few months after ordering the eight verdure. The Luxembourg stairs commission was thus cut loose from its de facto “patron” and began to change with the vagaries of circumstances. One of Chennevière’s original artists, Gaspard Lacroix, died shortly after receiving the commission. After much back and forth, Lacroix’s panel was given to Emile Maloisel in 1882, the senior weaver who showed so much initiative with *Saint Agnes*. Initiative was again the reason cited for his elevation to designer and weaver.<sup>112</sup> Maloisel had created the original prototype that all the other artists were supposed to follow in terms of size, general composition, coloration, etc. and was also the head weaver on the project, ensuring that all eight panels were similarly executed. Another artist, Emmanuel Lansyer, had submitted a design entitled *The Pheasant* that the Gobelins committee disliked. They requested that he remove the bird, among other key features of the composition. Lansyer refused, and given the difficulty of trying to find another replacement, the committee eventually accepted his design as is, putting it on the loom in 1884. Although these changes can be chalked up to convenience and accident, they can also be understood as a subtle incursion of Republican values. Individual initiative and expression were being rewarded and defended.

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<sup>111</sup> Chennevières, *Souvenirs d'un directeur*, I, 107.

<sup>112</sup> Darcel to Paul Mantz, General Director of Fine Arts, June 22, 1882: "Ce travail serait une recompense pour M. Maloisel dont l'esprit d'initiative et le talent nous ont aidés à sortir des difficultés qu'avait créés aux ateliers la commande à huit artistes différents de huit paysages destinés à former un seul ensemble décoratif." MN GOB Box 51, dossier 15.

By the time Gerspach took over the direction of the Gobelins in 1885, four of the eight tapestries were finished (Jean-Joseph Bellel, *Le Héron*; Paul Alfred de Curzon, *L'Ara rouge*; Jean-Paul Flandrin, *La Statue*; Alexandre Desgoffes, *Les Digitales*), one was on the loom (Lansyer, *Le Faisan*), two cartoons were in the process of being delivered (Paul Colin, *Les Cigognes*; Maloysel, *L'Ibis*), and the last planned panel required commissioning a new artist to execute a model (eventually given to Alexandre Rapin, *Le Chevreuil*). Gerspach was therefore inheriting a project that was well underway while simultaneously awkwardly changing. He shepherded the set to completion in time for the 1889 Universal Exposition. The critical reaction at the Exposition was underwhelming. Henry Havard described them as “landscapes of high style stuffed with animals” and judged them to be too simple for the talent and skill of the Gobelins weavers.<sup>113</sup> Eugène Muntz criticized the selection of landscapists of the modern school (ie. Barbizon/Realist) as inappropriate for the location and purpose. Muntz believed that tapestries meant to be set in the architecture of a palace should be designed as historical landscapes. It was Darcel’s commentary, however, that was the most revealing. The ex-director of the Gobelins wrote of the artists in the *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, “each one worked according to his own temperament and presented a landscape in his own manner. The ensemble, despite a uniform border, was most discordant.”<sup>114</sup>

The discordance of the Luxembourg tapestries, I propose, ultimately arose from a clash between Republican individualism and monarchical unity. The Gobelins, operating in its

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<sup>113</sup> “paysages de haut style étoffés d’animaux,” Havard, “Exposition Universelle de 1889. L’Ameublement. V. Les tissus d’ameublement.” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 31<sup>st</sup> year 3<sup>rd</sup> period, vol. 2 (1889), 425-26.

<sup>114</sup> “chacun travailla suivant son temperament et apporta un paysage de sa façon. L’ensemble, malgré une bordure uniforme, eut été des plus discordant.” Darcel, “Exposition Universelle de 1889 LXXI. Les manufactures nationales de tapisserie.” *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, October 7, 1889. MN G.183.

tradition of monumental royal sets that presented a coherent story or ideological message, tried to fashion the same cohesive effect from a hodge-podge group of works that followed no overarching program. The commission had morphed from a collector/amateur's vision into an ad hoc assembly. The personal styles and idiosyncrasies of each artist would not meld into a unified whole and the set suffered from being neither one thing nor the other. The problems of the Luxembourg commission revealed that the Gobelins was still in transition, still trying to comprehend how tapestry fit into a Republican regime, how it could carry meaning, and what it could represent. Just as the Republic was based on the model of a collective of individuals—a collectivity and not a unity—the Gobelins might have done better if it had been able to adopt the approach of the mural campaign that succeeded it: the Hôtel de Ville, a product of the liberal 1880s.

Plans for the decoration of Paris's Hôtel de Ville commenced in 1883 after it was reconstructed and reopened post-Commune. Between the municipal council and the state's fine arts administration, a compromise was reached in which certain rooms would be reserved for direct commissions and other spaces would be given over to an open competition.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, to be as democratic as possible, all decisions would be made by committee. In total, ninety-six different artists were employed in the decoration of the city hall's interiors, painting murals with subjects that ranged from contemporary to ancient history, from genre scenes of Parisian parks to allegories of science. The eclectic mix of styles and themes was supposed to reflect the richness and vitality of contemporary French art, but most importantly, it

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<sup>115</sup> The following discussion is based on Daniel Imbert, "L'Hôtel de Ville de Paris: genèse republicain d'un grand décor," in Burolet et al., *Triomphe des mairies*, 63-71.

was an affirmation of Republican individualism. The Hôtel de Ville murals represented freedom of expression and equality. Payment was standardized and therefore not based on the seniority or prestige of the artist, but rather on the size of the work.

The Luxembourg stairs commission was not exactly comparable to the Hôtel de Ville murals, as the actual execution of the tapestries had to be done not by the artist, but by an intermediary in the form of the weaver. The process therefore inserted one step of removal between work and individual, which brought in the complicated issue of reproduction and expression. Furthermore, the Luxembourg verdure began as an effectively monarchist project under Chennevières, while the Hôtel de Ville murals were planned from the beginning as an eclectic mix that embraced Republican values. Nevertheless, the point remains that the Gobelins was seeking unity in this set, even as it changed from its original impetus, as opposed to accepting its newfound plurality as its strength.<sup>116</sup>

It is perhaps unfair to represent Gerspach's tenure with a commission that he inherited; nevertheless, the complications of the Luxembourg stairs project do speak to the powerlessness and frustration he expressed in his reports and notes with his inability to obtain good models and thereby steer the Gobelins in the right direction.<sup>117</sup> The Luxembourg commission also speaks to his inability to make tapestry a successful, Republican vehicle. To briefly mention another example, after the opening ceremonies of the 1889 Universal Exposition, the Director of Fine Arts had the idea of creating a cloth of honor for the President to serve as a majestic background during such public appearances. The project became public news when the pompous cartoon

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<sup>116</sup> For a discussion of the various notions of pluralism within the ideology of the Republic, see Julian Wright and H. S. Jones, eds., *Pluralism and the Idea of the Republic in France*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>117</sup> See for example, Minutes of the committee meeting, January 5, 1892, MN G.316; Gerspach "Rapport de gestion," December 17, 1892, MN GOB Box 19.

was delivered to the Gobelins in 1892. The commission was lampooned and condemned in the media as a ridiculous, blundering return to the trappings of monarchy and totally unacceptable for a democracy. It could only have confirmed Gerspach's reputation in the press as a Bonpartist,<sup>118</sup> as someone wholly incapable or uninterested in bringing the manufactory into the modern republican era.

Gerspach did work to modernize the Gobelins in various ways. He prohibited the Deyrolle system in 1888; he experimented with alternative warp fibers, including ones made with ramie, a plant in the nettle family from East Asia; he reduced production expenses; and he streamlined the organizational structure of the manufactory to dispense with superfluous positions.<sup>119</sup> Nonetheless, amidst continuing attacks, a beleaguered Gerspach resigned after seven years as director, approximately half the time of his predecessor and successor.

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<sup>118</sup> Press clipping from *La Bataille*, December 1889, MN G.183.

<sup>119</sup> Gerspach "Rapport de gestion"; Minutes of the committee meeting, November 20, 1890, MN G.316

### CHAPTER 3. Jules Guiffrey: Towards Modern Tapestry

Under Jules Guiffrey, the Gobelins began to create what can be called their first major modern tapestries. By modern, I mean tapestries that not only incorporated some of the formal strategies of the artistic avant-garde, but also tapestries that staked out a claim for the medium's relationship to modern life. I will discuss three major new commissions: *The Siren and the Poet* (*La Sirène et le Poète*), designed by Gustave Moreau, woven from 1896-99 (Plate 9); *A Tournament Scene from the End of the Fourteenth Century* (*Une Scène du Tournoi à la fin du XIVe siècle*), designed by Jean-Paul Laurens, woven from 1895-99 (Plate 10); and *The Conquest of Africa* (*La Conquête de l'Afrique*), designed by Georges Rochegrosse, woven from 1896-99 (Plate 11). With these commissions, Guiffrey began to resuscitate the moribund Gobelins, bringing it to face the new century.

Early on in his tenure, Guiffrey sought out Gustave Moreau—a founding father for the Symbolists, Henri Matisse's teacher, and one of France's leading modern artists—to help revitalize the Gobelins. He unofficially gave Moreau the commission as early as July 1893. The terms of the official contract drawn up almost a year later were decidedly vague and open-ended: the artist was “responsible for executing a model to be reproduced in tapestry by the Manufacture nationale des Gobelins.”<sup>120</sup> This language is radically different from the other commissions Guiffrey initiated and indicates a reversal of the tapestry-painting relationship. For example, when Jean-Paul Laurens signed a contract with the Gobelins on March 24, 1894 for A

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<sup>120</sup> "chargé d'exécuter un modèle destiné à être reproduit en tapisserie par la Manufacture nationale des Gobelins." Letter of commission, June 12, 1894. AN F21/2142.

*Tournament Scene*, it clearly stated the subject, destination, dimensions, delivery date, etc. for his “tapestry model”, not “model to be reproduced in tapestry.”<sup>121</sup> The distinction in language would become the key point of success and failure of Moreau’s work. The only justification or motivation given for the Moreau commission was that it was to be added to the state museum’s collections “as an original work of an artist of great value of which our public collections possess too few works.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, in this commission, Guiffrey jettisoned any notion of tapestry as decoration, as tied to an architectural setting. Instead, the Moreau project was seemingly a redux of the tapisserie-tableau.

Moreau delivered his meticulously studied model, *The Siren and the Poet* (Musée Saint-Croix, Poitiers), in February of 1896.<sup>123</sup> It depicts a wondrous grotto of astonishing material and figural fluidity, where hair entangled with algae coil around flesh morphing into gilded scales, where underwater plants seemed to be made of translucent gauze or gold mesh (Plate 12). It was unanimously approved by the Gobelins’ committee, though Guiffrey expressed some reservations about the ability of the weavers to execute such a complex work: “certain little details are extremely difficult, to not say impossible, to reproduce exactly, and we must be content with an interpretation.”<sup>124</sup> The reversal of rhetoric here is baffling. After all the debates in the 1870s and 1880s about the evils of the tapisserie-tableau, of weavers as translators or copyists, Guiffrey surprisingly assumes that the tapestry’s value lay in its ability to accurately

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<sup>121</sup> AN F21/2137/B

<sup>122</sup> “comme l’oeuvre originale d’un artiste de grande valeur dont nos collections publiques ne possèdent que trop peu d’ouvrages.” Guiffrey to Director of Fine Arts, May 31, 1894. AN F21/2142.

<sup>123</sup> The Musée Moreau, Paris possesses many preparatory sketches for this composition, which show Moreau carefully working out the positioning of the figures, the color scheme, the design of the border, etc. See Des. 111, 294, 307, 1121, 2157, 2706, 3175, 4129, 9075, 11203, 11290, 16013, and Cat. 66 in the museum’s collection.

<sup>124</sup> “certains petits détails sont extrêmement difficiles, pour ne pas dire impossibles, à reproduire exactement, et il faudra se contenter d’une interprétation.” Minute of the committee meeting, April 27, 1896, MN GOB Box 2, dossier 35.

reproduce painting. More surprisingly, the critical reaction to the work, which was overwhelmingly positive, hinged on the weavers' virtuosic replication of Moreau's painterly effects.

While it was still on the loom, Lucien Magne wrote, "the completed sections have all the brilliance of the model: the weavers seem to have made a game of difficulties that would be insurmountable..."<sup>125</sup> The Symbolist writer Joris-Karl Huysman declared that the tapestry would certainly be a success "because this transposition is of a fidelity that one did not dare expect."<sup>126</sup> He claimed that Moreau's work proved that the Gobelins had regained its relevance in the modern era. At the Universal Exposition of 1900, where *The Siren and the Poet* was displayed, another reviewer described the work outright as "the copy of the painting by Gustave Moreau" and praised it as a tour de force of weaving that was able to render the hallmark impasto of the artist.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, one of the major breakthroughs of the Gobelins weavers was the use of a technique called *le crapaud*, in which silk weft threads were passed over two or more warp threads to create points of thickness or relief. Employed in this manner, the reflective quality of the silk imitated the encrusted surface effect of impasto (Plate 13); Moreau used this technique even in the border of the tapestry, a decorative band inspired by a mosaic in the Musée de Sens.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> "les parties faites ont tout l'éclat du modèle : les tapissiers semblent se jouer de difficultés qui seraient insurmontables," Lucien Magne, "La Tapisserie à la Manufacture," 38.

<sup>126</sup> "car cette transposition est d'une fidélité qu'on n'osait attendre," J.-K. Huysman, "Les Gobelins," *L'Echo de Paris*, January 18, 1899. MN G.279.

<sup>127</sup> Berthe Mendès, "Une Visite aux Gobelins," *La Fronde*, March 30, 1900. MN G.279.

<sup>128</sup> Moreau apparently saw a reproduction of the mosaic in V. Dufloy, "Mosaïque découverte à Sens," *Magasin Pittoresque*, series 2, vol. 8 (1890): 328. See Jean Guiffrey, "La Manufacture des Gobelins à l'Exposition de 1900," *Art et Décoration*, May 1900, 154: "La bordure... est inspirée en grande partie par une mosaïque conservée au musée de Sens et reproduite autrefois dans le Magasin Pittoresque."

A common sentiment throughout the reviews of the tapestry at the 1900 Exposition was the notion of exceptionality. *The Siren and the Poet* was constantly described with words like *inouï, imprevu, inattendu*—unheard of, unforeseen, unexpected.<sup>129</sup> The tapestry, in its replication of Moreau’s impasto, fluid brushwork, and blending of mutable colors, was wholly unprecedented by human perception—never seen before, never heard of before—, created as if by *deus ex machina*. Although this exceptionality was the basis of its critical triumph, it was also the reason for its uselessness, in terms of modernizing Gobelins production. It was an unrepeatable success. When Charles Lameire reported to the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts on the Gobelins’ contributions to the 1900 Exposition, he said as much: “we believe that this type of tapestry must remain a brilliant and magnificent exception.”<sup>130</sup>

I propose that this return to the *tapisserie-tableau* was a way of addressing the anxieties of industrialization from another perspective. In other words, instead of condemning mechanical copying of painting, *The Siren and the Poet* presented a model so complex that only supremely skilled humans could reproduce its effects. The Moreau tapestry was an example of non-mechanical copying, copying that defied industrial production and reaffirmed the artisanship of the Gobelins’ weavers. Reviewers and fine arts officials confirmed this point of view. In his report to the Fine Arts budget commission, Henri-Charles-Étienne Dujardin-Beaumetz wrote, “this piece of extreme complication triumphantly demonstrates that the virtuosity of the Gobelins

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<sup>129</sup> Alphonse Siché, "Tapisseries des Gobelins," *Le Siècle*, March 22, 1900; "Les Gobelins à l'Exposition," *Le Petit Parisien*, March 8, 1900. MN G.279.

<sup>130</sup> “nous estimons que ce genre de tapisserie doit deneurer une brillante et magnifique exception.” Charles Lameire, *Rapport...l'Exposition Universelle de 1900*, 17.

weavers is unmatched.”<sup>131</sup> Fernand Calmettes gave a more detailed appraisal, explaining how the weavers had to work against the rigid nature of wool and tapestry to reproduce the fluidity of the model:

All while bringing forth through wool threads of different colors and an unvarying stitch the subject to be reproduced, the tapestry covers its warp and makes its wefts, and it's to this servitude that it owes its somewhat cold appearance, specific to flat fabric of uniform structure. The translators of Gustave Moreau, in order to avoid such an appearance, incompatible with the character of their model, have employed artifices and all the tricks of the trade, as far as silk highlights simulating the crusts of paint that the painter daubs onto the canvas to catch the light.<sup>132</sup>

The Moreau model pushed the weavers to the extreme heights and depths of their craft.

In a way, the Moreau tapestry took a stance against the progress of modern society, that is, against the inevitable encroachment of industrialization on the arts. As evidence of the latter, the 1900 Exposition featured a new critical mass of machine-made “tapestries”. These were made on Jacquard looms through a process called *fabrication à fardages*, developed after the 1889 Universal Exposition and featuring the use of multi-colored warps and wefts.<sup>133</sup> One of the most lauded firms manufacturing this new product was the Maison Leclercq in Tourcoing, which won a gold medal at the 1900 Exposition. Leclercq was determined to create modern industrial art, as opposed to historicist pastiche, and therefore commissioned models from relatively progressive artists such as Eugène Grasset. Grasset designed a tapestry set for Leclercq entitled

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<sup>131</sup> “cette pièce d'une complication extrême démontre victorieusement que la virtuosité des tapissiers des Gobelins n'est égalée nulle part.” MN GOB Box 5, dossier 1900.

<sup>132</sup> “Tout en poignant en laines de couleurs différentes le sujet à reproduire avec un point constamment le même, la tapisserie couvre sa chaîne et fait sa trame, et c'est à cette servitude qu'elle doit son apparence un peu froide, propre aux tissus plats de travail uniforme. Les traducteurs de Gustave Moreau, pour éviter un tel aspect, incompatible avec le caractère de leur modèle, ont usé d'artifices et mis en jeu toutes les ficelles du métier, jusqu'à des rehauts de soie simulant les croûtes de pâte que le peintre plaque sur la toile en accroche-lumière.” Fernand Calmettes, “Les Tissus d'Art,” 244.

<sup>133</sup> Ferdinand Leborgne, “Classe 70. Tapis, tapisseries,” 326-27.

the *Festival of Spring* (*Fête du Printemps*, Plates 14a-b), on display at the 1900 Exposition and, fittingly, for sale at Printemps, the posh Parisian department store.

Interestingly, Grasset was supposed to have designed for the Gobelins a set of eight tapestries on the Song of Roland to decorate the Museum of Modern Sculpture in Luxembourg Palace; some, if not all, of these tapestries were supposed to be finished in time for the 1900 Exposition.<sup>134</sup> Despite serving on the Gobelins' committee, which must have provided a constant reminder of his negligence, Grasset never delivered more than one sketch.<sup>135</sup> We can speculate as to why this was the case: perhaps he favored the speed of mechanical production over the Gobelins' proverbial slowness and thus, the likelihood of seeing his design realized in a short amount of time; perhaps he was attracted to the profit of private production; or perhaps he preferred the wider and more democratic dissemination of machine-made tapestry. In any case, industrializing the arts held many attractions for artists, and many perceived threats for the Gobelins. In the face of these new technological developments that permitted the production of relatively modestly priced "tapestries," the virtuosic Moreau tapisserie-tableau made an argument for expert handcraft against the impinging replacement of man by machine.

Guiffrey's other commissions, *A Tournament Scene* and *The Conquest of Africa*, presented more concerted attempts to define modern tapestry, as opposed to a reaction to the state of industrialization and the arts. Indeed in terms of modernizing tapestry, *The Siren and the Poet* simplistically assumed that a design by a modern artist performed equaled modern tapestry.

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<sup>134</sup> "État des modèles commandés et non livrés encore," MN GOB Box 5, dossier 1896; "État des modèles commandés et non livrés encore," MN GOB Box 5, dossier 1897; Lepdor, *Eugène Grasset*, 211. Grasset was given this commission on February 19, 1894.

<sup>135</sup> Henri Roujon, Director of Fine Arts to Guiffrey February 5, 1895 specifies that at the next committee meeting of the Gobelins on February 11, they will examine a sketch of Grasset's. MN GOB Box 2, dossier 35.

*A Tournament Scene* and *The Conquest of Africa* instead offered two different conceptions of modern tapestry that, I suggest, mapped onto the two different imperatives the Gobelins faced over the course of the early Third Republic: reinvesting in ancient traditions; and reflecting the developments of modern life, respectively. These two tapestries, woven simultaneously, represent the culmination of the manufactory's see-sawing between historicist and technological tendencies during the nineteenth century.

Jean-Paul Laurens' *Tournament Scene* was intended for the reading room of the National Archives, then housed in the Hôtel de Soubise, which was originally built in the late fourteenth-century. Guiffrey had been employed as an archivist there before taking on the post of director of the Gobelins, so it is not surprising that his first commission in his new position would be for a building that he knew intimately. It is also fitting that Guiffrey, who had identified the Middle Ages as the most brilliant era of decorative tapestry,<sup>136</sup> stipulated a medieval subject for a building of medieval origin. As for Laurens, his previous medievalist history paintings, such as *The Excommunication of Robert the Pious* (1875, Musée d'Orsay), as well as his service on the Gobelins' committee, made him a logical choice for Guiffrey's mission to reinstate tapestry's medieval, decorative tradition.

*A Tournament Scene* was meant to bring modern tapestry back to the "simplicity and frankness" of medieval weaving,<sup>137</sup> and it was informed, from conception to execution, by nineteenth-century ideas about what that meant. Before receiving the official commission, Laurens designed a trial piece in April 1893 to study exactly how a painted image is translated

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<sup>136</sup> Guiffrey, *Histoire de la tapisserie*, 123 and 129.

<sup>137</sup> Dujardin-Beaumetz, Report to the Fine Arts Budget Committee, MN GOB Box 5, dossier 1900.

into a woven one (Plate 15). More precisely, he wanted to understand the medievalist tapestry design principles of “the simplification of the modeling of flesh, the general reduction of the number of colors, and the substitution of frank tones for modulated ones.”<sup>138</sup> The trial study represented a knight with two ladies and a banner partially inscribed with the battle cry of the French kings up until the sixteenth century: “Montjoye Saint Denis.” The subject was not actually taken from the as-yet unrealized cartoon of *A Tournament Scene*; instead, it seemed to be designed to test on a smaller scale, in one condensed panel, the same mix of text, figures, and various textures (silk dresses, metal armor, etc.) that would characterize the final piece. Laurens was therefore very conscientiously researching and preparing to create a model that would reference the Middle Ages in style as well as content. Although the final work retains vestiges of academicism, it still presents a noticeable departure from the theatrical realism of Laurens’s historicist paintings.

To that end, he painted the final cartoon using “a procedure of matte painting ... of color giving neither brilliance nor reflections.”<sup>139</sup> As discussed earlier, the sheen of oil paint was thought to be incompatible with, or even detrimental to, models to be translated into wool. Although Laurens’s cartoon was executed in oil on paper, he clearly took pains to either leech out or counteract the effects of oil so as to conform to a medievalist, decorative tapestry aesthetic of dry, matte areas of color. When Laurens delivered his cartoon, Guiffrey touted it as “considerable progress ... over everything that has been delivered to the workshop for many

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<sup>138</sup> Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, 190.

<sup>139</sup> “un procédé de peinture mate ... d'une couleur ne donnant ni brillants ni reflets,” Guiffrey to Roujon, February 4, 1895. AN F21/2137/B.

years. [...] Mr. Laurens will be the first to resolutely step in this new path that other painters will follow from now on, we must hope.”<sup>140</sup>

With this affirmative praise, Guiffrey elided a previous endeavor in this vein—*Saint Agnes*. Darcel’s “trial of textile simplification” was of course a minor, if significant, experiment that was not on the scale of Laurens’s *Tournament Scene*. It is interesting, however, that the precedent of *Saint Agnes* remained unacknowledged, or perhaps it was tacitly acknowledged, given that the head weaver on Laurens’s project was none other than Emile Maloisel. In contrast with Maloisel’s work on *Saint Agnes*, though, the “frank” yet complex coloration of *A Tournament Scene* necessitated more intricate weaving techniques. For example, to capture the luxurious appearance of the ladies’ moiré silk robes or other rarefied effects of color and texture, Maloisel and his weavers used double-ply weft threads made from two different colored strands (Plate 16). This *chiné* technique, unlike the Deyrolle system, was known in the Middle Ages and was therefore in keeping with the medievalist imperative.

The genesis of *A Tournament Scene* demonstrates not only Laurens’s and Maloisel’s diligence, but also Guiffrey’s erudition. The tapestry follows several details discussed in the latter’s chapters on medieval tapestry in his *Histoire de la tapisserie*: the inscriptions in Old French (Renaissance tapestries would predominantly feature Latin inscriptions); the detailed, sumptuous clothing imitating damask and silk; the black contours around all motifs, a device that Guiffrey argued was imported from stained glass; and a composition based on manuscript

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<sup>140</sup> “un progrès considérable ... sur tous ceux qui ont été livrés à l’atelier depuis bien des années. [...] M. Laurens aura le premier marché résolument dans cette voie nouvelle que d’autres peintres suivront désormais, il faut l’espérer.” Ibid.

miniatures.<sup>141</sup> Guiffrey, as an archivist, historian, and director of the Gobelins, probably had considerable input in the subject and design of Laurens's tapestry. He may have even pointed the artist towards specific illuminated manuscripts.

*A Tournament Scene* was very likely inspired by fifteenth-century manuscripts such as *The Tournament Book* (*Livre des tournois*, BnF, ms. Fr. 2695), and the *Armorial of the Golden Fleece* (*Grand Armorial équestre de la Toison d'Or*, BnF, Ars., ms. 4790).<sup>142</sup> The elaborate heraldry, which serves as the dominant ornamental scheme of the tapestry, probably draws from the latter, one of the most magnificent and renowned armorials from the Middle Ages. The compendium of 942 coats of arms was illustrated with 79 equestrian portraits (Plates 17-18).<sup>143</sup> A lavish facsimile of the manuscript was produced in 1890 by Lorédan Larchey, archivist of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. This publication greatly contributed to the renewed interest in heraldry during the fin-de-siècle.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, Larchey produced another facsimile in 1899 of a selection of fifty of the equestrian portraits.<sup>145</sup>

The armorial devices depicted in Lauren's tapestry were very deliberately chosen, as evidenced by a comparison between the artist's model and the final work (Plate 19). For example, the escutcheon emblazoned on the caparison of the mounted knight's horse in the center featured a cross partition in Laurens's model; in the final tapestry, however, it was altered to be a chevron. Shields with crosses were generally worn by knights going off to the crusades,

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<sup>141</sup> Guiffrey, *Histoire de la Tapisserie*, 29-30, 123.

<sup>142</sup> I would like to thank Jean Vittet and Brendan Sullivan for suggesting these connections, respectively. Kimberly Jones cites another source for Laurens's composition, the tapestry entitled *The Tournament*, late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Valenciennes ("Jean-Paul Laurens," 13).

<sup>143</sup> For a discussion of this manuscript, see *Miniatures flamandes*, 89-90 and Larchey, *Chevaliers de la Toison d'Or*.

<sup>144</sup> Michel Pastoureaux in Larchey *Chevaliers de la Toison d'Or*, 11. The facsimile was entitled, *Ancien armorial équestre de la Toison d'Or et de l'Europe au XV<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1890).

<sup>145</sup> *Costumes vrais. Fac-similé de 50 mannequins de cavaliers en grande tenue héraldique, d'après le manuscrit d'un officier d'armes de Philippe le Bon, duc de Bourgogne, 1429-1467* (Paris: Plon, 1899)

while a chevron partition referred generally to the spurs of a knight's armor,<sup>146</sup> a more fitting motif for a tournament scene. Clearly someone with detailed knowledge, Guiffrey perhaps, modified Laurens's heraldry for the sake of accuracy. I do not mean to suggest that Laurens and/or Guiffrey directly copied all the tapestry's heraldry from the armorial. In fact, the helmet on the right side of the tapestry with a crest in the shape of a woman's bust would suggest otherwise (Plate 20). It was also not present in Laurens's model and seems to be loosely based on Philippe de Ternant's crest pictured on fol. 154v of the *Armoiral* (Plate 18), but dispenses with the latter's fifteenth-century headdress of a divided hennin. The *Armoiral* thus served as both visual sourcebook and departure point for artistic invention.

Laurens's composition seems to draw from another manuscript, René d'Anjou's *Tournament Book*, a description of an ideal tournament, focusing on the preparations and ceremony surrounding the event, rather than on the details of combat. Likewise, Laurens depicts the entry of the knights and ladies and the presentation of the helmets, rather than battle in the lists. The artist's design seems to be an amalgamation of various folios, from the depiction of the knights' lodgings to the portrayals of the *mêlée* (Plates 21-22). Critics of the time and scholars today have commented on the incongruity of *A Tournament Scene*'s plunging recession into depth with medieval tapestry's planar conception of space.<sup>147</sup> However, if we compare Laurens's composition with folios 54v-55 of *The Tournament Book*, for example, his use of depth perspective did conform to a medieval prototype. The spectators' boxes in Laurens's tapestry are effectively a combination of the *The Tournament Book*'s depiction of the knights'

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<sup>146</sup> [http://classes.bnf.fr/rendezvous/pdf/MF\\_fiche\\_2.pdf](http://classes.bnf.fr/rendezvous/pdf/MF_fiche_2.pdf)

<sup>147</sup> Calmettes, "Les Tissus d'art," 246; Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past*, 29.

lodgings, including the orthogonal perspective and the display of their arms beneath their windows, with the scaffolding structure in which the ladies and judges sit, depicted in folios 100v-101, for example. The forest of poles on the right side of the tapestry, bearing inscribed banners and the knights' armorial devices, is also derived from folio 101. Providing a further link between manuscripts and tapestry, the *Tournament Book's* execution in ink drawing heightened with wash, an unusual technique for manuscript miniatures, was employed for tapestry cartoons during the Middle Ages.<sup>148</sup>

The text of Laurens's tapestry is, however, not related to the *The Tournament Book* or any medieval manuscript for that matter. Laurens extracted the text from François-René de Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity* (*Génie du Christianisme*, 1802). This magnum opus, published at the dawn of the nineteenth century, remained hugely influential throughout the century, as much an expression of French genius and a part of French patrimony as medieval manuscripts and tapestry. It originated a certain interpretation of the Middle Ages that rested on ideals of spiritual purity, social stability, and naïve faith.<sup>149</sup> The banderole at the top of Laurens's tapestry and the text at the bottom left are taken from part IV: Worship (*Culte*), book V: Military Orders or Chivalry (*Ordre militaire ou chevalerie*), chapter IV: Life and Manners of the Knights (*Vie et moeurs des chevaliers*). The bottom inscription quotes a song that roving troubadours sing for the knights just before the start of a tournament battle, alluding to the ladies in the spectator boxes: "Servants of love, look gently/ at the angels of paradise in the scaffolds/ If

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<sup>148</sup> François Avril in Pognon, *Livre des Tournois*, 11 and Gautier, *Splendeur de l'Enluminure*, 279.

<sup>149</sup> Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past*, 16-17. See also Jean-Claude Berchet, "François de Chateaubriand" in Bernard-Griffiths et al., *La Fabrique du Moyen âge*, 297-311.

you joust mightily and joyfully/ You will be honored and cherished.”<sup>150</sup> The top banderole recites the cry of heralds to a knight winning in battle: “Remember whose son thou art and be not degenerate!”<sup>151</sup>

The combination of Chateaubriand’s text with imagery inspired by illuminated manuscripts renders Laurens’s tapestry a multivalent work that intertwines various strands of medievalism. Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz have argued that fin-de-siècle medievalism was distinguished from earlier nineteenth-century medievalisms in several respects.<sup>152</sup> It was a multivalent phenomenon that crossed social and political categories and thus unified the populace in the belief that the Middle Ages were the origin of France as a nation and of France’s global artistic supremacy. Emery and Morowitz also characterize fin-de-siècle medievalism as having an archeological or scholarly tendency, a desire to search for the “truth” about the Middle Ages. This is in contrast with the picturesque fantasy of Romantic medievalism found earlier in the century, when the Middle Ages were conceived as one indistinct block of time, and terminology as well as periodization were fluid.<sup>153</sup> Troubadour paintings, which were often in fact inspired by Chateaubriand’s *Genius*, are characteristic of Romantic medievalism.

Laurens’s design adheres to the fin-de-siècle archeological trend, most obviously in its use of medieval manuscripts as visual inspiration. The artist went back to the source material from the time period, as opposed to basing his design completely on personal invention or other

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<sup>150</sup> “Servans d’amour regardez doucement/ Aux eschafaux anges de paradis/ Lors jousterez fort et joyusement/ Et vous serez honorez et chéris,” Chateaubriand, *Génie*, IV, V, 231 (Paris: Migneret, 1802)

<sup>151</sup> “Souviens-toi de qui tu es fils et ne forlignes pas!” Ibid., 232. Translation taken from Chateaubriand, *The Genius of Christianity*, trans. Charles I. White (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1856), 614. This cry is also cited in J.-J.-E. Roy’s *Historie de la Chevalerie*, a fifth edition of which was published in 1873. Roy credits Louis-Antoine-François de Marchangy’s *Gaule poétique* (1819) for this quote.

<sup>152</sup> The following discussion is based on Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past*, 2-9, 15.

<sup>153</sup> Berchet, “François de Chateaubriand” in Bernard-Griffiths et al., *La Fabrique du Moyen âge*, 298-300.

nineteenth-century imagery of the Middle Ages. In addition, the excerpts from Chateaubriand were altered to be written in Old French, presumably to augment the impression of historical accuracy. For example, in the top banderole, instead of copying Chateaubriand's wording of "ne forligne pas," the Old French form of negation is used: "ne forligne mie." Other archaizing changes in the tapestry's inscription include the declined form of the noun, "filz," and the use of double letters in "eschaffaux."<sup>154</sup> As Laurens's painted model followed Chateaubriand's original text, we can conjecture that Guiffrey had a hand in changing it for the completed tapestry. Finally, Laurens's interest in the subject of the tournament was part of the larger, scholarly study of chivalry in the late nineteenth century. Books such as the historian Léon Gautier's *La Chevalerie* (1884, re-issued multiple times throughout the 1890s) established the fin-de-siècle fascination with the codes and practices of medieval knights.

Gautier focused his study on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the tournament was an act of meaningful, mortal battle, as opposed to the courtly ritual of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which he somewhat derisively called, "plumed chivalry."<sup>155</sup> Laurens's specific depiction of a tournament at the end of the fourteenth century thus places it in the realm of chivalric ceremony. It is notable that Laurens specifies a century that comes after Gautier's study and before the production of the manuscripts that served as his main sources. This time frame might be related to two factors: the late fourteenth-century origin of the Hôtel de Soubise; and the late fourteenth-century production of the first great extant medieval tapestry cycle, the Anger Apocalypse, woven from 1377-82 with compositions based on manuscript miniatures. In

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<sup>154</sup> I am indebted to Brendan Sullivan for his knowledge of Old French.

<sup>155</sup> "la chevalerie à panache," Gautier, *La Chevalerie*, 701. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Paris: H. Welter, 1895)

fact, Laurens depicts costumes and dress specifically from the late fourteenth century—the fitted *cote hardy* with a scooped, off-the-shoulder neckline and no veiled turrets for the women (Plate 23); the long, dagged sleeves of the men—as opposed to the fifteenth-century fashions shown in *The Tournament Book*.<sup>156</sup> Such scholarly attention to historical detail indicates a deliberate choice of time period and research into fourteenth-century sources. Then again, fifteenth-century manuscripts did depict some of the fashions represented in Laurens’s design, such as the ermine-lined surcoats on two of the processing women (Plate 24), which were associated with ceremonial occasions.<sup>157</sup> In any case, the specific time period was not noticed by critics, several of whom identified the tapestry with the sixteenth century.<sup>158</sup> The tapestry was furthermore recorded by Fernand Calmettes in his definitive catalogue of nineteenth-century Gobelins production as, “Descent of a Tournament at the end of the 15th century.”<sup>159</sup>

This fuzzy notion of chronology or muddling of the centuries was more in keeping with Romantic medievalism than fin-de-siècle antiquarianism. In fact, through the references to Chateaubriand’s *Genius*, a work that was foundational to Romantic medievalism, this strain of historicism was literally writ into Laurens’s design. Laurens’s citations imbue the tapestry with a nostalgic longing for a mythic, peaceful past, a past when the arts were flourishing and society operated in communal harmony. Despite or in conjunction with its scholarly touches, the tapestry does include its share of picturesque fantasy. For instance, the entry of the knights,

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<sup>156</sup> For a chronology of medieval fashions, see van Buren, *Illuminating Fashion*. I thank Brendan Sullivan for this reference.

<sup>157</sup> See for example, “Marriage of Charles IV and Marie of Luxembourg,” *Grandes chroniques de France*, 1458, BnF, Ms. Fr. 6465, fol. 332, ill. in van Buren, *Illuminating Fashion*, 187.

<sup>158</sup> See for example, Eugène Montrosier, “Jean-Paul Laurens,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (February 1899); Alphonse Séché, “Tapisseries des Gobelins,” *Le Siècle*, March 22, 1900.

<sup>159</sup> Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, 189.

dismounted and bareheaded and thus stripped of the signifiers of knighthood, walking with their ladies on their arms, is wholly anachronistic. Firstly, ladies are not ever shown or described in medieval manuscripts or nineteenth-century histories as entering the lists with the knights. Secondly, if a lady is shown promenading with a knight, he is mounted, wearing his crested helmet, and she is holding the reigns of his horse.<sup>160</sup> Laurens's entry resembles instead a medieval dress-up version of nineteenth-century fashion plates. Indeed, it could be a representation of a fin-de-siècle medievalist spectacle. *A Tournament Scene* thus interweaves multiple medievalist tendencies; it is both unabashed fantasy and the fruit of archeological research, both a search for a true Middle Ages and a fictional invention of them.

*A Tournament Scene* offered a complex message as a decoration in the National Archives. It was first and foremost a celebration of French patrimony, a statement of French patriotism in both its subject matter and aesthetics. Gautier had in fact traced the origin of the tournament to France in *La Chevalerie*: "The only truly uncontested fact ... is that tournaments HAVE A FRENCH ORIGIN. They were born in our country; we have clearly introduced them to Germany and England."<sup>161</sup> Gautier's defensive, nationalist tone is obviously a symptom of France's contemporary rivalry with her European neighbors, or rather, her need to declare cultural superiority in the face of threatening economic inferiority. In any case, the choice to depict a tournament in a medievalist style was evidently a nationalist one that affirmed France's role as the source of high European culture. Furthermore, the historical subject was appropriate for a site reserved for historical inquiry.

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<sup>160</sup> I am again indebted to Brendan Sullivan for sharing his expertise in Flemish manuscript illumination.

<sup>161</sup> "Le seul fait, vraiment incontestable ... c'est que les tournois ONT UNE ORIGINE FRANÇAISE. Ils sont nés chez nous; nous les avons visiblement importés en Allemagne et en Angleterre," Gautier, *La Chevalerie*, 675-76.

As an art object created under a Republican regime, however, the implications were less straightforward. Emery and Morowitz have perceptively argued that the inscriptions on the banners depicted in the tapestry—loyalty, strength, persistence, etc.—were values of the Republic, vital to the construction of its political identity.<sup>162</sup> In their study, they also contrast Chateaubriand's vision of pure, naïve faith with Victor Hugo's democratic medievalism in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831); that is, Hugo's portrayal of the Middle Ages as a time of ribald street fairs that brought together all socio-economic groups in communal celebration. They convincingly demonstrate that Hugo's populist vision was at the heart of the fin-de-siècle's treatment of the Middle Ages as consumer spectacle.<sup>163</sup> Tournaments were part of this spectacle, however the tournament depicted by Laurens was decidedly not democratic. It instead emphasized a courtly culture of hierarchy and ritual,<sup>164</sup> an ideology that would have appealed more to Catholic Royalists than anticlerical Republicans, among which Laurens counted himself. We could associate this seemingly inconsistent message with the political *ralliement* of the 1890s, the Republican reconciliation with the right as a way of maintaining power and creating a bulwark against the violent tactics of the extreme left.<sup>165</sup> Or perhaps this disconnect reveals how the Gobelins, as it did under Gerspach, continued to struggle with integrating itself into a Republican regime.

Regardless, *A Tournament Scene* effectively proposed that looking back to ancient traditions was the way to move forward. With this commission, Guiffrey presented a conception

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<sup>162</sup> Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past*, 29

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-79.

<sup>164</sup> In fact, the woman standing outside of the scene, looking on with her back turned towards us, wears a plain kirtle, which marked her as a servant or peasant figure. She is excluded from the aristocratic festivities and, interestingly, functions as a double for the viewer.

<sup>165</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the *ralliement*, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 48-49.

of modern tapestry as a reinterpretation of medieval decorative principles. We can see how ingeniously Laurens imbricated the medieval and the modern, or showed how the modern could be a continuation of the medieval, in the bottom floral border. The flowers growing outside of the white partition bring to mind millefleurs tapestry as well as Art Nouveau floral motifs, particularly as used in wallpaper (Plate 25). Furthermore, the flowers invade the main scene so that the differentiation between border and image practically disappears. The fusion of border and image exemplifies the Gobelins' move towards a decorative, modernist stylization of tapestry, here looking back to borderless millefleurs hangings. Laurens's *Tournament Scene* presented a historicist, pre-industrial ideal of France, an image that would be countered and complemented by Rochemasse's *Conquest of Africa*.

Georges Rochemasse was a successful Salon painter of ancient and exotic subjects who also had a more avant-garde affiliation with Symbolism. The latter tendency is evident in the Wagnerian painting executed shortly before his Gobelins commission, *The Knight among Flowers* (1894, Musée d'Orsay). That year, he also traveled to Algeria, and it was perhaps this exposure to a French colony in Africa, along with his status as a modern and somewhat progressive history painter, that motivated Guiffrey's selection. When Rochemasse received an official contract on August 20, 1895, he had already been unofficially engaged in the project for several months; Guiffrey had sent him thread samples on May 2, 1895.<sup>166</sup>

It is unclear how the subject of France's colonization of Africa was chosen, but the decision attests to the growing political importance of the colonialists in the Chamber, and to the pervasive ideological change that married imperialism to republicanism during the 1880s and

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<sup>166</sup> Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, 211; MN G. 40.

1890s. Nevertheless, the subject of Rochegrosse's tapestry has been passed over in scholarly analysis of the work. Pierre Vaisse's half-defensive, half-dismissive footnote represents the scholarly attitude that has closed down discussion of the overtly racist imagery: "The subject of the tapestry dispenses with commentary; it would be vain to reproach Rochegrosse for a conception of colonization that was that of the crushing majority of his contemporaries."<sup>167</sup> The lack of commentary, however, has led to a lack of understanding of the significance of this tapestry. It is not productive to dismiss it out of hand as racist; to understand the how and why behind the imagery, so disturbing precisely because it is presented with such naiveté, is to understand more fully the problematic negotiation between nationalism and the ideals of the Republic.

In 1895, when Rochegrosse was working on his model, the "supercolony" of the Federation of French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française, AOF) was officially created.<sup>168</sup> This event represented the winding down of about a decade of astonishingly swift exploration and "pacification" of the western Sudan region of sub-Saharan Africa. As numerous historians have demonstrated, the "new imperialism" of the Third Republic was in large part motivated by the humiliating loss of Alsace-Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian war in 1871.<sup>169</sup> As one way to make up for the loss and regain a sense of Gallic glory, colonialists advocated for the expansion of French territory from the already held northern and western coasts of Algeria

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<sup>167</sup> "Le sujet de la tapisserie se passe du commentaire; il serait vain de reprocher à Rochegrosse une conception de la colonisation qui était celle de l'écrasante majorité des contemporains." Vaisse, "La Querelle de la tapisserie," 85n124.

<sup>168</sup> The AOF consisted of present-day Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Niger.

<sup>169</sup> See for example, Cooke, *New French Imperialism*, 10-11, 13, 17; Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, 12; Sibeud, *Une science impériale*, 20-21.

and Senegal into the interior of the continent, towards Lake Chad. Another motivation for expansion was economic competition. Looking at the example of Britain, who had formed the Royal Niger Company in 1886, France saw that commercial profit was potentially to be gained through exploitation of the colony's resources, as well as making the colony a guaranteed market for the export of French goods.

The alignment of industrialism and colonialism was made bureaucratic fact in 1889 when the administration of the colonies moved from the Ministry of the Marine to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. In 1890, furthermore, a private lobbying group called the Comité de l'Afrique française was created specifically to advocate for and fund exploration and colonization of Africa, as opposed to Asia or the South Pacific. One of the founding members was none other than Edouard Aynard, the deputy from Lyon discussed in the previous chapter. Africa represented an exciting, potential new market for the French textile trade. The interests of industry and conquest, and thus of republicanism and colonialism, went hand-in-hand. As evidence of the Comité's influence, in 1894, the Colonial Ministry was created. The establishment of a separate, new ministry affirmed not only the power and importance of this sector to the Third Republic, but also the transition from military rule of the colonies to civilian rule. In other words, if the 1880s were marked by unbridled conquest and expansion by the French army, in the mid-1890s began the process of administrative consolidation and economic development.<sup>170</sup> It was time to take stock of the vast, diverse territory France had just acquired and make it productive.

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<sup>170</sup> Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, 23, 35, 41-42; Sibeud, *Une science imperial*, 22.

The economic rationale behind colonization was tied up with a moral rationale. The invasion of sub-Saharan Africa during the late nineteenth century was the beginning of France's infamous *mission civilisatrice*. The civilizing mission was, of course, based on a paternalistic view of the races, well represented by Jules Ferry's speech to the Chamber in 1884: "the superior races have a right vis-à-vis the inferior races ... they have a right to civilize them."<sup>171</sup> In the ideology of the Third Republic, one of the most essential methods of civilizing native peoples was through commerce and the spreading of French industry and technology. In the AOF, as Alice Conklin has shown, it was not until the appointment of Ernest Roume as governor general in 1902 that this idea could be put into practice.<sup>172</sup> However, once appointed, Roume's first project was to introduce modern communication and transportation networks to the colony. Railroads and telegraph lines would, he believed, alleviate the perceived "uncivilized" state of isolation and poverty of the West African peoples.

It was within this context of administrative consolidation, of Republican faith in the civilizing powers of French technology, that Roehgrosse's striking and unusual tapestry was created. Notably, Roehgrosse places the troop of colonial officers trailing behind the allegorical figure of the French mission civilisatrice; their battleship is barely visible in the background behind the vegetation. The tapestry promotes the message that the period of military conquest was over and the civilizing mission now took precedence.<sup>173</sup> The figure of French Civilization is

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<sup>171</sup> Cited and translated in Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, 13. Ferry was then the President of the Council. For Ferry's role in French colonialism, see Charles-Robert Ageron, "Jules Ferry et la colonisation," in *Jules Ferry: fondateur de la République*, ed. François Furet, 191-206 (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1985).

<sup>172</sup> Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, chap. 2.

<sup>173</sup> Perhaps this was part of the reason behind the constant name-changing of the tapestry. It was variously referred to in the press and in official reports as *La France colonisatrice*, *Explorateurs de l'Afrique*, *L'Exploration de*

one of the more curious features of Rochegrosse's design, combining classical elements of allegory with representations of modern technology as ornament. With the French tricolor flag waving behind her, she arrives in a vaguely defined African village and makes a gesture of oration with her right hand. In her left hand, she holds a laurel branch, signifying France's military but also perhaps moral victory. She brings civilization in the form of the law, symbolized by the book also in her left hand labeled "LEX," and technology, as represented on her robe. Her garment is ornamented with telegraph poles at the bottom, mechanical gears at the top and bottom, light bulbs that oddly replace the cogs of these gears in the middle, electric conductors with currents zapping out at her waistline, and stylized steam throughout (Plates 26-27). How did Rochegrosse conceive of this peculiar, hybrid figure? What sources did he draw from and what meanings do they lend his design?

Rochegrosse's figure of French Civilization remarkably resembles allegorical figures of electricity depicted in late nineteenth-century posters, advertisements, and illustrations (Plate 28). These personifications are often portrayed with one arm raised, usually holding a torch, and/or beams of light shooting out from the crown of their heads. As Shelley Cordulack has demonstrated, the prototype for these figures was in fact the Statue of Liberty.<sup>174</sup> Émile Lévy's poster for the Industrial Arts Exhibition has Electricity not only holding a torch in her right hand, but also a rectangular object in her left arm, much like Lady Liberty. Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, the sculptor of this symbol of Franco-American friendship, had originally conceived

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*l'Afrique, L'Expansion de la France en Afrique, and La France en Afrique*, as if the word "conquest" was to be avoided. And yet, the notion of the explorer and exploration referred back to a "pre-conquest" moment in the 1870s, when the Romantic idea of the solitary scientist/explorer on a mission to Africa was current. See Sibeud, *Une science impériale*, 26.

<sup>174</sup> Cordulack, "Franco-American Battle," 152.

of the statue as a kind of lighthouse that would be fitted with electric lamps in both the torch and the crown. His work was thus to be a literal embodiment of his allegorical vision, which he called *Liberty Enlightening the World* (*Liberté éclairant le Monde*) (Plate 29). Cordulack further argues that as the US pulled ahead of France in terms of industrial production and technological innovation, French artists re-appropriated the Statue of Liberty as a French work, and used it to represent France's modernity through its association with electricity.

A comparison between Rohegrosse's model and the final tapestry reveals changes to his allegorical figure that enhanced its resemblance to the Liberty/Electricity figure in popular French visual culture. In the model, French Civilization's raised hand is held straight up, in a firm oratorical gesture meant to silence the audience (Plate 30). In the tapestry, her hand is strangely curled; if it was rotated ninety degrees, she could have been holding a torch (Plate 31). The model also emphasized one flame of white light at the top of her head, like a reinterpretation of the goddess Diana's crescent moon diadem;<sup>175</sup> smaller, subordinate, golden rays encircle the rest of her head. The tapestry, by contrast, depicts French Civilization with white rays shooting out from her entire head, like Bartholdi's vision of Liberty. Furthermore, she holds a book of the Law in her left hand, just as Lady Liberty holds a tablet of the Law in hers. Rohegrosse's allegorical figure thus not only presents civilization as electricity, that is, the civilizing process as modernization through technology, but also ingeniously conflates the mission civilisatrice with

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<sup>175</sup> Advertisements for non-electric, incandescent gas lights used the trope of Diana to ennoble their product. However, as Cordulack points out, "It is significant that the figure of Diana never appeared in France in the context specifically of electric light, associated as it was with ideas of the modern..." (Ibid., 160). Rohegrosse's change in his depiction of French Civilization's aureole thus perhaps signals an awareness of these associations and prototypes.

Liberty Enlightening the World. Rochegrosse's tapestry is a propaganda piece for colonialism, French technological prowess, and the success of the former as based on the latter.

Several late nineteenth-century posters depicted telegraph lines behind the allegorical figure of technological modernity (Plates 32-33).<sup>176</sup> In fact, Jules Chéret's poster for the newspaper *Le Rapide* features a telegraph pole at top left and a train puffing steam at bottom right. Similarly, the tapestry's left side border features a telegraph pole with telegraph lines extending out across the top border, and the right side features a steam engine with steam billowing out and curling into a sort of celestial cloud over the figure of French Civilization (Plates 34-35). Telegraph networks and railroads for trains powered by steam engines were precisely the first modern technologies implemented in French West Africa under Roume. Surely not coincidentally, Rochegrosse's design represents the technologies that would best open up West Africa to French commerce.

Notably, all of the technological ornaments in the borders are entangled or even fused with natural ones (Plates 36a-b). Monkeys frame the electrostatic generator at bottom center, leaves and flowers garland the steam engine, the light bulbs at the bottom seem to be growing out of exotic blossoms, and the telegraph pole starts out as the trunk of a palm tree. Technology is taking over, transforming, and replacing the savage jungles of Africa. The strange phenomenon of plants growing into light bulbs and telegraph poles may be related to the changing attitude towards scientific progress at the fin-de-siècle.

As discussed in the previous chapter, France began to stagnate and decline as an industrial producer in the 1890s, provoking a sense of disillusionment, a loss of faith in

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<sup>176</sup> See *ibid.*, 152.

technology by 1900. If one reaction was to prop up industry as per Aynard, another was to turn towards an ideal of handcraft and organicism. The Gobelins obviously benefited from the growing appreciation of artisan traditions and indeed, *A Tournament Scene* played into that movement. Yet at the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition, where both Laurens's and Rochegrosse's tapestry were displayed, the still very modern technology of electricity was given full emphasis. There was a spectacular Palace of Electricity, which contained the generators that powered every other pavilion in the Exposition. Camille Saint-Saens composed "Le Feu céleste," a paean to electricity that was performed at the World's Fair. Loie Fuller presented her literally electrifying dances with colored lights in her eponymous theater. And among these and other celebrations of electricity stood Rochegrosse's figure of French Civilization, surrounded by light bulbs and telegraph wires. Debora Silverman has argued that at the 1900 World's Fair, electricity was reinterpreted as a life-giving force, the magical current that allowed the Exposition to come alive with light, movement, and energy.<sup>177</sup> In this way, it was enfolded into the ideal of organicism. We can similarly interpret the light bulbs-cum-stamen and telegraph pole-cum-tree trunk of Rochegrosse's tapestry borders.<sup>178</sup>

The unequivocal faith in scientific progress articulated in *The Conquest of Africa* might seem outdated against the souring of this notion by 1900. However, Conklin has argued that this Republican faith was simply displaced, exported to West Africa.<sup>179</sup> In such virgin territory, technology could accomplish a great deal; the French colonizers believed that it could actually

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<sup>177</sup> Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 298-99.

<sup>178</sup> Interestingly, several critics avoided mentioning the technological ornaments in the borders, the most striking and unusual aspect of this tapestry. Perhaps they were too baffled by their representation. See Magne, "La Tapisserie," 38 and Lameire, *Rapport...l'Exposition Universelle de 1900*, 21.

<sup>179</sup> Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, 57.

improve people's lives. Of course, the reality was that these networks resulted in forced labor and forced trade to the detriment of West African lives. Along with its heavy-handed racism then, Rochegrosse's tapestry was a nuanced work of art that perceptively addressed complicated, contemporary issues.

But what of the racist imagery? How did Rochegrosse depict the West Africans and their surroundings? Like *A Tournament Scene*, the *Conquest of Africa* seems to be part fantasy and part what was perceived as archeological accuracy, though perhaps more of the former than the latter. To enumerate just a few examples, the patterns of the printed cloth that the central figures are wearing, presumably a husband, wife, and two children, were widespread in West Africa.<sup>180</sup> Although the way the fabric is wrapped and cut is erroneous, Rochegrosse does accurately represent wax-print and indigo resist-dyed cloth. Similarly a blend of the accurate and inaccurate, the form of the beer pot on the ground is common to former parts of the AOF, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, but the decoration is inappropriate for this object; the man's amulet is an appropriate ornament, but not suspended from shells; and the bangles and necklaces that the man wears (except for the pink shells which should instead be cowrie shells) do draw from West African traditions, but their combination on a single male figure is incorrect (Plates 37a-b). Some effects of pure fantasy include the feathers in the man's hair, which may draw from other non-European traditions;<sup>181</sup> and the geometric patterns in the top and bottom borders, which one could vaguely relate to Akan decorative traditions, but seem to be mostly imaginary.

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<sup>180</sup> I am grateful to Kathryn Gunsch for sharing her expertise in West African art. The following discussion is based on a personal communication, November 19, 2013.

<sup>181</sup> Native Americans, for example, were Romanticized and popularized in France by Chateaubriand's novels *Atala* (1801), *René* (1802), and *Les Natchez* (1826); paintings inspired by these novels, such as Eugène Delacroix's *Natchez* (1835, Metropolitan Museum of Art), show the male adorned with three feathers. The children in

The artist's cavalier invention of ornamental motifs is, of course, not surprising. It furthermore has a historical precedent. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Gobelins executed several weavings of a series entitled, *The Old Indies (Les Anciennes Indes)* that depicted the flora, fauna, peoples, and landscape of Dutch Brazil (Plate 38).<sup>182</sup> We can see a similar cataloguing impulse in Rochegrosse's cramming in of disparate animals so close to each other and to the people,<sup>183</sup> and the mixing of vegetation from different habitats. The *Old Indies* cartoons were painted by two Dutch artists who had accompanied an official Dutch expedition to the New World. Their colonialist portrayal was a mixture of scientific observation and artistic fantasy, like Rochegrosse's; in addition, the general format of their compositions offered a model for Rochegrosse's own colonialist tapestry. As Charissa Bremer-David explained, the panels of *The Old Indies* are all divided into three zones: a foreground with detailed studies of plants and animals; a middle ground with humans or larger animals along with more flora; and a background with a distant vista.<sup>184</sup> Rochegrosse's design, though strikingly modern in its representation of technology, was rooted in the Gobelins' past.

Given that Rochegrosse never traveled to West Africa as the Dutch artists did to Brazil, he must have looked to printed illustrations as one source for his African imagery. One likely

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Rochegrosse's design, furthermore, strikingly resemble Ming or Qing dynasty depictions of boys, their heads shaved to leave discrete patches of hair on the top and/or sides of the head (See Terese Tse Bartholomew, "One Hundred Children: From Boys at Play to Icons of Good Fortune," in *Children in Chinese Art*, Ann Barrott Wicks, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 57-83). Such images would probably have been available in France on Chinese export porcelain. Needless to say, the conflation of non-European peoples and traditions indicated a racist perception of them as interchangeable exotic Others.

<sup>182</sup> For a discussion of this series, see Bremer-David, *French Tapestries*, 10-19.

<sup>183</sup> Animals such as the elephant, giraffe, and buffalo represented were in general found in the forest and the bush, not near villages. They were therefore only encountered by hunters. I thank Kathryn Gunsch for this information. The monkeys in the borders seem to combine a scientific cataloguing impulse with an allusion to the decorative tradition of *singerie* so popular in Rococo designs. They are placed in an ornamental space, however, they are not "aping" humans in any way.

<sup>184</sup> Bremer-David, *French Tapestries*, 10.

resource was the illustrated accounts of French explorers and colonial administrators in Africa. Several were published in the travel journal, *Le Tour du Monde* and three in particular seem to have been relevant to Rochegrosse's composition: Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza's "Voyage dans l'Oeust africain" (1887); Louis-Gustave Binger's "Du Niger au golfe de Guinée" (1891); and Alexandre d'Albéca's "Au Dahomey" (1894). Binger and d'Albéca's accounts were additionally published as separate books in 1892 and 1895, respectively. Many little details of Rochegrosse's composition seem to draw from the illustrations of these accounts: the form of the man's amulet, the drum-like instrument lying next to the beer pot, the shape of the huts, among other aspects, directly resemble illustrations in Binger's book (see for example Plate 39).<sup>185</sup> Compositional devices, like the framing of the scene with a palm tree at left, can be found in d'Albéca's publication.<sup>186</sup> Savorgnan de Brazza's account offers the most compelling model for Rochegrosse's design. One of the illustrations depicts himself, a white French officer, holding a spark of light amidst a group of mesmerized Africans (Plate 40). An African man standing facing Savorgnan de Brazza throws his arms wide in astonishment. The illustration accompanies the following text: "The next day was about making every effort to complete the conquest of my sharp-toothed savages. I conducted veritable séances of conjuring and pyrotechnics: electric shocks, fuses, bright fires of magnesium, obtained an undisputed success, as each of them witnessed the manifestation of our superior strength."<sup>187</sup> The parallel to Rochegrosse's tapestry is clear—the white man uses technology, in the form of light, to awe and conquer the Africans.

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<sup>185</sup> See Binger, *Du Niger*, vol. 1, 11, 101, 185.

<sup>186</sup> D'Albéca, *La France au Dahomey*, 122.

<sup>187</sup> "Le lendemain il s'agit de tout mettre en oeuvre pour achever la conquête de mes sauvages aux dents aiguës. Je donne de véritables séances de prestidigitation et de pyrotechnie: secousses électriques, fusées, feux éclatants de

*The Conquest of Africa* proposed that modern tapestry should portray contemporary history and address issues of modern life.<sup>188</sup> It also successfully aligned tapestry with the era's idea of republicanism, promoting the industrial/moral justification of imperialism. In depicting modern technology in an ancient, artisanal medium, *The Conquest of Africa* perhaps furthermore reconciled France's desired image of itself as both a first-world industrial competitor and an Old-World producer of the finest luxury craft. Although it presented France as a colonizing, technological power, *The Conquest of Africa* was thus not the ideological opposite of *A Tournament Scene*. Both medievalism and colonialism were a form of exoticism—one of time, the other of place—and ultimately, both were manifestations of French nationalism. Furthermore, as Emery and Morowitz have argued, “Medieval history was evoked to sanctify the Republican aim of centralizing the state and of expanding and consolidating the French empire.”<sup>189</sup> *The Conquest of Africa* and *A Tournament Scene* represented, perhaps, two sides of the same modernist coin. Although Guiffrey would remain the director of the Gobelins into the early years of the twentieth century, it was these commissions of the 1890s that attempted to define new paths and possibilities for modern tapestry.

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magnésium obtiennent un succès incontesté, car chacun y voit la manifestation de notre force supérieure.” Savorgnan de Brazza, “Voyages,” 316.

<sup>188</sup> “L'Expansion de la France en Afrique par M Rochegrosse répond au désir maintes fois exprimé de voir la tapisserie s'appliquer aux sujets modernes...” Dujardin-Beaumetz, report for the Budget of Fine Arts, MN GOB Box 5, dossier 1900. Rochegrosse also designed a carpet with the motif of fireworks for the Savonnerie in 1896 (Minutes of the committee meeting, November 19, 1896, MN GOB Box 2, dossier 35). Colored fireworks were a modern technological phenomenon, as wondrous to fin-de-siècle audiences as electricity. See Cordulack, “Franco-American Battle,” 148 and Laura Anne Kalba, “Fireworks and Other Profane Illuminations: Color and the Experience of Wonder in Modern Visual Culture,” *Modernism/Modernity*, 19, no. 4 (November 2012): 657-76.

<sup>189</sup> Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past*, 27.

**PART II.**  
**Brotherhood of the Wool: Needlework and the Nabis**

Amid the financial, administrative, and artistic troubles of the Gobelins, avant-garde tapestry emerged as a serious creative endeavor during the late nineteenth century. The decline of the Gobelins even created consternation outside of France, reaching the consciousness of design reformers in England. It spurred William Morris, for example, to revive the moribund art form. Morris spared no words in his criticism of the manufactory: “it would be a mild word to say that what they make is worthless; ... a more idiotic waste of human labour and skill it is impossible to conceive.”<sup>190</sup> Morris & Co.’s Merton Abbey Tapestry Works, founded in 1881, is often cited as a precursor and possible influence on the Nabis’ foray into the medium. The London-based Arts & Crafts magazine, *The Studio*, is held up as the probable conduit of Merton Abbey’s methods and products.<sup>191</sup> While there is no doubt that Morris & Co. was instrumental in raising the profile of the decorative arts across England, Europe, and America, I consider the decorative and medievalist project of the Nabis as a related but parallel phenomenon, rather than a case of direct influence.<sup>192</sup>

In point of fact, *The Studio* began circulating in 1893, after the Nabis had already begun working in tapestry. The first illustrations of Merton Abbey works—*The Knights of the Round Table* and *The Ship* from the *Holy Grail* series—were published in volume 3, covering April-

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<sup>190</sup> William Morris, *The Lesser Arts of Life: An address delivered in support of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1882)* (London: Electric Book Co., 2001), 26.

<sup>191</sup> See for example, Slatkin, *Aristide Maillol*, 53; and Frèches-Thory and Terrasse, *Nabis*, 177

<sup>192</sup> For the French roots of the medievalist revival of the decorative arts, see Froissart-Pezzone, *L'Art dans Tout*, 14-16.

September 1894.<sup>193</sup> Although they share a medievalist aesthetic, it is more likely that Morris and the Nabis were independently drawing from the same sources for motivation and inspiration. Besides the negative impetus provided by the Gobelins, both Morris and the Nabis looked to French medieval tapestry as an artistic ideal, and Morris even claims to have taught himself how to weave on a high-warp loom with a seventeenth-century French manual.<sup>194</sup> Tapestry, for many reasons—its monumentality, its fragility, its labor-intensiveness, its historical associations—, became an ultimate craft to which avant-garde artists across Europe aspired during the late nineteenth century.

The earliest hints of this aspiration in France can be found, appropriately, in the work of Paul Gauguin, whose experiments with the decorative arts served as an acknowledged inspiration and precedent for the Nabis. In 1883, Gauguin suggested to Pissarro that they make models for “Impressionist tapestries,” though these works apparently never came to fruition.<sup>195</sup> His ex-colleague and would-be rival, Émile Bernard, was dabbling with tapestries in 1891.<sup>196</sup> After Bernard met a young woman named Maria in 1892, he was able to have his designs executed as needlepoint hangings, or patchwork in one case. Tapestry remained a minor part of Bernard’s artistic practice in the 1890s, however. He never exhibited any of the tapestries that he and Maria made in Pont-Aven from 1892 to 1893 because he didn’t consider them beautiful or

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<sup>193</sup> They serve as illustrations to Vallance, “Revival of Tapestry-Weaving,” 98-99. The *Holy Grail* series would not be shown in France until the 1900 Paris Universal Exhibition.

<sup>194</sup> Parry, *William Morris Textiles*, 100, 102; and Vallance, “Revival of Tapestry-Weaving,” 100.

<sup>195</sup> Camille to Lucien Pissarro, June 16, 1883 and July 25, 1883, in Merlhès, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, 1: 49-50, 385.

<sup>196</sup> Bernard to Eugène Boch, February 13, 1891, letter no. 64 in McWilliam, *Émile Bernard*, 133.

mature enough.<sup>197</sup> Moreover, he claimed in his letters that he only began designing tapestries to give Maria something to do while he painted.<sup>198</sup> The Nabis were therefore the first French avant-garde artists to seriously engage with tapestry as a major means of artistic expression.

The Nabis' tapestries were technically not tapestries woven on a loom. Like Bernard's works, they were needlepoint hangings, or *tapisseries à l'aiguille*, in which the design was stitched onto an open weave canvas support, which was much easier and cheaper to produce than the Gobelins' products. They nevertheless aspired to reinstate the decorative logic and function of high- or low-warp tapestry. In Henry Havard's *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement* (1896), the standard reference of the period for ornament and decoration, he treats *tapisserie à l'aiguille* under the same rubric as high- and low-warp tapestry for several reasons. He states that in both mediums, the design or image forms an integral part of the support. The resulting fabric is therefore an original work of art that requires a certain amount of artistic knowledge to successfully complete.<sup>199</sup> Although I will discuss the significance of the difference in technique between needlepoint and weaving on a loom later, I will continue to refer to the Nabi works as "tapestries."

The Nabis' tapestries have been studied within the general context of their experiments with the decorative arts or in individual monographic studies.<sup>200</sup> Aristide Maillol's designs, for

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<sup>197</sup> Bernard to Octave Maus, n.d. [beginning of 1893], letter no. 101 in *Ibid.*, 208. For other mentions of these works, see also letter nos. 94, 95, 97, and 100. For scholarship on Bernard's tapestries, see Christiaan Vogelaar, "Emile Bernard and the Decorative Arts" in *Emile Bernard 1868-1941: Pioneer of Modern Art*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 1990), 335-67; Jean-Jacques Luthi and Armand Israël, *Emile Bernard, 1868-1941: fondateur de l'école de Pont-Aven et précurseur de l'art moderne* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Amateur, 2003), 197-200.

<sup>198</sup> Bernard to his mother, n.d. [March 1894], letter no. 132 in McWilliam, *Émile Bernard*, 294.

<sup>199</sup> Havard, *Dictionnaire*, 1207.

<sup>200</sup> See for example, Frèches-Thory and Terrasse, *Nabis*, 157-200; Berger, "Plus beau qu'un tableau"; Prékopa, "Rippl-Rónai artiste décorateur," in Delannoy, *József Rippl-Rónai*, 78-93.

example, have been analyzed as precursors to his mature oeuvre as a sculptor; the work of the Hungarian expatriate József Rippl-Rónai has been held up as evidence of his utterly French style. What is lost or missing from the limited scholarship on these works is the particular status of tapestry held in the Nabis' mission. Tapestry, for the Nabis, served as an alternative to painting; it presented the perfect intersection between two of their main interests—decorative arts and mural decoration. Moreover, this large-scale craft anchored in French tradition offered a privileged site for exploring art's relationship to industry, to the space of interiors, and to its own process of creation in terms of materials, labor, and patronage. This section places the Nabi tapestries in relation to each other in order to compare the artists' divergent approaches to the medium and uncover how tapestry-making was intertwined with broader issues such as nationalism, gendered work, and the dialectic between historicism and modernism.

From early on in the group's formation, tapestry was considered an ideal medium because it offered the prospect of artistic as well as financial fulfillment. A letter from Paul Sérusier to Maurice Denis dated July 1890 states: "I am embarrassed to respond to what you tell me about your financial situation. I don't think that there is the least chance of succeeding with bourgeois portraits and merchants of illustrations; they will be the last to come to us. Only the major industries, tapestries, stained glass or others can address us, but we must prove ourselves. So be patient for as long as possible; ... look for other things, anything, but do not traffic sublime and chaste art."<sup>201</sup> This letter of encouragement, from Nabi brother to Nabi brother, reveals the

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<sup>201</sup> "Je suis embarrassé pour répondre à ce que tu me dis sur votre situation financière. Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait la moindre chance de réussite avec les bourgeois à portraits et les commerçants d'illustrations; ce seront les derniers qui viendront à nous. Seules, les grandes industries, tapisseries, vitraux ou autres pourront s'adresser à nous, mais il faut avoir fait ses preuves. Patientez donc le plus longtemps possible; ... cherchez autre chose, n'importe de quoi, mais ne trafiquiez pas de l'art sublime et chaste." Maurice Denis correspondence, Documentation Center, Musée Maurice

group's attitudes towards art and commerce. Commissioned portraits and journalistic illustrations were seen as purely commercial ventures that prostituted art. Industrial arts, however, remained worthy and honest pursuits because they decorated interiors and thereby affected or even shaped the daily lives of their owners. Sérusier's letter serves to introduce three themes that will structure the analysis of the following chapters: artistic ethics, brotherhood, and industry. I will examine how these themes manifest in the work of the three Nabis who were most involved with tapestry over the course of the 1890s: Aristide Maillol, Paul Ranson, and József Rippl-Rónai.

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Denis (henceforth MMD), Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Ms. 11896. Contrary to previous assumptions, Sérusier does not seem to have designed any tapestries that were executed in the 1890s. Although Albert Aurier praised the "merveilleuses tapisseries de haute lisses de Sérusier" in his review of the second Nabi exhibition at Le Barc de Boutteville in May 1892 ("Deux expositions," *Mercure de France* 5, no. 31 (July 1892): 262), he was speaking figuratively as Sérusier exhibited two paintings there, an "Etude" and *Retour des champs*. See Pierre Sanchez, *Les Expositions de la Galerie Le Barc de Boutteville (1891-1899)* (Dijon: L'Echelle de Jacob, 2012), 416.

## CHAPTER 4. Aristide Maillol and the Ethics of Handcraft

Maillol was most likely the first of the Nabis to begin working with tapestry and the most critically engaged with the medium. He claims to have started looking into tapestry as early as 1891.<sup>202</sup> By 1895, he was identifying himself to the Ministry of Fine Arts as a *brodeur*, or embroiderer/needleworker.<sup>203</sup> Around 1896, he drew a self-portrait that shows him working with threads, wrapping them around a chair arm and piece of board, perhaps to skein them and keep them untangled (Plate 41). He may even be plying thread, twisting two different colored strands together to create specific color effects, as in the *chiné* technique discussed in connection with Laurens's *Tournament Scene*.<sup>204</sup> As late as 1903, Maillol was still known as a *tapissier* or weaver among his peers.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, it is little known that during the 1890s, he planned to write a book on tapestry, outlining its history and discussing its materials, specifically wools and dyes.<sup>206</sup> During this era, he was intensely researching dye fabrication and the properties of wool in order to reproduce the quality of the threads he observed in ancient tapestries.

Maillol frequently spoke of tapestry as a more significant means of artistic expression than painting for him personally as well as generally. He said to one of his early biographers, Judith Cladel, "Tapestry can be considered as monumental painting. It's a more beautiful, more

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<sup>202</sup> Maillol to the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, May 16, 1896: "Depuis six ans je travaille à faire revivre l'art de la tapisserie et depuis quatre ans j'expose mes travaux au salon du Champ de Mars." AN F21/4324.

<sup>203</sup> Maillol to the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, May 3, 1895, signed "brodeur." AN F21/4324.

<sup>204</sup> I am grateful to Charissa Bremer-David for helping me interpret this image.

<sup>205</sup> The sculptor Antoine Bourdelle refers to Maillol contemptuously as a *tapissier* in February 1903. See Kramer, "Aristide Maillol," 90.

<sup>206</sup> Maillol mentions this project in a letter to art critic Maurice Guillemot [1894 or 1895]: "j'ai l'intention de publier plus tard un petit livre sur la tapisserie et l'art décoratif. Je prends des notes." Transcribed in Hôtel Drouot, January 30, 1980, lot 36. These notes are now in the archives of the Musée Maillol.

meaningful art than that of easel painting.”<sup>207</sup> Tapestry for Maillol had a decorative function; it served a purpose in everyday life and was therefore a more worthwhile pursuit than painting.<sup>208</sup> He further stated to Cladel, “I didn’t find my expression in painting, I found it in tapestry...It’s through tapestry that I began to make composition.”<sup>209</sup> Maillol thus credits his development as an artist to his work in tapestry, as opposed to the training he received in painting at the École des Beaux-Arts between 1885 and 1890. Indeed he said to one of his patrons, Harry Kessler, that he turned to tapestry to get away from the facile habits of academic art instruction.<sup>210</sup>

Notably, one of Maillol’s teachers at the École des Beaux-Arts was Jean-Paul Laurens. Laurens not only designed tapestries for the Gobelins, but has also been a member of the Commission de Perfectionnement since 1879. Maillol could therefore have been exposed to the fundamentals of tapestry design and the contemporary production at the manufactory during the early years of his artistic education. Ironically, it is perhaps through his painting training with Laurens that Maillol developed a taste for tapestry and, rebelliously, a distaste for the Gobelins. In his notes for his book on tapestry, Maillol writes, “The Gobelins – their bad tapestries [...] their false ideas about tapestry – that they are the primary cause of the decadence of this art.”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> “La tapisserie peut être considérée comme de la grande peinture. C’est un art plus beau, plus significatif que celui du tableau...” Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 50. In addition, Maillol said to Henri Frère, “Il y a des chefs-d’œuvres [dans la tapisserie] plus étonnants que dans la peinture.” *Conversations de Maillol*, 183.

<sup>208</sup> Harry Kessler, one of Maillol’s most important patrons, records in his journal in May 1905 Maillol’s words: “Je me demandai pourquoi est-ce que je fais de la peinture, dans quel but? ... Je ne voyais plus ce que ma peinture avait à faire avec la vie ... J’ai fait de la tapisserie parce qu’au moins là je voyais le but décoratif.” Typed transcription in Tapestry Documentation, box 1, Musée Maillol.

<sup>209</sup> “Je n’ai pas trouvé mon expression dans la peinture, je l’ai trouvé dans la tapisserie...C’est par la tapisserie que j’ai commencé à faire de la composition.” Cladel, *Aristide Maillol* 50. Maillol also said to Cladel (56), “L’époque de la tapisserie a été la plus heureuse de ma vie.”

<sup>210</sup> Kessler journal, August 23, 1904, Musée Maillol.

<sup>211</sup> “Les Gobelins — leurs mauvaises tapisseries [...] leurs idées fausses sur la tapisserie – qu’ils sont la cause première de la decadence de cet art,” fol. 3 of notebook entitled, *Notes sur la tapisserie*. Typed transcription in Tapestry Documentation, box 1, Musée Maillol.

Maillol directly pitted himself against the Gobelins in his vocation as a tapestry maker. He claimed to art critic Maurice Guillemot that he “had the idea of restoring the great tapestry of old because the Gobelins had brought it to the highest degree of idiocy.”<sup>212</sup> In this declaration, Maillol echoes Morris’s comments on the Gobelins cited above. Like Morris, Maillol instead held up French medieval tapestry as a counter model to the Gobelins’ contemporary production.

Maillol’s interest in tapestry was tied to the phenomenon of Nabi medievalism.<sup>213</sup> The Nabis were enthralled with medieval art for its decorative style, its integral place in society, and its artisanal production. They viewed medieval art as a spiritually pure, pre-industrial practice untainted by commercialism. Instead of commodified easel paintings that bore no relation to their surroundings, the Nabis endeavored to create art that was meaningfully incorporated into daily life. Tapestry was considered one of the premier arts of the Middle Ages. Consequently, medieval millefleurs hangings provided an important model for monumental, craft-based wall decoration. The flattened space, hieratic figures, simplified color palette, decentralized composition, and layering of patterns were valued characteristics of this decorative mode. Maillol visited the Musée de Cluny in Paris to draw inspiration from the millefleurs tapestry displayed there, including *Seignorial Life (La Vie Seigneuriale)* and *The Lady and the Unicorn (La Dame à la licorne)*. In fact, Maillol supposedly said of the latter, “She is the woman that I visited the most during this time in Paris.”<sup>214</sup> For Maillol, Nabi medievalism was tinged with

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<sup>212</sup> "J'ai eu l'idée de reconstituer la belle tapisserie ancienne parce que les Gobelins l'ont amenée au dernier degré de bêtise." Letter to Maurice Guillemot, 1893. Transcribed in Hôtel Drouot, January 30, 1980, lot 37. The letter is dated ca. 1895 in the auction catalogue, however Maillol mentions that he just moved to 282 rue Saint Jacques, which would indicate a date of 1893. See also Kramer, "Aristide Maillol," 41 and 43.

<sup>213</sup> For Nabi medievalism, see Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past*, chap. 3 and 129–39.

<sup>214</sup> "C'est la dame que j'ai le plus visitée à cette époque à Paris" From an unlabeled typed manuscript in Tapestry Documentation, box 2, Musée Maillol.

nationalism. He reportedly remarked to the poet Marc Lafargue, “We have lost the national sense of tapestry.”<sup>215</sup> He saw himself as picking up the tradition lost by the Gobelins by returning to the decorative and artisanal principles of the Middle Ages. Maillol, however, did not immediately begin to design medievalist tapestries with homemade dyes. He experienced a steep learning curve and, as I will show, was not able to sustain his Nabi medievalist ethos of pure handcraft at the end of his “era of tapestry.”

Maillol’s first attempt at tapestry was appropriately designated “essai de tapisserie,” or trial tapestry, when he exhibited it at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars in 1893. This work is now lost and no image survives, but it was purportedly criticized by Gauguin for its use of perspective.<sup>216</sup> Millefleurs tapestries are characterized by a flattened perspective so perhaps at this early stage, Maillol had not yet adopted a medievalist style. Maillol supposedly made his first tapestries with wool that he had obtained by unraveling fragments of old tapestries or carpets that he had bought in antique stores.<sup>217</sup> This would have been a cheap way to obtain high-quality wool as well as a way to study the look and feel of ancient dyed wools. One can imagine that it would have been a long process to gather enough wool of matching colors with this method to create a new tapestry, albeit a minor one, as the term “essai” implied. If he began working on tapestry in 1891, he would have spent two years creating his trial piece. Despite Gauguin’s criticism, Maillol apparently felt confident enough in his work, or desperate enough

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<sup>215</sup> Lafargue et al., *Aspects de Maillol*, 6.

<sup>216</sup> Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 53. Slatkin believes that *Jeunes filles dans un parc* was Maillol’s first tapestry and was exhibited at both the 1893 Champ-de-Mars and the 1894 Libre Esthétique (“Aristide Maillol,” 59-60, 97). This seems unlikely as Gauguin praised the Maillol tapestry exhibited at the latter; he wouldn’t have criticized it one year only to turn around and praise it the next.

<sup>217</sup> Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 47 and Lafargue et al., *Aspects de Maillol*, 8.

for money, to offer it to the state for purchase after the Salon.<sup>218</sup> It was refused and instead bought by a M. de Nesmond. De Nesmond was an early patron who had engaged Maillol to decorate his villa at Fécamp with mural paintings in the summer of 1891, when Maillol probably began working on his trial tapestry.<sup>219</sup> Although the state declined the purchase, Maillol did receive a grant (*bourse de secours*) from the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts for the execution of a second, more major tapestry, presumably based on the promise of his first *essai*.

This next tapestry, *Girls in a Park* (*Jeunes filles dans un parc*), was medievalist in style though not in execution (Plate 42). The composition consists of a frieze of hieratic, stylized young women and girls in contemporary dress enjoying a day in a Parisian park. *Girls in a Park* seems like an updated version of *The Promenade* from *Seignorial Life*, which features well-dressed ladies taking a walk in a garden (Plate 43). Maillol's work was, however, made with commercially spun and synthetically dyed wool threads bought from a department store. When it was exhibited at the Salon de la Libre Esthétique in 1894, it was praised as "the ingenious faded [*fanée*] tapestry of Mr. Maillol."<sup>220</sup> The word "fanée" actually connotes in French both faded and wilted. A longer description of the tapestry by another art critic makes this connection between faded and wilted more explicit:

Here is the attenuated and charming tapestry of Maillol. Figures that are sometimes awkwardly drawn live in a simple and serious idyll in a faded landscape [*un paysage fané*]. Wool threads in neutral tones—a glorious red ribbon barely appears in a head of hair—commonplace wool threads, though chosen for the marriage of exquisite tints, bring to life dreams of summers past! A direct vision of things, not at all; but rather the charm of a recollection, of a misty souvenir, of a scene half faded in memory that gently comes back hazily before the eyes [*d'une scène fanée à moitié dans la mémoire et qui*

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<sup>218</sup> AN F21/4090.

<sup>219</sup> For M. de Nesmond, see Kramer, "Aristide Maillol," 35-36.

<sup>220</sup> "L'ingénieuse tapisserie fanée de M. Maillol." Ernest Verlant. "Chronique artistique: La première exposition de la Libre Esthétique," *La Jeune Belgique* 13, no. 4 (April 1894): 193.

*s'en revient doucement à fleur des yeux*]. A tapestry that is for sight what would be for smell a perfume that had lost its overly harsh vivacity to conserve only that which was necessary to recall the rarest of roses.<sup>221</sup>

This passage layers metaphors of faded colors, faded memories, and wilted flowers as poetic praise of Maillol's tapestry. His wilted aesthetic, rooted in the tints of his wool threads, is clearly a valued visual effect. Subdued colors were associated with ancient tapestries. Medieval millefleurs, after all, were encountered by nineteenth-century artists as historic objects, worn and unrestored, faded by light and time. The tapestries that Maillol saw were not the cleaned and restored objects that we see today. The perception of the proper color value of natural dyes was therefore based on the appearance of faded, abraded, dirty threads. The late nineteenth-century viewer had a taste for this wilted aesthetic, as Alfred Darcel acknowledged: "ancient tapestries possess the charm that we recognize in them not despite their discoloration but because of it."<sup>222</sup> Wilted colors thus imparted a sense of historical legitimacy to avant-garde tapestry.

Nevertheless, Maillol would later use the term *fané* to denote an undesired material process. Discussing *Girls in a Park* with his friend François Bassères many years after its creation, he lamented, "You see it faded because I used, then, wool threads bought in the marketplace. These came from the Bon Marché" (see Plate 44). He continued defensively, "Needless to say, the tapestries that I executed with the wool that I prepared myself have not changed. [...] I had many doubts about the fragility of the colors, but I was pressed by the circumstances. And besides, since that moment—you remember perhaps—, I took my

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<sup>221</sup> Emile Verhaeren, "Le Salon de la Libre Esthétique. L'Art Appliqué" *L'Art moderne* (March 18, 1894), 84.

<sup>222</sup> Alfred Darcel, "Exposition Universelle. La Tapisserie." *Le Temps*, October 31, 1878, MN G.277.

precautions to avoid, in later works, the deception that I sensed and of which this first attempt bears, alas, the unduly visible trace!”<sup>223</sup>

The initial reception and eventual fate of *Girls in a Park* point to the ethics of art making tangled within the use of age-old natural dyes versus synthetic dyes, newly developed during the second half of the nineteenth century. As Maillol’s comments to Bassères implied, synthetic dyes were seen as unreliable, unethical even, because they faded quickly and erratically. Well within his lifetime, the artificial colorants lightened or darkened so unevenly that the original levels of color contrast were completely thrown off. Conversely, the natural dyes used in medieval tapestries, which “wilted” or faded organically over a span of generations, tended to maintain more even levels of color contrast as the overall brightness of the panels passed. Fabricating his own natural dyes became for Maillol the mark of the genuine artist-artisan. *Girls in a Park* thus presents a cautionary tale of the deceptiveness of synthetic dyes.<sup>224</sup>

In subsequent works, Maillol’s research into dye formulas and techniques had progressed enough that he was able use his own dyed threads for his tapestries. *The Enchanted Garden (Le Jardin enchanté)* is characteristic of the muted, earthy palette that Maillol cultivated (Plate 45). The brownish yellows and greens are the color of leaves beginning to wither; the reds, while deeply saturated, are not brilliant and suggest the stains of berries or the pomegranates depicted in the tapestry itself. The importance of dyeing his own wool to his ethics of art making is evident in Maillol’s comments to his friend Henri Frère: “I found tones that no one knew about.

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<sup>223</sup> Bassères, *Maillol mon ami*, 78-79.

<sup>224</sup> That is not to say that Maillol didn’t value the work. It was in fact of great sentimental value to him, as it was his first major tapestry. It had been bought by Charles Archbold-Aspol for 300 francs sometime before the 1894 Libre Esthétique exhibition—he is listed in the catalogue as the owner—and Maillol bought it back about thirty years later from the Galerie Druet for 6000 francs. See Bassères, *Maillol mon ami*, 78 and Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 54.

It's a very interesting métier, you know, when you do it yourself like I did. I made real tapestry. I did it all. Painters like Dufy...can't say that they make tapestry. They make tapestry cartoons and then have them executed."<sup>225</sup> This is somewhat of an exaggeration as Maillol didn't execute his own designs, a subject that I will discuss later. Nevertheless, the sentiment is clear that making his own materials from nature was a crucial part of creating art, separating the true artist from the false one. *The Enchanted Garden* is made from wool not only dyed by Maillol, but also supposedly purchased directly from shepherds in Roussillon and spun by local peasant women.<sup>226</sup>

In his choice of colors and dedication to using local, natural materials, Maillol again set himself in opposition to the Gobelins. He alleged that a chemist from the manufactory said to him, "Your dyes are more beautiful than ours." Maillol continued, "That wasn't surprising. Today, no one knows how to dye nor to spin; the French Revolution guillotined the majority of artisans. This remark from the chemist was the only encouragement I ever received from the Gobelins."<sup>227</sup> This possibly apocryphal exchange nevertheless reveals that Maillol's ethics of handcraft must be understood in the context of the manufactory's procurement and use of raw materials.

During the 1890s Maillol and the general public believed that the Gobelins was using unstable synthetic dyes to obtain a range of artificial colors inappropriate for the decorative simplicity of tapestry. In an 1897 article in the *Chronique industrielle*, the author, Maurice

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<sup>225</sup> Frère, *Conversations de Maillol*, 205.

<sup>226</sup> Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 47, 53.

<sup>227</sup> Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 49. Maillol expressed a similar sentiment in a letter to Maurice Guillemot [1894 or 1895], "Les tapisseries des Gobelins, de Beauvais, et d'Aubusson sont tellement loin de l'art que l'on peut dire que la tapisserie était morte à la révolution." Transcribed in *Autographes*, Hôtel Drouot, lot 36.

Lafuge, spends a large part of the article defending the Gobelins from accusations of employing the synthetic dye aniline, and differentiating the manufactory from the modern textile industry. Aniline, specifically in the form of a mauve dye, was discovered in England in 1856 by William Henry Perkin, who then developed it for industrial production.<sup>228</sup> There ensued a craze for bright, chemical colors and the invention of other synthetic dyes such as alizarin, quinones, and tartrazine. By the late nineteenth century, however, aniline dyes proved to be fugitive, fading with exposure to light far more quickly than solid natural dyes like madder or indigo. Synthetic dyes then became suspect and associated with poor quality, mass-manufactured, cheap products. Lafuge lamented that in a generation, “The high- and low-warp tapestries fabricated by modern industry will only be faded figures [*chiffres fanés*].”<sup>229</sup> The unnaturally faded appearance of aniline dyes is understood here as a blight of modern technology. Maillol expressed the same sentiment in his notes for his unrealized book on tapestry: “in 100 years where will modern fabrics be, they will all have become the same color.”<sup>230</sup>

As Lafuge pointed out, the Gobelins continued to use traditional, natural dyes in the late nineteenth century—mainly madder, cochineal, weld, and indigo.<sup>231</sup> These dyes had been classified by Jean-Baptiste Colbert in the seventeenth century as the *grand teints*, the high-quality, solid dyes that the Gobelins was only allowed to use, as opposed to the more fugitive *petit teints*, such as the turmeric or fustic that are the cause of the notoriously faded yellows of

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<sup>228</sup> For a history of the synthetic dye industry, see Travis, *Rainbow Makers* and Nieto-Galan, *Colouring Textiles*, chap. 6

<sup>229</sup> Maurice Lafuge, “La Teinture des Laines à la Manufacture des Gobelins,” *Chronique Industrielle*, January 16, 1897, MN G.184

<sup>230</sup> “dans 100 ans ou seront les étoffes modernes toutes seront devenues de la même couleur,” fol. 6, *Notes sur la tapisserie*, Musée Maillol.

<sup>231</sup> See also Guignet to Gerspach, July 23, 1892: “Les matières tinctoriales les plus usitées sont toujours la garance, la cochenille, la gaude, l’indigo.” MN Box 57, Dossier 25.

Rococo tapestries. During the 1890s, the Gobelins added some synthetic dyes, such as quinolone and tartrazine yellow, to replace these impermanent colors.<sup>232</sup> These artificial colorants were more resistant than aniline dyes, yet the mere knowledge that the Gobelins were buying synthetic dyes from outside sources, including the German company Badische, which had cornered the synthetic dye market by the late nineteenth century, was enough to mar their reputation. In 1892, Charles-Ernest Guignet, then the director of dyes, had to write a report to Édouard Gerspach detailing the exact provenance of all the workshop's materials in response to persistent bad press. Guignet notes that he is forced to purchase alizarin from Badische because no French company is manufacturing this colorant.<sup>233</sup> In the 1890s then, there was a perception that the Gobelins had unscrupulously given into fashion and commerce and debased their tapestries, these objects of French patrimony, with tawdry, foreign chemicals.

Even the wool, this fundamental material of tapestry, was tainted by commerce with foreigners. The Gobelins bought all of their wool in the marketplace. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, this meant that the fibers were of indeterminate provenance and uneven in quality; for example, the wools of different races of sheep were mixed together, or the wools of dead or sick sheep were mixed with those of healthy animals. Such adulteration became a major problem in the dye vats. Different kinds of wool react differently to the same dyes; thus, the mingling of various wools in the same threads meant that the threads dyed in the same bath for the same amount of time would not necessarily be of the same tonality throughout. The dwindling quality of the wool was a well-known problem during the fin-de-siècle, and it was

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid. See also Guignet, "Observations du Directeur des Teintures sur le Ms. Fr. 11183 de la Bibliothèque nationale," November 1894, p. 2, MN Box 57.

<sup>233</sup> Guignet to Gerspach, July 23, 1892, MN Box 57, Dossier 25.

blamed on foreign imports, specifically the use of Australian wool.<sup>234</sup> In 1895, Jules Guiffrey began urgently working on obtaining wool solely from a French source—a sheepfold in Rambouillet.<sup>235</sup>

The Gobelins was one of the pillars of French art and its very visible decline during the nineteenth century was cause for consternation. Foreign products, and especially synthetic dyes, were an easy scapegoat. Not only did the dye industry originate in England and become dominated by Germany, but its very industrial nature seemed incompatible with the artisanal work of making tapestry. Synthetic dyes encountered more resistance in France than in England (despite Morris who fabricated his own dyes) or Germany because of a real concern with its impact on the *métier* of dyeing. Artificial colorants were unadulterated and came pre-made as a pure color, like the parallel development of tube paints to be squeezed directly onto the artist's palette. They required very little skill or knowledge to use, unlike dealing with the variables of organic material and the minute adjustments and almost intuitive understanding of color that this entailed. With the advent of synthetic dyes, the craft of dyeing threatened to die out and be replaced by industrial science. The tension between luxury craft and industrialization culminated in the 1890s. France's inability to keep up with England and Germany's manufacturing prowess during the *fin-de-siècle* resulted in protectionist policies, such as a tax on foreign imports in 1892, and redirected attention to France's traditional strengths, namely pre-industrial handcraft such as tapestry making.

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<sup>234</sup> Henri Vuagneux, "Les Tapisseries de l'État," *Le Temps*, January 29, 1895, MN G.184.

<sup>235</sup> Guiffrey to Henry Roujon, Minister of Fine Arts, April 1, 1895, MN Box 57, Dossier 32.

Maillol's ethics of art making must be seen within this context. It was part of the nationalist and retrogressive turn to luxury craft as France struggled to adapt to the changing socio-economic landscape brought about by industrialization. In other words, Maillol was contributing to a larger attempt to restore France's primacy in crafted goods. Not only were England and Germany surpassing them in machine-made ones, the former was beginning to rival them in artistic handcraft with the growing international reputation of William Morris. If the Gobelins were failing in the nationalist effort by tainting an artisanal process with industrial products, Maillol would maintain the French standard by wholeheartedly embracing the Nabi medievalist ethos of handcraft.

Maillol taught himself how to dye wool, supposedly with an old manual of recipes and the help of a dyer in Barcelona.<sup>236</sup> A son of Catalonia, Maillol had cultural ties to its capital city and visited Barcelona often. Barcelona was in fact one of the main centers for dye fabrication, part of what the scholar Agustí Nieto-Galan calls the "Republic of chemist-dyers."<sup>237</sup> In this unofficial, tacit, European network, formulas and advice, knowledge and tradition, were passed on from artisan to artisan. The craft of dyeing was almost like alchemy in its highly secretive nature. Maillol tapped into this clandestine community and subscribed to its devotion to the craft process. He cared immensely about the quality and origin of the materials he used. He spent an enormous amount of time scavenging for plants in the mountains and fields around his hometown Banyuls-sur-Mer—nestled between the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean—and experimenting with different formulas to create solid, deeply saturated, and earthy colors. To

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<sup>236</sup> Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 48-49.

<sup>237</sup> Nieto-Galan, *Colouring Textiles*, chap. 4.

test their stability, he would nail samples of his dyed wools to the outside of his house, exposing them to the sun, rain, and sea air for a period of six months.

The local origin of his natural dyes was vital to his image as an artist whose work stemmed not just from nature, but more specifically from the Catalan soil. For example, instead of using cochineal from Mexico or the Canary Islands like the Gobelins did to concoct crimson dyes,<sup>238</sup> Maillol employed kermes from the eponymous insects that live on the kermes oak trees native to the Mediterranean region. Weld, used to make yellow dyes, grew in northern France, but not in the Pyrenees; Maillol therefore tried extracting his yellows from the indigenous *inula viscosa*.<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, he employed the local flora in innovative combinations. Another Mediterranean plant, *daphne gnidium*, is usually used for yellows or greens, however Maillol claims to have combined it with iron sulfate to get a pearly gray.<sup>240</sup> Dyeing wool, and then producing tapestry from these hand-wrought materials, was for Maillol as close to creating from nature as he could get. Indeed, these fruits of his labor, baked in the sun, were described by Marc Lafargue as “these beautiful, warm, sweet, bursting wools, like fine fruits.”<sup>241</sup> Maillol’s localist approach can be related to the protectionist economic policies of the fin-de-siècle and are a reiteration of Colbert’s strategies in the seventeenth century. As part of his attempt to promote French raw materials, Colbert encouraged the use of kermes over cochineal, despite classifying the latter as a *grand teint*.

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<sup>238</sup> Guignet to Gerspach, July 23, 1892, MN Box 57, Dossier 25.

<sup>239</sup> This dye proved to be too fugitive and Maillol ended up obtaining weld around Paris. See Frère, *Conversations de Maillol*, 204 and Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 49. The point remains that he tried to use Catalan materials when possible.

<sup>240</sup> Frère, *Conversations de Maillol*, 204.

<sup>241</sup> “ces belles laines chaudes, douces, éclatantes, pareilles à de beaux fruits” Lafargue et al., 8.

*The Enchanted Garden*, with its Catalan-made threads and dyes, is exemplary not only of Maillol's regionalism but also his medievalism. The subject matter of fashionable women strolling in a garden again harkens back to *The Promenade* from *Seignorial Life*. The preparatory oil sketch for *The Enchanted Garden* reveals that Maillol made some changes that enhance the work's resemblance to millefleurs tapestries (Plate 46). The exotic birds in the pomegranate tree at the top of the composition, which are not included in the oil sketch, are reminiscent of the various birds in the fruit trees and flowers of *The Lady and the Unicorn* and *Seignorial Life*. The oil sketch shows that Maillol originally planned to have a flowering shrub cover up part of the skirt of the right-hand foreground figure. The final tapestry instead depicts the whole skirt, emphasizing the decorative linearity of the folds, which recall the crisp pleats of millefleurs figures. The depiction of the folds of the women's dresses as flat, layered patterns is heightened by the treatment of shading as intentionally coarse hatching. This archaizing technique, as well as the detailing of the belts and shoulder lines with gold thread, also allude to medieval tapestry.

*The Enchanted Garden* is dated to the mid 1890s for its original conception even though it probably wasn't exhibited until the 1899 Salon du Champ-de-Mars.<sup>242</sup> This work is generally held up as the exemplar of Maillol's medievalist tapestry in scholarship today. However, if *The Enchanted Garden* was not actually completed and exhibited until the end of the 1890s, it was not his most publicly known tapestry at the time. Maillol instead exhibited two other historicist

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<sup>242</sup> In a letter from Maillol to Maurice Guillemot dated to 1898, the artist mentions finishing a tapestry two meters high (Kramer, "Aristide Maillol," 47). *The Enchanted Garden* measures 1.9m in length and was likely the work listed as no. 288 "Le jardin (tapisserie)" in the Salon catalogue. Kramer believes that Maillol was working on the tapestry in 1894 and meant to send it to the Libre Esthétique that year.

works during the mid 1890s, one that was not successful, and another that cemented his reputation as a talented and serious tapestry maker who was reviving French tradition.

At the 1895 Champ-de-Mars, Maillol exhibited a tapestry that remains unknown. Antoinette Le Normand-Romain and Linda Konheim Kramer believe that a work entitled *Concert of Women* (*Concert des Femmes*) was shown at this Salon;<sup>243</sup> *Concert of Women* was, however, commissioned by Princess Hélène Bibesco (Plate 47). On May 3, 1895, Maillol offered the tapestry he exhibited at the Salon to the state for purchase.<sup>244</sup> It therefore could not have been *Concert of Women* as he never would have offered a work to the state that already belonged to another patron. Whatever the tapestry was that he exhibited, it was not well-received by the critics, who judged it a badly executed pastiche of ancient tapestry. Jacques-Emile Blanche wrote, “Mr. Maillol represents Gothic motifs, young girls sitting in a circle on the grass to which his patient but crude execution adds nothing really new.”<sup>245</sup> André Fontainas had far more disparaging comments: “the seductive and deceptive prettiness that gives the illusion of embroidery ... not to mention the appearance of copying the 17<sup>th</sup> century in composition, subject, design, the choice of nuances.”<sup>246</sup> The state declined to purchase this unsuccessful tapestry and unlike their refusal in 1893, they did not offer Maillol any more monetary aid.

This was not a major setback for the artist, however. On September 14, 1894, he wrote to József Rippl-Rónai that he had just received a commission for a tapestry for 1500 francs, which

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<sup>243</sup> Monery and Le Normand-Romain, *Maillol*, 31; Kramer, “Aristide Maillol,” 51.

<sup>244</sup> AN F21/4324

<sup>245</sup> “M. Maillol représente des motifs gothiques, jeunes filles assise en rond sur l’herbe, auxquels son exécution patiente mais fruste n’ajoute rien de très nouveau.” Jacques-Emile Blanche, “Les Objets d’art aux Salons” *La Revue Blanche* 7 (May 1895): 466.

<sup>246</sup> “...la mignardise alluciante et trompeuse jusqu’à faire illusion de broderie des tapisseries de Mr. Maillol, et je ne parle pas de l’apparence de copies du XVII<sup>e</sup> s. qu’elles ont par la composition, le sujet, le dessin, le choix des nuances.” Notes and comments of André Fontainas, April 26, 1895, cited in Houssais, “André Fontainas,” 101.

was presumably *Concert of Women*.<sup>247</sup> He was therefore already gaining traction as a tapestry maker. Moreover in 1896, he exhibited a work at the Champ-de-Mars called *The Book (Le Livre)* that was critically acclaimed (Plate 48). Thadée Natanson enthused, “The arrangement, the harmony, the accord of the chosen color scales with the gravity of the subject and these beautiful greens, reds, yellows, pale tones, so ingeniously distributed, acknowledging the folds, and the metallic highlights, all is to be praised.”<sup>248</sup> And Gustave Babin commented, “The figures in his panel, dreamers in a garden of wilted flowers [*fleurs fanées*] are not without grace; all of this is deliberately extinguished, muted, and the result of this penchant for halftones is a certain charm.”<sup>249</sup> This tapestry is now in an unknown private collection, however based on these descriptions, *The Book* probably resembled *The Enchanted Garden* in color palette. The earthy, wilted colors made from natural dyes, coupled with the subtle sheen and richness of gold thread, effectively evoked the mystique of faded millefleurs tapestries. *The Book* was presumably more skillfully executed than the 1895 hanging and was thus Maillol’s first successful medievalist tapestry both in terms of composition and handcraft. Following the success of *The Book*, Maillol requested that the state commission a tapestry from him to decorate one of the national palaces.<sup>250</sup> This entreaty was, like the others, denied.

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<sup>247</sup> “l’on vient de me commander une tapisserie de 1500 francs.” Wertheimer, “Lettres d’Aristide Maillol,” 113. Edouard Vilarem, however, claimed that the Princess Bibesco paid Maillol 4000 francs for the finished work (see Kramer, “Aristide Maillol,” 51n27).

<sup>248</sup> “L’arrangement, l’harmonie, l’accord des gammes choisies avec la gravité du sujet et ces beaux verts, rouges, jaunes, pâles, si ingénieusement étendus, accusés aux plis, et les rehauts métalliques, tout est à louer.” Thadée Natanson, “L’Art des Salons” *La Revue Blanche* 10 (1896): 524.

<sup>249</sup> “Les figures de son panneau, rêveuses dans un jardin aux fleurs fanées, ne sont pas sans grâce; tout cela est volontairement éteint, assourdi, et il résulte de ce parti pris de demi-teintes quelque charme.” Gustave Babin, “La Salon du Champ-de-Mars. La Tapisserie” *L’Art décoratif moderne* (June 1896): 140.

<sup>250</sup> AN F21/4324. *The Book* already belonged to Maurice Bouchor, a long-time supporter and friend of Maillol’s.

Although he was continuously unsuccessful in his quest for official recognition, Maillol did have success with private patrons. Interestingly, many early collectors of his tapestries were literary men. *The Book* was owned by the poet and playwright Maurice Bouchor. *The Enchanted Garden* was owned by Léo Rouanet, a writer from Bézier in the Languedoc-Roussillon region best known for translating Spanish and Portuguese literature into French.<sup>251</sup> Another Roussillon compatriot, Charles Archbold-Aspol from Cette (today Sète), bought Maillol's first tapestry, *Girls in a Park*. Archbold-Aspol was a liquor merchant, however he was quite the bibliophile and was not only friends with Bouchor's poet friends, but also a founding member of the exclusive Société des Bibliophiles contemporains. This book society was founded by the art critic and aesthete Octave Uzanne as a selective group of initiates—collectors, authors, artists, and publishers—dedicated to producing limited-edition, modern luxury books. As Willa Silverman has demonstrated, these bibliophile societies were a way of creating an unabashedly elitist, closed circle of upper bourgeois bohemian homosociability.<sup>252</sup> These men of rarefied taste were constantly in search of the new, the esoteric, the unique luxury object that would distinguish them from the commercial masses. Maillol's tapestry unwittingly appealed to this aesthete culture of communal elitism.<sup>253</sup>

Maillol's most important patron, however, was a woman, Princess Bibesco. An accomplished pianist, the Romanian princess lived in Paris where she hosted a salon that was

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<sup>251</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire's obituary of Rouanet (*Mercur de France*, December 1, 1911, 660) mentions that he owned tapestries by Maillol, though he mistakenly says they were woven with wool sent by the queen of Romania.

<sup>252</sup> Silverman, *New Bibliopolis*, 12, 91-99.

<sup>253</sup> I say unwittingly because *The Book* depicts a practice abhorred by the gentleman-bibliophile: female reading. Silverman discusses how women were seen as the enemy of the book and that the practice of female collective reading while doing domestic activities (such as needlework) was disdained by the "Biblios-contempos" (*New Bibliopolis*, 168-72).

frequented by composers, such as Claude Debussy and Charles Gounod, and artists, including Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard. It is through Vuillard, who was close friends with the princess's sons Antoine and Emmanuel, that Maillol met Hélène Bibesco. She commissioned two tapestries from Maillol, *Concert of Women* and *Music for a Bored Princess (Musique pour une princesse qui s'ennuie)* (Plate 49).<sup>254</sup> The former takes the subject of *The Book*—women sitting in a circle in a garden—and transposes it into a subject more fitting for a musician-princess who hosted an artistic salon; instead of women reading a book, the tapestry depicts women making music. Three women play lutes or mandolins to entertain a fourth who presides over them and looks out at the viewer. The figures and composition can be related to *The Bath of Seignorial Life* (Plate 50). The kneeling musician at right in *Concert of Women* is a reversed version of the woman playing the lute in *The Bath*, and both tapestries feature a circular composition with the central axis marked by a tree.

The palette of *Concert of Women*, however, is different from the medievalist tints of *The Enchanted Garden* and, presumably, *The Book*. Although the preparatory oil sketch for *Concert of Women* features the same rich earthiness of tone found in Maillol's other tapestries (Plate 51), the final work is characterized by a pale blondness, as of a tapestry bleached by sunlight. This was perhaps a different interpretation of the notion of *fané* on Maillol's part, or it might be

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<sup>254</sup> The dating of these works is quite contested. Most scholars date both panels to various years in the mid-late 1890s. Berger ("Plus beau qu'un tableau," 35-36, 185), however, dates them both to 1902. She believes that the tapestry mentioned in the September 1894 letter to Rónai is now unknown. Her dating is based on the assumption that Vuillard didn't know the Bibesco princes before 1900 and on the fact that Maillol exhibited *Concert des femmes* at his 1902 Vollard show. However, Groom has argued that Vuillard could have known the princes at least by February 1895 (*Édouard Vuillard*, 150), though admittedly this dating still doesn't prove that the 1894 commission was indeed *Concert des femmes*. At any rate, Maillol exhibited other tapestries from the mid 1890s at his Vollard show—*Le Livre* and *Le Jardin enchanté*—therefore, he was not just showing new work. Furthermore, the woman looking out at the viewer in *Concert des femmes* is clearly based on an 1894 portrait of Mme Maillol now in the collection of the Musée Maillol (see Lorquin, *Aristide Maillol*, 23).

evidence of some influence from Paul Ranson, who favored these lighter colors for his tapestries. Ranson's threads, however were synthetically dyed. The curatorial files of the Designmuseum, Copenhagen, where the Bibesco tapestry is now held, confirm that the wool was handspun and the dyes were made from plants; madder was identified as one of the dye sources. In certain sections of *Concert of Women*—such as in the shadow under the eyebrow of the woman looking out, the soundboard of the central mandolin, or the tree trunks—the nuanced coloring is achieved by using the *chiné* technique, double-ply wool threads that have been twisted from two different colored strands (Plates 52a-b). Such effects were only possibly with handmade threads and attest to Maillol's careful attention to color and close supervision of wool preparation.

*Music for a Bored Princess* was commissioned several years after *Concert of Women*. It was perhaps the tapestry exhibited on a rod or in a wood frame at the 1897 Champ-de-Mars.<sup>255</sup> The panel presents the same subject as *Concert of Women* but in a different composition. Three lute players, depicted as one mass as if they were carved from one block of wood, serenade a languid woman who is separated from them by a winding path. Scholars have speculated as to why the princess would have commissioned two such similar tapestries that do not hang together as pendants. It is known that Princess Bibesco convinced Queen Elizabeth of Romania to purchase one of Maillol's tapestries; the artist himself tells this story to Dr. Bassères.<sup>256</sup> The

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<sup>255</sup> The Salon catalogue lists the work as “tapisserie avec tringle,” which would translate to “tapestry on a rod.” Kramer, however, believes it was a wooden frame based on Cladel's assertion that *Musique pour une princesse* was exhibited on an easel (Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 54; Kramer, “Aristide Maillol,” 62).

<sup>256</sup> Bassères, *Maillol mon ami*, 81.

queen thus perhaps purchased *Concert of Women* and the princess commissioned *Music* to replace it.<sup>257</sup>

Despite the additional patronage, Maillol was still chronically short of money; the materials used to make *Music* perhaps attest to this fact. The wool threads are much coarser than those used for *Concert of Women*, though one could argue that this material choice supported an archaizing aesthetic. However, in the borders of *Music*, thin, machine-spun wool threads are mixed in with handspun ones.<sup>258</sup> Given Maillol's ethics of handcraft, this infiltration of industrial products is possibly a sign of compromises forced by pecuniary troubles.

In any event, by 1899 this was certainly the case. On January 21, 1899 Daniel de Monfreid records in his journal that he spent twelve francs on an antique door curtain (*portière*) for Maillol to unravel and use the wool because his friend is penniless.<sup>259</sup> Monfreid, as he did with Gauguin, acted as a sort of agent, personal banker and shopper for Maillol when he wasn't in Paris, facilitating the sale of his works, lending him money, and picking up art supplies for him. In 1899, Maillol had thus returned to a practice from the beginning of his tapestry career when he had no patrons and no funding. Evidently, obtaining handspun wool, making natural

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<sup>257</sup> Berger ("Plus beau qu'un tableau," 31), on the contrary, thinks that the queen's tapestry is a different (unidentified) one and Hoog ("Maillol peintre," 257) believes that she purchased *Musique pour une princesse*, not *Concert des Femmes*. Queen Elizabeth of Romania, however, is not listed in the provenance of either tapestry in the Designmuseum's curatorial files. Even more confusingly, Dina Vierny claims that the queen commissioned *Concert des Femmes* herself in 1894 and was the one who gave Maillol 1500 francs as mentioned in the letter to Rónai. (Dina Vierny to Gabriel Badea-Păun, June 11, 2005, Tapestry Documentation, box 1, Musée Maillol). Interestingly, Queen Elizabeth of Romania was an honorary chair of the Société des bibliophiles contemporains, of which Archbold-Aspol was a member, so it is not wholly impossible that she could have heard of Maillol as a tapestry maker by 1894 and through channels other than the Princess Bibesco. The queen wrote poetry under the pen name of Carmen Sylva.

<sup>258</sup> Curatorial file, Designmuseum, Copenhagen. There is no indication that this was from a later repair.

<sup>259</sup> "Nous dînons avec les Maillol, et leur achetons une tenture de Caramanie dont ils veulent se défaire, étant sans le sou. [...] À Maillol, portière caramanie 12,00." Notebooks of Georges Daniel de Monfreid, Documentation Center, Musée d'Orsay

dyes, and dyeing threads himself was an extremely expensive and ultimately unsustainable undertaking. Maillol had to cut corners in order to continue his work as a tapestry maker. He did not, however, have Monfreid purchase him new, synthetically dyed threads from the Bon Marché. Rather, he chose the more painstaking route of unraveling old tapestry, which would at least provide him with handspun, naturally dyed wool.

Hélène Bibesco would come to Maillol's rescue one last time. Monfreid records accompanying Maillol to lunch with the Bibesco family on April 14, 1900. Perhaps a new commission was discussed at this meeting; for in 1901, the princess's sons, along with Vuillard, stopped by Banyuls-sur-Mer to drop off wool from Romania during their trip to Spain.<sup>260</sup> As further evidence, in a letter of November 1902, Maillol tells Rónai that he had a high-warp loom constructed and will begin weaving a new tapestry.<sup>261</sup> This tapestry, however, remained unfinished. Maillol only wove a third of it before abandoning it, supposedly due to an ocular problem that left him nearly blind in his right eye for several months over the winter of 1903-04. It is unclear what the problem was and Maillol attributed it to working on tapestry by lamplight in the evenings.<sup>262</sup> Interestingly, fabricating dyes with daphne gnidium was known to be bad for the eyes in the seventeenth century,<sup>263</sup> though Maillol was probably unaware of this danger. Regardless, Maillol's sudden abandonment of this tapestry, and of the vocation all together, could not have been only due to eye strain; he did after all regain his sight and continued to work

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<sup>260</sup> Groom, *Édouard Vuillard*, 150; Berger, "Plus beau qu'un tableau," 35.

<sup>261</sup> "Je fais faire un immense métier de gobelins et je veux commencer une tapisserie." Wertheimer, "Lettres d'Aristide Maillol," 114. A drawing in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen (I.N. 2774), is identified as a preparatory sketch for this last tapestry.

<sup>262</sup> Maillol to Octave Mirbeau, 1903 or 1904: "savez-vous que je suis resté aveugle pendant deux mois? j'avais trop travaillé c'est probablement le travail de nuit qui m'a fatigué la vue. J'ai du abandonner ... une tapisserie, tout mon hiver perdu..." Transcribed in Hôtel Drouot, December 8, 1980, lot 41. See also Bassères, *Maillol mon ami*, 91.

<sup>263</sup> Dominique Cardon, *Le monde des teintures naturelles* (Paris: Belin, 2003), 155.

in other mediums. Notably, Princess Bibesco died in 1902, leaving him bereft of his main patron. More significantly, this final, unfinished tapestry was the first and last that Maillol attempted to fabricate himself.

Although Maillol identified himself as a tapestry maker, he did not actually make his own tapestries. His companion and then wife, Clotilde Narcisse, her sister Angélique, as well as other women in Banyuls-sur-Mer stitched his designs. We could compare this system to the embroidery workshop of Morris & Co.<sup>264</sup> Morris taught himself to embroider in order to understand the technique so as to be able to design for the medium. Nonetheless, he did not execute his own designs for Morris & Co. and instead had his designs embroidered by his wife, daughters, other female relatives, and wives of other Morris & Co. associates. His daughter May eventually took over the successful embroidery workshop. Most interestingly, some commissions were embroidered by the patronesses themselves, such as those by Lady Bell (née Margaret Pattinson), wife of Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell, and her daughters Florence and Ada. This practice confirmed the highborn nature of the work, as well as the custom of stitching amongst an intimate circle. Perhaps because the work was being done by his social peers and superiors, Morris respected the embroiderers of his firm as craftspeople, even though he ultimately considered the labor feminine.

Maillol, by contrast, displayed a more misogynist attitude towards this gendered work. He said to Maurice Guillemot, “I invented a stitch of such great simplicity that I can have my tapestries executed by *the least intelligent* women.”<sup>265</sup> Unlike Morris, Maillol never made a

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<sup>264</sup> The following is taken from Parry, *William Morris Textiles*, 10-35.

<sup>265</sup> “J’ai inventé un point d’une simplicité très grande de telle façon que je puis faire exécuter mes tapisseries par des femmes *les moins intelligentes*.” Maillol to Guillemot [1893]. Transcribed in Hôtel Drouot, January 30, 1980, lot 37.

needlepoint hanging on his own. Nevertheless, the discrepancy evidently bothered him and he felt the need to justify or compensate for it. He emphasizes to Guillemot, “I directed my tapestry, I dictated the tones to the workers while all the while I worked on the large-scale design for execution.”<sup>266</sup> I believe that this statement can be understood not only as a declaration of male leadership and superiority, but also as revealing an insecurity about the legitimacy of his claim to being a tapestry maker.

While various women made his tapestries, Maillol not only worked on tapestry cartoons, he also started carving wood reliefs. He clearly felt the need to participate in the creation process in some fashion. To Harry Kessler, he said specifically that he turned to sculpture because if he wanted to execute his tapestries himself, he would be “crushed by work.” He therefore had to delegate the mechanical but important tasks of stitching to others.<sup>267</sup> It is no surprise then that after a decade of working in this way with needlepoint, he finally bought a high-warp loom and taught himself to weave, as suggested by the 1902 letter to Rónai cited above (Plate 53). Ultimately, Maillol wanted to create real tapestry, not needlepoint hangings, a desire latent in his choice of materials and techniques: the silk, metallic threads, and the custom-colored two-ply threads; the straight stitches that give the impression of woven wefts.

It is worth noting that tapestry weavers at the Gobelins were customarily male, as opposed to the female tradition of amateur needlework.<sup>268</sup> At Merton Abbey, too, only young

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<sup>266</sup> “je dirige ma tapisserie, je dicte les tons aux ouvrières pendant que je travaille toujours le dessin grandeur d’exécution.” Cited in Maurice Guillemot, “Aristide Maillol,” *Le Carnet des Artistes*, 16 (Sept 15, 1917), 11.

<sup>267</sup> “écrasé par le travail,” Kessler journal, August 23, 1904, Musée Maillol.

<sup>268</sup> In the 1890s, this gendered division was apparently changing, leading to some ambivalence and misogynist grumbings. The journalist Gaston Stiegler commented, “Les femmes empiètent aujourd'hui sur les métiers des hommes; mais il me semble qu'aux Gobelins les hommes ont bien empiété sur ceux des femmes, car on s'étonne de ne pas voir des artistes en jupons devant ces trames.” “Aux Gobelins,” *Echo de Paris*, July 29, 1892, MN G.278.

boys were hired and trained as weavers, as opposed to the exclusively female embroidery workshop. Maillol was, it seems, trapped by gender stereotypes. And yet, his self-portrait drawing (Plate 41) shows him performing a menial task—skeining or plying threads—that was usually relegated to a female worker. Perhaps in the end, Maillol abandoned tapestry because he didn't possess the skill to weave them, and the discrepancy between his ethics of handcraft and the reality of his tapestry production was too self-contradictory to continue.

## CHAPTER 5. Paul Ranson: Tapestry and Collectivity

Paul Ranson did not share Maillol's commitment to natural materials and assiduous artisanship. His wife, France Ranson, bought wool threads from the Bon Marché to execute his designs. They were therefore commercially spun and synthetically dyed, far from the custom-colored, two-ply threads that gave such nuanced tones to Maillol's works. Ranson was apparently content with a more graphic approach to color than Maillol's, as well as the uniform texture of one kind of wool, in contrast to the silk, metallic threads, and different kinds of wool that Maillol employed. Hippolyte Fiérens-Gevaert noticed Ranson's lack of attention to materials and judged his wools to be "sampled with little care."<sup>269</sup> In addition, Ranson's pale blond yet synthetic palette received mixed reviews. Gustave Soulier found one of his tapestries, *Spring (Printemps)* "rather poor in tonality" while Octave Maus praised the harmony of "the tones of dried leaves, golden yellow, steel grey, hazelnut" (Plate 54)<sup>270</sup> After seeing Ranson and Maillol's tapestries hung at the same Salon, Gauguin supposedly told the latter that Ranson's colors were not beautiful; Maillol didn't necessarily agree, as I suggested earlier with the curious change in palette of *Concert of Women*.<sup>271</sup>

In any case, the stitching of Ranson's tapestries is much simpler and coarser than Maillol's, despite the latter's claim to have simplified the needlework for his unintelligent workers. These coarse stitches were particularly noticed by critics as a hallmark of Ranson's

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<sup>269</sup> "échantillonnées avec peu de soin," Fiérens-Gevaert, "Tapisseries et broderies," *Art et Décoration*, 1 (Jan-June 1897): 85.

<sup>270</sup> Gustave Soulier, "Notes d'art: Le Salon du Champ de Mars," *L'Art et la Vie* (Aug 1897): 509; "les tons feuille-morte, jaune d'or, gris d'acier, noisette" Octave Maus, "Le Salon de la Libre Esthétique," *Art et Décoration*, 3 (March 1898): 103.

<sup>271</sup> Maillol purportedly replied that Ranson's tapestry was more original than his. Cladel, *Aristide Maillol*, 54.

tapestries. Some, such as André Fontainas, preferred them to Maillol's delicate prettiness (cited in the previous chapter); while others, like Jacque-Émile Blanche, found them too coarse.<sup>272</sup>

Ranson's work is executed entirely in either straight stitches or half cross stitches while Maillol's features a mixture of straight stiches, chain stitches, and couching of the metallic threads.

Ranson, unlike Maillol, did not necessarily aspire to make high-warp tapestry. The types of stitches used—the half-cross stitch, which is never found in Maillol's works, and the straight stitch specifically in a zigzag pattern—firmly place Ranson's works in the genre of *tapisseries à l'aiguille*. They do not try to evoke warp threads woven with a shuttle.

These differences in technique and genre, tapestry versus needlepoint, seem to map on to Maillol and Ranson's class differences. Ranson's father was the mayor of Limoges while Maillol was from a farming family, though his parents were petit bourgeois shop assistants. Ranson's wife, France, was his cousin and of equal social standing, while Clotilde was a Roussillon peasant girl. Furthermore, Clotilde was hired as a needleworker by Maillol first, and then became his companion and later his wife. France was never treated as a professional needleworker. Unlike Maillol, Ranson never referred to his wife as a worker (*ouvrière*), and not just because he probably didn't pay her. France stitching her husband's designs belonged to a completely different tradition from that of Clotilde executing Maillol's work.

France could place herself within the long line of noblewomen who did amateur embroidery as a past time, much like Lady Bell who embroidered her own commission from

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<sup>272</sup> Notes and comments of André Fontainas, April 26, 1895, cited in Houssais, "André Fontainas," 101; Jacques-Émile Blanche, "Les Objets d'art aux Salons" *La Revue Blanche* 7 (May 1895) : 466. In addition, Maurice-Pillard Verneuil commented on the "point un peu grossier, mais qui ne gêne pas trop, étant donnée la grande dimension de ses décorations." "La Décoration intérieure," 79-80. Roger Marx and Gustave Geffroy judged the stitching to be "original." Marx "Salon du Champ de Mars" *Revue encyclopédique*, no. 106 (1 May 1895): 169; Geffroy, *La vie artistique*, 1897, 376-77.

Morris & Co. In the nineteenth century, it was believed that the medieval Queen Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, made the Bayeux tapestry with the help of her ladies-in-waiting. This tradition thus ostensibly stretched back to the eleventh century. The sixteenth century, however, was the acknowledged height of aristocratic needlepoint when noblewomen would supposedly stitch designs provided by recognized artists. This textile art was well-respected in its own right and needlepoint was just as likely to decorate interiors as woven tapestry during this era.<sup>273</sup>

Notably, Queen Elizabeth of Romania also placed herself within this lineage. In an introduction to a book on lacemaking, she is pictured embroidering with her ladies-in-waiting. She writes that needlework is a luxury for the woman who could afford to stay at home, “the solitary woman who has time for reading and thinking.” She continues, “I have often pitied men ... because they are bereft of our greatest comfort—needlework. Our needlework is so much better than their smoking; it is so unobtrusive.”<sup>274</sup> Needlework in this context was thus an aristocratic, leisurely past time, associated with high-minded activities like reading and thinking. Yet the dedication of the book to the queen reads, “whose love and knowledge of the arts of the thread have never failed to encourage fellow needlewomen of all classes.” Her patronage of Maillol may thus have been as much a patronage of Clotilde. In any case, France was operating within this tradition of upper-class, amateur female needlework while Clotilde was a poor woman earning her living with conventionally female skills.

Furthermore, in the eighteenth century, Louis XV apparently started a vogue for aristocratic men to practice embroidery when he picked it up as a past time.<sup>275</sup> In that vein,

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<sup>273</sup> Privat-Savigny, *Quand les princesses*, 16, 29.

<sup>274</sup> Hoar, Katharin L. *The Art of Tatting* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), ix-x.

<sup>275</sup> Havard, *Dictionnaire*, 1214.

Ranson may have helped to stitch his own work. He writes in a letter to Maurice Denis, “the horrible weather that we are having in Le Havre has forced us to have no other occupation than to pull wool [*tirer la laine*].”<sup>276</sup> Paul and France were visiting her brother, who was the prefect of Le Havre. The implication in this letter is that both husband and wife were working on the tapestry together. By contrast, Maillol, as mentioned earlier, was never interested in needlework and instead taught himself the masculine profession of weaving. For Ranson, tapestry was a communal, albeit elite medium. It was not an expression of handcraft, but of an elite bohemian sociability, a collectivity of initiates somewhat akin to the bibliophile societies mentioned in the previous chapter. In this way it was different from Morris & Co.’s embroidery workshop, which of course was a commercial enterprise and not just an artistic one. Ranson’s first foray into the medium is indicative of his mindset.

*Alpha and Omega* is a mantle cover that was designed by Paul Ranson around 1893 (Plate 55). It was stitched by Laure Lacombe, the mother of the Nabi sculptor Georges Lacombe, allegedly with the help of the poet Auguste Cazalis.<sup>277</sup> *Alpha and Omega* is thus an example of collective work executed by a tight group of family and friends, a theme that is reflected in the work’s subject matter. It recounts the Nabis’ genesis as a biblical narrative in the form of a group portrait. Cézanne, one of their progenitors, is God in majesty flanked by Sérusier with his palette on the right, and Cazalis with a tome on the left. These two friends played a significant role in the founding of the group: Sérusier’s painting, *The Talisman*, was the philosophical and aesthetic origin point of the brotherhood; Cazalis devised the name “Nabi,”

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<sup>276</sup> “l’affreux temps que nous avons au Havre nous force à n’avoir guère d’autre occupation que de tirer la laine.” Ranson to Denis, n.d. [spring or summer 1894], Maurice Denis correspondence, MMD, Ms 12595.

<sup>277</sup> Levy-Gormezano, “Paul Élie Ranson,” 28. Laure Lacombe was an artist in her own right, see Catherine Gendre, ed. *Laure Lacombe 1834-1924*, exh. cat., (Versailles: Musée Lambinet, 1984).

from the Hebrew word for prophets, “Nebiim.” The monogram of Lacombe sits right below Cézanne’s feet. The other figures have not been firmly identified, but also probably represent various associates of the Nabi circle in the guise of angels and saints. This extremely esoteric work, filled with pagan and hermetic symbols, was at least partly in jest. Ranson was a farceur and a satirist who would have felt perfectly comfortable making fun of himself and his friends. In the letter to Denis cited above, Ranson must have enjoyed the double entendre of *tirer la laine*, which was an idiomatic expression that meant “to pickpocket.” The image of Paul and France pickpocketing the haute bourgeoisie of Le Havre was farcical indeed.

*Alpha and Omega* is characteristic of Ranson’s over-the-top, half-joking occultism, which was not only a product of his very real interest and knowledge of Theosophy and other mystical ideas in fashion at the time, but also a way to create a sense of secret brotherhood. Laura Morowitz and William Vaughan have studied the structures and motivations of artistic brotherhoods in the nineteenth century, as opposed to artistic schools or societies; one of the distinguishing characteristics is an acknowledged secrecy complete with private rituals, dress, and language.<sup>278</sup> Ranson spearheaded this aspect of the Nabis. He bestowed a sobriquet on several of his brethren; for example, Maurice Denis was known as the “Nabi of beautiful icons,” and Pierre Bonnard was the “Japoniste Nabi.” His letters are full of inside jokes, secret references, esoteric symbols, and signed with some version of the ritual closing “En ta paume mon verbe et ma Pensée” (in your palm, my word and my thought).<sup>279</sup> He hosted the Nabis’

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<sup>278</sup> Morowitz and Vaughan, *Artistic Brotherhoods*, 5.

<sup>279</sup> See for example the letters transcribed in Bitker, *Paul Ranson*, 392-403.

weekly meetings in his apartment, which he dubbed “The Temple” and France, “The Light of the Temple.”

We can see similar strategies in the fin-de-siècle book society. For example, an 1896 luxury book on bibliophilia depicts entrance into a bibliophile society as a ritual initiation into a temple;<sup>280</sup> these temples sometimes had exceptional membership for women, such as Queen Elizabeth of Romania, who was an honorary chair of the Société des bibliophiles contemporains. I bring up this comparison as a way of contextualizing the seemingly contradictory combination of collectivity and elitism that characterized Ranson’s working mode. However, unlike the bibliophile societies, the Nabi brotherhood did not discriminate based on class but based on artistic sensibility.

Ranson supposedly did attempt to set up a tapestry workshop at some point, in which his designs would be executed by needleworkers. That venture failed, however, because it was not financially viable, according to art critic François Thiébaud-Sisson.<sup>281</sup> I would also argue that such a model didn’t fit Ranson’s conception of the medium. Tapestry was a communal art form, a way of reinforcing a sense of exclusivity and belonging to an intimate artistic circle. Like theater, which was another major occupation of the Nabis during the 1890s, tapestry required collaboration and emphasized the group’s identity as a brotherhood.<sup>282</sup> Claire Frèches-Thory has argued that Ranson’s experiences designing theater décors naturally led him to designing

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<sup>280</sup> Silverman, *New Bibliopolis*, 19-20.

<sup>281</sup> Preface to *Vente Paul Ranson*, Hôtel Drouot, June 7, 1909, vi.

<sup>282</sup> For Nabis work in theater, see Mauner, *Nabis, their History*, chap. 4; Prelinger and Boyer, *Nabis and the Parisian Avant-garde*; Patricia Eckert Boyer, *Artists and the Avant-garde Theater in Paris, 1887-1900: The Martin and Liane W. Atlas Collection*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1998); Kuenzli, *Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, 71-82.

tapestry.<sup>283</sup> The décors that the Nabis created together emphasized a flattened, two-dimensional view of the stage in which the actors and background seemed to merge into one plane. Two of Ranson's tapestries, *Four Figures Reading a Scroll* (*Quatre personnages lisant un rouleau*) and *Spring* look as if they represent figures artfully placed on a stage set (Plates 54, 56). The scholar Francine Lévy-Gormezano even described the landscape in the latter as stage flats.<sup>284</sup> Ranson's background in theater may have not only influenced his tapestry formally, but also may have provided an ideal model for artistic production. In any case, instead of a tapestry workshop where he dictated to workers as Maillol did, Ranson set up an art academy shortly before he died where many of the Nabis worked together as instructors. This attempt to recapture the spirit of an artistic family attests to the importance of brotherhood to Ranson's artistic practice until the very end.

That is not to say that Ranson viewed his tapestries as solely private productions that were an exercise in collective work rather than an expression of his artistic ideas. In fact, Ranson exhibited his tapestries more than any of the other Nabis. Between 1894 and 1898, he exhibited examples every year at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars as well as at several other venues. In 1895 alone, he exhibited *Woman in a Cape* (*Femme à la Cape*) at the Libre Esthétique in February; *Four Figures Reading a Scroll* at the Salon in April; and *Woman in a Cape* again at the inauguration of Siegfried Bing's gallery, the Maison de l'Art Nouveau in December (Plate 57). Ranson sought state patronage and recognition only once, in that busy year of 1895. He

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<sup>283</sup> Frèches-Thory, "Paul Élie Ranson, un art décoratif," in Delannoy, *Paul Élie Ranson*, 17.

<sup>284</sup> Lévy-Gormezano in Delannoy, *Paul Élie Ranson*, 127

offered *Four Figures* to the ministry of Fine Arts after it was exhibited at the Salon.<sup>285</sup> It was rejected and Ranson never seemed to have offered any of his tapestries again, unlike Maillol who was indefatigable in his entreaties to the ministry.

Ranson instead seems to have sought more rarefied private patrons, given the venues in which he exhibited his tapestries. The Libre Esthétique, while a public salon, was a showcase for more experimental art. As for private venues, Ranson exhibited his tapestries in three different galleries that catered to a more discerning clientele with avant-garde taste: Bing's in 1895, Vollard's in 1897, and the Maison Moderne of Julius Meier-Graefe in 1900. Furthermore, several letters to the art entrepreneur André Marty reveal that Ranson exhibited his tapestries in either the offices of *Le Figaro* or a space sponsored by them.<sup>286</sup> Lastly, he sent his then decade-old tapestries to the innovative and rebellious Salon d'automne in 1908. Ranson was therefore very actively seeking patronage of his tapestries amongst a certain artistically progressive set, as if seeking other initiates into his intimate bohemian circle. Of course, he was not dependent on his art for his livelihood as Maillol was.

Also unlike Maillol, Ranson did not set tapestry apart from or above other decorative endeavors. His needlepoint hangings were of a piece with other forms of mural decoration, such as wallpaper or decorative paintings. In one of his letters to Marty, he mentions working in all three media simultaneously, seemingly without any distinction of artistic value. Whereas Maillol claimed to have found his expression through tapestry, for Ranson, these different media simply

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<sup>285</sup> AN F21/4336. Lévy-Gormezano ("Paul Élie Ranson," 29) claims that Ranson proposed this tapestry to the Gobelins in 1897, however I was unable to find any documentation of this in the Mobilier national archives.

<sup>286</sup> These letters, previously thought to be lost, are actually located at the Getty Research Institute: Letters and manuscripts received by André Marty, ca. 1886-1911, Special Collections, GRI, 870525. The letters are undated, however one mentions that Ranson is working on a decoration in Cette. In 1899, he executed four decorative panels for the dining room of Jules Déjean's villa in Cette, therefore it is likely that the letters date to this time.

provided different vehicles for expressing his decorative approach to the flat surface—the sinuous clarity of his organic, arabesque forms. From this perspective, it is understandable that he wasn't concerned with the details of wool spinning and dyestuffs. In his letters to Marty, Ranson expresses concern about his designs in terms of color and scale, not about the materials or in which medium his designs are executed. For example, in one letter he writes to Marty that he would like to change the format of his design from square to rectangular (50 x 50cm to 50 x 75cm) because the repetition of the motif from a distance would be disagreeable to the eye if it were square. In another letter, Ranson tells Marty that he can pick up the models that Ranson has left for him to use for either wallpaper or furnishing fabric. He writes to Marty of one of his models, “you can have it executed very easily, and I leave it at your disposal.”<sup>287</sup> One could not imagine Maillol uttering this phrase. Ranson did not exercise the control and close supervision that Maillol did as he wasn't interested in materiality or the artistic process per se; rather, he was focused on the end product as an expression of the decorative.

Based on the tapestries he exhibited, Ranson's decorative mode was epitomized by the female figure among flowers and vegetation. Although this subject is related to millefleurs tapestries, Ranson's works are not as patently medievalist as Maillol's. Instead they are related to the Art Nouveau and japoniste aesthetic of his easel paintings. Ranson tended to carry his style from medium to medium, submitting the new format to his style rather than changing his approach to suit the medium. Yet Ranson would gradually distinguish his decorative works from

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<sup>287</sup> “vous pourriez le faire exécuter sans peine, et je le tiens à votre disposition.” Letters and manuscripts received by André Marty, GRI, 870525.

his paintings in terms of narrative tone; the former were progressively emptied of the sinister and arcane penchant of Art Nouveau and Symbolism that characterizes the latter.

*Women in White (Femmes en blanc)* was the first tapestry that he exhibited (1894 Salon du Champ-de-Mars) and it retains a sense of ominous mysticism (Plate 58). Two women dressed in virginal white have just collected apples in baskets. One of the women sits on the floor next to a stray apple, holding her head as if the fruit had just fallen on her. Brigitte Ranson Bitker reads this as a symbolic representation of the punishment of Eve.<sup>288</sup> In the same vein, Geneviève Lacambre describes the scene as “a religious ritual to some unknown god.”<sup>289</sup> And yet there are hints of humorous banality that belie such portentous readings. The setting, summarily indicated by the stylized floral wallpaper and tiled floor, is a commonplace kitchen or dining room. Sprawled on the tiles, as if straight out of a standard comic gag, the young woman being hit on the head by an apple is as droll as she is biblically symbolic.

With his next tapestry, *Woman in a Cape*, Ranson continued with his biblical allusions. The caped woman, set against a background of poppies, is related to the female figures in his contemporaneous illustrated book on the life of the Virgin Mary (*Le Livre de la Vierge*) (Plate 59). Ranson in fact exhibited his tapestry alongside the illuminated letters for this book at the 1895 Champ-de-Mars, hinting at the Marian undertones of his hanging. The copy of the book on display was furnished with an exquisitely crafted binding by René Wiener, an Art Nouveau book binder who was especially favored by Octave Uzanne, the founder of the *biblios-contemplos*. *Woman in a Cape*'s similarities to *The Book of the Virgin* thus ties it to both a medieval practice

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<sup>288</sup> Bitker in Genty, *Paul Ranson*, 43.

<sup>289</sup> Lacambre in Arts Council of Great Britain, *French Symbolist Painters*, 114, cat. no. 233.

of relating tapestry design to manuscript illumination, as well as to the elite milieu of the luxury book.

In addition, the caped woman echoes the female figures in a seven-panel decoration, *Women at the Harvest (Femmes à la récolte)*, that Ranson painted for the model dining room of the Maison de l'Art Nouveau (Plate 60). As mentioned earlier, *Woman in a Cape* was exhibited at Bing's Maison. The inauguration of the Maison de l'Art Nouveau, as well as the 1895 Salon, would therefore have displayed the decorative motif of the caped woman as interpreted in two different media: both miniature and monumental at the Salon; and two monumental formats at Bing's gallery. Such an exhibition strategy emphasized the mobility of Ranson's style and motifs across artistic formats and encouraged symbolic resonances between works.

Ranson exhibited *Woman in a Cape* more than any other of his tapestries, at five or perhaps six different venues between 1895 and 1908.<sup>290</sup> He must have considered it a particularly successful tapestry and representative of his decorative philosophy. Interestingly, it remains unsigned. All of his other tapestries are signed with his monogram; moreover, the cartoon for *Woman in a Cape* bears his signature "P. Ranson." Perhaps the lack of a signature was not an oversight, but a deliberate move to not solely credit the creation of the work to Paul. It remains ostensibly anonymous, as a collective work would have in the Middle Ages.

Ranson must have also considered *Four Figures Reading a Scroll* (Plate 56) as an especially significant work, since he offered it to the state for purchase. It is his largest known tapestry, measuring more than double the width of *Women in White* or *Woman in a Cape*. Its

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<sup>290</sup> Salon de la Libre Esthétique, 1895; Maison de l'Art Nouveau, no. 549, 1895; Salon du Champ-de-Mars, no. 350, 1896; possibly at the Galerie Vollard, 1897; Maison moderne, 1900; Salon d'automne, no. 1723, 1908.

monumental size alone attests to his ambitions for the work. *Four Figures* still trades in a sense of mysticism, with its disembodied women that seem to float in their undulating robes reading an enigmatic scroll. Nevertheless, the ominous undertone of *Women in White* is here absent. Instead, the enigmatic character is balanced by the pleasing subject matter of women in a garden. The content is, in turn, overshadowed by Ranson's primary interest in the articulation of the decorative: in sinuous lines, organic forms, and the harmony of soft, delicate shades.

In his comments on the work, André Fontainas focused solely on the formal, decorative qualities of the work: "This tapestry with large figures gracefully placed against a background of pale greens and yellows is of a very beautiful effect with the contoured grace of its lines, with the rare and precious arrangement of its colors." He further records that Ranson thought "it would go well hung on the wall of a room with English furniture, with various light-colored pottery."<sup>291</sup> With *Four Figures*, Ranson was considering, perhaps more carefully than before, how the tapestry would work in a domestic interior as a long-term decoration. A subtly sinister subject would not be pleasant to live with. Furthermore, the mention of English furniture reveals that Ranson's work in tapestry was not particularly motivated by nationalistic pride like Maillol. He was more concerned with building an ensemble, whether of interior ornament or brethren, based on shared artistic sensibility. The Nabi brotherhood, like bibliophile societies, was an international coterie. Despite his request for state patronage, Ranson seemed to have ultimately desired private patronage for his tapestries. Indeed his letter to the Minister of Fine Arts reads

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<sup>291</sup> "Cette tapisserie à grandes figures gracieusement placées sur des fonds vert et jaune pâles est d'un très belle effet avec la grâce contournée de ses lignes, avec l'agencement rare et précieux de ses colorations. Ranson signalait comme elle ferait bien tenue aux murs d'une chambre aux meubles anglais, avec quelques poteries claires, variées." Notes and comments of André Fontainas, March 26, 1895, cited in Houssais, "André Fontainas," 99.

like an obligatory, rote application, as opposed to Maillol's more vehemently argued entreaty. Maillol may have encouraged Ranson to write this letter of request in the first place.

The tapestry of Ranson's that received the most critical attention was *Spring*, exhibited at the 1897 Salon du Champ-de-Mars and the 1898 Libre Esthétique (Plate 54). In his review of the former, Gustave Babin specifically mentions with relief that *Spring* has left behind the convoluted esotericism so characteristic of Ranson's painting:

M. Ranson ... no longer torments himself with taking apart symbols and haunting us with indecipherable enigmas. ... In a tapestry, M. Ranson has represented Spring under the guise of a landscape all in flower, broadly indicated, where two svelte women, undulating like the Primavera herself, the smiling figure of Botticelli, wander under the pink snow falling from branches. The touch is still large, the line is ample and elegant, and all this is left to us to contemplate without annoyances or the least appearance of a headache."<sup>292</sup>

Curiously, Babin overlooks the third female figure emerging from the landscape in the background. She completes the allusion to the Three Graces seen from the front, in profile, and from the back, found in Botticelli's Primavera. *Spring*, however, draws more from Japanese woodblock prints than classical antiquity or Renaissance paintings. Models for the elegant, undulating women among flowering trees can easily be found in ukiyo-e compositions of female figures viewing cherry blossoms. Japanese prints were of course admired by French artists for their formal qualities and Ranson was known to be an avid reader of Bing's *Le Japon artistique*, a short-lived (1888-91) but extremely influential magazine dedicated to Japanese art. A preparatory sketch for *Spring* reveals that Ranson originally planned to keep the colors closer to

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<sup>292</sup> "M. Ranson ... non plus ne se tourmente point à écarteler des symboles et ne nous obsède point d'énigmes indéchiffrables. ... Dans une tapisserie, M. Ranson a représenté le Printemps sous les apparences d'un paysage tout fleuri, indiqué à grands traits, où deux femmes sveltes, onduleuses comme la Primavera elle-même, la souriante figure de Botticelli, errent sous la neige rose tombée des ramures. La tâche est toujours large, le dessin ample et élégant, et tout cela se laisse contempler sans ennui et n'a pas la moindre allure de casse-tête." Babin, "Le Salon du Champ-de-Mars," *L'Art décoratif moderne* (July 1897): 182.

the pale greens and yellows of *Four Figures* (Plate 61). The change to a pink-and-blue palette further links the composition to the model of Japanese cherry blossom prints.

With *Spring*, France began using a stitching technique—the zigzagging straight stitches—that she would continue to use in her and Paul’s subsequent tapestries (Plate 62). This technique serves to emphasize and echo the sinuous curves of the composition. Despite Fiérens-Gevaert’s complaint cited above, the wool France used for *Spring* is much finer than that for earlier tapestries, such as *Women in White*. It presents a much smoother, almost silkier surface, in contrast with the archaizing, coarse hairiness of *Women in White*. With *Spring*, Ranson thus realizes a purely decorative work, emptied of his hallmark mysticism, in which the materials, technique, subject matter, and composition all work together to express the arabesque.

At the 1897 Champ-de-Mars, Ranson exhibited a second tapestry besides *Spring*—*Snack in the Dunes* (*Goûter dan les dunes*) (Plate 63). This was the only tapestry commission that Ranson received, from a family friend of his sister-in-law. Although the work garnered positive reviews, the private patronage that Ranson coveted resulted in an essentially bourgeois portrait of children, the type of work that Sérusier had earlier scorned as prostituting art. Evidently, this family friend did not share the sensibilities of the initiates of the Temple. To create the composition, Ranson worked from casual snapshots taken outdoors of the children of this family, as well as from posed photographs of France in his studio (Plates 64a-b). France served as the model for the female figures bracketing the composition at left and right; one can perhaps read the embroidering woman at right as a self-referential figure, implicating her role in the creation of the work. The zigzag stitching supports the formal program of sinuous lines that make up the trees, dunes, and clothing of the figures. The end product, however, of this awkward

combination of the patron's and artist's desires; of the anecdotal and the decorative; of photographs and the exigencies of the arabesque, is a curious mismatch in scale and narrative: the maternal figures seem oversized, cramped by the trees, and remain strangely unaffected by the wind tousling the dress of the little girl.

France stopped executing Paul's cartoons after the birth of their son in September 1898. Their last tapestry was the appropriately titled *Last Flowers (Dernières Fleurs)* exhibited at the 1898 Salon du Champ-de-Mars (Plate 65). Although Paul did design a few cartoons after this date, they remained unrealized. If Maillol's tapestry era ended soon after the death of his main patron, Ranson's ended soon after his main collaborator had moved onto more important projects. In this case it was not the ethics of handcraft that was unsustainable, but the ideal of collective work amongst an intimate artistic circle. In fact, the Nabis as a group would effectively dissolve in 1899. Although many of them would remain lifelong friends, their collective projects as an artistic brotherhood came to an end with the close of the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER 6. József Rippl-Rónai: Between Paris and Budapest

The Hungarian artist, József Rippl-Rónai would remain lifelong friends with his Nabi brother Aristide Maillol. The two were in fact close friends before they became associated with the group and it was Rónai who introduced Maillol to the brotherhood in the mid 1890s. It was Maillol, however, who introduced Rónai to tapestry making by the Hungarian artist's own admission. Rónai writes in his memoirs, "Among other influences, it was Maillol who induced me to start making cartoons for embroideries and tapestries, as he was doing."<sup>293</sup> Operating somewhere in between Maillol and Ranson's models for production, Rónai enlisted his companion, Lazarine Boudrion, and sometimes her sister, to execute his cartoons. Although Lazarine and her sister were presumably unpaid, as France Ranson and Laure Lacombe were, Rónai did look to hire other needleworkers, but could only offer the cheapest wages.<sup>294</sup> Rónai may have followed Maillol's lead in tapestry making, however he took a completely opposite approach to art's relationship with industry. I will demonstrate that this attitude was as related to Hungarian nationalism as Maillol's ethics of handcraft was related to French nationalism.

Rónai, who lived in Paris from 1887-1900, is usually treated in scholarship as a Francophilic artist who was not attuned to the interests and concerns of Hungarian art at the turn of the twentieth century. He is known by Hungarian scholars as "Hungary's Cézanne and

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<sup>293</sup> Cited and translated into English in Genthon, *Rippl-Rónai*, 17.

<sup>294</sup> Rónai to his father, June 1895: "...I would like to know for how much Paulina would consider doing the embroidery. It must be a bargain or else I cannot give it to them." Cited in Balogh, "Rippl-Rónai József," 265, trans. Zsófia Tracikievicz.

Gauguin ... Vuillard, Bonnard ... all in one.”<sup>295</sup> Hungarian art at the fin-de-siècle is often divided into two tendencies: an internationally oriented, pan-European avant-garde; and a nationalist movement focused on excavating Magyar origins.<sup>296</sup> Rónai is usually held up as the representative of the former and rarely discussed in the context of the search for a distinctly Hungarian style. The latter tendency is instead exemplified by the architect Ödön Lechner, the Gödöllő weaving workshop, and the Nagybánya colony, who mined folk art, peasant life, and Magyar history and myth for the form and content of their works. Representative is Katalin Gellér’s view that, “in [Rippl-Rónai’s] works one doesn’t find the typical forms that expressed a consciousness of national identity like in that of his compatriots. That is, he never painted history paintings, he didn’t use motifs borrowed from folk art. ... He was a lone voice in the history of Hungarian art.”<sup>297</sup>

Despite this assertion, I argue that Rónai was very much invested in creating a modern and distinctly Hungarian style, particularly through his designs for tapestries. Since most of his tapestries were destroyed in a fire at the 1906 Milan International Exhibition or during World War II, their significance has been difficult to assess and the interpretation of Rónai’s oeuvre has relied largely on his painting and graphic works. The literature that does exist on Rónai’s tapestries emphasizes their affinity with the works of Maillol, Maurice Denis, and the Pont-Aven school. Consequently, it does not adequately recognize the differences that developed over the course of the 1890s between the “Hungarian Nabi” and his French contemporaries—differences

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<sup>295</sup> Lajos Fülep, “Rippl-Rónai József,” *A Haz*, no. 10 (1910): 223-28. Cited and translated in Szabadi, *József Rippl-Rónai*, 5. Fülep was one of the founding art historians, theoreticians, and critics of modern Hungarian art.

<sup>296</sup> See for example Starcky and Beke, *Budapest 1869-1914*, 19.

<sup>297</sup> “dans ses oeuvres on ne retrouve pas les formes typiques qui expriment la conscience de l’identité nationale chez ses compatriotes. C’est-à-dire il n’a jamais peint de tableaux historiques, il n’a pas utilisé des motifs emprunté à l’art populaire. ... C’était une voie à part dans l’histoire de l’art hongrois...” Gellér, “József Rippl-Rónai,” 270.

in palette, motifs, and approach to the issue of craft. While Rónai did draw from the same pool of influences and preoccupations as that of his French friends, a closer examination of his tapestries shows that he was simultaneously looking towards Hungarian trends, namely the nationalist interest in Magyar folk art. I will trace how Rónai increasingly hybridized French avant-garde and Magyar styles through three of his tapestry projects, *Idealism and Realism*, *Azstrik transmitting the crown*, and *Woman in a Red Dress*.

Rónai was never disconnected from the Hungarian art scene during his expatriate years in Paris. In fact, in 1893 he was already planning his return to Hungary and wrote to Gusztáv Keleti, the director of the Royal Hungarian Institute for Drawing, inquiring about a position as an art professor.<sup>298</sup> In August of 1894, he visited Transylvania, which was considered the exemplary regional source of Hungarian folk art and national identity. During these years, Rónai began to experiment with designing needlepoint works that Lazarine would execute. Their first work was a small screen depicting a woman's profile against a yellow ground, exhibited at the 1894 Salon du Champ-de-Mars.<sup>299</sup> Shortly afterwards, Rónai wrote to Keleti, "I've just finished a cartoon on a larger scale for a new tapestry, but I don't have the money to complete it."<sup>300</sup> This tapestry was very likely *Idealism and Realism*, the first large-scale needlepoint hanging that he and Lazarine were able to realize (Plates 66-67).<sup>301</sup> With *Idealism and Realism*, Rónai began formulating his ambitions for his place in the development of modern Hungarian decorative art.

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<sup>298</sup> Berend, "Rippl-Rónai József," 133-34.

<sup>299</sup> "On remarquera, parmi les écrans [...] le profil de femme sur fond jaune de M. Rippl Ronai." François Thiébault-Sisson, "Le Salon du Champ de Mars. Les Objets d'art." *Le Temps*, May 16, 1894.

<sup>300</sup> Berend, "Rippl-Rónai József," 135, trans. Judith Igloi.

<sup>301</sup> Rónai had designed a tapestry cartoon before *Idealism and Realism* entitled, *The Birth and Death of Christ* ca. 1892; this work, however, was not woven until 1908. See Judit Palosi, "Rippl-Rónai József: Krisztus Születése és halála falkárpitjáról," *Ars Hungarica*, 1 (1984): 79-85.

Work probably commenced on the tapestry in the summer of 1895. In a letter to his brother Ödön dated July 24, 1895, he writes, “We are working intensely on a tapestry which will be exhibited in Berlin for a month, and then in the winter it will be on display in Pest.”<sup>302</sup> At the annual Christmas exhibition of the Hungarian State Fine Art Association (OMKT) in Budapest in 1895-96, Rónai presented a tapestry about 1.5m large that Edit Szentesi believes was *Idealism and Realism*.<sup>303</sup> The textile was offered as an example of Rónai’s novel technique and style in an attempt to garner public support for his work. He was in fact seeking a commission from the Hungarian government at this time. Budapest was in the throes of preparation for the 1896 Millennial Exhibition, a commemoration of the thousandth anniversary of the Magyar settlement of the Carpathian Basin. This exposition was a landmark declaration of Hungarian autonomy and nationalism. Ever since the Compromise of 1867, which granted Hungary independent sovereignty under the new dual monarchy system of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Magyar nationalist sentiment was intensifying. An enormous, Gothic Revival Parliament building was under construction and artists were competing for the privilege of decorating its interiors.

In September of 1894, Rónai had already written to Béla Lukács, Minister of Trade, proposing that he design a tapestry to hang behind the presidential podium. His letter clearly states his patriotic intentions:

The millennial exhibition’s main goal is to present both to our country and to the educated abroad all the progress which has been made in the fields of industry, economy, and most of all art and culture, by the Hungarian mind. As a Hungarian artist, I feel compelled to contribute to the dissemination of Hungarian decorative art. With my

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<sup>302</sup> Balogh, “Rippl-Rónai József,” 265, trans. Zsófia Tracikievicz. The embroidery was evidently not finished in time for a Berlin showing as Rónai didn’t exhibit any work in Berlin in 1895.

<sup>303</sup> Szentesi, “Rippl-Rónai Józsefnek,” 382. The sample was identified as measuring 1.5m<sup>2</sup>, which doesn’t correspond to the rectangular format of *Idealism and Realism*, however this work was the only large-scale needlepoint hanging Rónai is known to have produced at this time.

original artwork I would like to serve my country in fulfilling the purpose of the exhibition: to present the development of Hungarian art to the world.<sup>304</sup>

If indeed *Idealism and Realism* was the sample tapestry sent to secure this commission, it was central to Rónai's nationalistic goals. In his letter to Lukács, Rónai also portrayed the technique used in his tapestries as an innovation that represented the most progressive initiative in Hungarian decorative art.<sup>305</sup> It consisted almost entirely of vertical straight stitches of varying lengths that required little skill to execute. Only the brown contour threads followed the curves of the motif, but even then, straight stitches were used.<sup>306</sup> The innovation, one presumes, was in the simplicity and therefore speed and reproducibility of the technique. Rónai clearly maintained a sense of proprietary pride over his technique long after he ceased to design embroideries. In a letter dated August 26, 1907 to art historian, Béla Lázár, who was working on a monograph on the artist, he pointed out his "characteristic fluid, brown contours, which is unique and it is *my* method to fill them entirely with embroidery."<sup>307</sup>

Rónai's proposal for the Parliament was eventually rejected, however he persisted in promoting *Idealism and Realism* as an important work for the modernization of Hungarian art. After the OMKT winter exhibition, Rónai displayed the tapestry at the 1896 Salon du Champ-de-Mars, where it received favorable mention from Parisian art critics. Roger Marx credited Rónai's work, along with Ranson's, as revitalizing the art of tapestry and Gustave Babin wrote

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<sup>304</sup> Szentesi, "Rippl-Rónai Józsefnek," 380, trans. Anna Pesti.

<sup>305</sup> In this letter, Rónai actually refers to the screen that he had exhibited in the spring at the 1894 Salon du Champ-de-Mars. However, he used the same technique for *Idealism and Realism*, which must have been made and sent to show how the technique would work on a larger scale.

<sup>306</sup> Emese Pásztor and the staff of the Textile and Costume Department, Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest provided invaluable assistance in analyzing Rónai's technique, as evidenced in *Woman in a Red Dress*, his only extant large-scale tapestry.

<sup>307</sup> Balogh, "Rippl-Rónai József," 273, trans. Zsófia Tracikievicz.

that the “vibrant color scales of orange-yellow and green are infinitely pleasing.”<sup>308</sup> Boosted by this positive reception in the art capital of the world, Rónai wrote to the Gyula Wlassics, minister of Culture and Education, and suggested that the ministry purchase his tapestry for the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest. Wlassics referred the affair to the Jenő Radisics, director of the museum, but signaled his support of the purchase as representative of the latest research being done in Hungarian decorative art.<sup>309</sup> Wlassics and Radisics were both major forces in promoting modern art within Hungary; the latter introduced the English Arts & Crafts movement to his country and was particularly interested in improving the technical and artistic quality of Hungarian decorative arts in order to compete with Austrian and Czech imports.<sup>310</sup>

In offering *Idealism and Realism*, Rónai was clearly appealing to Radisics’s mission and indeed, the museum director saw that the work had the potential to advance the Hungarian textile industry. In a memorandum to Wlassics dated March 3, 1897, Radisics approved the acquisition and observed that Rónai “had created a hand-embroidered wall decoration of artistic value in terms of its design, but substantially cheaper than woven tapestry; for these reasons it is destined not only to replace it, but chiefly because of the latter quality, to oust it completely.”<sup>311</sup> For the museum, Rónai’s needlepoint hanging provided a model for a new category of textile mural

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<sup>308</sup> “à M. Paul Ranson encore est due la tapisserie qui constitue, avec celle de M. Rippl Ronai, la seule tentative faite pour réagir contre les errements d’un art dévoyé.” Roger Marx, “Le Salon du Champ-de-Mars,” *Revue encyclopédique*, 138 (April 25, 1896): 283; “M. Rippl-Ronai et la ‘tapisserie pour une chambre’, du même, avec leurs vibrantes gammes de jaune d’orangé et du vert me plaisent infiniment,” Gustave Babin, “La Salon du Champ-de-Mars”, *L’Art décoratif moderne* (June 1896): 140.

<sup>309</sup> Balogh, “Les Principes de Joseph Rippl-Rónai,” 88

<sup>310</sup> For Wlassics, see Clegg, *Art, Design, and Architecture*, 81-83, 129-30; for Radisics, see Gyöngi and Jobbágyi, *Golden Age*, 36.

<sup>311</sup> “a créé une decoration murale brodée à la main, de valeur artistique par le dessin, mais sensiblement meilleur marché que la tapisserie tissée; pour ces raisons il est destiné non seulement à la remplacer, mais surtout à cause de cette dernière qualité, à l’évincer complètement.” Cited and translated into French in Balogh, “Les Principes de Joseph Rippl-Rónai,” 90.

decoration that was not mass-produced, but was also not reserved for the elite and could be made accessible to a broader clientele. Rónai himself was casting about for the correct terminology for his innovative wall hanging. He asked Radisics to label his work not as “imitation tapestry, but as an original embroidered painting.”<sup>312</sup> Interestingly, Rónai here pits imitation against original, tapestry against painting in a way that recalls and disorders the debates at the Gobelins. Instead of trying to free tapestry from mimicking painting, Rónai proposes a new kind of painting involving colored threads in place of brushstrokes of pigment. We will see in the next section how Vuillard further inverts this debate by making painting out of imitation tapestry.

Rónai enthusiastically dreamed with Radisics of revolutionizing industrial art in Hungary, thereby raising its international profile. In a letter to the latter received on March 17, 1898, Rónai was bursting with suggestions for “creating a new Hungary”: domestically producing high quality linen, cotton, and silk; designing artistic models for bulk production by hand; establishing factories run by artists and funded by either the government or private shareholders. He cheekily wrote, “I can say from experience that the artist and artisan must be *practically married*, it is absolutely necessary that they understand each other to create a harmonious and beautiful work.” Rónai paints a Morrisian picture of improving workers’ lives and raising the standard of living by propagating good taste so that “our nation can take its place among the best.”<sup>313</sup> Notably, Rónai’s vision seems to have been aligned with the French interpretation of William Morris’s ideas, and not the utopian socialism espoused by the man himself. Instead of Morris’s emphasis on the worker’s well-being and antagonism towards

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 100-02.

mechanical, industrial production, the Gallic version emphasized the benefits of good taste for the well-being of the consumer—and thus, the nation—and advocated for artists and industry to work together.<sup>314</sup> Rónai believed his tapestry could help put Hungary on the right path, according to the French model of a top-down transmission of artistic taste.

*Idealism and Realism* was exhibited at the inaugural contemporary decorative arts exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest in the spring of 1898. The ground-breaking new building designed by Ödön Lechner had recently been completed for the 1896 Millennial Exhibition (Plates 68-69). Combining the organic forms of international Art Nouveau with ornament derived from Hungarian folk art, Lechner's design established and defined a new modern Hungarian style.<sup>315</sup> By contrast, *Idealism and Realism's* bipartite composition combined Post-Impressionist nudes at top with a Pont-Aven farm scene at bottom. In the self-consciously nationalistic setting of Lechner's Museum of Applied Arts, Rónai's French avant-garde tapestry received mixed reviews. József Mihalik wrote in *Magyar Iparművészet* (Hungarian Applied Arts), the official journal of the museum:

exhibited are new works of applied art that József Rippl-Rónai created under the influence of the 'modern' trend. A larger embroidered tapestry of his, the allegorical expression of '*Idealism and Realism*,' with its warm colors, its border and the adept composition of its lower section could be called a well-done work, if the coarsely drawn, clumsy female figures in the upper section did not ruin the general impression.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> I am specifically referring to the ideas promoted by the art critic and government official Roger Marx, who was dubbed the "William Morris of France." For Marx, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 219–28 and Blandine Chavane, *Roger Marx, un critique aux côtés de Gallé, Monet, Rodin, Gauguin. . . .* exh. cat. (Nancy: Musée des Beaux-Arts and Musée de l'école de Nancy, 2006).

<sup>315</sup> For a more extensive discussion and analysis of the Museum of Applied Arts, see Rebecca Houze, "Hungarian Nationalism, Gottfried Semper, and the Budapest Museum of Applied Art," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 16, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 2009): 7-38.

<sup>316</sup> József Mihalik, "Az Iparművészeti Múzeum tavaszi nemzetközi kiállítása," *Magyar Iparművészet*, 1, nos. 6-7 (May 1898): 287, trans. Zsófia Tracikievicz.

Clearly, *Idealism and Realism* was not as well regarded in Budapest as it was in Paris. The tapestry was evidently too western in style; in the Hungarian text of the review, “modern” is written in English with negative implications. Even Radisics, in approving the acquisition of the work the year before, expressed his reservations about its style. In the memo to Wlassics cited above, he admitted, “I don’t find the forms exemplary; I deplore the lack of ... grace ... The work in its entirety is marked by a certain naïveté that is difficult to tell whether it is intentional.”<sup>317</sup> The crude awkwardness of the nudes, which both Radisics and Mihalik lamented, undeniably draws from Cézanne’s oeuvre (Plate 70). Like Cézanne’s bathers, Rónai’s nudes are depicted in conventional academic poses, but remain isolated from each other, as if they were cut-out silhouettes placed against the proscenium of framing trees. *Idealism and Realism* as a whole manifests this disconnected quality, offering a visual catalogue of avant-garde French trends, as if to display all that Rónai had learned in Paris: the Nabi interest in decorative arts; the deliberate coarseness of Post-Impressionist drawing; the fascination with archaic Breton culture.

Based in Paris and working in the milieu of the Nabis, Rónai believed he was at the forefront of the international avant-garde. Paris remained to him the center of the art world, even after he returned to Hungary permanently in 1902. He wrote to Béla Lázár in December 1905, “objet d’art (l’art appliqué) that is serious and worth mentioning exists only in Paris, at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars; elsewhere, especially in our country, it is nothing more than self-delusion.”<sup>318</sup> It is not surprising then that Rónai’s first solution to modernizing Hungarian art entailed introducing the avant-garde French style, in effect proposing it as a universally modern

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<sup>317</sup> "je ne trouve pas les formes exemplaires; je déplore la manque [de] ... la grâce ... L’oeuvre dans son ensemble est empreinte d’une certaine naïveté dont il est difficile de décider si elle est voulu..." Cited and translated into French in Prékopa, "Rippl-Rónai artiste décorateur," in Delannoy, *József Rippl-Rónai*, 92n.33.

<sup>318</sup> Balogh, "Rippl-Rónai József," 273, trans. Zsófia Tracikievicz.

style. Yet, his nationalistic goals were clear: the technical innovation of his tapestry was intended to raise the level and reputation of Hungarian craft on the international stage. János Gerle has argued that at the end of the nineteenth century, the terms “national” and “progressive” were considered incompatible, contradictory ideas. The former was equated with the conservative, provincial, and isolated while the latter was unpatriotic, cosmopolitan, and derivative.<sup>319</sup> Rónai seemed to have been trying to reconcile the two terms in his work; in other words, was it possible to make the progressive nationalistic? Radisics, for his part, had his doubts. He worried that Rónai’s work was too avant-garde French for Hungarian taste. In the same 1897 memo to Wlassics, he questioned, “given the tendency of their style, are the compositions of Rippl-Rónai suitable for making the public adopt and like this new genre of wall decoration?”<sup>320</sup> Rónai would struggle with this question for the rest of his time working in Paris creating embroideries for Hungary.

When Rónai sent *Idealism and Realism* as a sample tapestry to the 1895-96 winter OMKT exhibition, he exhibited alongside it three preparatory drawings for the monumental 6m by 4m tapestry that he intended to create for the Parliament itself. This would’ve been Rónai’s most ambitious work to date. None of these drawings survive, although a reproduction of one of them appeared in the 1912 issue of *Magyar Iparművészet* (Plate ?). In his 1894 letter to Lukács, he stated that he wished to “portray certain outstanding moments from our civilization’s history.”<sup>321</sup> The subject he chose, Bishop Asztrik handing over the crown sent by the pope to

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<sup>319</sup> Gerle, “What is Vernacular?,” 145-46.

<sup>320</sup> “étant donnée la tendance de leur style, les compositions de Rippl-Rónai sont-elles propres à faire adopter et aimer par le public ce nouveau genre de décoration murale?” Cited and translated into French in Balogh, “Les Principes de Joseph Rippl-Rónai,” 92.

<sup>321</sup> Szentesi, “Rippl-Rónai Józsefnek,” 380, trans. Anna Pesti.

King Stephen I, is one of the founding legends of the Hungarian nation. Taken from Bishop Hartvic's *Life of St. Stephen*, the story recounts how Stephen Christianized Hungary and was coronated as its first Christian king in 1000 AD. The king had sent Asztrik to Rome to obtain papal benediction of his newly created bishoprics and Pope Sylvester II responded by sending a crown and cross to declare Stephen an apostolic ruler. Although this story is contested—it was Hartvic's addition and did not appear in the previous lives of St. Stephen—it became critical to Hungary's identity as an autonomous nation from its inception, as ratified by Western Europe.<sup>322</sup> It was thus a fitting subject for the decoration of the Hungarian Parliament and the unabashed nationalism of the Millennial Exhibition. In designing his tapestry, Rónai seemed to be responding to the Hungarian government's original directive for the Parliament to be "the monument of the thousand-year-old life of this nation in this place," a representative of "the connection, the continuation between past and present."<sup>323</sup>

If *Idealism and Realism* was completely French in style, with *Azstrik* Ronai began to incorporate Hungarian elements, and not just the overtly nationalistic subject matter. Rónai's *Azstrik* has received very little scholarly attention, given that it was an unrealized project with no extant original sketches; however it is key to understanding Rónai's ambitions for tapestry. Besides Szentesi's article, which lays out the documentation of the proposal and its rejection, only Ágnes Prékopa has commented on the work. Her overall impression is one of bafflement: she finds the composition overcrowded, the costumes strange, and certain details out of proportion: the cleric's hands in prayer at left, the nobleman's sword at right, and the cross on

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<sup>322</sup> Lázsló, "Holy Crown," 426.

<sup>323</sup> From a speech given by Arnold Ipolyi in the upper house of Parliament on May 15, 1884. Cited in Keserű, "Táblakép és építészeti dekoráció," 582, trans. Eszter Timkó.

the tree at right.<sup>324</sup> Prékopa's reaction is understandable as the work, though it draws from the primitivist Pont-Aven aesthetic, doesn't quite fit into that school; nor does it correspond to anything that was being made by a Hungarian artist at the time. However, if we try to understand *Asztrik* as an attempt to combine French avant-garde and Hungarian trends, the work becomes less perplexing. Its dense composition, naïve drawing, and the peculiar garb of the figures can be contextualized within the Nabi medievalist interest in tapestry as well as the Hungarian interest in Magyar history and folk art.

Millefleurs and other medieval tapestries were appreciated by the Nabis for their all-over surface decoration, among other characteristics. No part of the composition was to remain empty because tapestry was meant to ornament a two-dimensional wall and keep the viewer's eye circulating across the entire surface. Rónai's tapestry adheres to these Nabi design principles; the composition is filled with figures, foliage, and emblematic, narrative details. The short, rhythmic strokes that mark the trees and grass activate the surface, and perhaps refer to both the texture of the vegetation as well as the stitches that would fashion them. Furthermore, the dense layering of hieratic figures punctuated by vertical tree trunks is a compositional device characteristic of medieval tapestry sets such as the *Story of Saint Stephen (Tenture de saint Étienne)*, acquired by the Cluny in 1880 (Plate 72). The various milestones of Saint Stephen's life are marked off and structured through vertical elements like columns, ship masts, and trees, which also function as a form of crowd control for the densely populated scenes.

Rónai's medievalism, however, was not just derived from the Nabis. Hungary witnessed its own medieval revival in the late nineteenth century. The Parliament building, designed by

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<sup>324</sup> Prékopa, "Rippl-Rónai artiste décorateur," in Delannoy, *József Rippl-Rónai*, 86.

Imre Steindl in 1885, is exemplary of the Neo-Gothic style in architecture (Plate 73). As in England and France, the Gothic style in Hungary became associated with national identity and a golden age of history and spirituality. The Gothic Revival Parliament building specifically recalled the reign of Matthias Corvinus (r. 1458-90), who was viewed as an enlightened, just ruler who consolidated the nation and patronized the arts and education.<sup>325</sup> Steindl himself declared that “this brilliant style of the Middle Ages perfectly represents the connection between the material and the spiritual world.”<sup>326</sup> More importantly for our purposes, this medievalism also manifested itself in archeological missions. Historic preservationists became intensely preoccupied with recovering medieval frescoes in churches in northern Hungary, particularly the northeastern region of Transylvania (Plate 74).<sup>327</sup> Thousands of drawings and photographs were made, collected, and published in journals such as *Művészeti Ipar* (Artistic Industry), the precursor to *Magyar Iparművészet*.

Medieval frescoes provide a point of comparison for Rónai’s *Asztrik*. The naïveté and insistent linearity of the drawing, the awkward proportions of figures, and the outsized motifs that bothered Prékopa could be an attempt to capture the simple expressivity of medieval Transylvanian frescoes. The disjunctive proportions were not a sign of ineptitude, but rather served the purpose of emphasizing decorative harmony and/or narrative clarity over illusionism. For example, the cleric facing the viewer at left possesses disproportionately large hands in prayer that are vertically aligned with the buttons on his robe. He acts as a double for the figure of the king on the throne at right, and his conspicuous hands draw attention to King Stephen’s

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<sup>325</sup> Houze, “Hungarian Nationalism,” 18.

<sup>326</sup> Keserű, “Táblakép és építészeti dekoráció,” 583, trans. Eszter Timkó.

<sup>327</sup> Fejős, *József Huszka*, chap. 2.

similar gesture of prayer. The king's hands and buttons, moreover, act as trail leading to and accentuating the otherwise unobtrusive holy crown, the center of the entire narrative.

The curiously voluminous and conical robes that the prelates and noblemen wear possibly reference another preoccupation of Hungarian nationalists—folk art. They resemble a combination of two different items of male peasant clothing: the *suba*, a sleeveless sheepskin cloak that was like a round cape; and the *cifraszűr*, a more rectangular shaped woolen coat with sleeves (Plate 75). The *cifraszűr* was depicted on folk objects as a two-tiered, bell-shaped silhouette (Plate 76). The ample robes of Asztrik and his entourage echo the bell shape of the *suba* and the *cifraszűr* as represented in folk art. Furthermore, the capelets of Rónai's figures correspond to the tiered depiction of the *cifraszűr*'s sleeves, as well as the densely embroidered shoulder section of the *suba*. Both types of outerwear were worn by Magyar shepherds, but the *cifraszűr* in particular became a symbol of political resistance over the course of the nineteenth century. Hungarian urban intellectuals who advocated for autonomy from the Habsburgs during the second half of the nineteenth century would don these colorfully embroidered coats to indicate their political leanings.<sup>328</sup>

With *Azstrik* Rónai attempted to design a nationalistic yet progressive tapestry. He chose to depict a foundational moment in Magyar history, belying Katalin Gellér's statement cited above, and possibly incorporated nationalistic references to Hungarian folk art and medieval frescoes. He also, however, drew from his French avant-garde aesthetic, which would have encouraged him to seek out the expressive naïveté of primitivist art in the first place. This

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<sup>328</sup> Houze, "Hungarian Nationalism," 15. The sale of *cifraszűrs* and the profits of master tailors peaked between 1870 and 1890. See Hofer and Fél, *Hungarian Folk Art*, 36-37.

hybridization of the Parisian and the Hungarian is not found in his contemporaneous paintings. Unlike Ranson, Rónai conceived of his tapestries as a medium separate in purpose and aesthetic from other forms of mural decoration. His paintings were made largely for a Parisian audience while his tapestries were conceived for Budapest. The latter reveal his clear interest in developing a distinctive Hungarian style that would project his native country's heritage as well as its modernity to the international community.

The Parliament's Executive Board, however, did not understand Rónai's work. The style of Rónai's proposed tapestry was deemed inappropriate for the setting. A subcommittee of the Executive Board did not believe it would "suit the accustomed artistic taste in every sense."<sup>329</sup> A comparison between a work that was actually commissioned by the Executive Board and Rónai's rejected proposal reveals the distance between official Hungarian art and Rónai's vision for Hungarian modernism. Mihály Munkácsy, Rónai's teacher when he first moved to Paris and Hungary's most celebrated living painter, executed *Conquest* in 1893 to decorate the Deputy Council Chamber (Plate 77). It is a grandiose history painting depicting the capture of the Carpathian Basin in 896 by Árpád, leader of the Hungarian tribes. The academically drawn, monumental composition in the traditional medium of oil paint is representative of the dramatic realism favored by mainstream taste. Rónai's work, by contrast, exhibited the same crudeness of drawing that was so ill received in *Idealism and Realism* and in the format of an unsophisticated needlepoint hanging. Rónai's unconventional proposal was an attempt to modernize Hungarian history painting, to replace a moribund tradition of painting so stalwartly represented by Munkácsy with the modernist medium of tapestry. Although Rónai's interpretation of the holy

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<sup>329</sup> Szentesi, "Rippl-Rónai Józsefnek," 382, trans. Anna Pesti.

crown donation was never realized, the Upper House of the Parliament did end up including a ceiling painting by the academic artist Zsigmond Vajda of Bishop Asztrik handing King Stephen his crown.

Rónai's last attempt at tapestry finally realized his fusion of French avant-garde and Hungarian folk art. Entitled *Woman in a Red Dress*, it was made for a private, domestic setting and was therefore not subject to the scrutiny and approval of government officials (Plate 78). Count Tivadar Andrassy, a member of one of Hungary's most prominent families and an aristocrat with unusually progressive taste, commissioned Rónai to design the entire dining room of his new palace in Budapest in 1896. *Woman in a Red Dress* was therefore conceived as part of a total ensemble including furniture, glassware, ceramics, stained glass, and other embroideries, such as a folding screen, overdoor, and frieze. This Art Nouveau *Gesamtkunstwerk* was bound together by the leitmotif of stylized flowers and abstract vegetal forms. The tapestry was placed over the mantle, under a floral frieze and stained glass ceiling, and across from a stained glass window depicting the rose bushes on Andrassy's country estate. The room thus became a kind of hortus conclusus, or enclosed garden for the graceful woman in red.<sup>330</sup> Such a reference connects the tapestry to medieval Marian iconography, secularized in works like the thirteenth-century French courtly poem *Roman de la Rose*, as well as to millefleurs tapestry like the *Lady and the Unicorn* (Plate 79). Reminiscent of the latter, there is a fence in the background of *Woman in a Red Dress*, which makes Rónai's tapestry itself a hortus conclusus, an enclosed garden within an enclosed garden.

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<sup>330</sup> Katalin Keserü, *József Rippl-Rónai* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1983); Delannoy, *József Rippl-Rónai*, 232.

*Woman in a Red Dress* is often discussed as derivative of Maillol's medievalist tapestry, *The Enchanted Garden* (Plate 45). Both embroideries feature the female figure enveloped in the dense foliage of a garden and Rónai's female figure is noticeably similar to the left-hand foreground figure in Maillol's work. Both are seen in profile and from the back; both wear long dresses belted at the waist with ruffles at the shoulder line; and both hold their left elbow bent. While it is clear that Rónai's work operates within the context of Nabi medievalism like Maillol's, the dissimilarities between *Woman in a Red Dress* and *The Enchanted Garden* are as striking as the similarities. Rónai and Maillol employed vastly different techniques, materials, and colors in accordance with their different goals for their wall hangings.

*The Enchanted Garden*'s palette is earthier and more subdued than *Woman in a Red Dress*, a quality that Maillol prized as an indicator of his artisanal authenticity. His natural dyes and handspun threads unequivocally upheld the Nabi medievalist ethos of pre-industrial production. *The Enchanted Garden* features a variety of stitches, including couching and straight stitches that are all about 1cm long but oriented in different directions to follow the motif. These stitching techniques, along with the use of metallic thread, give the work much more varied textures and surface effects than *Woman in a Red Dress*. For example, the details of the necklines on the backs of the foreground figures in *The Enchanted Garden* are executed in gold thread and they stand out in rich relief as they catch the light. By contrast, Rónai's tapestry is executed using only straight stitches, as previously mentioned. Except for the curved contour lines, the stitches are all vertically oriented and are therefore of varying lengths. The effect is one of a colored-in drawing. Furthermore, *Woman in a Red Dress* is made with commercially bought, synthetically dyed thread. Of course, as we saw with *Girls in a Park*, one could

purchase wools in the marketplace to evoke the wilted aesthetic. Rónai's intensely bright palette and simplified technique, then, suggest that he was working with a divergent paradigm, which I believe to be Hungarian folk embroidery.

Beginning in the 1870s, the textiles of the Matyó people from Mezőkövesd, a town west of Transylvania, became the focus of national attention for their distinctive coloring and composition.<sup>331</sup> Up until the 1860s, Matyó embroidery featured strictly symmetrical floral designs in red and blue (Plate 80). However, with the revival of folk art and the industrial revolution, production began to change. Ready-made, synthetically dyed thread replaced homespun, naturally dyed thread and yellow and green were introduced to a palette that was keyed to the brighter and brighter hues available with artificial colorants (Plate 81). A novel approach to folk art developed that stressed decorative invention, as opposed to the continuation of long-established patterns, in order to address the new, wider market for these goods among urban intellectuals. Compositions thus became more free and flexible and individual motifs could be independently used, extracted, and combined to create fresh and pleasing patterns. The emphasis was on the total surface decoration, unified through rhythmic changes of color. Matyó embroidery usually used only one kind of stitch, either chain stitch or satin stitch, allowing for more rapid production and keeping the focus on color and pattern rather than the needlework.

Likewise, *Woman in a Red Dress* emphasizes flamboyantly vibrant color distributed throughout the tapestry. These candy-bright hues have no pretensions of being derived from madder or weld. The commercial nature of the yarns and synthetic artificiality of their colors are

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<sup>331</sup> The following discussion is based on Hofer and Fel, *Hungarian Folk Art*, 39, 50-51; Márta Fügedi, "The Discovery of Matyó Folk Art," *Hungarian Heritage*, 1, nos. 1-2 (Spring/Autumn 2000): 9-18; and conversation with Mónika Lackner and Hajnalka Fülöp, Curators, Textile Department, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, April 27, 2012.

all the more apparent in comparison to Maillol's finely handspun wool and homemade, muted natural dyes. Rónai's unusual palette becomes even more striking when compared to his painting. His woman in red is based not only on Maillol's female figure in *The Enchanted Garden*, but also on a painting that he executed in 1892, *Young Woman with a Rose (Jeune femme à la rose)* (Plate 82).

The most striking difference between the painting and the tapestry is the use of color. Rónai's palette for his tapestry was completely opposite of that for his paintings, a difference that scholars have not sought to investigate. The painting is done practically in grisaille, with only the woman's red hair adding a spot of color to the work. The style is typical of Rónai in the early 1890s. Before he became the "Hungarian Nabi," Rónai was greatly influenced by the work of Eugène Carrière and James McNeill Whistler. He created wispy monochrome paintings in which the drawing of the figure is seen clearly through a layer of oil paint so thin that it resembles a transparent watercolor wash. In his memoirs, Rónai connects this diaphanous mode of painting with his French milieu. He lived in Neuilly at the time, a quiet, residential neighborhood just outside the northwest border of Paris proper. He poetically described, "All is without color here, almost desolate: the calm gestures of men, the abandonment of nature, the cold, winter fog . . . . In fact, the 'sketch' done in charcoal on the gray canvas is so close to the actual appearance that a few touches of color . . . sufficed to render the particularities of this atmosphere."<sup>332</sup> If delicate grayness was associated with painting in Paris, the riot of vivid, opaque colors that make up

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<sup>332</sup> Translation into French of excerpts from *Rippl-Rónai József emlékezései* (Budapest: Nyugat kiadása, 1911) from typed manuscript in Rippl-Rónai files, MMD.

*Woman in a Red Dress* points to an alternate model. I attribute the change in palette to a conscious referencing of Matyó embroidery.<sup>333</sup>

In adapting the composition of the painting to the tapestry, Rónai not only altered the palette, but also deliberately exchanged the rose held by the female figure for a tulip. This seemingly insignificant detail changes the iconographic landscape of the composition. Tulips are a common and particularly symbolic motif in popular Hungarian art and culture, which is not the case in Nabi medievalism, French tapestry, nor French mass culture.<sup>334</sup> They are a characteristic motif of Transylvanian painted furniture and found in Matyó embroidery. In fact, one of Rónai's few Hungarian colleagues in Paris, István Csók, executed a Fauvist painting whose central subject was a Transylvanian dowry chest ornamented with colorful tulips.<sup>335</sup> This work represents Csók's own attempt to visualize a modern and distinctly Magyar style. Tulips became politicized symbols of Hungarian identity in the early twentieth century. In 1906, when Hungarian nationalists began boycotting Austrian goods to protest Austria's economic power over Hungary, they adopted the tulip as their symbol and were dubbed the tulip movement.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Rónai would later feature Matyó embroidery in many of his interior paintings after he returned to Hungary. See for example, *When one lives on one's memories*, 1904, Hungarian National Gallery, inv. 3296.

<sup>334</sup> Alain Corbin mentions that in nineteenth-century French bourgeois culture, women were metaphorically associated with roses, violets, and lilies; they cultivated these flowers in their winter gardens and boudoirs; and they ornamented and scented themselves with jasmine, lilies-of-the-valley, roses, orange blossoms, but he never mentions tulips. *Le miasme et la jonquille: l'odorat et l'imaginaire social XVIII-XIX siècles* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982), 215-16, 218, 226. Furthermore, tulips do not count among the checklist of over 100 plants identified in the Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of the greatest millefleurs tapestry sets extant. See Adolph S. Cavallo, ed. *The Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), Appendix I, 111-17.

<sup>335</sup> István Csók, *Chest with Tulips*, 1910, Hungarian National Gallery, inv. 62.45 T.

<sup>336</sup> David Crowley, "Budapest: International Metropolis and National Capital," in Paul Greenhalgh (ed.), *Art Nouveau: 1890-1914* exh. cat. (London Victoria & Albert Museum, 2000), 351. See also the political cartoon reproduced in Éva R. Bajkay, ed., *Zeit des Aufbruchs: Budapest und Wien zwischen Historismus und Avantgarde* exh. cat. (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 2003), 243, Plate 3.

Hungarian folk ornament became widely known largely through the efforts of József Huszka, a drawing teacher turned amateur ethnographer who traveled around northern and southeastern Hungary collecting samples and making drawings of peasant art (Plates 74, 83). He published the enormously influential *Magyar díszítő stíl* (Hungarian Decorative Style) in 1885 and *Magyar ornamentika* (Hungarian Ornament) in 1896. These became the reference books for Hungarian artists, architects, and designers interested in folk art, including Lechner, the father of Hungarian Art Nouveau and architect of the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest. Featuring images of isolated motifs and patterns ready to be lifted and copied into other media, Huszka's publications were analogous to Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) for the design reform movement in England. Moreover, in separating the motif from its medium and context, Huszka effectively freed it to become a floating signifier of national identity.

Rónai's exposure to Hungarian folk art was likely through Huszka's work, however he didn't simply cut and paste designs from Huszka's sourcebooks. His borrowings were more subtle. In the case of *Woman in a Red Dress*, he extracted the tulip motif—though not its folk idiom—leaving the flower itself to signal Magyar identity. He not only replaced the rose of *Young Woman with a Rose* with a tulip in the Andrassy tapestry, but he also filled the tapestry's border with this Hungarian flower, which serves to emphasize the significant substitution. Furthermore, the coloration of the tulips in the border is rather idiosyncratic in comparison to western European tapestries. Random blue and yellow tulips are placed among the otherwise uniform bunches of orange tulips in the top and bottom borders and the side borders present a rainbow of multicolored leaves and patches. This recalls examples of Matyó embroidery in which, for example, blue and purple petals are unsystematically inserted in bands of red and pink

flowers and colors are divorced from a representative function in favor of creating rhythmic patterns (Plate 83). Rónai, perhaps taking a cue from folk art, emphasized visual delight and invention within a program of decorative harmony, not the craft process. His tapestry was therefore not simply derivative of Maillol's. Though close friends, they developed very different philosophies based on their diverging purposes for their textile wall hangings.

Although *Woman in a Red Dress* was a one-off piece created for an elite Hungarian patron, it was fabricated in the spirit of the larger ambitions that Rónai had for both his contribution to Hungarian decorative art and Hungary's place on the international stage as an economic and cultural force. According to Rónai, Andrassy also shared these goals. In a letter to Radisics dated March 9, 1898, Rónai wrote of Andrassy, "No one knows better than me his competence, his zeal and his patriotic Hungarian feelings towards our industry and our art."<sup>337</sup> *Woman in a Red Dress* can thus be understood as part of a collaborative, nationalistic experiment on the part of the artist and patron. Andrassy's dining room, the first Art Nouveau interior in Hungary, was an attempt to spur the modernization of Hungarian art industry and to project the country's internationalism as an expression of native pride.

Nonetheless, Rónai and Andrassy's nationalistic goals were largely lost on the Hungarian audience. *Woman in a Red Dress* met with a lukewarm reception in Budapest. Reviewing the 1899 winter exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts where it was on view, József Diner-Dénes deemed the tapestry "interesting" and observed that color provided "the main impact."<sup>338</sup> At

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<sup>337</sup> Cited and translated into French in Balogh, "Les Principes de Joseph Rippl-Rónai," 98.

<sup>338</sup> József Diner-Dénes. "A Magyar Iparművészeti társulat karácsonyi kiállítása," *Magyar Iparművészet* (1899): 14, trans. Zsófia Tracikievicz.

Rónai's retrospective exhibition the year after, he exhibited the entire Andrassy dining room, which was condemned by Miklós Rózsa in a scathing review:

The dining room of Count Andrassy is a true masterpiece of decorative art. ... But let no one seek among it Hungarian things. The beating of the heart of our nation, which is chaste, innocent, simple, can never be understood by a psyche like that of Rippl-Rónai, of a totally western indolence, tending almost to perversity ... All that is modern, we accept gladly, but only within the limits of the healthy.<sup>339</sup>

As usual, despite Rónai's efforts to incorporate Magyar references in his art, his Hungarian audience continued to read his work as completely western. In fact, Andrassy's family nicknamed the woman in red the "Botticelli lady." Much like Ranson's female figures in *Spring*, Rónai's Primavera-like woman featured a long, graceful silhouette that was more in line with Aesthetic Movement ideals and dress reform than with the beribboned and festooned costume of Matyó peasant women, for example.<sup>340</sup> Additionally, the woman in red is capped by chestnut tree leaves, a favorite motif of the Nabis and found in the decorative panels and stained glass designs of Vuillard and Ker-Xavier Roussel. Nevertheless, Rónai did seek to distinguish himself from his French colleagues and create a hybrid style that could be progressive yet nationalistic. Ultimately, to Hungarian eyes, Rónai's work looked very French; however, from the perspective of French art, Rónai was pointedly marking his difference.

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<sup>339</sup> "La salle à manger du comte Andrassy est un véritable chef-d'oeuvre des arts décoratifs. ... Mais que personne ne cherche parmi les choses hongroises. Le battement du coeur de ce pays qui est le nôtre, chaste, innocent, simple, ne peut être compris par un psychisme tel celui de Rippl-Rónai, d'une mollesse toute occidentale et tendant presque à la perversité. ... Tout ce qui est moderne, nous l'acceptons volontiers, mais seulement dans les limites du sain." Miklós Rózsa, *Hazánk*, December 23, 1900. Cited and translated into French in Bernath, Maria, ed., *Rippl Rónai*, exh. cat. (Musée des beaux-arts André Malraux, Le Havre, 1983), 24.

<sup>340</sup> For the influence of Aesthetic dress on the Nabis, see Srivastava, "Fashioning the Decorative Body," chap. 2. Srivastava compares Aesthetic dress to the horticultural practice of acclimatization and thus, women's bodies to pliant plants. She argues that the trellis was a "potent symbol of fin-de-siècle French femininity" in that it forced female bodies to adapt curving postures according to its framework (106). Interestingly, Rónai exploits that analogy with his inclusion of the rectilinear fence on which the woman leans. It not only creates the impression of a hortus conclusus, but it also acts as a trellis to the woman-cum-flower, supporting her gently arched posture as it does the ivy growing around the post under her hand.

The format of large-scale needlepoint hangings seemed to be a perfect vehicle for Rónai's hybrid style as it combined the Nabi interest in tapestry with the Hungarian interest in folk embroidery. Unfortunately, Rónai ceased to create textiles after he moved back to Hungary permanently in 1902. Although his memoirs and letters attest to his pride and interest in these works, the continued lack of comprehension of his artistic intentions was too discouraging. He confessed in his memoirs in 1911, "I no longer seek contact with Hungarian applied arts circles. It seems impossible to swim against the current, even if a whole series of projects that I have worked on and of which I am convinced could be useful to Hungarian applied arts has accumulated within me over the years."<sup>341</sup> The burning of three of his textiles in the 1906 Milan Exposition, including *Idealism and Realism*, probably also contributed to his sense of disillusionment and weariness. He wrote to his younger brother Ödön of that tapestry in particular, "The loss is immeasurable...I don't believe that I can create another one in this lifetime. Poor Lazarine worked so hard embroidering it...night and day."<sup>342</sup> Although from his paintings, scholars have judged him to be solely a Francophilic, cosmopolitan artist, during his Parisian years, he sustained an interest in the issues facing Hungarian art. Through his tapestries designed in Paris but meant for Budapest, Rónai endeavored to contribute to the fervent search for a modern Magyar art.

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<sup>341</sup> "Je n'ai plus recherché le contact avec les milieux d'arts appliqués hongrois. Il me semblait impossible de nager contre le courant, même si toute une série de projets extrêmement travaillés dont j'étais persuadé qu'ils pouvaient être utiles aux arts appliqués hongrois s'accumula en moi au cours des années." Cited and translated into French in Ágnes Prékopa, "Amitiés d'artistes et relations de style. Remarques sur l'activité de Rippl-Rónai dans le domaine des arts décoratifs," *Ars Decorativa*, 18 (1999) : 104n.5.

<sup>342</sup> Rónai to Ödön, August 15, 1906, cited in Palosi, "Rippl-Rónai József," 81, trans. Anna Pesti.

## Part II Conclusion

The concept of the Nabi brotherhood has often seemed problematic to scholars because of their total lack of stylistic, philosophical, or even political unity. The Nabis have therefore been difficult to categorize; one scholar has even suggested that we think of the term “Nabi” as a last name or family name, taking the notion of brotherhood literally.<sup>343</sup> If we think of the formation of the group as a desire for economic and moral support, as well as a shared commitment to the decorative, their heterogeneity becomes more admissible. Maillol, Ranson, and Rónai were all interested in tapestry as a particularly emblematic form of modern art. It combined the utilitarian with the artistic, serving as both wall insulation and wall decoration, with its formal exigencies of flat, decorative arrangements of line and color. It was an extremely labor-intensive craft that required collaborative work, which made it both a mark of artistic authenticity and a natural link with art industry. Tapestry offered a mode of artistic work that was work, that felt useful, that could possibly be a way to earn a living while maintaining artistic integrity, while cultivating creative expression. Maillol, Ranson, and Rónai’s diversity of approaches shows not only how elastic the brotherhood was, but also how the medium of tapestry could hold so many aspirations.

Tapestry allowed Maillol to create art from nature, Ranson to work communally, and Rónai to express Hungarian nationalism in an artistically advanced format. For Maillol, the arduous process of naturally dyeing and plying wool was an expression of French nationalism in

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<sup>343</sup> Fleur Roos Rosa de Carvalho, “Nabis or not Nabis: The Question of Henri Gabriel Ibels,” paper presented at Redefining European Symbolism, c.1880-1910: Conference on the Nabis, October 28, 2011, Amsterdam

its revival of craft traditions, a notion that was out of place in the Hungarian nationalist context. Maillol's medievalism eschewed industry and commercial viability. His ethics of art making was a reflection of a perceived incompatibility between art and industry, in direct contrast with Rónai's goals of jumpstarting Hungary's art industry. Nevertheless, the contrast between Maillol and Rónai is less one of differing goals than different manifestations of the same goal. While Maillol successfully articulated French nationalism through his tapestry making, Rónai could be said to have failed in his attempt. His nationalist sentiment remained illegible to his Hungarian audience.

Ranson instead saw tapestry as a vehicle for collaboration, for group art projects that would decorate the homes of a small coterie of friends and associates. Like the bibliophile societies, this group would ideally include both collectors and creators, the two roles preferably united in the same individual. Ranson's private and intimate ideal contrasted with the public platforms that Maillol and Rónai desired—official recognition by the French and Hungarian government respectively. All three Nabis, however, ultimately upheld the notion of gendered labor in their collaborative works. Although Ranson and Rónai seemed to have respected their collaborators more than Maillol, the needlework of their wives and friends works to unravel the very notion of the Nabi brotherhood. Do these female compatriots function the way female members of bibliophile societies did, as honorary exceptions? Or do they inject the notion of sisterhood into the group? Tapestry, perhaps, served to loosen the concept of brotherhood in one sense as it tightened those familial bonds in another sense. Regardless, the Nabis found their strength in their diversity and supported each other in their various pursuits to transform wool threads into meaningful mural decoration.

**PART III.**  
**Faire tapisserie: Édouard Vuillard's Tapestry Aesthetic**

Unlike his fellow Nabis Aristide Maillol, Paul Ranson, and József Rippl-Rónai, Édouard Vuillard took a purely conceptual approach to tapestry. He was not interested in designing modern tapestry per se; rather, he looked to the medium as a paradigm for reimagining painting. Reversing and then subverting the debate of medium specificity at the Gobelins, Vuillard modernized painting by “imitating” tapestry. The Vuillard literature often refers to the artist’s so-called tapestry aesthetic. Scholars have defined this as his mottled brush strokes and matte surfaces, which recall the texture of woven wool, and his flattened perspective, all-over patterning, and lack of modeling, which harken back to Franco-Flemish medieval tapestry.<sup>344</sup> I contend, however, that Vuillard’s engagement with tapestry was more profound and far-reaching than these borrowed aspects of composition and surface effects. This section investigates two of his decorative commissions from the 1890s, *The Album* (1895) and *Interior with Figures* (1896), to demonstrate how Vuillard incorporated the materiality, technique, decorative function, and perceptual experience of tapestry into these multi-panel suites in an attempt to define a new modernist painting. His tapestry aesthetic was not just a mimicking of style and texture, but rather encompassed a new conception of art’s relationship to the viewer, of art’s role in society, and of art as an expression of modernism.

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<sup>344</sup> See for example Groom, *Édouard Vuillard, Painter-Decorator*, 93; Kimberly Jones in Cogeval, *Edouard Vuillard*, 197.

*Early Exposure, First Encounters: Vuillard, the École des Gobelins, and the Musée de Cluny*

Before analyzing Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic, we must examine why and how Vuillard's attention was drawn to tapestry in the first place. A commonly overlooked aspect of Vuillard's artistic training is his attendance of the evening drawing classes at the École des Gobelins.<sup>345</sup> The seeds of his interest in tapestry, however, may lie in this detail of his early biography. Fresh out of high school and intending to continue his studies at the military academy, Vuillard had an abrupt change of heart in November of 1885. He decided to follow his best friend, Ker-Xavier Roussel who was studying with the academic painter Diogène Ulysse Napoléon Maillart. Maillart was not only a recipient of the prestigious Rome Prize of the French Academy, but like Maillol's teacher Jean-Paul Laurens, he was also a dedicated official at the state tapestry manufactory. Maillart served as the Inspector of Works of Art (*inspecteur des travaux d'art*) at the Gobelins from 1873-1877 and he taught drawing at both the Upper School (*atelier du cours supérieur*) and the Drawing Academy (*académie de dessin*) of the École des Gobelins beginning in 1871.<sup>346</sup>

The Drawing Academy was, until 1887, free and open to outside students who were not following the full tapestry apprenticeship program; the students in the latter category trained at the Upper School. The Drawing Academy prepared its students for entrance to the Upper School as well as for the entrance exam at the École des Beaux-Arts; the latter was probably Vuillard's

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<sup>345</sup> Russell (*Edouard Vuillard, 1868-1940*, 13), Thomson (*Vuillard*, 10), and Groom (*Edouard Vuillard*, 6) all mention in passing that Vuillard attended evening classes at the École des Gobelins. In the registry of students for the Drawing Academy during the 1885-86 winter session beginning November 2, Roussel and another close friend, Charles Cottet, are listed under "Élèves du dehors". Unfortunately, Vuillard is not listed, which may be a result of his last minute decision to attend these classes. *Registre d'admissions aux écoles de dessin et teinture 1883-1922*, MN G.74.

<sup>346</sup> Calmettes, *État général des tapisseries*, xi; Maillart to Jules Guiffrey June 20, 1895, MN GOB box 67.

motivation for attending. The program of the Drawing Academy officially consisted of alternating weeks of drawing after plaster casts and from a live male model. Nevertheless, Maillart's duties at the Upper school in the morning and the Drawing Academy in the evening, must have resulted in some points of overlap or interchange in the instruction of the two classes. The Upper School followed a rigorous curriculum that emphasized studying architectural ornament, plants and flowers from nature, as well as copying ancient tapestries in watercolor.<sup>347</sup> In a page of his sketchbook from November 1888, Vuillard's close attention to the different species of trees in Parisian parks and to a rosette divorced from its architectural structure may be a vestigial habit from Maillart's instruction (Plate 84).<sup>348</sup>

Maillart had of course designed a tapestry for the Gobelins, *Penelope at Her Loom* (Plate 3). As I discussed in Chapter 1, this self-reflexive work was a tapestry about the making of tapestry, and an attempt to unite Gobelins and Savonnerie weaving. *Penelope* was not only an experiment in technique, however; it was also an exploration of texture. The nubly main field of tapestry weave juxtaposed against the soft pile borders creates a palpable contrast that addresses the viewer's sense of touch. Vuillard's first experience of formal artistic training was

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<sup>347</sup> Information about the schedule and curriculum at the École des Gobelins from Muntz, *Rapport sur les tapisseries*, 21-23 and MN GOB box 67.

<sup>348</sup> Vuillard seemed to have never forgotten Maillart's instruction. On November 16, 1909, he records in his journal, "matinée avec Kerr pas beaucoup d'animation. souvenir de Maillard [*sic*]. me distrait me rappelle préoccupation de jeunesse."; and on May 9, 1910, "vais au Salon Champs-Élysées. mornes réflexions. Maillard." Vuillard's journal, Ms 5397, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France. Vuillard's surviving sketchbooks and journals are all kept in the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, Ms 5396-99. Various scholars have transcribed various portions of these notebooks (Easton, *Intimate Interiors*; Groom, *Édouard Vuillard*; Georges, "Symbolisme et décor"; Court, "Vuillard: les années de jeunesse"; Girard, "Le Journal d'Édouard Vuillard"; and Alexandre, "Édouard Vuillard. Carnets intimes") and I have relied on them in my own attempts to decipher Vuillard's infamously illegible handwriting. Where there is disagreement, I have compared the various transcriptions to the original document and chosen the one that seems the most accurate.

therefore with a teacher intimately acquainted with tapestry as an artistic medium and at an institution geared towards tapestry weavers.<sup>349</sup>

As his first art school, the *École des Gobelins* cannot be discounted. Scholars tend to begin the narrative of Vuillard's genesis as an artist with the *Académie Julian*. While this independent art academy was certainly the birthplace of the Nabi brotherhood, Vuillard's beginnings as an artist pre-date his attendance there. Indeed, I would argue that the *École des Gobelins* provided him with a foundational awareness of the decorative, which would become the focus of his career as a mature artist. Most importantly, it planted the seed that would later grow into an appreciation and profound exploration of tapestry's aesthetic and material qualities.

Almost a decade after attending the *École des Gobelins*, Vuillard was a member of the Nabis and working on a major decorative commission for a private domestic interior, *The Public Gardens (Les Jardins Publics)* (Plates 85a-c). This suite consisted of nine seven-foot tall paintings—one triptych with three diptychs. Until this point, Vuillard had primarily worked on a very small scale, painting cozy or sometimes claustrophobic interiors that art critics dubbed *intimiste* (see for example Plate 86).<sup>350</sup> Transitioning from a miniature-like format, in which he painted individual works about a foot high, to a monumental series requiring paintings seven times that size, was understandably difficult. Vuillard turned to tapestry as a model for creating his *intimiste* work on a much larger scale. Like Maillol, Vuillard was steeped in Nabi medievalism and went to the Cluny for inspiration. He wrote in his sketchbook on July 16, 1894, “Visited Cluny yesterday...Contemplating the tapestries, I think that by enlarging it, pure and

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<sup>349</sup> Vuillard took a drawing class in his final year of high school at the Lycée Condorcet in 1884, however I am not considering that formal artistic training.

<sup>350</sup> Vuillard had executed one large-scale decorative commission before the *Public Gardens*—six overdoors for Paul and Léonie Demarais. See Groom, *Édouard Vuillard*, chap. 2.

simple, my little panel can be the subject of a decoration. The humble subjects of these decorations at Cluny! Expressions of an *intimate feeling* on a bigger surface, that's all!"<sup>351</sup>

Vuillard's interpretation of the medieval tapestries as quotidian decorations composed of "humble subjects" indicates the objects he favored at the museum. The catalogue of works on display at the Musée de Cluny in 1884 (by which time the museum had made its most significant acquisitions of the late nineteenth century) reveals that over two-thirds of the tapestries exhibited were of overtly religious or biblical subjects: eighteen panels from the *Story of Saint Stephen*, ten panels of the *Story of David and Bathsheba*, scenes from the life of Christ, various martyrdoms of saints, etc.<sup>352</sup> These grand narrative tapestries of ferocious battles and gruesome sacrifice were clearly not made to accompany the intimate routines of daily life in private interiors. They would have instead been taken out on feast days or special occasions and displayed publicly, either outside lining processional streets or in cathedrals and royal reception rooms.

Vuillard's attention was evidently directed towards the minority of tapestries depicting courtly life and chivalrous romance, namely *Seignorial Life* and *The Lady and the Unicorn* (Plates 43, 50, 79, 87, 95, 96). Although these magnificent tapestries were not simple, everyday decorations, they would have been hung inside private interiors. The seemingly mundane activities (promenading, dressing, reading, sewing, bathing, etc.) depicted with such lush elegance, and glorified through monumental treatment, served as a lasting inspiration for Vuillard as he worked on his decorative commissions throughout the 1890s.

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<sup>351</sup> "Visite hier à Cluny ... Dans les tapisseries je pense qu'en grandissant purement et simplement mon petit panneau cela ferait le sujet d'une décoration. Sujets humble de ces décorations de Cluny! Expression d'un *sentiment intime* sur une plus grande surface voilà tout." Vuillard's sketchbook, fol. 44, Ms 5396. Translated by Easton, *Intimate Interiors*, 109.

<sup>352</sup> Edmond du Sommerard, *Catalogue et description des objets d'art de l'antiquité, du moyen âge et de la renaissance*. Paris: Musée de Cluny, 1884.

## CHAPTER 7. *The Album*: Exploring Paradigms of Tapestry

In 1895, the entrepreneurial art dealer Siegfried “Samuel” Bing decided to open the Maison de l’Art Nouveau, a gallery devoted to the new decorative tendencies he observed in contemporary art. For the much publicized inaugural exhibition, he commissioned various artists, such as Paul Ranson discussed in Chapter 5, to create interior ensembles combining mural paintings, furniture, ceramics, lighting, etc. Vuillard was given the walls of a small antechamber to a circular salon on the ground floor to decorate. He produced a set of five oil-paintings collectively entitled, *The Album*, which featured women engaged in domestic activities in a flower-filled interior (Plates 88a-e). Despite his turn to the Cluny’s millefleurs to help him realize *The Public Gardens*, it is *The Album* that marks the beginning of Vuillard’s profound engagement with tapestry as a model for revitalizing painting.<sup>353</sup> In this set, we can see Vuillard thinking about tapestry on many levels, from the commercial to the conceptual.

*The Album* is a decidedly idiosyncratic work. It is so disjointed in terms of format and execution that curator Joseph Rishel even questioned whether the paintings were meant to be a cohesive decorative set.<sup>354</sup> The five panels – *The Embroidery (La Tapisserie)*, *The Dressing Table (Le Table de toilette)*, *The Stoneware Vase (Le Pot de grès)*, *The Album (L’Album)*, and *The Striped Blouse (Le Corsage rayé)* – vary in shape and size, from square to rectangular, of horizontal and vertical orientation. By contrast, all of Vuillard’s other decorative sets from the 1890s consist of vertical rectangular paintings of the same height, if different widths. This

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<sup>353</sup> *The Public Gardens* retains a fresco-like character in the broad flat planes of sky, grass, and gravel reminiscent of Puvis de Chavannes’s public murals. It does not yet fully exploit the layers of dense patterning characteristic of Vuillard’s tapestry aesthetic.

<sup>354</sup> Bailey and Rishel, *Masterpieces of Impressionism*, 115.

strange disjointedness in format extends to the execution of the individual panels. *The Embroidery* is far more legible and far less claustrophobic than the other four paintings. It contains the sole window and light source in the suite. The foreground embroiderer is clearly delineated against the background, unlike the figures in *The Dressing Table*, for example, who seem to merge with the walls and curtains. Vuillard's other sets, such as *The Public Gardens*, exhibit a consistency of style throughout; the figures in that work are detached from the ground, like paper dolls or silhouettes cut out and pasted onto a continuous backdrop.<sup>355</sup> Conversely in *The Album*, the women, flowers, fabrics, and furniture dissolve into one another until it is impossible to tell where one ends and another begins, where hair becomes wallpaper, where leaves become skin. *The Album* is arguably the most radical of Vuillard's decorations in its dazzling dissolution of form and its confusion between figure and ground, animate and inanimate.

Furthermore, it is the only one of Vuillard's decorations to be designed for a commercial setting and not specifically commissioned for a particular room in a private home. Vuillard designed the set expressly to fit the dimensions of the antechamber in Bing's Maison de l'Art Nouveau, which is one reason for the paintings' differing shapes and sizes (Plate 89). *The Embroidery* was placed on a narrow strip of wall between two windows opposite the entrance to the antechamber. *The Album* was placed on the long unbroken wall to the proper right of *The Embroidery*. *The Dressing Table* and *The Stoneware Vase* hung to the left of *The Embroidery*,

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<sup>355</sup> For Vuillard and the silhouette, see Forgione, "Édouard Vuillard in the 1890s," chap. 1.

flanking the doorway to a circular salon. *The Striped Blouse* hung on the wall opposite *The Embroidery* by the entrance to the antechamber.<sup>356</sup>

The set, however, was listed as belonging to Thadée Natanson, editor of the avant-garde magazine *La Revue Blanche*, and his wife Misia, muse to the Nabis.<sup>357</sup> The Natanson family, including Thadée's brothers and father, were Vuillard's most important patrons early in his career.<sup>358</sup> The scholars Annette and Brooks Beaulieu have convincingly argued that Bing commissioned the decoration and Thadée acted as the financial backer. The panels were therefore also designed to aesthetically complement the Natansons' various homes in Paris and the French countryside. Despite the Beaulieus' new findings, the complex patronage history of the set has not been fully taken into account by scholars and yet, it is vital to understanding the work's rationale.

I argue that this dual imperative motivated Vuillard to design *The Album* to function both as a cohesive ensemble and as a collection of individual panels to mix and match. Installed in the gallery, the five panels together relay a clever conceit of weaving. *The Embroidery* marks the beginning of the narrative: the foreground figure clutches a skein of scarlet thread that tumbles and unravels down the side of her skirt, an explicit metaphor for artistic creation and the commencement of a story. A background figure draws back a curtain, revealing a window that provides the fictive light source for the rest of the paintings. As the point of inception, *The Embroidery* is intentionally the most legible and airy of the panels. The other panels seem to

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<sup>356</sup> Annette and Brooks Beaulieu reconstructed this installation in their article, "The Thadée Natanson Panels."

<sup>357</sup> In fact, Joseph Rishel speculates that the female figures in the panels are all variants of Misia. (Bailey and Rishel, *Masterpieces of Impressionism*, 115).

<sup>358</sup> For an extensive discussion of the Natansons as patrons, see Groom, *Edouard Vuillard*, 16-17, chaps. 3 and 4, passim.

spin out from it like a blurred dream. The scarlet yarn reappears throughout as an otherwise inexplicable motif—in the left edge of the *Album* under the woman's extended arm, and in the center of the *Striped Blouse*, tying up the ensemble in a flowery bow. To enhance the impression of an interconnected ensemble, Vuillard painted equal numbers of women on the paintings facing each other. Thus, the seven women in *The Album* are balanced by three women in the *Dressing Table* and four in the *Stoneware Vase*; and the single foreground figure with two background figures in *Embroidery* are compositionally mirrored by the two foreground figures with one background figure in the *Striped Blouse*.

And yet, each painting also reads as an independent work. This contrasts with *The Public Gardens*, for example, in which the backgrounds of the panels continue into each other within the groupings of triptych and diptychs, and each picture was conceived almost as a fragment to be completed by the other pictures. For instance, the large, emphatic tree trunk on the left side of *Little Girls Playing* creates a completely lopsided composition that can only be resolved and understood in relation to the adjacent panels, *Asking Questions* on its right, and *Under the Trees* on its left. The curving figure of the woman in *Asking Questions* acts as a balancing vertical element to the large tree in *Little Girls Playing*; the texture of her dress echoes and amplifies the texture of the tree bark. The compositional force of the tree trunk is diffused through repetition and diminution of the same motif in *Under the Trees*. Furthermore, the strangely appendage-like chair back attached to the tree trunk in *Little Girls Playing* becomes less odd when seen in the context of the multiple chairs depicted from various angles and rhythmically arranged in *Under the Trees*.

In *The Album*, however, each panel is compositionally contained. The pendants, *Dressing Table* and *Stoneware Vase*, which imperfectly continue into each other through the motif of the white chrysanthemum bouquet, still stand alone as individual paintings. In the *Dressing Table*, Vuillard places clumps of chrysanthemums on either side of the composition, creating a frame for the trio of women seen from the side, front, and back, in the classic equilibrium of the Three Graces. The panel therefore does not feel like a fragment, although it works well with its pendant. Indeed, the paintings were visually self-sufficient enough that curator Gloria Groom did not recognize that the *Dressing Table* would originally have hung to the right side of *The Stoneware Vase*; she reversed their order in her seminal 2001 exhibition, *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890–1930*.<sup>359</sup>

Groom was, however, following the spirit of Thadée and Misia in her personal installation. Archival photographs and contemporaneous paintings show that the Natansons hung these five panels in different rooms in different configurations at different times in their apartment in Paris as well as in their rented country homes in Valvins and Villeneuve-sur-Yonne (Plates 90-91).<sup>360</sup> The general aesthetic unity of the set, in terms of palette, subject matter, etc., is exactly what allows them to be variously rearranged. *The Album* presents an assembly of related but not totally interdependent units. Each painting could be hung with any of the other paintings, according to the desire of the owner and the exigencies of the room. *The Album* is unique in this way among Vuillard's decorative suites of the 1890s. All of his other commissions were designed with prescribed groupings.

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<sup>359</sup> According to Beaulieu and Beaulieu, "Thadée Natanson Panels," n.p.

<sup>360</sup> See Groom, *Édouard Vuillard*, 84-89.

The distinctive flexibility of *The Album* remarkably resembles the commercial model at the Beauvais tapestry manufactory since its inception in the seventeenth century. As a privately run business, Beauvais had to respond to the demands of the market. Tapestry sets, such as François Boucher's *Fragments d'Opéra* to take an example (Plates 92a-d), would be designed around a theme, but clients were not obliged to order the whole set. The entire set—*Rinaldo Asleep* (*Renaud Endormi*), *Venus and Putti* (*Vénus et les amours*), *Apollo and Issa* (*Le Sommeil d'Issé*), and *Vertumnus and Pomona* (*Vertumne et Pomone*)— would create a complete and harmonious ensemble with compositionally interrelated panels for the client who had the means to procure it and the space to install it. Yet those who could only order part of a set were assured that any panels they chose would work together as an ad hoc grouping. Like *The Album*, *Fragments d'Opéra* features panels of different shapes and sizes, square and rectangular, vertical and horizontal. The tapestries are thematically related through motifs such as the sleeping figure (Issa, Pomona, Rinaldo) or the disguised god (Apollo, Vertumnus). Compositionally, *Vertumnus and Pomona* is practically a mirror image of *Apollo and Issa* and a double for *Venus and putti*. *Fragments d'Opéra* was rarely woven as a complete set; clients usually ordered two scenes or so to decorate their interiors.

Vuillard could very well have been aware of such tactics in the history of tapestry production, given his artistic training at the École des Gobelins. Although none of his daily journals and only his sketchbooks from before 1907 survive, multiple journal entries dated after 1907 demonstrate that he was reading about Beauvais and attending auctions of Beauvais

tapestries, proving that it was an ongoing interest.<sup>361</sup> Even if Vuillard did not model himself after Beauvais, it provides one way to understand why the *Album* looks the way it does: the flexibility increased the commercial viability of his works.

Although the set was owned by Thadée and Misia and therefore not for sale, it offered an example of what Vuillard could execute for other interested patrons. *The Album* was in fact the first decoration Vuillard publicly exhibited. As such, the paintings can be seen as showpieces that were meant to attract business. Scholars tend to characterize Vuillard as a monk-like artist who shunned publicity, however he was very much interested in selling his art. His sketchbooks, which he also used for recording thoughts and daily activities when his journal was not at hand, attest to his constant financial worries in the 1880s and 1890s, and to his attempts to find a market for his work. For example, on July 23, 1894 he mentions that he doesn't have a penny, and is anxiously waiting for a payment from Arthur Huc.<sup>362</sup> Huc was an entrepreneurial newspaper editor who organized an exhibition including Nabi work to introduce Parisian avant-garde art to Toulouse. This exhibition not only presented works for direct sale, but also held a raffle for paintings.<sup>363</sup> On July 27, Vuillard received half the sum owed him, 250 francs, and immediately used it to pay back a loan of 75 francs to his friend's father.<sup>364</sup> Chronically in debt,

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<sup>361</sup> On April 4, 1908 and March 11, 1911, Vuillard records viewing Beauvais tapestries at auction and on January 2, 1916 he records reading an article on the Beauvais manufactory (Vuillard's journal, Ms 5397). Françoise Alexandre's dissertation on Vuillard's notebooks at the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France has clarified that they consist of two distinct types: larger format sketchbooks and smaller daily journals. I follow her distinction in my citations ("Edouard Vuillard. Carnets intimes," 117-21). See also Françoise Alexandre, "Les Carnets de Vuillard: un peintre au miroir de son écriture intime," *48/14 Revue du Musée d'Orsay*, no. 23 (Autumn 2006): 20-33.

<sup>362</sup> "Nous n'avons pas le sou ni l'un ni l'autre. Huc!" Vuillard's sketchbook, fol. 44v, Ms 5396.

<sup>363</sup> Vuillard to Bonnard, undated [July 30, 1894], Vollard papers, Box 2, f. 27, GRI Special Collections.

<sup>364</sup> "Enfin reçu 250 de Huc en attendant le reste...vu le matin le père de Ligné à qui je rends les 75 fr. que je lui dois" Vuillard's sketchbook, fol. 45, Ms 5396.

Vuillard was more inclined to explore creative commercial options than scholars have previously implied.

Tapestry offered not only a model for marketable flexibility, but also a model for art making. *The Embroidery* makes the connection between painting and weaving explicit. The woman in the foreground works on what could be a lap loom with the white warps held tense by the frame, or a canvas support stretched around a frame. She weaves or stitches the scarlet threads to form the design visible at the top of the frame. *The Embroidery* thus becomes a sort of self-reflexive work, much like Maillart's tapestry about the making of tapestry. Indeed, Maillart's *Penelope* lies in the figurative unconscious of this panel. Like Penelope, Vuillard's weaving woman sits at her loom, dominating the center of the composition, with her basket of colored threads on the floor at her right side. She embodies the self-reflexive conceit of a tapestry-like decoration about the making of a tapestry-like decoration. However, instead of the statue of Odysseus, Vuillard's figure has two female companions, one of whom is embroidering or sewing. Notably, Vuillard's foreground woman faces her companions and not the viewer, as Maillart's Penelope does; this positioning serves to emphasize the communal nature of needlework. Through the foreground figure, Vuillard effectively draws a parallel between needlework and his own *métier* of painting.<sup>365</sup>

Similar to Ranson, Vuillard valued the notion of brotherhood in his artistic practice. He actively participated in the collaborative work of designing theater sets, costumes, programs,

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<sup>365</sup> For a discussion of the motif of needle-working women as related to Vuillard's mother's home dressmaking business, see Easton, *Intimate Interiors*, chap. 2.

etc.<sup>366</sup> In his painting, the moral support of his brethren was vital to his work, a fact that he mentions repeatedly in his letters and journals. While finishing *The Album*, and before delivering it to Bing, he wrote to Denis who was living outside of Paris in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and asked if he would come by his studio to give his opinion.<sup>367</sup> He wrote on another occasion to Félix Vallotton that the latter's previous letter "made me feel more sharply the quality of the support the friends I have just left and who prevent me from lapsing into discouragement."<sup>368</sup> He described in a later letter to Vallotton the idyllic life at Thadée and Misia's country home in Villeneuve, where many of the Nabis were gathered: "We are in a Theleme that's just about perfect, everyone works and is in good humor."<sup>369</sup> The reference is to the French Renaissance writer François Rabelais's Abbey of Theleme, a utopia of communal life in which there was no hierarchy and no conflict; each member of the community independently pursued the activity that pleased them, that expressed their divine will. This model of working together yet separately is represented in *The Embroidery*: each woman is quietly absorbed in her own task, but doing so in each other's company.

While needlework here provides the ideal model for art making, I would not argue that Vuillard is equating the artist with the needleworker. Rather he is importing certain features of female handiwork into the male sphere of art. Though such a move revalues women's work, ultimately Vuillard was endeavoring to transform feminine domestic craft into modern art, as if

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<sup>366</sup> For Vuillard's work in theater, see Forgione, "Édouard Vuillard in the 1890s," chaps. 1 and 3; Kuenzli, *Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, chap. 2, who also connects theater to an ideal of collectivity.

<sup>367</sup> Vuillard to Denis, December 1, 1895, MMD, Ms 12088.

<sup>368</sup> "m'a fait plus vivement sentir la qualité de soutien des amis que je viens de quitter et qui m'empêche de rouler au découragement." Vuillard to Vallotton, November 2, 1897, in Guisan and Jakubec, *Félix Vallotton: Documents*, 1 :170.

<sup>369</sup> "Nous somme dans une Thélème à peu près parfaite, chacun travaille et est de bonne humeur" Vuillard to Vallotton, November 23, 1899, in Guisan and Jakubec, *Félix Vallotton, Edouard Vuillard*, 19.

through an alchemical process with ornament serving as the base prime matter. An entry from Vuillard's sketchbook from the year before he began working on the *Album* elaborates on this point:

On the table at noon the chrysanthemums, violet and white. An ornamental motif that is at once serious and pleasing. [...] Flowers after all are a common, simple ornament, I don't mean to say that I scorn them, but they don't demand much effort to grasp their appearance, their forms and colors; it's properly the true natural ornament. Their ornamental sense is primitive, simple, interesting enough in the quality of their forms and colors: quite on the contrary a painting, which is also made up of forms and colors, demands of the spirit that contemplates it a more complex effort of the imagination.<sup>370</sup>

The violet and white chrysanthemums in the *Album* were thus a meaningful motif, likely chosen to represent this idea of modern painting as based in common ornament.<sup>371</sup> Painting transforms this primitive decoration into something more imaginatively expressive and intellectually engaging. In *The Embroidery*, the woman in the foreground is making a textile with a repeat pattern—a simple, common ornament—not a multi-figural, metaphorically complex mural decoration like the *Album*. *The Album* takes these domestic decorative patterns and transforms them into art. Although the narrative of the suite begins with the needlewoman's scarlet thread, Vuillard remains the creator of the decoration, an artist and not a needleworker. He has conjured these women into being with his stippled brushwork, merging and layering patterns so that bourgeois textile ornament is transfigured into modernist painting.

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<sup>370</sup> “Sur la table à midi les chrysanthèmes violacées et blanches. Motif ornemental sérieux et aimable à la fois. [...] Les fleurs après tout sont un ornement grossier, simple, je ne veux pas dire que je les méprise, mais cela ne demande aucun effort pour en saisir l'aspect, les formes et les couleurs, c'est proprement le véritable ornement naturel. Le sens ornemental en est primitif, simple, a un intérêt suffisant dans la qualité de leurs formes et de couleurs. Tout au contraire un tableau qui lui aussi se constitue de formes et de couleurs demande à l'esprit qui le contemple un effort d'imagination plus complexe.” October 26, 1894, fol. 51, Ms 5396. Translated by Easton, *Intimate Interiors*, 78.

<sup>371</sup> Chrysanthemums held a wider cultural significance at the time, perhaps spurred by japonisme. The Société française des chrysanthémistes was founded in 1896 in Lyon dedicated to the promotion of chrysanthemums and to their greater use by the general public.

Vuillard's stippled brushwork carries the painting-weaving metaphor to the level of material structure. Scholars have often compared Vuillard's insistent little daubs of paint to the surface appearance of interlaced warps and wefts. Further to that, Vuillard's handling of oil paint in the *Album* approximates weaving. In the panel entitled *The Album*, the conservator Charlotte Hale observed that the pigments were laid down with little overlap of color and without underpainting or modulation of tones.<sup>372</sup> This is an atypical way of applying oil paint, a medium that lends itself to layering, glazing and blending. Vuillard's technique instead seems to emulate the weaving of wefts, laying one colored thread down next to another. The result of this mottled brushwork is a dissolving of boundaries between one motif and the next, a vertiginous confusion between figure and ground. This confusion finds a structural metaphor in tapestry where support and design, warps and wefts, are integrated into one cloth. The unification of figure and ground is thus fundamental to the very construction of the medium.

Scholars have previously associated the merging of figure and ground with a variety of cultural and artistic impulses of the fin-de-siècle, including: a Wagnerian musical aesthetic in which all elements merge into a harmonious *Gesamtkunstwerk* as in Richard Wagner's operas;<sup>373</sup> Vuillard's work in Symbolist theater in which actors and stage set were integrated to create a unified visual plane for the spectator;<sup>374</sup> a formalist tactic in which Vuillard is moving towards abstraction;<sup>375</sup> or as reflecting nineteenth-century attitudes towards women as decorative

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<sup>372</sup> Curatorial files, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>373</sup> Kuenzli, *Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, chap. 2.

<sup>374</sup> Forgione, "Édouard Vuillard in the 1890s," chap. 3.

<sup>375</sup> Martin Sundberg, "The Cluttered Surface: Vuillard, Proust and the Decorative," paper presented at Arts décoratifs et poésie – artistes, écrivains et esthètes autour de Marcel Proust, Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art, Paris, February 11, 2012.

objects.<sup>376</sup> While all of these explanations are valid, none of them acknowledge the paintings' palpably corporeal and specifically tactile address to the viewer;<sup>377</sup> namely that the confusion between figure and ground is realized through Vuillard's physically evocative, tapestry-like brushwork. Tapestry, then, offers not just a structural model, but also a sensory and perceptual one. I propose that *The Album*'s bodily address and vertiginous effects can be understood as a translation of Vuillard's encounter with the materiality of tapestry and its status as historic art object.

If we compare *The Album* to Maurice Denis's, *The Love and Life of a Woman* (*Frauenliebe und Leben*), we can see Vuillard's distinctive approach to the picture surface and to the materiality of paint. *The Love and Life of a Woman* was another decorative suite painted for the Maison de l'Art Nouveau, specifically for a model bedroom upstairs from Vuillard's antechamber. *Farandole* from Denis's suite (Plate 93) and Vuillard's painting entitled *The Album* (Plate 88d) share similar dimensions and the general subject matter of women in peignoirs floating across the canvas, but they are quite disparate in execution. Denis favored clearly defined forms. His female figures are neatly outlined and the folds of their dresses extend in linear curves that correspond to the distant landscape. The broad, flat planes of the pink sky and purple-brown earth fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. The clarity of the motifs contrasts markedly with the muddled confusion of women, fabrics, and flora in Vuillard's painting. Moreover, the

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<sup>376</sup> Groom, *Edouard Vuillard*, 71-81.

<sup>377</sup> Francesca Berry ("Maman is my Muse") has recently suggested another apt model—that of the infant's envelopment in the maternal body—which acknowledges the haptic dimension of Vuillard's work. This metaphor, however, is limited to the "maman-motif paintings," as she calls them. For Vuillard's monumental decorative commissions, I believe that tapestry provides a more probable and appropriate model for tactility and corporeal immersion. Michel Makarius had earlier offered a psychoanalytic interpretation of Vuillard's work as representing a pre-Oedipal fusion with the Mother, though his analysis is less sustained than Berry's (*Vuillard*, 16).

highly nuanced, flickering yet muted colors of the *Album* are far more complex than Denis's simple pink-blue-brown scheme. Denis's work can be described as following a stained-glass aesthetic of firm contours and colored shapes, as opposed to Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic.

The vogue for stained glass in the late nineteenth century was undeniably connected to the tapestry revival.<sup>378</sup> Both were related to fin-de-siècle medievalism and both mediums offered an alternative means of artistic wall decoration to painting. Both encouraged flat, decorative compositions that dematerialized the wall surface. In fact for the Maison de l'Art Nouveau, both Vuillard and Denis designed a stained-glass window as part of a larger group commission from Bing that included nine other artists. These windows were produced by Louis Comfort Tiffany in New York.<sup>379</sup> Notably, while Denis designed several windows for various patrons and exhibitions after having participated in the Bing-Tiffany commission, the latter was Vuillard's first and last work in that medium. Vuillard seems to have found stained glass unsympathetic to his artistic sensibility.

Perhaps his experimentation with a related but materially opposite medium helped to crystallize his tapestry aesthetic. Stained glass is of course characterized by luminosity; light passes through its panes to animate the image. Tapestry, by contrast, absorbs light; the fibers of the wool and furrows between the threads consume all ambient illumination. We could say that the transparency of stained glass as opposed to the opacity of tapestry provides a metaphorical parallel to the clarity of Denis's work seen against the obscurity of Vuillard's in terms of subject

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<sup>378</sup> See Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past*, chap. 5.

<sup>379</sup> For this commission see Frèches-Thory and Terrasse, *Nabis*, 182-87; Groom, *Beyond the Easel*, 114-17; Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 49-52; and Gabriel P. Weisberg, Edwin Becker, and Évelyne Possémé, eds. *The Origins of l'Art Nouveau: The Bing Empire*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2004), 82-83.

matter as well as form. More importantly for our purposes are the perceptual differences between the two. Denis's paintings are conceived of as flat, smooth surfaces that confront the viewer as objects to be looked at, to be understood primarily through vision. They presuppose an almost disembodied opticality. Instead, Vuillard's *Album* presents a conception of painting that addresses the sense of touch as much as vision.

In the *Album*, Vuillard places the optic and the tactile in dialogue with each other. On the one hand, the window in *The Embroidery* represents and facilitates sight. The drawing back of the curtain to illuminate the rest of the panels portrays vision made possible by light on a very literal level. On the other hand, *The Album* is engulfed in mottled daubs of paint that both emphasize the artist's touch, his physical application of paint, as well as stimulate the viewer's sense of touch through their evocation of woven wool. Vuillard's tapestry-like paintings assume the embodiment of the viewer; in other words, that the viewer's eye is grounded in a feeling, sensing body.<sup>380</sup> This critical difference is key to Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic and, I believe, explains his keen interest in a medium that was structured around the corporeality of the viewer.

Tapestry was an insistently tactile medium that was used as much for warmth as for decoration. In the Middle Ages, tapestries were hung one next to the other, over chilly stone walls, doors and even windows, to cover the entire room; they created an insulating architectural clothing of wool and silk. Itinerant nobility treated tapestries as portable walls that could be transported from chateau to chateau, easily rolled and unrolled to make draughty halls habitable as well as to recreate the same symbolic spaces in different structures. In rococo *hôtel*

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<sup>380</sup> Scholars have previously focused on the way the eye interacts with Vuillard's work, eliding the body of the viewer, which I believe runs counter to the logic of the work itself. Yves-Alain Bois, for example, has argued that "Vuillard's art assumes an entropy of the gaze" ("On Matisse," 90); and the subtitle of the Vuillard catalogue raisonné, *The Inexhaustible Glance*, emphasizes Vuillard's eye above all other aspects of his art.

*particuliers*, tapestries were set into wood paneling and sized for smaller interiors, but still produced this enveloping environment of soft, pliable walls. Tapestry thus offered Vuillard a haptic model of corporeal immersion of viewer in art object. The stippled brushwork was therefore not just a surface effect, but an endeavor to create a new relationship between art object and viewer; one that proposed a continuity between the body and its surroundings, between animate and inanimate, through touch.

Touch has traditionally been conceived in Western thinking as inferior to the more intellectual sense of sight because it was associated with the body, with pure, unthinking feeling.<sup>381</sup> France, however, had a history of revaluing the tactile sense. In early modern France, touch was considered one of the “master senses” because it checked and confirmed the impressions of sight and gave solidity to other sense perceptions.<sup>382</sup> With the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, vision (aligning light and reason) began its ascendancy as the dominant sense through which one understood the surrounding world. Yet touch was still regarded as an indispensable cognitive experience. Étienne Bonnot de Condillac valued touch as a double experience in his 1754 *Treatise on the Sensations*. He argued that through touch, the body gains knowledge of objects in the exterior world; at the same time, touch permits the extension of the body, a sense of continuity or undifferentiation between interior and exterior.<sup>383</sup> Touch erased the physical distance between object and perceiver, uniting toucher and touched, and thus gave the individual a sense of being part of the larger universe.

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<sup>381</sup> Classen, *Book of Touch*, 5.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 277

<sup>383</sup> Lajer-Burcharth, “Pompadour’s Touch” 56-57. Touch is discussed in books 2 and 3 of Condillac’s treatise.

The late nineteenth century has been characterized by scholars as an age of visuality, or rather, an era when technology effected the disassociation of the senses, disentangling sight from touch, and reifying the former into an autonomous and aestheticized experience of pure perception. The stereoscope, photography, cinema, the spectacularization of mass culture through posters or display windows of department stores, the paradigm of the flâneur's gaze, have all been cited as evidence of the disembodied opticality of the era.<sup>384</sup> Vuillard's visual tactility can be contextualized within this moment as a competing model of perception; it was perhaps a reaction to the increasing ocularcentrism of mass culture, an attempt to reintroduce the body to perception.

In a way, *The Album* is about the process of corporeal perception. Several months before beginning work on the set, Vuillard wrote in his sketchbook, "my interest at the moment is in the discovery of objects: work of slow coordination of multiple sensations in which I don't stop to worry about the details."<sup>385</sup> Accordingly, the *Album*'s dense layers of patterns impose on the viewer a cognitive slowness,<sup>386</sup> as if to parallel or illustrate the coming into being of an object through tactile perception. The sense of touch discerns objects gradually and progressively, feeling part by part to construct an impression of the whole, as opposed to vision's immediate apprehension of the complete object. Likewise, Vuillard's stippled brushwork enacts the accumulation of bits of sensation, a myriad of microperceptions that make up the larger

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<sup>384</sup> See Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*; Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); and Danius, *The Senses of Modernism*.

<sup>385</sup> "l'intérêt que je prends en ce moment c'est la découverte des objets: travail de coordination lent de sensations multiples où je ne m'arrête pas au détail en m'énervant" Vuillard's sketchbook, April 19, 1895, fol. 56, Ms 5396.

<sup>386</sup> Bois has discussed this perceptual slowness as a point of contrast with the perceptual assault or immediacy of Matisse's images, which he compares to a firecracker. "On Matisse," 67. Makarius (*Vuillard*, 8) has identified Vuillard's perceptual slowness with the child's gradual perception of objects in the world.

comprehension of the whole, the macroperception.<sup>387</sup> We can perhaps understand this representation or translation of tactile perception and cognitive slowness into visual terms as not only as an insistence on embodied perception in a visual age, but also as a resistance to the speed and sensory overload of modern life.

The imposed slowness of *The Album* suggests nothing so much as an encounter with a set of faded, ancient tapestry. The subject and details take time to decipher. There is no central focus in any of the compositions; rather, bouquets and women's heads proliferate across the canvases. Although Vuillard used rich complementary colors of red and green, he neutralized them through middle tones and proximate hues such as ochre and rose, so that the tempered palette works against defining form. Even at a distance, the viewer has the feeling of viewing the painting close up, of being absorbed into the paintings, rather than standing back to contemplate them.<sup>388</sup> The sense of disorientation is enhanced by the combination of contradictory viewpoints, even within the same picture. For example in *The Album*, the table at left is seen from above while the woman in profile seated next to it is seen head-on.<sup>389</sup> In *The Embroidery*, the weaving woman is seen from below while her needlework and the other embroidering woman are seen from above. These destabilizing spatial and perspectival effects echo the historical disjunctiveness of a late nineteenth-century subject encountering an object from the distant past.

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<sup>387</sup> Here I am appropriating terminology from Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 86-87.

<sup>388</sup> Michel Makarius has superbly described this effect in relation to another Vuillard painting: "The picture pulls the viewer into the painterly fabric, and turns the visual experience of the canvas into a tactile one. It is as if one were ensnared in a tapestry's threads" *Vuillard*, 8. This effect of the "near view" even when physically standing back from the painting recalls Alois Riegl's connection of close vision (Nahsicht) with the haptic.

<sup>389</sup> Ursula Perucchi-Petri argues that this combination of perspectives derives from Japanese prints. "Vuillard et le Japon," in Dumas and Cogeval, *Vuillard*, 150-51.

The contemporary literature on tapestry provides a productive context for understanding Vuillard's strategies for slowness, for reinforcing an impression of tactile perception—ie., his muted colors, dense composition, and imprecise forms. Charles Blanc's *Grammaire des arts décoratifs* (1882) expounds at length on the material properties of tapestry. He explains that the small gaps between each warp and weft create countless minute shadows that produce an overall graying effect of the surface; that light is absorbed by woven wool as opposed to reflected as in the case of silk; that the fibrous character of the material naturally blurs form; and that dyed wool tends to fade faster than oil paint.<sup>390</sup> Blanc identified these characteristics in order to suggest how to counteract them in tapestry cartoons; Vuillard's *Album*, however, seems to emulate these blurring and graying effects of wool on the perception of form and color.

To take another example, Eugène Muntz's foundational history of tapestry published in 1884 asserted that "it would be contrary to logic to give to the modeling and coloration [of tapestry] the finish necessary to painting properly speaking, to concentrate all the interest of action in a small number of figures. One must...not shy away from the abundance of details, multiplying figures, in a way that produces a very rich grouping."<sup>391</sup> In other words, ancient tapestry featured decentralized compositions and pervasive decoration that covered the entire surface of the work, as opposed to the illusionistic clarity of painting. The viewer was encouraged to get lost in the sumptuousness and complexity of the ornament, to leisurely and pleurably linger within the work.

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<sup>390</sup> Blanc, *Grammaire des arts décoratifs*, 91-94.

<sup>391</sup> "il serait contraire à la logique de donner au modelé ou au coloris le fini nécessaire à la peinture proprement dit, de concentrer sur un petit nombre de personnages tout l'intérêt de l'action. Il faut...ne pas reculer devant l'abondance des détails, multiplier les figures, de manière à produire un groupement très nourri." Muntz, *La tapisserie*, 9-10.

Whether Vuillard read Blanc and Muntz, and he most likely did the former, these texts present a contemporary understanding of tapestry that help explicate how Vuillard developed his tapestry aesthetic, that is, which characteristics of tapestry he chose to emphasize and emulate. Tapestry was not conceived of as a purely flat surface; the furrows between warp threads, the fuzziness of the wool, the undulations of the material all had to be taken into account. Nor was it supposed to imply or depict depth. Given the prevalence of richly patterned clothing and other textiles depicted in medieval tapestries, the medium was perhaps best thought of in terms of thickness, as a planar accumulation of these layers of decorated cloth.<sup>392</sup> Vuillard's *Album* likewise presents this sense of planar density, of a not-quite-flat surface fabricated from a layering of manifold patterns. This idea of thickness suggests not only the tactile sense, but the larger haptic sense within Vuillard's work.

Vuillard linked tapestry and the perception of objects earlier on in his sketchbook. The year before he started work on *The Album*, he recorded his intention to, "Make a tapestry...the imagined harmony and the subject that folds and forms all the imagined objects for a certain effect"<sup>393</sup> Here the pliability of tapestry, the fold, serves as a model for haptic perception. Subject and object are folded into each other, like the merging between inanimate and animate, inhabitant and habitation. Unfolding then instantiates a coming into being. *The Album*, with its confusion between figure and ground and its multi-panel installation, represents as well as induces this haptic relationship of the body to its surroundings. It operates through this logic of

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<sup>392</sup> I borrow this notion of *épaisseur* from Hubert Damisch, *Fenêtre jaune cadmium* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 290. I am grateful to Merel van Tilburg for this reference.

<sup>393</sup> "faire une tapisserie...l'harmonie imaginée et le sujet qui plie et forme tous les objets imaginés pour un certain effet." Vuillard's sketchbook, August 30, 1894, fol. 49, Ms 5396. Transcribed by Alexandre, "Edouard Vuillard. Carnets intimes," 2:368. Interestingly, Vuillard's words bring to mind Deleuze's concept of the fold (see n.46).

tapestries and textiles, of wrapping, unfolding, becoming. Ribbons, tablecloths, and dresses that bunch up, unfurl, and envelop permeate the paintings. These motifs reinforce the tactile, material effect of the mottled brushwork, creating the impression of a slowly unrolling, tapestried interior that enfolds the viewer in a warm, muffled embrace.

We could further understand Vuillard's turn towards the haptic and the tactile as part of his medievalism.<sup>394</sup> It speaks to both an anti-industrial turn towards handcraft, and a longing for some imagined time of wholeness, cohesion, connectivity. Vuillard's experience of medieval tapestry, was of course as a historic artifact. Belying the idea of wholeness that they engendered, these objects were fragmentary, discolored with age, damaged, repaired and reconstituted. For example, when the Cluny acquired *The Lady and the Unicorn* in 1882, the edges had been eaten by rats and deteriorated by humidity. Many sections were threadbare, such as the face of the lady in several of the panels. Between 1889 and 1892, the set underwent a restoration campaign that only involved reconstructing the bottoms of the panels using ancient wool threads from the store rooms of the Gobelins. The set was not thoroughly repaired and washed until 1943, after which the supervising committee complained that the conservators had gone too far because the colors were so bright.<sup>395</sup> For all the conservation issues of *The Lady and the Unicorn*, it remained a remarkably intact set. Other surviving tapestries were not so lucky.

In his *Grammaire des arts décoratifs*, Blanc recounted his experience of viewing a Gothic tapestry that had been burned and reconstituted.

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<sup>394</sup> In the oral culture of early modern Europe when literacy was not widespread, hearing and touch would have been privileged over sight. See Donald Lowe, *The History of Bourgeois Perception* (Chicago, 1982), 7-8. For the centrality of touch in medieval life, see also Classen, *Deepest Sense*, xii-xiv and chaps. 1-3.

<sup>395</sup> For the restoration history and accompanying documentation, see Joubert, *La tapisserie médiévale*, 71-75, 85-92.

[The tapestry] seemed to be made from pieces and morsels...the subject represented was almost unintelligible. [...] There were shoulders without heads, hands without arms, legs without feet...the tapestry thus recreated from so many disfigured fragments was marked by a strange poetry. Seen in the shadows, it presented an admirable magic book of indefinite things, of mysterious figures, some disappearing into the landscape, others...gesturing incomprehensibly...<sup>396</sup>

These ancient, salvaged vestiges were thus resuscitated, reconstructed into a new whole for the imaginative interpretations of a late nineteenth-century audience. Fin-de-siècle medievalism was of course predicated on fabricating a unity—an image of the Middle Ages as a time of unity—from fragments, and ancient tapestry served as an apposite metaphor for this process. Likewise, Vuillard's *Album* creates a redemptive, new whole out of parceled bodies. Vuillard reclaimed medieval tapestry as a way to both express and counteract modern life. The fragmented body was not only a feature of reconstituted ancient tapestry; it was also a symptom of nineteenth-century consumer culture and mechanical production. Vuillard's partial figures thus interrelate medieval tapestry fragments and the parceled bodies of retail advertisements, window displays, or industrial labor. And yet, the visual tactility and haptic nature of the *Album*—its immersive sense of connectivity and wholeness as inspired by ancient tapestry—provided an antidote to the psychological and physical alienation caused by urbanism and industrialization. Medieval tapestry offered a model for creating a sense of wholeness out of fragments.

By evoking the haptic qualities of tapestry, Vuillard demonstrated the possibility of cohesion between individual and environment, of a tactile intimacy between beings and things.

Vuillard was not unique in this respect; rather this model of porosity and interdependence was a

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<sup>396</sup> “Elle paraissait faite de pièces et de morceaux...et le sujet représenté en était presque inintelligible. [...] c'étaient des épaules sans tête, des mains sans bras, des jambes sans pied...la tapisserie ainsi refaite avec tant de morceaux défigurés se trouvait empreinte d'une étrange poésie. Vue dans une pénombre, elle présentait un admirable grimoire de choses indéfinies, de personnages mystérieux, les uns fuyant dans le paysage, les autres...faisant des gestes incompris...” Blanc, *Grammaire des arts décoratifs*, 99-100.

feature of many currents of fin-de-siècle thought, from scientific to social theory. Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic thus seems to be part of a wider trend. Louis Pasteur's discovery of communicable germs in 1875, or the "new psychology's" conception of the psyche as a permeable entity in dynamic relation with the exterior world in the 1880s, contributed to the notion that a person's identity and well-being was tied to all the other beings and things around them. Following this model, even interior decoration became instrumental in psychic formation; it could both shape and be shaped by the psyche.<sup>397</sup> Inhabitant and habitation formed an organic unity.

The philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau subsequently developed a notion of sympathy from the concept of the permeable psyche in his posthumously published book, *Art from a Sociological Point of View* (1889). Guyau, who taught philosophy briefly at Vuillard's high school, the Lycée Condorcet, started from the assumption that the individual is amenable to the influences of other consciences. Sympathy, then, was a psychological and biological process of adjustment of the individual to its habitat, a continual interpenetration in order to reach equilibrium. Through sympathy, individual consciousness could merge with the collective milieu. Guyau further posited that, "Touch is the most primitive and sure way to...harmonize...two consciences."<sup>398</sup>

Guyau's theory of sympathy was closely connected to what became the republican political doctrine of the Belle Époque: solidarism. One of the founding theorists of solidarism,

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<sup>397</sup> See Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, chap. 5

<sup>398</sup> "Le toucher est le moyen le plus primitive et le plus sûr...d'harmoniser...deux consciences." *L'art au point de vue sociologique*, 3.

Alfred Fouillée, was in fact Guyau's stepfather.<sup>399</sup> Solidarism conceived of society as an organism; each person was a cell that had to perform its particular task in collaboration with all the other cells to keep the organism in equilibrium. Everyone in society was therefore interdependent and had an obligation to work towards the common good. Art's role in solidarism was to produce sympathy, to create an experience of social cohesion. The political ideal of solidarity crystallized in 1895-1896 with the Radicalist politician Léon Bourgeois's short-lived tenure as Prime Minister. The chief proponent of solidarism, Bourgeois's book *Solidarité* (1896) defined the doctrine for the general public.

This rapid précis of contemporary socio-political thought is meant to suggest the broader context for Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic, and that tapestry perhaps was more than a formal artistic device. Although I am not arguing that Vuillard was consciously referencing these ideas of sympathy, solidarism, and germ theory, he does share with them an ideal of collectivity, an awareness of the body's relationship to other bodies, a resistance to the fragmentation and isolation of modern urban life. The interdependence between beings and things is writ into the *Album* through the indexical touch of the artist and relayed to the viewer as an immersive, haptic experience. With *The Album*, Vuillard ambitiously posits that tapestry, far from being an erudite, obscure interest, could serve as a model for a redemptive modern art and society.

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<sup>399</sup> For solidarism and Fouillée, see Sheradin, "Reforming the Republic," chap. 1. Fouillée was responsible for posthumously publishing Guyau's work.

## CHAPTER 8. The Vaquez Panels: Tapestry and Bourgeois Modernism

*Interior with Figures*, better known as the Vaquez panels after their patron, has been deemed the apotheosis of Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic (Plates 94a-d).<sup>400</sup> If the *Album* signaled Vuillard's serious engagement with tapestry utilizing various paradigms, *Interior with Figures* offers a more focused statement about tapestry's relationship to modernism. This suite of four paintings was commissioned in 1896 to decorate the library of cardiologist Dr. Louis-Henri Vaquez's home in Paris. Unlike the disjointedness and flexibility of the *Album*, The Vaquez suite is composed of two pairs of vertical rectangular panels of the same length: *Intimité* and *Music* form the larger pair; *Working* and *Choosing a Book* the smaller one. The four panels are unified by the dense, flowered wallpaper and wood-beam ceiling that serve as a continuous backdrop to the various everyday activities taking place in the well-appointed space—female figures playing the piano, listening to music, looking through an album of prints, sewing, etc., as well as a male figure reading.

More than the *Album*, the Vaquez panels evoke those pivotal millefleurs tapestries at the Cluny, *The Lady and the Unicorn* and *Seignorial Life* (Plates 95-96)—the floral backdrop, the flatness of the compositions, the hieratic figures, and the objects floating against a densely patterned vertical plane. *Intimité* even echoes *The Embroidery* from *Seignorial Life* in composition: a woman sitting with her task at left, women standing at right, and a mirror in between them; the tree in *The Embroidery* has migrated to the vase of flowers on the table at left in *Intimité*. In *Interior with Figures*, Vuillard cleverly deconstructs the various functions of the

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<sup>400</sup> Russell, *Edouard Vuillard, 1868-1940*, 67; Dugdale, "Vuillard the Decorator," 97.

millefleurs motif in medieval tapestries—are they plane, ground, or “real” flowers?—and made them manifest as wallpaper, rugs, and vases of lush blooms.

Vuillard restricted his palette to a handful of colors, paralleling the limited range of natural dyes that were used in medieval tapestry. The muted hues furthermore suggest the faded appearance of ancient tapestries, as Vuillard would have seen them. Vuillard applied his paint very thinly, letting the warps and wefts of the linen support show through and creating the impression of dyed threads. The structure and installation of tapestry is manifest in the composition of the paintings in a way that is different from the *Album*. The *Album*'s dazzling dissolution of form verged on total disintegration, as if threatening the total psychic dissolution of the self into the environment. *Interior with Figures* features an array of rectilinear elements to contain this dissolution, such as the wood-beam ceiling, the books and bookshelves, and the rugs. These motifs borrow from the grid-like, perpendicular crossings of warp and weft to create a stabilizing scaffold for the decoration. We can, in addition, read the vertical beams of the ceiling as ribbons from which the ersatz tapestries hang, the way ancient tapestries were installed in the sixteenth century.

*Interior with Figures* maintains the stippled brushwork that was so central to the *Album*'s affect. The sense of touch remains vital to the experience and meaning of the Vaquez panels, however Vuillard takes the concept even further in this decoration. In addition to the feeling of cohesion and haptic intimacy that tactility fosters in the suite as a whole, the panel entitled *Music* offers another role for touch and texture—as part of a synesthetic experience along with sound

and color. Synesthesia has recently been discussed as central to the Nabis' modernism.<sup>401</sup> While it will not be the primary focus of this chapter, in the interest of exploring the manifold ways Vuillard mobilized tapestry to modernize painting, it is worth considering how Vuillard utilized tapestry to bring a tangibility to this rather abstract concept.

Symbolists of the late nineteenth century conceived synesthesia as a unification or transcendence of the discrete senses.<sup>402</sup> The idea of cross-sensory equivalents or associations implied not only the interdependence of the senses, but also a feeling of wholeness, of a pre-modern, almost prelapsarian state of undifferentiation. Here we can connect the underlying goals of synesthesia to those of Nabi medievalism. Symbolist synesthesia, however, was almost always manifested as chromaesthesia, or colored hearing: the sound of a vowel or musical note would stimulate the vision of a certain color.<sup>403</sup> In other words, the rest of the senses were more neglected, belying the ideal of a unification of all the senses. I propose that the Vaquez panels perhaps represent an attempt to rectify this by finding equivalencies across the senses of sight, hearing, *and* touch.

At first glance, *Music* from the Vaquez suite places the decoration within this chromaesthetic discourse, most obviously with its subject matter. It depicts a woman in the middle ground at left playing a piano that horizontally bisects the composition. Five other women listen to the music being played. Two sit behind the musician and listen with quiet attention. Two more women stand in the background at the sideboard: one has turned towards

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<sup>401</sup> Kuenzli, *Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, chap. 2.

<sup>402</sup> Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, 14-15, 36, 79.

<sup>403</sup> Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen* 43. Although chromaesthesia is the most common form of synesthesia, Dann points out that tactile-visual and tactile-auditory synesthesia has also been recorded as occurring naturally (*Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, 11).

the piano player as if suddenly captivated by the music; the other remains absorbed in her task. The woman in the foreground handling the fabrics tilts her head downwards, also absorbed in her task as the melody washes over her. The tenor of the music is expressed through the muted palette of soft purples, rose, and green.

Perhaps taking their cue from this panel, critics have often compared the Vaquez panels to music. They spoke frequently of the decoration's harmonious colors and Claude Roger-Marx specifically likened the work to a symphony in four parts.<sup>404</sup> James Dugdale later described the metaphorical symphony as one in a minor key.<sup>405</sup> Dugdale and other scholars and critics thus associated the muffled colors of the Vaquez panels with music of a certain tonal structure and tempo, inferring a synesthetic metaphor of sight and sound. I would argue, however, that the tapestry-like texture of the paintings also contributes to the evocation of music. Indeed the idea of muffled colors implies a covering over and dampening of sound with layers of thick fabric; or perhaps with the use of the soft pedal on the piano.

Tapestry making and music making, high-warp looms and pianos, were familiar analogies of the period. In recounting his visit to the Gobelins in 1892, Gaston Stiegler described a weaver as follows: "He has in front of him his loom, high, straight, formed by long, vertical threads very similar to the assembling of the strings of a piano."<sup>406</sup> Henry Havard compared weavers to pianists in an 1893 interview because they transpose colors from the painted cartoon to wool threads, just as pianists transpose music scores from one key to

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<sup>404</sup> Roger-Marx, *Vuillard et son temps*, 125. See also Charles Saunier, "Le Salon d'automne," *Revue Universelle*, no. 147 (1905) : 626; Camille Mauclair, "Le Salon d'Automne," *Revue Bleue* 4, no. 17, 5th series (October 21, 1905): 523; François Monod, "Le Salon d'automne," *Art et Décoration* 18 (Nov 1905): 200;

<sup>405</sup> Dugdale, "Vuillard the Decorator," 97

<sup>406</sup> "Il a devant lui sa trame, haute, droite, formée de longs fils verticaux, très analogue à l'assemblage des cordes d'un piano" Gaston Stiegler, "Aux Gobelins," *Echo de Paris*, July 29, 1892, MN G.278.

another.<sup>407</sup> The Symbolist writer Joris-Karl Huysmans perhaps best expressed the notion of tapestry weaving as music making. While viewing Gustave Moreau's *Siren and Poet* being woven, he wrote, "it's marvelous to see, through the immense harp of white strings that is the high-warp loom, the silent musician of this art animating the instrument that renders little by little, in the coming and going of the shuttles, sounds of different shades."<sup>408</sup> Through a lyrical interweaving of sound, color, and thread, Huysmans here compares the tapestry loom to a musical instrument that creates tactile-visual rather than aural music. Tapestry, in other words, was silent music.<sup>409</sup>

Likewise, Vuillard's *Music* offers equivalencies between visual, auditory and tactile sensations. The painting's resemblance to tapestry coupled with its depiction of a piano recall the metaphoric associations of Huysmans and others. It's as if Vuillard wished to materialize the immaterial, to make music tangible. Not only can the viewer see music through the pulsating colors and as represented by the piano, he or she could also touch music. Just as Vuillard's facture re-introduced the body to perception, *Music* introduces tactility to the synesthetic equation via the model of tapestry.

Chromaesthesia stands as evidence of the paragone between music and painting amongst the Symbolists in the late nineteenth century. This rivalry stems from the ideas of the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer; he believed that music was the highest form of art, that it was

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<sup>407</sup> "les tapissiers sont alors obligés de *transposer* le coloris, tout comme les violonistes et les pianistes transposent des partitions musicales." "Les Gobelins. La Question des Manufactures Nationales," *Le Matin*, March 6, 1893, MN G.278.

<sup>408</sup> "c'est merveille de voir, au travers cet immense harpe aux cordes blanches qu'est l'appareil d'haute lisse, le musicien silencieux de cet cart anime l'instrument qui rend peu à peu, dans le va-et-vient des broches, des sons différents de nuances." J.-K. Huysmans, "Les Gobelins," *L'Echo de Paris*, January 18, 1899, MN G.279.

<sup>409</sup> This metaphor was still current in 1909 when Camille Mauclair compared symphonic music to a tapestry woven by the orchestra who cannot see the whole that they are making; only the audience had the privilege of viewing the work from the proper side. See Leonard, "Picturing Listening," 270.

a pure, unmediated embodiment of what he called Will—the blind, striving universal force that underlies the everyday world of things.<sup>410</sup> Anne Leonard characterizes the music-painting paragone as a competition breeding a mix of admiration and resentment on the part of painters as they attempted to transcend the “stubborn materiality of their own art” and “piggyback on... music’s prestige.”<sup>411</sup> In this context, we can perhaps understand Vuillard’s tactility as a way to uphold and insist on the materiality of painting in the face of immaterial music as an equal mode of expression.

Further to this point, Richard Leppert has argued that in the late nineteenth century, listening to music became an experience of private reverie, as opposed to the conversational, social activity it was in the eighteenth century.<sup>412</sup> With the orchestra hidden in the pit or the listener listening with eyes closed, music was severed from music-making, from the materiality of the instruments and the laboring bodies of the musicians. Vuillard’s *Music* perhaps counters the dematerialization and disembodiment of music by incarnating it in his *touche*, in the visible traces of the artist’s labor. Leppert also observes that the over-decorated materiality of the piano in nineteenth-century representations contradicts the immateriality of the music it produced.<sup>413</sup> However, by my logic, this decorative materiality in *Music* works precisely to render tangible what is invisible, not to contradict it.

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<sup>410</sup> For Schopenhauer’s influence on Symbolism, see Shehira *Doss-Davezac*, “Schopenhauer According to the Symbolists: The Philosophical Roots of Late 19th Century French Aesthetic Theory.” In *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*. Dale Jacquette, ed. (Cambridge, 1996): 249-76; and for Schopenhauer’s conception of music, see Lawrence Ferrara, “Schopenhauer on music as the embodiment of Will,” in *Ibid.*, 183-99.

<sup>411</sup> Leonard, “Picturing Listening,” 277.

<sup>412</sup> Leppert, *Sight of Sound*, chap. 9.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

Vuillard would further develop this tapestry/piano/painting analogy in a series of works executed around 1899 that are similar in composition to *Music*, including *Misia at the Piano*, *Misia in White Wearing a Red Necklace and Playing the Piano*, and *In Front of the Tapestry* (Plates 97-99). They depict Misia Natanson at the piano along with a male listener in front of what looks like a seventeenth-century verdure, of a type well represented by the Aubusson tapestry, *La Ronde* (Plate 100). These small paintings were likely based on a photograph taken by Vuillard that same year of Misia performing in her Paris apartment on the rue Saint-Florentin (Plate 101).<sup>414</sup> The photographic composition is vertically bifurcated by the edge of the verdure tapestry; on the right side, Misia, the piano, and the tapestry form one integrated entity; the left side is given over to the wallpaper and chair back. Notably there is no other figure in the photograph.

When compared to Vuillard's photograph, his painting *Misia at the Piano* seems to have zoomed out of the scene; it includes more wallpaper on the right side as well as Thadée, notably turned away from the piano and possibly with eyes closed, listening to the music. The supplementary strip of wallpaper serves to frame the scene, emphasizing the integrity of the Misia-piano-tapestry motif. The addition of the listening figure underscores the presence of the music, which is characterized by or made visible through the expressive colors and facture of the textiles in the painting. The tumultuous tapestry in the background, teeming with amorphous patches of yellow-whites and blue-greens, rises out of the piano and flows into the red shawl covering the instrument, as if to convey the stormy, passionate chords elicited by Misia's hands

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<sup>414</sup> Misia was an accomplished pianist. See Isabelle Cahn and Guy Cogeval, *Misia, Reine de Paris*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2012), 133-36 for her musical training. For an extended discussion of the motif of the woman at the piano, see Leppert, *Sight of Sound*, chap. 7.

spanning the keyboard. The shawl's white decorated border leads to the almost imperceptibly dark figure of Thadée, perhaps incarnating the music surging towards him, transposing sound into texture.<sup>415</sup>

Exploring the opposite effect of *Misia at the Piano*, *Misia in White* seems to have zoomed in on the photograph, cropping out the wallpaper and focusing in on Misia and the piano. Her white dress juxtaposed with the black suit of the page-turner/listener connects them to the black-and-white piano keys and music score.<sup>416</sup> This black-and-white music making unit is enveloped by the tapestry in the background, whose muted appearance perhaps expresses the calmer, gentler melodies intimated by Misia's posture at the keyboard. The tapestry-music metaphor culminates in the painting, *In Front of the Tapestry*. In title and composition, tapestry becomes the incarnation of music. Misia is no longer even playing the piano; she is instead occupied in needlework, bringing the metaphor full circle. Thadée, with head in his hand, listens to the silent music of the tapestry looming over and subsuming the piano.

The tapestry-music metaphor, while made more explicit in these 1899 paintings, is already apparent in *Music* from the Vaquez suite. *Music's* synesthetic fusion of color, sound, and tactile sensations expand the practice and terms of this modernist, fin-de-siècle discourse. In a way, synesthesia harmonized with the Nabi desire to move beyond existing typological boundaries and discrete categories of the senses or of medium. From this perspective,

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<sup>415</sup> The association between music and the texture of textiles finds a precedent in Alfred de Lostalot's review of Wagner's *Tristan* in which he compares "the texture of *Tristan*" to an Oriental carpet. "Revue musical," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 31 (March 1, 1885): 270. Cited in Leonard, "Picturing Listening," 270.

<sup>416</sup> Leonard explores the function of the listener in late nineteenth-century paintings of music making, arguing that these representations give the listener a participatory role in the creation of a piece of music ("Picturing Listening," 276-77). One of Vuillard's paintings that also belongs to this 1899 series, *By the Piano* (Salomon and Cogeval, *Vuillard: The Inexhaustible Glance*, VI-47), could be understood in these terms. The painting is dominated by the seated figure of Thadée listening to a tiny Misia in the background playing the piano.

synesthesia complemented the Nabis' mission to align painting with the decorative arts. *Interior with Figures* can be thought of as encompassing these parallel preoccupations of modernism: the cross-sensory and the cross-media.

Besides the decoration's engagement with synesthesia, its claim to modernism lies above all in its manipulation of decorative references. Not only do the paintings evoke tapestry, but the evocation of millefleurs is achieved via another form of mural decoration—the quintessentially bourgeois ornament of wallpaper. Reprising the notion implicit in *The Album* that common ornament serve as the basis for modern art, the Vaquez panels advance a more systematic statement of modernist painting as transfiguration of domestic bourgeois decoration.

An entry from Vuillard's sketchbook makes the artist's conception of modernism more clear. Along with his thoughts on chrysanthemums cited in the previous chapter, on that Friday morning in October of 1894, he recorded his observations of every object and ornamental detail in the room—their textures, their forms, their colors. This mundane exercise prompted the following reflections:

...this idea of the life surrounding us, of our life, source of all our thoughts and productions, this becomes modernism (paintings of interiors...) ... I was struck by the abundance of ornament in all these objects. They are what one calls in bad taste, and if they were not familiar to me they might be unbearable. It's an opportunity to think about this label "in bad taste" that I am quick to say and that keeps me from looking... it's just as difficult, even more so I think, but very instructive, to understand a vulgar thing... a common thing, as it is to understand a beautiful sacred thing that has moved you. To thus understand the world was, I believe, the direction originally pointed out by those who first spoke of the modern and modernity.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> "cette idée de la vie qui nous entoure de notre vie, sources de toutes nos réflexions et productions, cela devient le modernisme (les tableaux d'intérieur ...) ... j'étais frappé de l'abondance d'ornements de tous ces objets. Ils sont ce que l'on appelle de mauvais goût et ils ne me seraient pas familiers qu'ils me seraient peut-être insupportables. C'est l'occasion de réfléchir sur cette appellation que je dis rapidement 'de mauvais goût' et qui m'empêche de regarder. ...c'est aussi difficile, même plus je crois, mais très instructif de comprendre une chose vulgaire ... une chose commune qu'une belle chose consacrée qui vous a ému. Comprendre le monde ainsi, c'était je crois la

For Vuillard, the ordinary bourgeois interior embodied contemporary life. This mindset contrasts with Maillol, for example, who wrote in his notes for his tapestry book, “the word modern has become synonymous with ugly and worthless.”<sup>418</sup> While Maillol turned away from the “bad taste” of common ornament and tried to create artistic replacements, Vuillard appreciated its place in contemporary life and attempted to salvage it by transforming it into art.

In the passage cited above from his notebook, Vuillard equates modern painting with “paintings of interiors”; this did not mean that simply depicting contemporary interiors qualified as modernist art. Rather, I argue that Vuillard looked to domestic ornament not just in terms of subject matter, but also in terms of technique, composition, and decorative function to re-conceptualize painting. Scholars have previously speculated that Vuillard drew directly from the decoration of Dr. Vaquez’s library to create *Interior with Figures*, making the paintings a sort of mirror of the room itself.<sup>419</sup> Unfortunately, no evidence survives of the panels’ original installation to confirm or dispute this supposition. Whether the paintings reflected and continued the ornamental scheme in which they were placed or whether they are an amalgamation of various domestic bourgeois interiors familiar to Vuillard is however, beside the point. The subject of the Vaquez panels serves to emphasize Vuillard’s underlying decorative philosophy; that is, how the paintings play with tapestry and wallpaper—the sacred and the vulgar—as aesthetic models in order to exemplify the notion of decoration as the essence of modern art.

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direction qu’indiquaient primitivement ceux qui parlaient les premiers de moderne et de modernité.” October 26, 1894, fols. 51-52, Ms 5396. Translated by Easton, *Intimate Interiors*, 78.

<sup>418</sup> “le mot moderne est devenu synonyme de laid sans valeur” *Notes sur la tapisserie*, Musée Maillol.

<sup>419</sup> Salomon, *Vuillard témoignage*, 40; Roger-Marx, *Vuillard et son temps*, 124; Georges, “Symbolisme et décor,” 105; Forgione, “Édouard Vuillard in the 1890s,” 107; Marie-Pierre Salé, “La peinture décorative et le décor modern en France au tournant du siècle,” in *1900*, exh cat. (Paris: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 2000), 116.

When *Interior with Figures* was exhibited at the 1905 Salon d'automne, it received contradictory reviews. Laertes remarked that the panels “resembled wallpaper too much.”<sup>420</sup> In a similar vein, Maurice Guillemot criticized, “Vuillard, exaggerating his method, impatiently makes trompe l’oeil tapestry, thereby spoiling his lovely decorative sense with his facture.”<sup>421</sup> As if responding to Guillemot, Charles Morice countered, “[Vuillard] is reproached for imitating tapestry to the point of trompe l’oeil. Why is this game not permitted, what does the eye have to complain of if it is delicately amused? I imagine that this imitation was dictated to the artist by the very destination of the compositions; they are ornaments painted to embellish our modern interiors.”<sup>422</sup> These critics’ comments provide a useful framework of two intersecting binaries—tapestry and wallpaper on the one hand, imitation as a positive or negative trait on the other—within which we can understand how the Vaquez panels functioned on a formal and conceptual level. Before discussing the paintings further, however, it is necessary to examine the reference points for the critics’ reactions. I will therefore look at the use and perception of ancient tapestries, imitation tapestries, and various types of wallpaper in nineteenth-century interiors and then consider how the Vaquez panels might have engaged with these diverse modes of mural decoration.

Well-preserved, ancient tapestries were of course not widely available for use in bourgeois homes. Interior decoration manuals assumed that the average reader would only have

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<sup>420</sup> “ressemblent trop à des papiers peints” Laertes, “Le Salon d’automne” *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, 13641 (October 28, 1905): 5.

<sup>421</sup> “Vuillard, exagérant son procédé fait avec impatience des trompe l’oeil de tapisserie, gâte par sa facture un joli sentiment décoratif.” Maurice Guillemot, “Le 3<sup>e</sup> Salon d’Automne,” *L’Art et les artistes*, 2 (October 1905): 51.

<sup>422</sup> “On lui reproche d’imiter la tapisserie jusqu’à tromper l’oeil. Pourquoi ce jeu ne serait-il pas permis, et de quoi se plaindrait l’oeil, s’il est délicatement amusé? J’imagine que cette imitation a été dictée à l’artiste par la destination même de ses compositions; ce sont des ornements peints pour l’embellissement de nos intérieurs modernes.” Charles Morice, “Le Salon d’Automne,” *Mercur de France* 58, no. 203 (December 1, 1905): 385.

some odd family heirlooms to work with, if anything at all, and probably damaged ones at that. Henri de Noussanne, for example, recommended in *Le Goût dans l'ameublement* (*Tasteful Furnishing*) salvaging these old fragments and sewing new borders for them to create a sort of refurbished tapestry panel for ornamenting one's walls.<sup>423</sup> Ancient tapestries were thus to be used sparingly, mainly in the *grand salon*, the formal reception room.<sup>424</sup> The *grand salon* conveyed the public image of the family and Noussanne advised decorating it with items collected over generations; it was not to be created right away from items bought in a department store.<sup>425</sup> In general then, intact sets of ancient tapestries were reserved for the homes of wealthy collectors or museums.

Instead, imitation tapestry became a new and rising trend during the fin-de-siècle to respond to the demand of bourgeois consumers looking to add an aristocratic touch to their rooms. Promoters of this product also tied its popularity to the state of affairs at the Gobelins—both the fact that the national importance of the manufactory was confirmed by the continuation of its state subsidies, discussed in Chapter 2; and the undeniable mediocrity of its production.<sup>426</sup> If tapestry was *de rigueur* as French mural decoration, but contemporary tapestry was dreadful and ancient tapestry out of reach, imitation tapestry filled the gap for a broad clientele. The most popular designs were pastiches of Flemish verdure, genre scenes after the Flemish artist David

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<sup>423</sup> Noussanne, *Le Goût dans l'ameublement*, 228.

<sup>424</sup> Although taste professionals agreed on this point, there was some debate about whether ancient tapestries should be used in the dining room, which could also be a space of formal reception and was sometimes in the same space as the salon. Noussanne and Georges de Landemer recommended it while Henry Havard advised against it because tapestries would absorb all the culinary odors and end up smelling foul. (Noussanne, *Le Goût dans l'ameublement*, 159; Landemer, *Le Carnet des fiançailles*, n.p.; Havard, *L'Art dans la Maison*, 2:150).

<sup>425</sup> Noussanne, *Le Goût dans l'ameublement*, 151.

<sup>426</sup> "Les Gobelins," *La Liberté*, July 22, 1891, MN G.183; Godon, *La Peinture sur toile*, 45; Louis Désiré, "L'Art dans la Tapisserie," *Art et Décoration* 2, Suppl. no. 3 (March 1898): n.p.

Teniers the Younger, and Rococo works (Plates 102a-c).<sup>427</sup> This range reveals the eclectic historicism that dominated mainstream taste at the time.

Imitation tapestry was made from coarse-grain supports of cotton or linen that were professionally colored.<sup>428</sup> The coarseness of the fabric ensured the visibility of the weave, and thus fostered the appearance of tapestry. Water-based paints were specially formulated to absorb into the fibers of the support without bleeding and evoke the appearance of dyes; they furthermore left the fabric supple like a woven hanging. The Maison Binant seems to have been the leading manufacturer of the canvas supports, which they made in at least twenty different grains. The company published several books and pamphlets on how to make painted tapestries and stipulated which *toile Binant* was best for imitating Gobelins or Flemish tapestries or Beauvais and Aubusson works. They even recommended finishing a painted tapestry by applying a layer of water dirtied from washing brushes in order to create the effect of a soiled, ancient tapestry.<sup>429</sup> The Maison Binant claimed that imitation tapestry was less expensive, quicker to make, and physically fit into modern apartments better than real tapestry. Nineteenth-century urban apartments were of course much smaller than the medieval/Renaissance chateaux or even Rococo *hôtels particuliers* for which ancient tapestries were sized. Imitation tapestries

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<sup>427</sup> Godon's *La Peinture sur toile* contains detailed instruction on how to paint each one of these types.

<sup>428</sup> I have for example, found mention of a M. Cleis, a M. Feldman, and the Ormesson firm who all painted imitation tapestries for sale on the open market. See André Treille, "L'Exposition au jour le jour" *La France*, July 6, 1878, MN G.277; Lux, "L'Exposition des Gobelins à l'Athénée," *L'Indépendance Rouenian*, November 17, 1891, MN G.183; and Désiré, "L'Art dans la Tapisserie". There was also amateur imitation tapestry, which consisted of wall hangings that bourgeois women would weave themselves using a specially manufactured loom that simplified tapestry technique. Two options marketed in the 1890s were the Brignolas loom and the *métier des fees*. See "Les Gobelins chez soi," *Le Matin*, December 2, 1891, MN G.183; "La Vraie Tapisserie," *La Femme chez elle*, November 15, 1899, MN G.279; and *La Revue Mame*, December 10, 1899, MN G.279.

<sup>429</sup> M.C., *Peinture sur toiles*, 529.

were made to order, preventing the deplorable practice of cutting down ancient tapestries to fit modern apartments.

For this and other reasons, interior decoration manuals encouraged utilizing imitation tapestry over the genuine article. Henri de Noussanne wrote that in his ideal house, “For reasons of hygiene, I shun old and precious tapestries. I content myself with imitating in painting the beautiful weavings of Flanders, Beauvais, and Gobelins.”<sup>430</sup> The new dictates of sanitation during the fin-de-siècle discouraged the use of woolly wall coverings, especially in libraries, because they were thought to trap dust and microbes that would damage books.<sup>431</sup> We might be surprised that a product so blatantly derivative would be promoted by taste professionals, however imitation tapestry was touted as artistic for two reasons: it was possible, though not usual, for an artist-decorator to create an original work, unlike a weaver at the state tapestry manufactory of the Gobelins, who reproduced the designer’s cartoon; and imitation tapestry possessed an illustrious historical pedigree in its own right. Julien Godon, in a booklet published by the Maison Binant in 1885, and Jules La Forge, a French correspondent for the British *Journal of Decorative Art* in 1898, both cited a set of painted tapestries of the Hôtel-Dieu in Reims from the fifteenth century as the origin of this artistic medium.<sup>432</sup> Painted tapestry was thus construed as part of the French artistic tradition, comparable to woven tapestry.

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<sup>430</sup> "Par hygiène, je repousse les vieilles et précieuses tapisseries. Je me contente d'imiter en peinture les beaux points de Flandre, de Beauvais, des Gobelins." Noussanne, *Le Goût dans l'ameublement*, 207.

<sup>431</sup> Havard cautions, “la poussière est...la plus implacable ennemi du livre,” *L'Art dans la maison*, 2:220. Noussanne advises extensively against using wallpaper imitating velours because it traps dust and microbes (*Le Goût dans l'ameublement*, 138-41).

<sup>432</sup> Godon, *La Peinture sur toile*, 45-6; Jules La Forge, "A Word on Tapestry. Paris Notes." *Journal of Decorative Art* (July 1898): 175-7, MN G.279.

On account of its historic origins, these taste professionals set imitation tapestry against wallpaper as a more legitimate and tasteful form of mural decoration. In 1874, a reviewer in *La République Française* wrote, “Wallpaper, so fragile, is thus finding itself chased from the place it usurped, by the revival of a procedure practiced in France since the Middle Ages until the end of the eighteenth century.”<sup>433</sup> Contemporary to Noussanne’s manual cited earlier, M.C. of the Maison Binant declared that painted tapestry was replacing banal wallpaper, “to the rejoicing of people of taste... As rich as it can be, next to [imitation tapestry] wallpaper seems shoddy.”<sup>434</sup> As these comments imply, by the late nineteenth century, wallpaper had become the default mode of mural decoration. The 1880s and 1890s witnessed a shift in patterns of habitation. The bourgeoisie no longer occupied family homes for generations, but rather moved around from rented apartment to rented apartment.<sup>435</sup> Wallpaper responded to the transiency of modern life, allowing nomadic tenants to economically paper and repaper their walls as needed and desired. This shoddy, fragile ornament had seemingly no history and no aesthetic value. Indeed, the modern art impresario Julius Meier-Graefe called wallpaper a “bad habit” that was “a practice so utterly divested of interest, so boring, so annoying...”<sup>436</sup> He declared that wallpaper was intrinsically not decoration; it was only background, a way to vary the wall surface and give it texture.

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<sup>433</sup> “Le papier peint, si fragile, se trouve ainsi chassé de la place qu’il avait usurpée, par la remise en oeuvre d’un procédé pratiqué en France pendant tout le Moyen-âge jusqu’à la fin du dix-huitième siècle.” “Des Sciences Historiques. CXXXII. Union centrale et nos Manufactures nationales.” *La République française*, September 4, 1874, MN G.277.

<sup>434</sup> “pour réjouir les gens de goût... Si riche qu’il soit, le papier auprès d’elle semble mesquin.” M. C. *Peinture sur toiles*, 530

<sup>435</sup> Eleb and Debarre, *L’Invention de l’habitation moderne* 5-7, 289-307.

<sup>436</sup> G.M. Jacques [pseudonym of Julius Meier-Graefe], “Décoration murale et papier peints,” *Art décoratif*, 19 (April 1900): 10; “une pratique si parfaitement dénuée d’intérêt, si ennuyeuse, si agaçante” G.M. Jacques, “La Décoration murale des appartements,” *Art décoratif* 41 (February 1902): 205.

The type of wallpaper denigrated by these critics was mass-manufactured, mechanically printed repeat patterns. However, a wide-ranging variety of papers existed on the market for every taste and budget. In the 1890s, Art Nouveau designs, like the stylized flowers depicted in the Vaquez panels, were considered quite avant-garde in France and therefore had a small market. These “artistic” papers, as opposed to mass-market historicist patterns, were often wood-block printed or, if they were mechanically printed, they used higher quality paper and dyes.<sup>437</sup> They were thus rather expensive and reserved for a more elite and discerning clientele. Even more luxurious were wallpaper décors, which contained single images, not repeat patterns, and were not mass produced. One type of these wallpaper décors was known as the scenic paper, which often featured exotic landscapes, such as Brazil or even Boston (Plate 103). Scenic papers were fabricated from multiple vertical strips, the number of which could be expanded or contracted to fit the architectural demands. A room papered with these images allowed the inhabitant to become a sort of armchair traveler, enveloped in the rainforest or looking out onto Boston Harbor. Also included in the category of wallpaper décor were papers imitating tapestry (Plate 104). These luxury products featured embossing and intaglio printing by hand.

Mimicking other materials, from tapestry to leather, was one of the hallmarks of wallpaper in the nineteenth century, a characteristic that was celebrated by some and criticized by others. Henry Havard deemed it the medium’s “true path” and approved of methods like stamping and intaglio printing to simulate the interlacing of warps and wefts.<sup>438</sup> These creative uses of techniques were a demonstration of virtuosic skill and ingenuity. By contrast, the

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<sup>437</sup> Cerman, *Le Papier Peint Art Nouveau*, 121-22; Bernard Jacqué, “Proliferation,” in Hoskins, *Papered Wall*, 177-79.

<sup>438</sup> Havard, *L'Art dans la Maison*, 1:241, 245-6.

designer and critic Maurice-Pillard Verneuil complained, “What good are these coarse imitations of tapestries...that don’t fool anyone?”<sup>439</sup> Verneuil’s words echo the Salon criticism of the Vaquez panels cited earlier. Both Laertes and Guillemot interpreted the resemblance of Vuillard’s paintings to tapestry and wallpaper as a mark of failure; Guillemot even declared that the decorative quality of the paintings was negated by their evocation of weaving. Nevertheless, Charles Morice, also cited above, offered another perspective on imitation, redeeming it as a clever game and a mark of modernity. *Interior with Figures* is of course not meant to fool anyone, but its resemblance to other forms of mural decoration is meant to signify their modernism.

When the contemporary critics described the Vaquez panels as trompe l’oeil tapestry, they were not only associating the works with a historic and venerable French art; I argue that they were also placing them within a more commercial and fashionable context of interior decoration. Scholars tend to isolate Vuillard within the hermetic world of the Symbolist avant-garde and have thus not explored how his works interacted with the wider material culture of the fin-de-siècle, with vulgar, common things. I propose that the Vaquez panels can be understood as playing with the trend of imitation tapestry. Painted copies of Flemish verdure, for example, were considered appropriate decoration for an haute bourgeois library, like Vaquez’s. Noussanne claimed that a Gothic or Renaissance style was the most appropriate for a library.<sup>440</sup> Moreover, Edouard Bajor, in *Du choix et de la disposition des ameublements de style* (1898), specifically prescribed Flemish verdure for ornamenting the walls of the *cabinet de travail*

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<sup>439</sup> “A quoi bon faire des imitations grossières de tapisseries ou d’étoffes n’illusionnant personne . . . ?” Verneuil, *Étude de la Plante: son application aux industries d’art* (Paris, n.d. [ca. 1897]). Reprinted in Bieri and Jacqué, *Papiers peints Art nouveau*, 62.

<sup>440</sup> Noussanne, *Le Goût dans l’ameublement*, 183.

(study), which was often the same room as the library.<sup>441</sup> The painted versions would then have offered a more hygienic, dust-free, yet still aspirationally aristocratic option.

Havard further advised that the male space of the study should “affect a grave, serious and reserved demeanor. ...it should be a pleasant place where one likes to shut oneself up, to meditate, to think...”<sup>442</sup> Although Havard didn’t give specific recommendations in terms of mural decoration for creating this male sanctuary, other prescriptive literature filled in the blanks. The designer Edme Couty in particular codified the psychophysiological reactions elicited by the primary and secondary colors; from this system, one could compose color combinations to create the desired effect for each room. “Violet,” he wrote, “is the basis of expansive severity, soft melancholy, and mystical reveries...green...is the severity and coldness of the deep and somber woods.”<sup>443</sup> Although I do not wish to imply that Vuillard followed this prescriptive literature, Couty’s publications reveal an understanding of color as used in interior decoration during the fin-de-siècle that provides a context for the Vaquez panels.

Vuillard’s response to Henry Vaquez’s commission—a painted set of violet and green imitation millefleurs—was therefore a clever re-interpretation of the expected bourgeois ornament. Dr. Vaquez, as both an established member of the haute bourgeoisie and collector of avant-garde French painting, must have appreciated this play of references.<sup>444</sup> On the one hand, *Interior with Figures* could be read as realizing the artistic potential of imitation tapestries.

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<sup>441</sup> Bajot, *Du Choix et de la Disposition*, 9. For the relationship between the study and the library, see Havard, *L’Art dans la Maison*, 2:219 and Eleb and Debarre, *L’Invention de l’habitation modern*, 102.

<sup>442</sup> “Il affectera une tenue grave, sérieuse, réservée. ...ce soit un lieu aimable où l’on aime à s’enfermer, à méditer, à réfléchir...” Havard, *L’Art dans la Maison*, 2:213.

<sup>443</sup> Edme Couty, “La décoration des tissus et du papier de tenture. Conférence faite à l’Union Centrale des Arts décoratifs,” *Revue des arts décoratifs* 17, no. 6 (June 1897): 177.

<sup>444</sup> For Vaquez, see Groom, *Edouard Vuillard*, 90-91.

Instead of pastiches of ancient tapestries, Vuillard created an original work that alludes to painted tapestry's vaunted medieval origins. On the other hand, by being set against the pastiche of imitation tapestry, the Vaquez suite underscores the "bad taste" of the latter, which it then transforms, like a sort of alchemy, into art. Bad taste, in the form of popular bourgeois ornament, thus becomes the basis of modern painting.

We could similarly compare *Interior with Figures* to wallpaper imitating tapestry, which served the same decorative function as painted tapestry but was technically a different medium. Both painted tapestry and wallpaper imitating tapestry, however, consisted of discrete panels set off by borders. The Vaquez panels, by contrast, continue into each other and are all implicitly part of the same fictive interior, as suggested by the floral backdrop. *Interior with Figures* is more akin to scenic papers in this sense—they form a unified decoration that transformed Dr. Vaquez's library into an indoor landscape. Although the Vaquez panels lack the compositional flexibility of scenic papers because they could not be extended or contracted to fit a different interior, they are in a way composed of vertical strips. The two larger panels are exactly twice the width of the smaller panels (154cm vs. 77cm) and their compositions neatly divide in the middle as if they were made up of two separate strips of 77cm each. In *Music*, the dividing line would be in between the two figures at the sideboard in the back. Thus one "strip" depicts the woman at the table covered in fabrics with an enormous vase of Queen Anne's lace behind her;<sup>445</sup> and the other strip features the pianist and her audience framed by the floral wallpaper and striped rug, much like the Misia/piano/tapestry paintings discussed above. In *Intimité*, the mirror

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<sup>445</sup> Queen Anne's lace was a popular flower in medievalist and Art Nouveau works. It was featured, for example, on Eugène Grasset's cover for the *Histoire des Quatre Fils Aymon* (1894), one of the most admired luxury books amongst fin-de-siècle bibliophiles (Silverman, *New Bibliopolis*, 40-42).

and two figures in the doorway form one half, while the woman looking through the album of prints dominates the other. Like scenic papers, the Vaquez panels include the viewer in the scene; the familiar domestic environment depicted becomes a psychological extension of the inhabitant's space.

Interestingly, by 1900 a new product of machine-woven tapestry came on the market that seemed to draw from the flexibility of scenic papers. The Maison Leclercq in Tourcoing, discussed in Chapter 3, exhibited at the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris a “panneau scène antique” designed by Lionel Péraux and sold through the Bon Marché. It could be woven as either one panel or two separate panels (Plate 105). Thus the customer could purchase the half entitled *Le Chant*, the half entitled *La Danse*, both as separate panels, or the entire “song and dance” depending on the size of the walls they wishes to ornament. Although this flexibility is related to the tradition of Beauvais discussed in the previous chapter, it was slightly different in that like scenic papers, the Maison Leclercq offered the option to extend the same scene and not just supplement a decorative set with additional related scenes.

I bring up the example of the Maison Leclercq to demonstrate how tapestry and wallpaper were imbricated, how there was a constant exchange between these mediums during the fin-de-siècle. The Vaquez panels can be placed squarely within this dialogue, one that Vuillard skillfully exploited. For example, the wood-beam ceiling and striped rug at the top and bottom of the panels recall tapestry borders; however, the fact that these borders are only at the top and bottom liken them to the frieze and dado of a papered room. The frieze in particular was an indispensable element of a wallpaper scheme, according to taste professionals and interior

decoration manuals.<sup>446</sup> *Interior with Figures* thus features the infinite horizontal extension characteristic of wallpaper, as opposed to the neatly bordered aspect of tapestry.

More significantly for our purposes, it is by way of the patterned floral wallpaper depicted in the Vaquez panels that millefleurs tapestry is brought into the circle of decorative references. In some sense, Vuillard is construing millefleurs as the medieval version of wallpaper, destabilizing our expectations of high and low.<sup>447</sup> This strategy comes directly out of his belief that vulgar and sacred objects should receive equal consideration in the praxis of modernism. Besides the flowered backdrop, the books in *Working* and *Choosing a Book* could also refer to wallpaper. Sham book spines were a popular wallpaper pattern in the mid nineteenth century and Vuillard's depiction of them could be a playful allusion to this "vulgar" bourgeois mural decoration.<sup>448</sup> Here again, he elevates bad taste with artistic ingenuity. Like Henry Havard cited earlier, Vuillard clearly appreciated wallpaper's capacity for mimicking other materials. The Vaquez panels seem to revalue imitation as evidence of skill and invention, as a playful manipulation of vision and touch, and ultimately as a modern characteristic of the bourgeois interior. We can appreciate how aptly Charles Morice made this connection between *Interior with Figures*, imitation, and modern interiors.

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<sup>446</sup> G.M. Jacques, "La petite demeure," *Art décoratif*, no. 7 (April 1899):2; G.M. Jacques, "Décoration murale et papier peints," *Art décoratif*, no. 19 (April 1900):13; Verneuil, *Etude de la Plante* in Bieri and Jacqué, *Papiers peints Art nouveau*, 62.

<sup>447</sup> Millefleurs tapestries were often produced through a cut-and-paste method where stock figures were repeated in multiple panels on a standard floral background. They were therefore not necessarily luxury products, though the examples Vuillard would have seen in the Cluny, replete with silk thread, were of extremely high quality. See Thomas P. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 24.

<sup>448</sup> Claude Roger-Marx perhaps hinted at this when he described the books as "livres désincarnés," *Vuillard et son temps*, 124.

Wallpaper that simulated the texture and weave of tapestry offered the conceptual model of visual tactility that Vuillard strove for in his decorative paintings. Vuillard employed the unusual medium of distemper, or *peinture à la colle*, to achieve the tactile paint surface of the Vaquez panels.<sup>449</sup> Distemper produced a dry, matte surface which, when paired with his stippled brushwork, explicitly evokes the texture and appearance of woven wool. I would furthermore argue that distemper allowed Vuillard to not only evoke the materiality of tapestry, but also the artisanal experience of fabricating tapestry, or at least a craft-based art. To make the medium, he dissolved sheets of animal glue in a double boiler. This sticky binder was then mixed with dry pigments, each color in a separate pot that had to be stirred continuously over a hot stove to keep it from thickening. The colors dry lighter than when first brushed on, so Vuillard had to test each one on a scrap of paper before laying it on the canvas. Sometimes, he would notice a hue that he liked while the paint sample was drying and would then start the mixing process all over again to recapture a color that was no longer before his eyes. Unlike oil, distemper does not lend itself to blending. Brushstrokes are laid down side by side, like one weft next to another, and one color must dry before laying another color on top of it.

Distemper was thus a difficult medium to use for the densely patterned compositions and delicately balanced color harmonies of the Vaquez panels. Vuillard was not just squeezing paint out of a tube, as he could have been if he used oil paint. In fact, in a conservation report from February 2000, Jean-François Hulot commented that “the paint seems artisanally fabricated as

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<sup>449</sup> Forgione (“Édouard Vuillard in the 1890s,” chap. 3), Bois (“On Matisse,” 89), Groom (*Edouard Vuillard*, 44) and others have connected the artist’s penchant for distemper to his use of it painting theater sets. The *Album*, however, was executed in oil, perhaps due to time constraints. Oil was a faster medium to work with and Vuillard had about a month to finish the whole decoration.

indicated by some clusters of poorly ground pigment.”<sup>450</sup> Scholars have explained that Vuillard adopted this technique in order to temper the facility he had with oil paints and slow down his artistic decision-making process. Maillol expressed a similar sentiment to his patron Harry Kessler when he said that he turned away from painting because with tapestry, “I would be obliged to put one tone next to another, without this excessive dexterity.”<sup>451</sup> Like the resistance to synthetic dyes and the resultant de-skilling of dyers discussed in the context of Maillol’s fabrication of natural dyes, Vuillard’s turn to distemper revalued craftsmanship and an acute sense of color. Ironically, just as the Gobelins were being criticized for their inveterate slowness, the Nabis were seeking to emulate such laboriousness. The comparison of Vuillard’s paint to textile dyes might be extended to their very materiality. According to another conservation report from 2000, the purple and rose hues, which are the dominant colors of the paintings, were mixed from an organic lake red pigment.<sup>452</sup> Lake pigments are made from precipitated dyes, in this case probably madder,<sup>453</sup> the same material that Maillol used.

Vuillard stated several times in his sketchbook that he sought a way to systematize the act of painting, to make it a routine method. For example, on July 16, 1894 he writes that he is

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<sup>450</sup> “La peinture semble de fabrication artisanale comme l’indiquent quelques amas de pigments mal broyés.”

Curatorial files, Musée du Petit Palais.

<sup>451</sup> “je serais obligé de mettre un ton à côté de l’autre, sans cette trop grande habileté” Kessler Journal, August 23, 1904, Musée Maillol.

<sup>452</sup> J.P. Rioux, Centre de recherche et de restauration des musées de France, June 26, 2000. Curatorial files, Musée du Petit Palais

<sup>453</sup> New pigment analysis performed at the National Gallery, London on Vuillard’s *Terrasse at Vasouy* (1901, reworked 1935) shows that one of the red lake pigments he used was derived from madder root. See Anne Robbins and Kate Stonor, “Past, Present, Memories: Analysing Edouard Vuillard’s *La Terrasse at Vasouy*,” *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 33 (2012): 94-95.

looking for “the tranquility of a worker —think back often to the Cluny tapestries.”<sup>454</sup> Here he explicitly links the art-making process to tapestry and values the model of artisan over artist. On July 23 he continues this line of thought: “I cannot be tranquil while thinking about work unless I deliver myself from the idea of work by practicing mechanical work.”<sup>455</sup> Vuillard clearly associates this ideal of tranquility with the repetitive nature of craft, as in the rhythmic interlacing of warp and weft that is weaving. This kind of unthinking, mechanical work was previously the basis of criticism of avant-garde painting. Reviewing the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886, Émile Hennequin denigrated Georges Seurat’s *La Grande Jatte* for “the absence of life in the figures whose contours are painstakingly filled in with colored dots as in a tapestry. They are painted gobelins, just as unpleasant as the originals.”<sup>456</sup> The regularity and routine appearance of Seurat’s brushwork provoked critics to associate his painting with the anodyne production of the Gobelins, whose weavers as discussed in Chapter 2, were likened to automatons. Vuillard’s stippled, scumbled brushwork instead prompted associations with the anonymous, spiritually pure medieval weaver, the methodical but sensitive craftsman, thereby re-investing pointillist facture with expressivity.

Nevertheless, the mention of mechanical work in Vuillard’s notebook also brings into play a more industrial model—the repetitive process of printing wallpaper, for instance. This mechanized process is reflected in the infinite repetition of the ornamental motif, also known as

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<sup>454</sup> “la tranquillité d’un ouvrier—repenser souvent aux tapisseries de Cluny” Vuillard’s sketchbook, fol. 44-44v, Ms 5396. Cf. Waldemar George, *Maillol* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1927), 19 in which Maillol is quoted as saying an artist must “avant tout, être un parfait ouvrier manuel.”

<sup>455</sup> “Je ne pourrai avoir de tranquillité en pensant au travail qu’en m’étant délivré de l’idée de travail par habitude de travail machinal.” Vuillard’s sketchbook, fol. 44v, Ms 5396.

<sup>456</sup> Émile Hennequin, “Notes d’art: exposition des artistes indépendantes,” *La Vie Moderne*, 11 (September 1886). For more negative comparisons of *La Grande Jatte* to tapestry, see Stumpel, ‘The Grande Jatte’, 211.

the repeat. For Vuillard, I believe that both the fabrication and formal qualities of wallpaper offered a way to re-conceptualize painting. The repeat, by nature, becomes background when spread across a wall surface. Vuillard valued this quality of wallpaper and believed that modern decoration should function similarly. He wrote in his sketchbook on August 2, 1894, “Really as apartment decoration, a subject that was too objectively precise would easily become unbearable. One would get tired less quickly of a furnishing fabric, of designs without too much literary precision.”<sup>457</sup> Vuillard explicitly looked to the repeat as a model for modern decoration’s role in the interior. He recognized that his patrons would live with his decoration, day in and day out; it therefore had to form a backdrop to quotidian life.

This view diverges from that of Julius Meier-Graefe, for example, whose disdain for patterned wallpaper was cited earlier. Meier-Graefe believed that modern wall decoration “should be *the most powerful center of interest in the room*. ...A décor should not be the subject of study; the eye must seize the ensemble and all of its details in an instant, with the speed of lightning.”<sup>458</sup> Meier-Graefe clearly favored clarity of form and the primacy of vision. Such a philosophy is the opposite of Vuillard’s, whose indistinct forms encouraged slow, desultory looking over time, a looking that is better described as optical touching. Furthermore, according to Vuillard’s nephew, Jacques Salomon, the artist believed that “the principle quality of a mural

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<sup>457</sup> “Vraiment comme décoration d’appartement un sujet objectivement trop précis deviendrait facilement insupportable. On se lassera moins vite d’une étoffe, de dessins sans trop de précision littéraire.” Vuillard’s sketchbook, fol. 47v, Ms 5396.

<sup>458</sup> “doit être *le centre d’intérêt le plus puissant du milieu*. ...Un décor ne doit pas être un sujet d’étude; il faut que l’oeil en saisisse l’ensemble et tous les détails à l’instant même, avec la vitesse de l’éclair.” G.M. Jacques, “Décoration murale et papier peints,” *Art décoratif*, 19 (April 1900): 13, 21. This is not to say that Meier-Graefe was against Vuillard and the Nabis’ decorative mission. He was in fact a great supporter of the group (see Kuenzli, *Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, 158-59; Anger, “Modernism at Home” 215). Though it is fitting that he chose to display Ranson’s tapestries when he opened his gallery, the *Maison Moderne*, as mentioned in Chapter 5.

decoration consisted of not imposing itself.”<sup>459</sup> Directly contrasting with Meier-Graefe, this notion is instead similar to Verneuil’s dictate that wallpaper “should not attract the eye, but should be able to satisfy it if the eye happens to notice it”;<sup>460</sup> or Havard’s advice that the *cabinet de travail* should be ornamented with objects that “don’t impose themselves,” but rather ones that are discovered by the “distracted eye”; meaning ornament that doesn’t interrupt one’s train of thought but rather provides respite for the mind.<sup>461</sup>

We could thus call Vuillard’s philosophy, modern-decoration-as-wallflower, playing with the idiomatic English expression that likens reserved, self-effacing people to wallpaper; rather than impose their presence, they blend into the background. More apt still, the equivalent expression in French for wallflower is *faire tapisserie*, which could be translated literally as “to act like a tapestry.” Embedded in the French language then is the idea that mural decoration should stay in the background and not try to grab the attention of the inhabitants of the room. In some ways, the Vaquez panels respond to these injunctions for modern decoration. The imprecise subject matter combined with the dense patterns—after the millefleurs model—creates a generalized, enigmatic decoration that can accompany daily life. The suite depicts self-effacing figures, many of whom *font tapisserie* by blending into the background. Their unobtrusive character reflects the function of the decoration as a backdrop sensed in the periphery of vision. In reviewing the work at the 1905 Salon d’automne, François Monod intimated as much when he praised the suite as “a rich Oriental carpet that one looks at without

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<sup>459</sup> Salomon, *Vuillard témoignage*, 60

<sup>460</sup> “n’attirant pas le regard, mais pouvant le satisfaire cependant si l’oeil vient à le découvrir.” Verneuil, *Étude de la plante* in Bieri and Jacqué, *Papiers peints Art Nouveau*, 62.

<sup>461</sup> “Il faut, en effet, que l’oeil distrait devine ces beaux objets plutôt qu’il n’en soit obsédé. Il faut qu’il les cherche et non pas qu’ils s’imposent. Ils ne doivent jamais détourner la pensée de son cours.” Havard, *L’Art dans la Maison*, 2:214.

thinking of anything.”<sup>462</sup> Vuillard’s decoration was meant to seep into the unconscious, to slowly and subtly shape the inhabitant’s psyche in a sympathetic exchange.

And yet for Vuillard, unassuming did not mean insignificant. His aesthetic of self-effacement was in fact a bold re-conception of modern painting as bourgeois ornament transformed. Notably, the floral wallpaper in the Vaquez panels almost takes over the entire decoration to become the center of attention, as if Vuillard wanted to emphasize the importance of this often disparaged medium for his theory of modernism. Wallpaper was the ultimate modern material because its ephemerality suited the itinerant reality of urban life. Not surprisingly, Meier-Graefe blamed this modern nomadism, the transient situation of the renter, for the lack of taste and investment in contemporary decoration.<sup>463</sup> Vuillard instead viewed this fact of contemporary life in a positive light, as a condition of modernity to be taken into account.

Indeed, tapestry could also be construed as suiting this modern nomadism. As discussed earlier, tapestry sets were treated as portable walls in the Middle Ages, taken from one seasonal home to the next, as the Natansons did with the *Album*. Although *Interior with Figures* was painted for the lighting and particular installation in Dr. Vaquez’s library, Vaquez took the paintings with him when he moved and Vuillard possibly re-installed them in the doctor’s dining

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<sup>462</sup> “un riche tapis d’Orient qu’on regarderait sans penser à rien” François Monod, “Le Salon d’automne” *Art et Décoration*, v. 18 (Nov 1905): 200. The model of the Asian carpet is a separate topic of discussion that would bring in issues of Orientalism, colonialism, etc. I believe Vuillard focused on the model of tapestry precisely for its French associations. Jérémie Cerman made an apt comparison between wallpaper and music that is applicable to the notion of *faire tapisserie*. He writes that the repeat functions like Erik Satie’s repetitive compositions, which were meant to be a sound background that was heard and not listened to (*Le Papier peint Art Nouveau*, 17-18). Kuenzli interprets Vuillard’s desire for his decorations to go unnoticed as part of his musical aesthetic in which line and color would invade the viewer like the sound vibrations of music and form part of his mental unconscious (*Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, 77 and 86).

<sup>463</sup> G.M. Jacques, “Petits appartements,” *Art décoratif* no. 35 (Aug 1901): 200

room/salon in 1907.<sup>464</sup> In this sense, they assumed the aristocratic air of ancient tapestries, portable walls passed down from generation to generation. Charles Morice implied such an interpretation when he compared the colors to “the soft and extinguished tones of tapestry, of wool.”<sup>465</sup> *Interior with Figures*’ muted palette allows the decoration to quietly exist in the room, as if it had been there for decades, like a family heirloom fading gradually in the sunlight streaming in from the windows. And yet, the experience of haptic wholeness and the time-honored craft of tapestry, refuted the sense of modern instability. Perhaps this simultaneous prefiguration and refutation of modern nomadism was yet another reason why tapestry was such a compelling reference point for Vuillard.<sup>466</sup>

When Vuillard recorded installing panels for Dr. Vaquez on November 6, 1907, he also indicated receiving a new commission (“*Demande nouvelle de panneaux*”). This new commission was cancelled the next year and Vuillard instead helped Vaquez pick out wallpaper.<sup>467</sup> In an ironic twist of events, Vuillard’s philosophy was taken to its logical extreme in this instance: the role of decorator superseded that of painter. Although it would be glib to say that wallpaper could substitute for Vuillard’s monumental paintings, the latter certainly operated within this nexus of different modes of mural decoration. Wallpaper and tapestry, as interpreted by Vuillard in the Vaquez panels, were two sides of the same coin. This binary of the beautiful

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<sup>464</sup> Vuillard used different ground colors for the two pairs of panels in the suite. *Intimité* and *Music* are painted on a light blue-grey ground and *Working* and *Choosing a Book* on an ochre ground. This was supposed to take into account the installation of the larger panels against the light and the smaller panels across from windows in full sunlight. Salé, “La peinture decorative,” 116.

Vuillard’s journal, November 6, 1907: “Chez Vaquez. ...Emplacement des panneaux. Salle à manger salon.” Ms 5397

<sup>465</sup> “les tons éteints et doux de la tapisserie, de la laine,” Morice, “Le Salon d’Automne,” 385.

<sup>466</sup> I thank Brendan Sullivan for this suggestion.

<sup>467</sup> See Groom, *Edouard Vuillard*, 96, 226n152 and Girard, “Le Journal d’Édouard Vuillard,” 2:9.

and the vulgar, historical and modern, elite and mass, tapestry and wallpaper, was for Vuillard the crux of modern art.

## EPILOGUE

Vuillard continued to draw inspiration from tapestry throughout the 1890s and indeed, throughout his artistic career. However, his tapestry aesthetic shifted from a perceptual and conceptual approach to a more purely imitative one as the twentieth century approached. And his relationship with ancient tapestry grew increasingly nostalgic as the twentieth century progressed. By way of conclusion, I will briefly trace the fate of Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic through subsequent decorative commissions and consequently, how tapestry was buried in the discourse of modernism. I will suggest how tapestry was, so to speak, swept under the rug of the new decorative paradigm of the ascendant Henri Matisse.<sup>468</sup>

Still working in the mode of *The Album* and the Vaquez panels, Vuillard painted a pair of decorative panels in distemper for the grand salon in the Paris apartment of his high school friend, Jean Schopfer in 1898 (Plates 106a-b). This pair, posthumously entitled *The Garden of Le Relais at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne*, was dubbed by Claude Roger-Marx as Vuillard's masterpiece.<sup>469</sup> They rival the Vaquez panels in representing the epitome of Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic. The mottled brushwork, muted palette, and layering of patterns are here mobilized in a plein-air setting, moving the intimate interior scenes of women among flowers outdoors.

Although the *Garden of Le Relais* continues to exploit the material and perceptual effects of

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<sup>468</sup> Joseph Masheck has coined the phrase "carpet paradigm" to describe the formalism of modernist painting. While this expression does recover the repressed origins of modernist painting theory in the "minor" field of design and the decorative arts, I prefer to use the model of printed furnishing fabrics to discuss Matisse's painting in this context for reasons that are outlined below. Matisse was of course greatly influenced by Islamic art, which the model of the Oriental carpet addresses; his use of this non-Western tradition forms another important point of contrast with Vuillard that is unfortunately outside the scope of this epilogue.

<sup>469</sup> Roger-Marx, *Vuillard et son temps*, 127.

tapestry, the change to a garden setting introduces an imitative dimension to the panels' relationship to the medium. They are, in other words, closer to imitation verdure or millefleurs than their predecessors.

Vuillard underscores this new mimetic aspect with the size and motifs of the Schopfer panels. *The Garden of Le Relais* measures about seven feet by five feet (214 x 161cm), the largest of Vuillard's decorations to date and thus the one that most closely approximated the size of actual tapestries. *The Embroidery* from *Seignorial Life* (Plate 96), for example, measures 260 x 224cm. Furthermore, Vuillard includes animals entwined in the vegetation—a dog in the left-hand panel, *Women Reading on a Bench*, and a rabbit the right-hand panel, *Woman Seated in an Armchair*—that were characteristic of millefleurs tapestry.

Not that the breathtaking Schopfer panels were merely derivative. In the *Garden of Le Relais*, Vuillard experimented with blurring the line between genres, and made decoration out of portraiture.<sup>470</sup> Instead of the anonymous figures of his previous commissions, Vuillard has populated Schopfer's decoration with his own friends: *Women Reading on a Bench* depicts Bonnard playing with a dog seated next to Marthe Mellot, wife of Thadée's younger brother Alfred;<sup>471</sup> *Woman Seated in an Armchair*, features Misia half-asleep in a rocking chair with her brother Cipa standing beside her. Although Schopfer had visited the garden of Thadée and Misia's rented country home the summer before the panels were painted, the circle of friends

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<sup>470</sup> In this way, the Schopfer panels look forward to Vuillard's later production of large-scale, distemper society portraits, in which the accumulation of decorative detail maintains a tapestry-like richness of ornament.

<sup>471</sup> The woman has long been identified as Marthe de Méliny, Bonnard's companion, however Salomon and Cogeval's catalogue raisonné have established that the figure is Marthe Mellot (*Vuillard: The Inexhaustible Glance*, 2:517).

depicted were the artist's and not the patron's. Schopfer had married a New York heiress, Alice Wetherbee, in 1895 and consequently moved in more aristocratic circles.

The odd choice to depict Vuillard's intimates as opposed to Schopfer's in a decoration meant for the latter's home could be explained as an effort to make a sort of souvenir. Schopfer commissioned the set shortly after his summer sojourn at Le Relais, so it is appropriate that a typical scene from that summer would serve as the subject for the decoration. Or we could rationalize it as the artist's *intimisme* taken to the extreme. Vuillard had discussed in his notebooks the advantages of painting the familiar over the new or exotic: "in front of forms, of objects already known, the soul invents a novel aspect, a new idea, unhampered by the exterior modifications that forms or so-called new objects present, whose correspondence with forms and formulas already acquired occupies one to the detriment of one's faculty of invention."<sup>472</sup> For Vuillard, the familiar allowed for greater artistic experimentation.

In support of this latter hypothesis, Vuillard would again paint a scene related to his personal life and unrelated to his patron's life his next decorative commission. Adam Natanson, the father of the Natanson brothers, engaged Vuillard to execute panels for the library of his Paris apartment in 1899. The artist responded with a pair of enormous paintings, *First Fruits* and *Window Overlooking the Woods*, depicting the countryside around Ker-Xavier Roussel's home in L'Étang-la-Ville in the Île-de-France region (Plates 107a-b). Roussel had married Vuillard's sister in 1895 and the couple had a daughter, Annette, in 1898. This joyous event was the reason

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<sup>472</sup> "devant des formes, des objets déjà sus, l'âme invente un nouvel aspect, une idée nouvelle, non gênée par les modifications extérieures que présentent des formes, des objets soi-disant nouveaux, dont la correspondance avec les formes et formules déjà acquises l'occuperait au détriment de sa faculté d'invention." Vuillard sketchbook, dated 1891-93, fols. 75-76, Ms 5396. Kimberly Jones has argued that the use of Vuillard's personal life as the subject of his decorations for others "is an indication of the exceptional latitude accorded Vuillard" by his patrons (Cogeval, *Edouard Vuillard*, 204).

for Vuillard's frequent trips and long stays in the Île-de-France beginning in that year. Several letters written in the summer of 1899 attest to Vuillard's growing familiarity with and affection for the region, and his idea to make this landscape the subject of his decoration.

He wrote to Vallotton on July 26, 1899: "I have been very preoccupied with the paintings to be done for the rue Jouffroy. I see them more clearly now. For the past week, long walks in lovely weather and torrid heat which has not bothered me have rekindled my interest in things, skies, trees, above all the little flowers one sees when walking with head down, and I think I will find useable material in this."<sup>473</sup> And to Denis several days later: "I've been getting to know the valley of Étang la Ville rather well and am more and more delighted that I have come here to nest...I begin to understand the pleasure that you have in getting to know countries and why traveling is often so insipid for me."<sup>474</sup> Here Vuillard again extols the benefits of steeping himself in the familiar. His immersion in the Île-de-France landscape renewed him the way traveling to foreign countries revitalized Denis.

Vuillard's resulting decoration for Adam Natanson presents a noticeable departure from his hallmark tapestry aesthetic. The stippled brushwork, though still present, is now intermingled with flat planes of color. The bird's-eye view of a landscape dotted with tiny figures is the opposite of his previous focus on full-scale women in interiors. Even the Schopfer panels, though set outdoors, had the feeling of an enclosed interior scene. The *Île-de-France*

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<sup>473</sup> "je me suis beaucoup préoccupé des peintures à faire rue Jouffroy. J'y vois plus clair maintenant. Depuis une huitaine, de grandes promenades par un beau temps et une chaleur torride dont je ne souffre pas m'ont fait reprendre intérêt aux choses, aux ciels, aux arbres, aux fleurettes surtout qu'on regarde en se promenant tête bassé et je pense y trouver matière exploitable." Vuillard to Vallotton, July 26, 1899, published in Guisan and Jakubec, *Felix Vallotton, Edouard Vuillard*, 15.

<sup>474</sup> "Je commence à connaître assez bien le vallon de l'Étang la Ville et me félicite de plus en plus d'être venu m'y nicher... Je commence à comprendre le plaisir que vous prenez à connaître des pays et pourquoi un voyage est souvent si insipide pour moi." Vuillard to Denis, July 31, 1899, MMD, Ms 12097

*Landscapes*, furthermore, were painted in oil. Thick layers of shiny oil paint in various parts of the canvases provide a very different surface effect than his more typical method of thinly painted distemper. Instead of referencing the materiality of tapestry, Vuillard here tries his hand at painting “high-art” imitation tapestries, blurring the line even more between art and bourgeois ornament. He includes a border around all four sides of both works, which he had not done in any of his previous decorations. And he again increased the size of his panels. Just a year after executing the Schopfer panels, the *Île-de-France Landscapes* surpassed them as Vuillard’s largest decoration to date, with *First Fruits* measuring fourteen feet wide and *Window Overlooking the Woods* twelve feet wide. These paintings were bigger than some millefleurs tapestries and about the same size as some seventeenth-century verdures, such as *La Ronde* made at Aubusson (Plate 100).

Interestingly, Vuillard painted the *Île-de-France Landscapes* at the same time that he was working on the series of Misia/piano/tapestry pictures discussed in Chapter 8. In these intimiste works, Vuillard paints a tapestry like *La Ronde* into the paintings. With the *Île-de-France Landscapes*, he thus realizes what is implicit in those easel paintings—painted verdures that serve as the main decoration of a room. The imitative intent of the decorative panels is underscored by the fact that Vuillard referred to them as “verdures” in the letter to Denis cited above, and exhibited them as *Verdures* at the 1904 Salon d’Automne. It is fitting that these imitation verdures were meant for an haut bourgeois man’s library, exactly the kind of ornament prescribed for such a space. The *Île-de-France Landscapes* fulfill the expectations that might have originally been in place for the Vaquez panels, had Dr. Vaquez been a more conservative patron.

Adam Natanson was indeed that kind of patron. He did not share the avant-garde taste of his sons, and Gloria Groom has speculated that Thadée and Misia were behind the commission as they were living with the elder Natanson at this time. Groom further suggests that Vuillard catered to Adam's old-fashioned taste with these landscapes, thus explaining their difference from the artist's previous endeavors in this genre.<sup>475</sup> We could also look at Vuillard's change of style as part of his experimentation with the familiar. If in the early 1890s, working with familiar motifs allowed him to upend conventions of space, form, and facture, by 1900, perhaps, experimentation meant working in a more classical idiom. The *Île-de-France Landscapes* draw not only from seventeenth-century verdure, but also from the murals of Puvis de Chavannes, who ultimately harkened back to Nicholas Poussin, the great seventeenth-century French classical painter. Puvis had just died in 1898, which may have prompted Vuillard to take stock of his work anew. Several scholars have noted that the landscapes, especially in their borders, are reminiscent of Puvis's murals in Amiens and Marseille.<sup>476</sup>

Despite their stylistic differences, Kimberly Jones sees the *Île-de-France Landscapes* as part of a coherent progression of Vuillard's oeuvre; she claims that they take Vuillard's tapestry experiments to their logical conclusion.<sup>477</sup> Jones implies that after flirting with tapestry as an aesthetic model for so long, the inevitable next step was to paint a version of imitation tapestry. If we extrapolate further from this line of thought, the next logical question would be, did Vuillard ever design an actual tapestry? Did he ever paint a tapestry cartoon? The simple

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<sup>475</sup> Groom, *Edouard Vuillard*, 123 and 130.

<sup>476</sup> Roger-Marx, *Vuillard et son temps*, 139; Thomson, *Vuillard*, 48; Bouillon, "Puvis de Chavannes and the Nabis," 109; Salomon and Cogeval, *Vuillard: The Inexhaustible Glance*, 2:575.

<sup>477</sup> Jones in Cogeval, *Edouard Vuillard*, 204

answer to these questions seems to be no. There are, however, various tantalizing indications that he may have had such a project in mind spanning the years before and after World War I.

From November 1910 to April 1911, Vuillard worked on a decorative commission entitled, *The Library (La Bibliothèque)* (Plate 108), for an American heiress living in Paris, Marguerite Chapin. This work, going even further than the Misia/piano/tapestry pictures, features a fully realized tapestry painted into the heart of the composition, serving as its focal point. Vuillard moves from imitating tapestry in the *Île-de-France Landscapes*, to representing one in *The Library*. One could argue that this shift brought him one step closer to the seemingly “logical conclusion” of designing a real tapestry. The tapestry in *The Library* is in fact an invention on Vuillard’s part: its composition is derived from Titian’s *Adam and Eve* (ca. 1550), which Vuillard had recently seen at the Prado during a trip to Madrid in September 1910; and, as Guy Cogeval has pointed out, the idea of painting a tapestry into the center of the picture as an allegorical foil to the mundane activities of the foreground figures is indebted to Velazquez’s *The Spinners* (ca. 1657), also at the Prado.<sup>478</sup> As with the *Île-de-France Landscapes*, Vuillard reached back to Renaissance/Baroque models to develop *The Library*, as opposed to the medieval models that guided his aesthetic choices in the 1890s.

While working on *The Library*, Vuillard made several trips to the Gobelins and notes in his journal having various conversations with friends about tapestry and the Gobelins. On March 25 and 30, 1911, Vuillard visited the Gobelins to seek inspiration or distraction from his Chapin

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<sup>478</sup> Vuillard sent postcards of *Adam and Eve* and *The Spinners* to Roussel and his mother, respectively. Salomon and Cogeval, *Vuillard: The Inexhaustible Glance*, 3:1110.

commission.<sup>479</sup> On the latter date, he records spending an hour with the dye chemist to confirm ideas of his. On March 18, 1911 he notes discussing tapestries with Gustave Geffroy (the current director of the Gobelins) and Roussel while at lunch at Dr. Vaquez's apartment;<sup>480</sup> and on April 15, 1911, he has a long conversation with Antoine Bibesco on "my panel tapestry and the Gobelins."<sup>481</sup> These visits and discussions have been explained as meticulous research for the depiction of his own fabricated Renaissance/Baroque tapestry. However, given their intensity (one hour with a dye chemist!) and the time Geffroy took out of his schedule as a busy new director, I wonder if they might also signal discussions of Vuillard possibly designing a tapestry for the Gobelins.

Geffroy, who was appointed director of the Gobelins in 1908, was a longtime friend and supporter of Vuillard. He was among the first art critics to identify the artist's burgeoning tapestry aesthetic; in a review of an 1893 Nabi exhibition, he raved about, "his painting which makes one think of the woolly back of a tapestry, which expresses in a new way the density of bodies, the gold and silver of light and the velvet of shadows."<sup>482</sup> Geffroy's appointment was an event that merited recording in Vuillard's laconic journal. It would not be surprising that the

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<sup>479</sup> Vuillard journal, March 25, 1911, Ms 5397: "très dérangé de mon panneau. vais Gobelins grandes surexcitation Geffroy me confirme mes idées sur cette histoire. tapisserie de Ferrare, les métiers. les ouvriers. copies fausses et justes...remonte déjeuner chez Bonnard...(bordures de tapisseries ferraraise)."

March 30, 1911: "Vais aux Gobelins...passe 1 heure avec chimiste teinturier confirmation de toiles mes idées. vais déjeuner enchanté à la table de Geffroy"

<sup>480</sup> Vuillard journal, March 18, 1911, Ms 5397: "vais déjeuner chez Vaquez avec Ker et Geffroy. Forte cuisine. Tapisseries." At this time, Geffroy was pursuing Monet to design a model for the Savonnerie based on his *Waterlilies* series. Dr. Vaquez often acted as chauffeur during Monet's visits to Paris from Giverny. Monet was in fact scheduled to visit the second week of April, 1911 (Vittet, "Claude Monet et les Gobelins," 107), so this project could have been part of the lunch discussion. One can imagine that Monet's involvement with the Gobelins would have encouraged Vuillard to do likewise, as the latter admired the older Impressionist artist.

<sup>481</sup> Vuillard journal, April 15, 1911, Ms 5397: "longue conversation [avec Antoine Bibesco] sur mon panneau la tapisserie et les Gobelins"

<sup>482</sup> Geffroy, *La vie artistique*, 6:295-96.

relatively new director would begin talks with one of his favored artists while that artist was researching tapestry for his own purposes. It is hard to imagine a director providing an artist such access to the details of tapestry making and paying so much attention to him, even if he was an old friend, if he wasn't cultivating him for an official commission.

This mysterious thread would not be picked up again until May 24, 1917 when Vuillard records another detailed visit to the Gobelins: "the loom, the precise design required by the weaver; question revived, the head of the workshop, impossible to have the ancient blues; ... very excited." Was the revived question that Vuillard was so excited about an impending commission first discussed with Geffroy in 1911? Vuillard's meeting with the head of the tapestry workshop; his inquiries into ancient blue dyes; and his observations on the finish of the cartoons that the weavers required, all point to involvement in some sort of unrealized project. His visit was too pointed and detailed to be just a tourist outing. As late as 1923, Geffroy mentioned Vuillard as one of the artists who "have been asked but have not yet accepted" a commission from the Gobelins.<sup>483</sup>

In any case it seems that Vuillard never designed an actual tapestry. Though he painted "high-art" imitation tapestries in the form of the *Ile-de-France Landscapes* and depicted an invented tapestry in *The Library*, he was ultimately not interested in creating modern tapestry. He remained inspired by historical tapestries as a model for modern painting. The 1918 distemper decorative panel, *Foliage—Oak Tree and Fruit Seller* (Plate 109), is a case in point.

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<sup>483</sup> 'On été appelés, mais ne sont pas encore venue...' Gustave Geffroy, *Les Gobelins* (Paris: Nilsson, 1923), III. This long courting process seems to have been common under Geffroy's administration. Geffroy began courting Monet as soon as he became director in 1908 and was still pursuing him in 1921 (see Vittet, "Claude Monet et les Gobelins"). Geffroy also asked Denis to design a tapestry. In a letter from Geffroy to Denis dated June 25, 1912 (MMD, Ms 4447), the former suggests "aspects de l'Isle-de-France" as a subject for a Gobelins tapestry commission. Denis would not design a tapestry for the Gobelins until 1930 (see Joubert et al., *Histoire de la Tapisserie*, 348).

Here Vuillard joins his hallmark tapestry aesthetic with a composition and figure that deliberately recall a panel from one of the greatest tapestry sets at the Louvre, *The Month of July* from *The Hunts of Maximilien* (1531-33, Plate 110).<sup>484</sup> This decoration notwithstanding, in the twentieth century, tapestry seemed to have acquired another metaphorical dimension for Vuillard, that of the palimpsest.

With the vicissitudes of life—marriages, divorces, deaths, moves—Vuillard’s decorative panels in the early twentieth century were often removed from the interiors, and sometimes from the patrons, for which they were designed. For many of these relocations, Vuillard retouched and often dramatically reworked his old compositions, sometimes at the request of the owner and sometimes of his own volition. *The Library* was reworked in 1914, after Marguerite Chapin married an Italian count and returned the panel, to Vuillard’s devastation; Vuillard possibly added the woman in the dark dress at left.<sup>485</sup> A panel for the Bibesco princes painted around 1900, *The Lilacs*, was repainted in 1908 to harmonize with two newly commissioned panels for the princes’ new apartment, *The Haystack* and *The Alley*. These in turn were somewhat obsessively reworked in various campaigns from 1928-40, many years after they were returned to the artist following Emmanuel Bibesco’s suicide in 1917. A decoration for the country villa of the art dealers, Josse and Gaston Bernheim, was painted from 1911-14 and reworked in 1934, when the brothers sold their villa. Vuillard made the irregularly shaped, custom-built panels rectangular, presumably to make them more saleable.

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<sup>484</sup> For this comparison, see Salomon and Cogeval, *Vuillard: The Inexhaustible Glance*, 3;1301.

<sup>485</sup> Chapin’s marriage was actually announced in October 1911, less than six months after Vuillard delivered his panel. The artist reworked the painting for an exhibition at the Manzi gallery in 1914. Groom suggested that Vuillard added the figure at left (Groom, *Edouard Vuillard*, 198).

Most interestingly, a third large panel painted for Jean Schopfer in 1901, *The Terrace at Vasouy*, was cut into two and repainted in 1935, after Schopfer had died and his widow had to move. Vuillard made extensive changes to the newly created pair of panels, *The Garden* and *The Lunch* (Plates 111a-b). Some changes were purely formal, allowing the severed panels to stand as independent works. Others point to a more philosophical attempt to replace the past with the present, to expunge and revise life and time. The most significant alteration is the addition of Lucy Hessel, pictured in *The Garden* at left in white, and sitting in *The Lunch* at right with her elbow leaning on the table. Lucy, who was the art dealer Jos Hessel's wife, had replaced Misia in the early twentieth century as Vuillard's muse. The artist's move from the bohemian *Revue Blanche* circle of the Natansons, broken up by Misia and Thadée's divorce, to the more haute bourgeois circle of the Hessels, was a significant shift in patronage, one that prompted his transformation into a society portraitist in the twentieth century. Lucy's presence in the repainted panels, erasing and replacing other figures,<sup>486</sup> transforms them into a document of the vagaries of life and the passage of time; they become a palimpsest of memories, with the present overlaying a past that still tends to assert itself. In *The Lunch*, Lucy is seated next to Misia, her predecessor in Vuillard's affections, the past and the present strangely juxtaposed. The notion of the palimpsest is physically expressed in the clotted surface of the paintings, which present an accumulation of layer upon encrusted layer.

Historical tapestries similarly bear the physical traces of time and changes in ownership. Various campaigns of restoration, for instance, leave layers of often visible reweavings. A

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<sup>486</sup> Vuillard's adding and replacing of figures is meticulously detailed by Robbins and Stonor "Past, Present, Memories," 101-2, 104-6.

particularly calculating and emblematic example of reweaving as connected to ownership can be found in the origin story of the Gobelins. In 1661, Louis XIV imprisoned Nicholas Fouquet, his parvenu finance minister who had upstaged him with the magnificence of his chateau, Vaux-le-Vicomte. The king subsequently confiscated all of Fouquet's artistic treasures and commissioned the same team of architect, garden designer, and painter that built Vaux to construct Versailles, which was to be the ne plus ultra of royal residences. The spirit of artistic collaboration that created Vaux was to be superseded by the monarchical unity of Versailles.<sup>487</sup> Included in the mass repossession were the tapestries made for Vaux by weavers that Fouquet had enticed over to France from Flanders. These weavers and their unfinished as well as finished tapestries became the foundation of the new royal tapestry manufactory; it was established on the former grounds of the Gobelins family's dye workshop in 1662. Claire Goldstein has traced the process of "erasure and reinscription" of the appropriated tapestries, principally through the borders of the set entitled, *The Story of Constantine*.<sup>488</sup> Fouquet's former weavers, now Gobelins weavers, unwove Fouquet's insignia in *Constantine*'s borders and rewove them with the king's emblems. Thus, the past owner and past site were erased and replaced with the present one through the works' margins.

Although the violence of this narrative with its agenda of political power has no connection to Vuillard, the way in which tapestry supports the process of erasure and rewriting provided another dimension of interest for the artist, who was so obsessively reworking past, discarded commissions in the twentieth century. In *The Terrace at Vasouy*, Vuillard made one

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<sup>487</sup> Goldstein, *Vaux and Versailles*, 76, 85.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, 81.

ostensibly insignificant change in 1935 that is akin to the reweaving of *Constantine*'s borders. He repainted the brickwork of the edge of the house, changing it from the plain red brick of the first state, to the present pattern of alternating red and pale brick. This minor alteration actually cemented the identification of place and milieu in the panel. As Anne Robbins and Katie Stonor have demonstrated, the plain brick edge was associated with Le Relais, Thadée and Misia's country home in Villeneuve, and Vuillard had painted it to match the first pair of Schopfer panels.<sup>489</sup> When the *Terrace* was returned to Vuillard to be reworked and sold, he repainted the brickwork to represent the façade of the villa La Terrasse. Lucy and Jos Hessel had rented this villa in the Normandy village of Vasouy during the summer of 1901. Thus, this marginal change signaled the move from Burgundy to Normandy, from the milieu of the bohemian Natansons to the conservative Hessels, replacing if not erasing one with the other.

Vuillard's compulsive reworking of old paintings in the twentieth century introduced a tone of nostalgia to his tapestry aesthetic. Although in the 1890s, his historicist medievalism was a radical form of modernism, in the twentieth century, his gravitation towards Renaissance/Baroque models seems to have corresponded to a more purely retrospective outlook. The fact that he exhibited the classically inspired, five-year-old *Ile-de-France Landscapes* at the 1904 Salon d'Automne is indicative of a changed mindset. Moreover, at the 1905 Salon d'Automne, most famous for the debut of the Fauves led by Matisse, Vuillard displayed even older work, the Vaquez (1896) and Schopfer panels (1898).

Some critics appreciated Vuillard's offerings over the cacophony of the infamous Salle VII of the 1905 Salon d'Automne. Camille Mauclair declared that Vuillard's work "gave all

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<sup>489</sup> Robbins and Stonor, "Past, Present, Memories," 98-99.

around a silent and beautiful lesson” to “the discordant ugliness and pretentious ignorance” of the as-yet unnamed, upstart artists in Salle VII.<sup>490</sup> Ironically, he described Vuillard’s work as exhibiting “*une harmonie fauve*,” which would translate in this case as “a tawny harmony,” referring to the artist’s earthy colors. It was the art critic Louis Vauxcelles who legendarily coined the term Fauves, in the sense of wild beasts, to positively characterize the Matisse group in his own review of the Salon published a few days before Mauclair’s. Vauxcelles’ article simultaneously marked the birth of a new artistic movement and the changeover of the artistic avant-garde. In his section on Salle VII, Vauxcelles described the exhibiting artists as a “group that stands as tight fraternally as, in the preceding generation, Vuillard and his friends.”<sup>491</sup> It is clear here that the Fauves were seen as taking the place of the Nabis in the artistic life of Paris. Vuillard’s display of old panels from the 1890s could only have reinforced the impression of a changing of the guard.

At the 1905 Salon d’Automne, Vuillard’s tapestry aesthetic was thus respected but passé, already representative of an artistic establishment ready to be challenged and upended. Matisse’s *Woman with a Hat*, the talk of the Salon, signaled one major area of change: his synthetically garish colors—the colors of fashion, of the ephemeral, industrial commodity—were a stark contrast to Vuillard’s subdued palette, reminiscent of the faded natural dyes of historic, handcrafted French tapestries. Matisse would subsequently transform Vuillard’s tapestry aesthetic into what I am calling a “textile aesthetic,” emphasizing the bright colors and patterns of printed furnishing fabrics, as opposed to the materiality and technique of tapestry.

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<sup>490</sup> Camille Mauclair, “Le Salon d’Automne,” *Revue Bleue* 4, no. 17 (October 21, 1905) : 523.

<sup>491</sup> “groupe qui se tient aussi fraternellement serré que, dans la précédente génération, Vuillard et ses amis.” Vauxcelles, “Le Salon d’Automne,” n.p.

As has been recently discussed, Matisse grew up in the textile town of Bohain-en-Vermandois, known for its production of luxury silks among other fabrics.<sup>492</sup> This early exposure to a design vocabulary of patterned lines and colors was foundational for the artist and he took from it very different lessons than Vuillard did. Although it is outside the scope of this epilogue to fully recount the genesis of Matisse's textile aesthetic, I would like to suggest some points of comparison for future inquiry. Central to the erasure of the tapestry paradigm was the shift from what I have identified as Vuillard's aesthetic model of tactility, to Matisse's greater emphasis on opticality. Matisse, as Rémi Labrusse has suggested, eschewed the tactile appeal of textiles and treated them as "pure optical surfaces."<sup>493</sup> Textiles, whether handwoven or industrially printed, thus served as vehicles of pattern and form irrespective of their material qualities. That is not to say that Matisse excised touch from his painting. The vestiges of tactility are found everywhere, from his own deliberately exposed pentimenti to the representation of his sculpture in his work. Actually, we could say that tactility in Matisse's oeuvre largely migrated to his sculpture. The point remains that Matisse does not refer to the materiality of textiles like Vuillard did, to a model of tactility outside of the painting itself; instead, Matisse's vestiges of touch refer back to the work and ultimately, to the artist himself. The result is a shift from the viewer's sense of corporeal immersion in Vuillard's works to the sense of distanced expansion in Matisse's; from the slow, piecemeal perception of a Vuillard to

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<sup>492</sup> Hilary Spurling and Ann Dumas, eds., *Matisse, His Art and His Textiles: The Fabric of Dreams*, exh. cat., Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2006, 14-15, 75.

<sup>493</sup> Labrusse in Spurling and Dumas, *Matisse, His Art and His Textiles*, 57.

the “firecracker” effect of a Matisse—the immediate apprehension of the whole image is followed by an extended contemplation of its dispersion.<sup>494</sup>

Matisse’s *Harmony in Red* is a prime example of his textile aesthetic (Plate 112). This painting was exhibited at the 1908 Salon d’Automne as a “Decorative panel for a dining room,” indicating its destination in the Moscow palace of Sergei Shchukin.<sup>495</sup> The work’s title suggests that Matisse shared the Nabi ambitions for painting as mural decoration. *Harmony in Red* thus provides a suitable point of comparison with Vuillard’s commissions. In *Harmony in Red*, the arabesque-and-flower-basket pattern of the tablecloth has taken over the composition, overrunning the wall, dwarfing the still-life objects so that they become almost incidences within the pattern; even the female figure bends and curves in imitation of the arabesque. In this sense, pattern works for Matisse as it does for Vuillard, uniting and confusing figure and ground. However, through the exaggerated scale of the motifs and unbounded composition of *Harmony in Red*, Matisse’s use of pattern encourages the viewer to imagine the work’s infinite expansion into space. Furthermore, the enlarged pattern combined with the sheer vibrancy of the red create an almost pulsating effect, an optical haptic experience. By contrast, Vuillard’s dense layering of minute patterns works to absorb the viewer and “implode” the composition.<sup>496</sup> Vuillard’s decorative panels enfold the viewer, referencing the pliable quality of textiles and tapestry to suggest a haptic connectivity.

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<sup>494</sup> Bois, “On Matisse,” 67-68, 90.

<sup>495</sup> Shchukin was an industrialist whose family made their fortune in manufacturing textiles. The role of a patron well-versed in the design language of textiles on Matisse’s burgeoning decorative aesthetic is a rich topic for future exploration.

<sup>496</sup> Bois, “On Matisse,” 64

Matisse instead uses the fold as a way of playing with space. The curving folds of the tablecloth at right and at left near the chair back, for example, hold the painting in tension between two and three dimensions. The fold at left seems to demarcate the edge of the table standing adjacent to the chair; however, it disappears into a field of red, creating a sense of planarity where depth was originally promised. At right, the fold reads as both the curving edge of the tablecloth as well as a rounded, flat, red shape next to the rounded, flat, white shape of the woman's skirt. The fold thus becomes a formal device for suggesting space while maintaining the primacy of the surface. We can contrast Matisse's play with flatness with Vuillard's sense of thickness, which was his way of suggesting space (and the haptic) within a surface.

*Harmony in Red* famously started out as *Harmony in Blue* with the background painted blue-green. Hilary Spurling has compared the abrupt and dramatic shift in color of the work to the practice of colorways in textile manufacturing, in which the same pattern is available in different color combinations.<sup>497</sup> The shift from blue-green to red also indicates another shift inherent in the transference from the tapestry aesthetic to a textile one: Vuillard's Symbolist intimations of narrative are replaced with Matisse's confounding of narrative. Beyond all of their formal and material characteristics, tapestries were meant to convey a story, an allegory, some kind of illustrative meaning. Vuillard maintained this symbolic function of tapestries with his decorations that may have been enigmatic, but were nonetheless evocative of a narrative. Matisse's transposition of his painting from a subdued blue-green to a startlingly vibrant red reminiscent of synthetic dyes, serves to emphasize the purely formal nature of the composition, its status as a decorative arrangement of lines, shapes, and hues, like a printed furnishing

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<sup>497</sup> Spurling and Dumas, *Matisse, His Art and His Textiles*, 17

fabric.<sup>498</sup> The bright red takes the work out of referential time and eliminates the notion of a genre scene taking place at a certain time of day in a certain season.<sup>499</sup>

The shift from the tapestry aesthetic to a textile one, from a model of tactility to one of opticality was much more than a statement of artistic preferences. I would argue that it implied the excising of certain social concerns that underpinned the Nabis' concept of the decorative, issues such as championing handcraft in the age of mass production, the ideal of collectivity, and the role of art in everyday life as fostering connectivity, as responding to the notion of the interdependence between beings and things. Instead, Alastair Wright has argued that Matisse's emphasis on vision and surface was a cipher for the modern society of consumption, for the consumer's gaze in the department store window that rendered everything—history, tradition, other cultures—as consumable commodities.<sup>500</sup> Vuillard did not engage with commodity culture or play with the idea of art as a commodity. Rather his engagement with bourgeois ornament was on the level of material culture, an attempt to create art that related to everyday life. Although he was interested in selling his art, he was not, like Matisse, interested in exploring the capitalist commodity as the emblem of modernism.

Yet Matisse did inherit the decorative imperative from Vuillard and the Nabis and his ambitions for mural decoration are not completely divorced from theirs. Matisse infamously declared that he wished his art to be “like a good armchair that provides relaxation from fatigue.”<sup>501</sup> Art historians have spilled much ink contextualizing this seemingly superficial

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<sup>498</sup> Although Vuillard also referenced printed furnishing fabrics, it was in dialectic with tapestry.

<sup>499</sup> Flam, *Matisse, the Man*, 232

<sup>500</sup> Wright, *Matisse and the Subject*, chap. 3

<sup>501</sup> Matisse, “Notes d'un peintre,” *La Grande Revue* 52, no. 24 (December 25, 1908): 742. Translated by Kuenzli, *Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, 215.

statement within Matisse's artistic theory, within contemporaneous art history, and have additionally traced its source back to Baudelaire.<sup>502</sup> We can now also see its similarities with Vuillard's own philosophy of modern-decoration-as-wallflower. For both artists, art was conceived as a respite for the mind comparable to a domestic, decorative object. In Matisse's painting, this goal was to be realized through purely visual means, through the manipulation of form, color, line, and scale.

In the early twentieth century, Matisse managed to flip the terms of Nabis; he made the decorative a characteristic of painting, rather than conceiving of painting as an instance of the decorative. The tapestry aesthetic, which was inextricably tied to a revaluation of decoration inclusive of the decorative arts, faded in significance with the redefining of the decorative as a primarily painterly concept. Tapestry, as a mural-based decorative art, enjoyed a moment of parity with painting during the fin-de-siècle, when modern art could be construed in terms of collective work and allusive narratives, and when the domestic and the peripheral could constitute the spaces of modernism.

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<sup>502</sup> See for example Benjamin, *Matisse's Notes*, 208-09; Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 34; Mashek, "Carpet Paradigm," 97; Neff, "Matisse and Decoration," 59; Bois, "On Matisse," 81-82; Kuenzli, *Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, 215, 227.

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Plates 1a-d: Alexis-Joseph Mazerolle, cartoons for *Wine, Fruits, Tea, and Coffee*, 1872-73



Plates 2a-b: Mazerolle's *Hunting* and *Fishing* installed in the Rotonde du Glacier, Palais Garnier



Plate 3: Gobelins Manufactory, *Penelope at Her Loom*, designed by Diogène Ulysse Maillart, woven 1873-75



Plate 4: Detail of *Penelope at Her Loom*



Plate 5: Gobelins Manufactory, *Saint Agnes*, designed by Louis-Auguste-Charles Steinheil, woven by Emile Maloisel, 1875-76



Plate 6: Detail of *Saint Agnes*



Plate 7: Gobelins Manufactory, *The Heron*, designed by Jean-Joseph Bellel, woven 1879-84



Plate 8: Gobelins Manufactory, *The Roe Deer*, designed by Alexandre Rapin, woven 1888-89



Plate 9: Gobelins Manufactory, *The Siren and the Poet*, designed by Gustave Moreau, woven 1896-99



Plate 10: Gobelines Manufactory, *A Tournament Scene from the End of the Fourteenth Century*, designed by Jean-Paul Laurens, woven 1895-99



Plate 11: Gobelins Manufactory, *The Conquest of Africa*, designed by Georges Rochegrosse, woven 1896-99



Plate 12: Detail of *The Siren and the Poet*

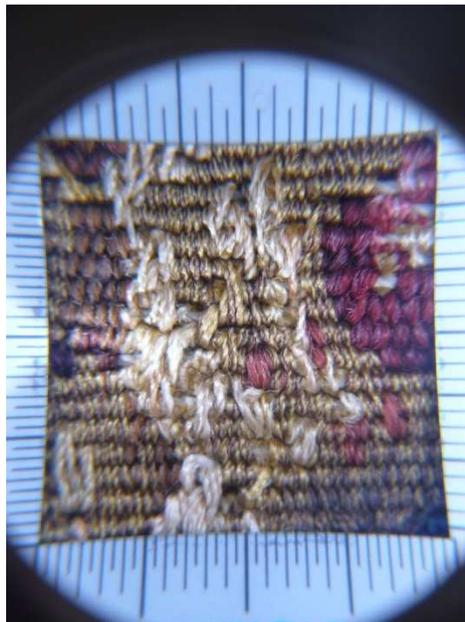


Plate 13: Magnification of *The Siren and the Poet* showing the *crapaud* technique



Plates 14a-b: Maison Leclercq, *The Festival of Spring*, designed by Eugène Grasset, 1900



Plate 15: Gobelins Manufactory, trial study for *A Tournament Scene*, designed by Laurens, woven 1893

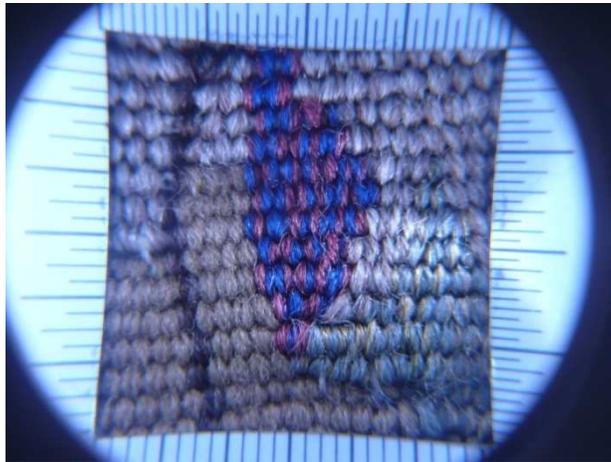


Plate 16: Magnification of *A Tournament Scene* showing *chiné* technique

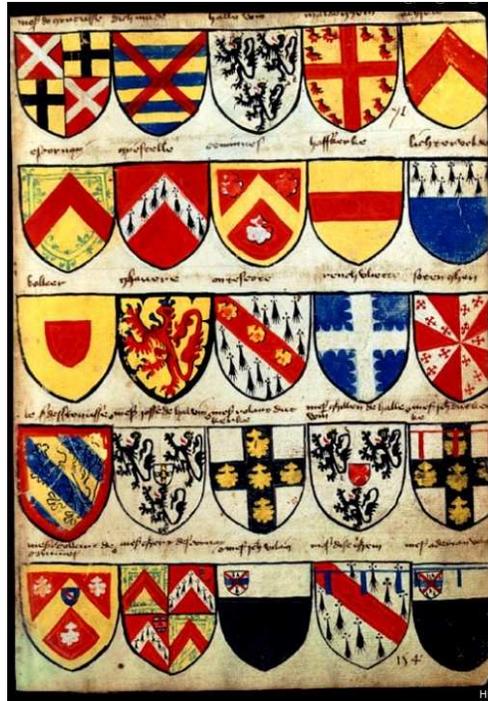


Plate 17: French, *Armorial of the Golden Fleece*, ca. 1430-61, fol. 71



Plate 18: French, *Armorial of the Golden Fleece*, ca. 1430-61, fol. 154v



Plate 19: Jean-Paul Laurens, model for *A Tournament Scene*, 1894



Plate 20: Detail of *A Tournament Scene*



Plate 21: Attributed to Barthélemy d'Eyck, *The Tournament Book*, ca. 1462-65, fols. 54v-55



Plate 22: Attributed to Barthélemy d'Eyck, *The Tournament Book*, ca. 1462-65, fols. 100v-101



Plates 23, 24: Details of costumes depicted in *A Tournament Scene*



Plate 25: Grantil workshop, *The Poppy*, wallpaper décor, 1899-1900



Plate 26: Detail of *The Conquest of Africa*



Plate 27: Detail of *The Conquest of Africa*



Plate 28: Emile Lévy, detail of poster for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Industriels, 1890

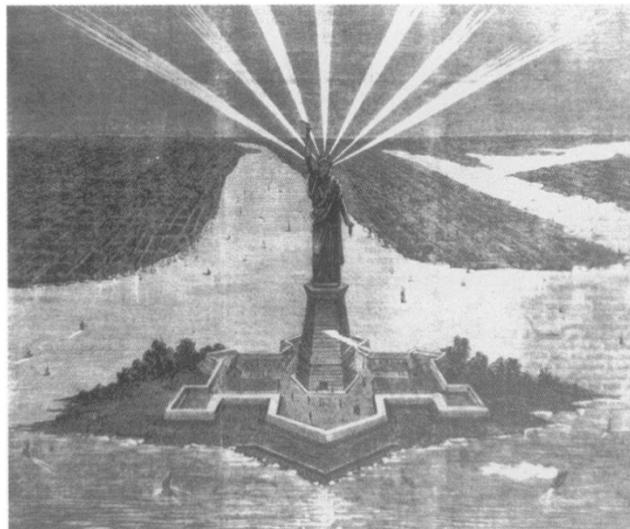


Plate 29 : Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, *Liberté éclairant le Monde*, *Le Journal Illustré*, October 10, 1875



Plate 30: Detail of Georges Rochegrosse, model for *The Conquest of Africa*, oil on canvas, 1896

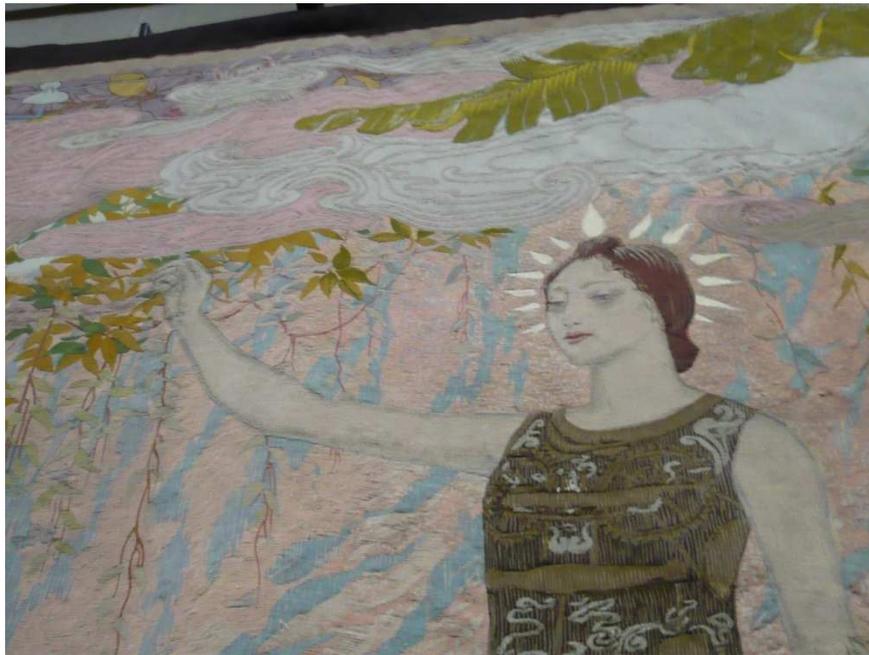
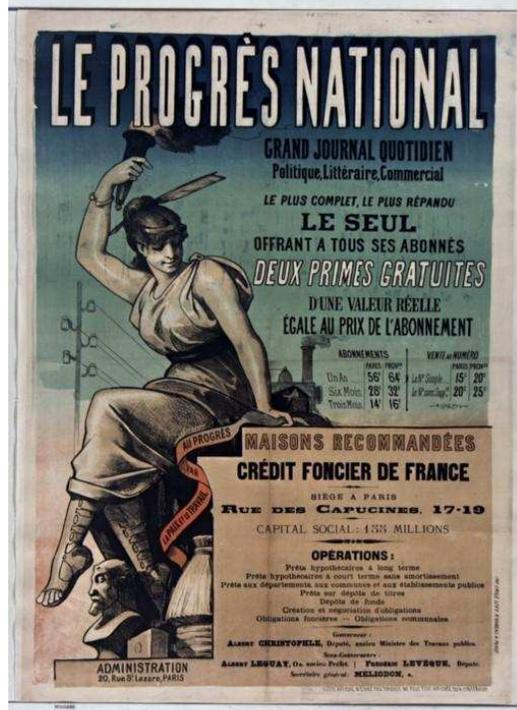
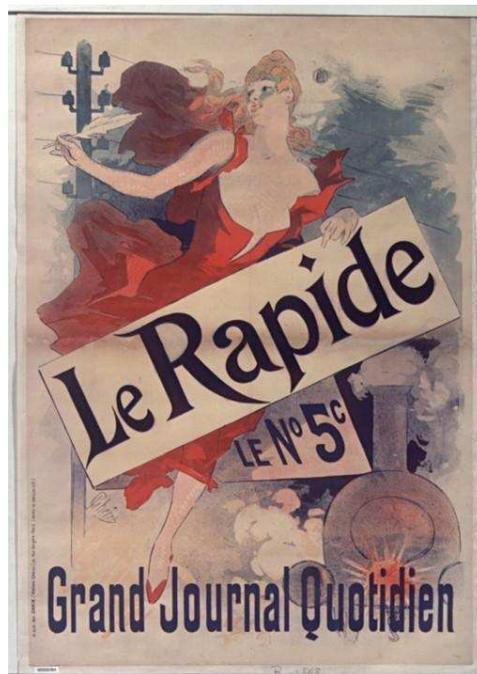


Plate 31: Detail of *The Conquest of Africa*



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Plate 32: Emile Lévy, poster for *Le Progrès national*, 1885



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Plate 33: Jules Chéret, poster for *Le Rapide*, 1892



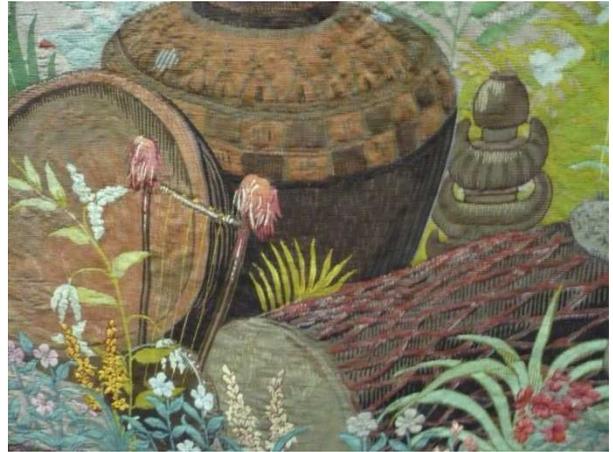
Plate 34 : Detail of top right corner, *The Conquest of Africa*



Plate 35: Detail of bottom left corner, *The Conquest of Africa*



Plates 36a-b: Details of bottom border, *The Conquest of Africa*



Plates 37a-b: Details from *The Conquest of Africa*



Plate 38: Gobelins Manufactory, *The Striped Horse*, from *The Old Indies* series, designed by Albert Eckhout and Frans Post, woven 1692-1730

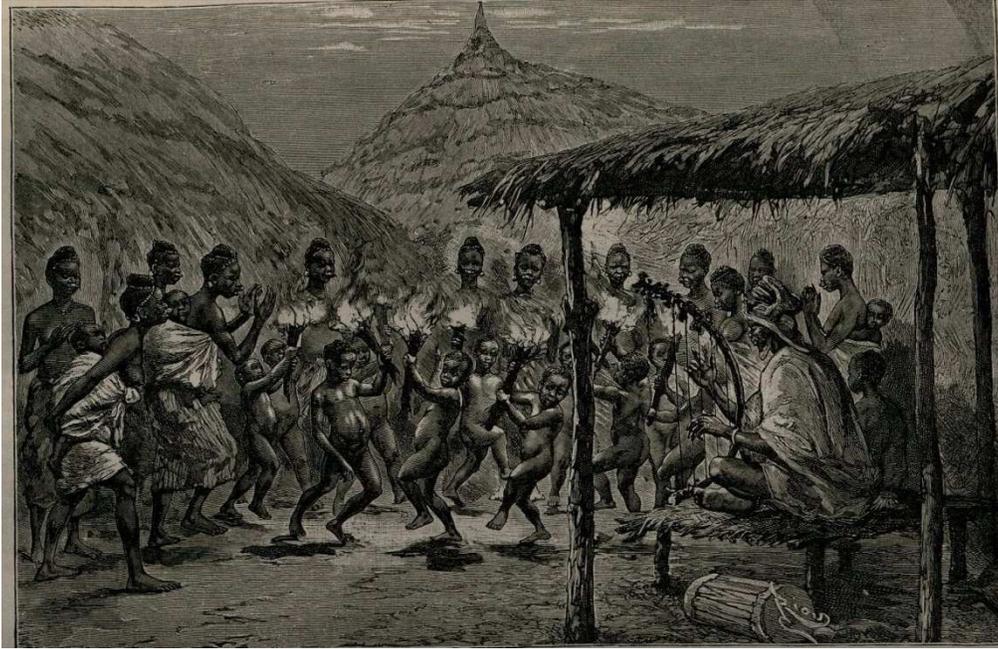


Plate 39: Louis-Gustave Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée par le pays de Kong et le Mossi*, vol. 1, p. 185

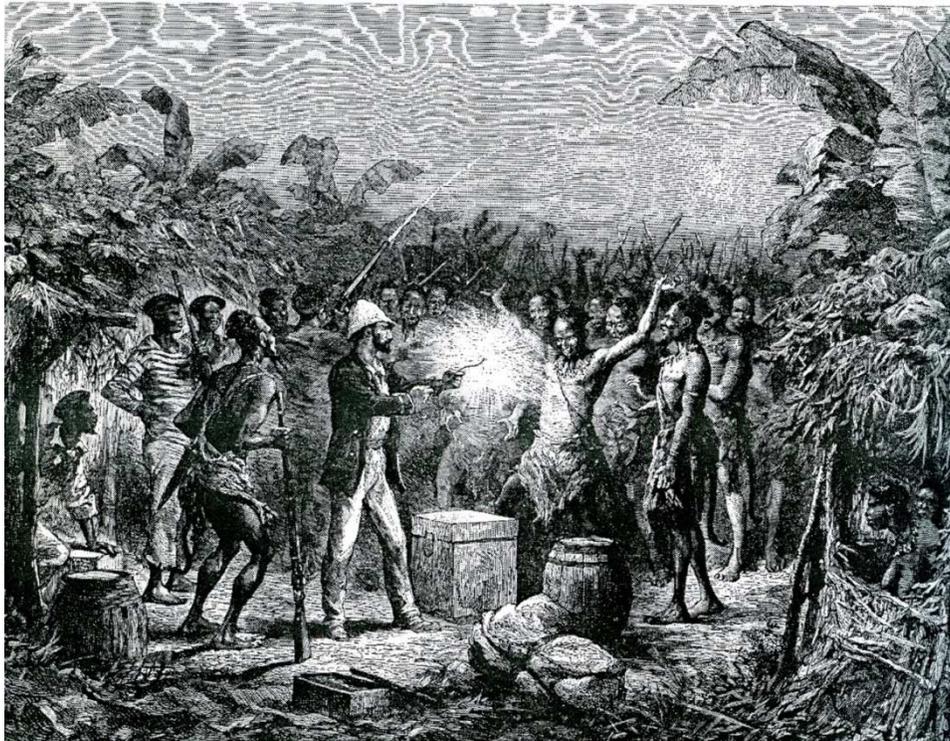


Plate 40: Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, "Voyages dans l'Oeust africain," *Le Tour du Monde*, vol. 54 (1887), p. 317

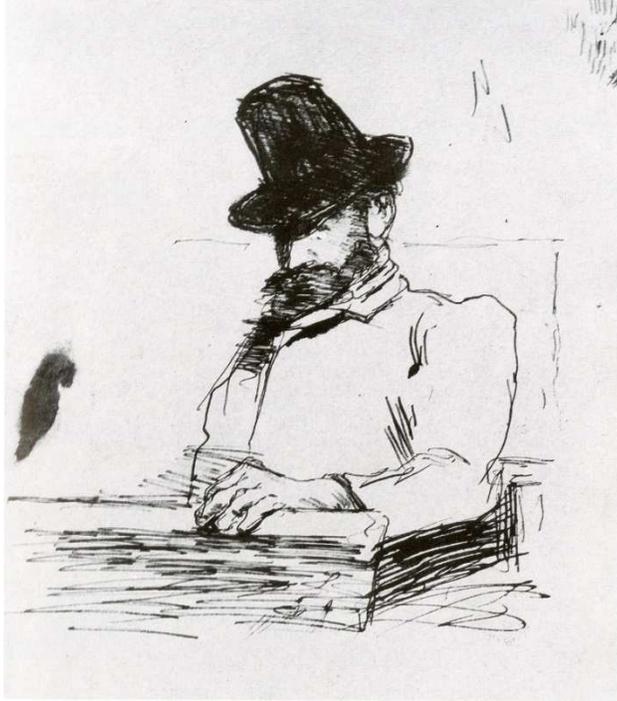


Plate 41: Maillol, Self-portrait, ca. 1896

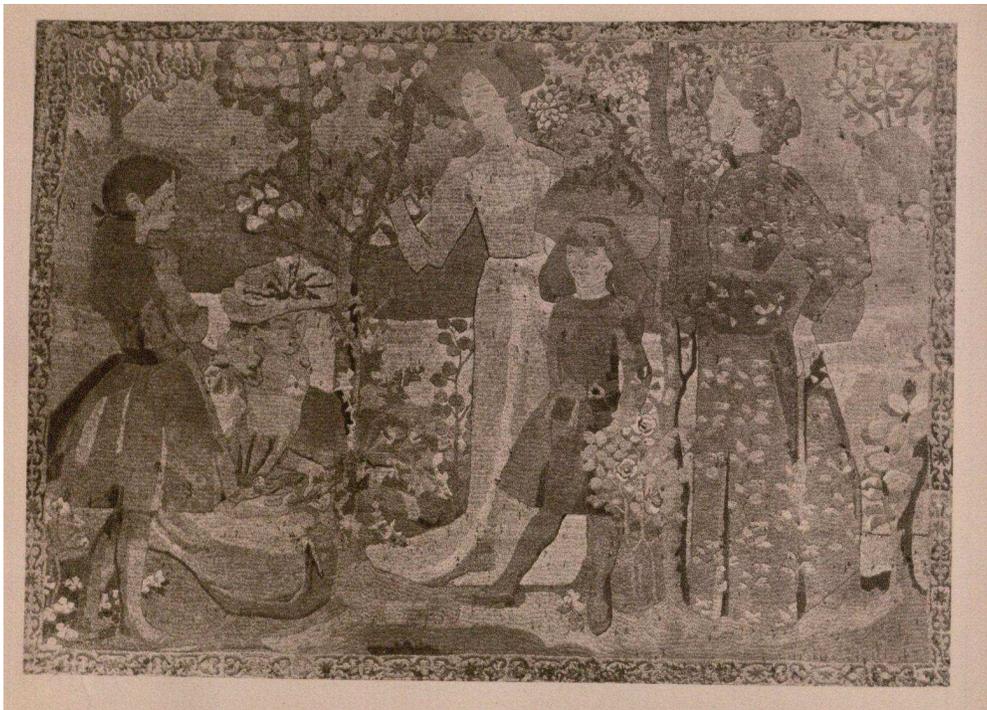


Plate 42: Maillol, *Girls in a Park*, 1894



Plate 43: Southern Netherlands, *Seignorial Life: The Promenade*, first quarter 16<sup>th</sup> century



Plate 44: *Girls in a Park* as it looks today



Plate 45: Maillol, *Enchanted Garden*, ca. 1895

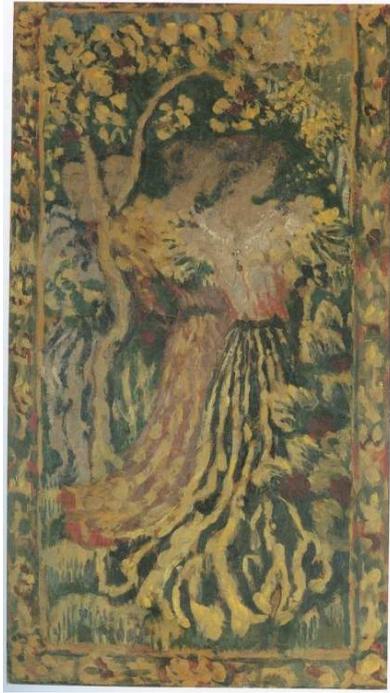


Plate 46: Maillol, preparatory sketch for *Enchanted Garden*, ca. 1894



Plate 47: Maillol, *Concert of Women*, ca. 1895



Plate 48: Maillol, *The Book*, ca. 1896



Plate 49: Maillol, *Music for a Bored Princess*, ca. 1896-98

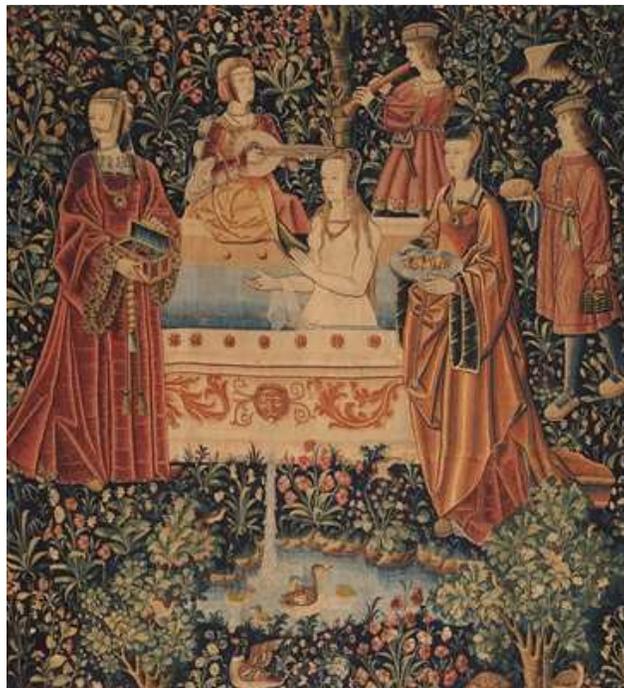


Plate 50: Southern Netherlands, *Seignorial Life: The Bath*, first quarter 16<sup>th</sup> century



Plate 51: Maillol, preparatory sketch for *Concert of Women*, ca. 1895



Plates 52a-b: Magnification of *Concert of women* showing the *chiné* technique: mandolin; tree trunk



Plate 53: "Maillol at his tapestries." Photograph published in *L'Art décoratif*, February 1911



Plate 54: Ranson, *Spring*, 1895



Plate 55: Ranson, *Alpha and Omega*, ca. 1893



Plate 56: Ranson, *Four Figures Reading a Scroll*, 1894



Plate 57: Ranson, *Woman in a Cape*, 1895

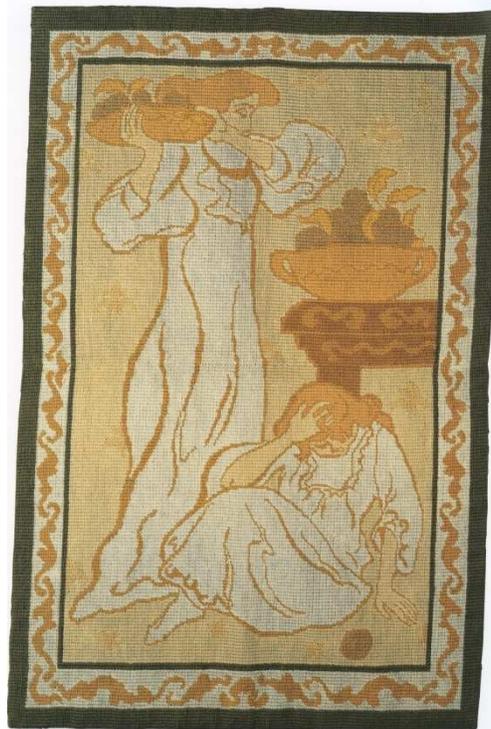


Plate 58: Ranson, *Women in White*, 1894

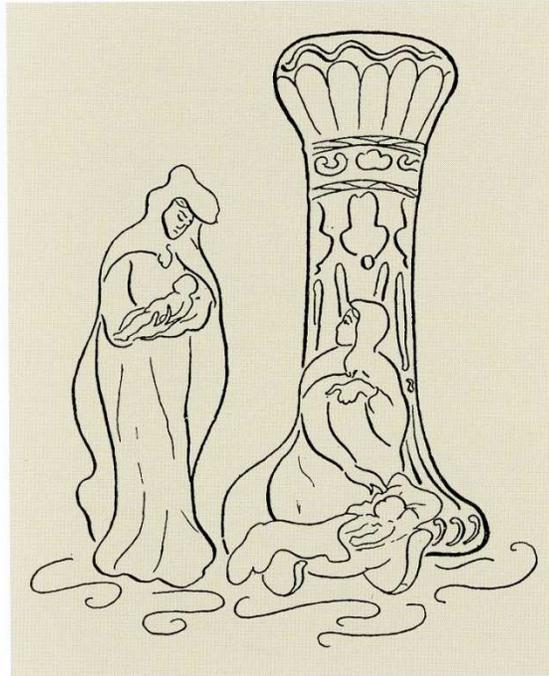


Plate 59: Ranson, Letter I from Chapter XXXIV, *The Book of the Virgin*, 1895



Plate 60: Ranson, *Seven Woman Harvesting*, 1895

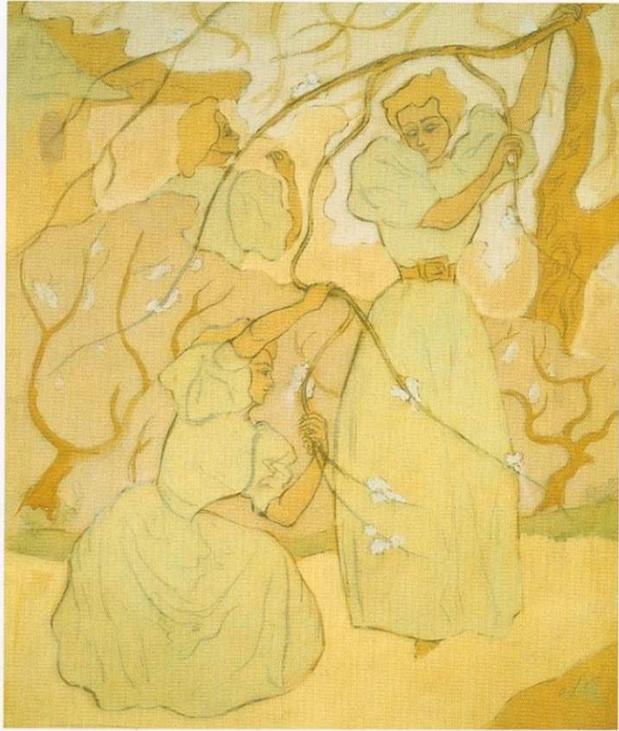


Plate 61: Ranson, preparatory sketch for *Spring*, 1895



Plate 62: Detail of *Spring* showing zigzagging straight stitches

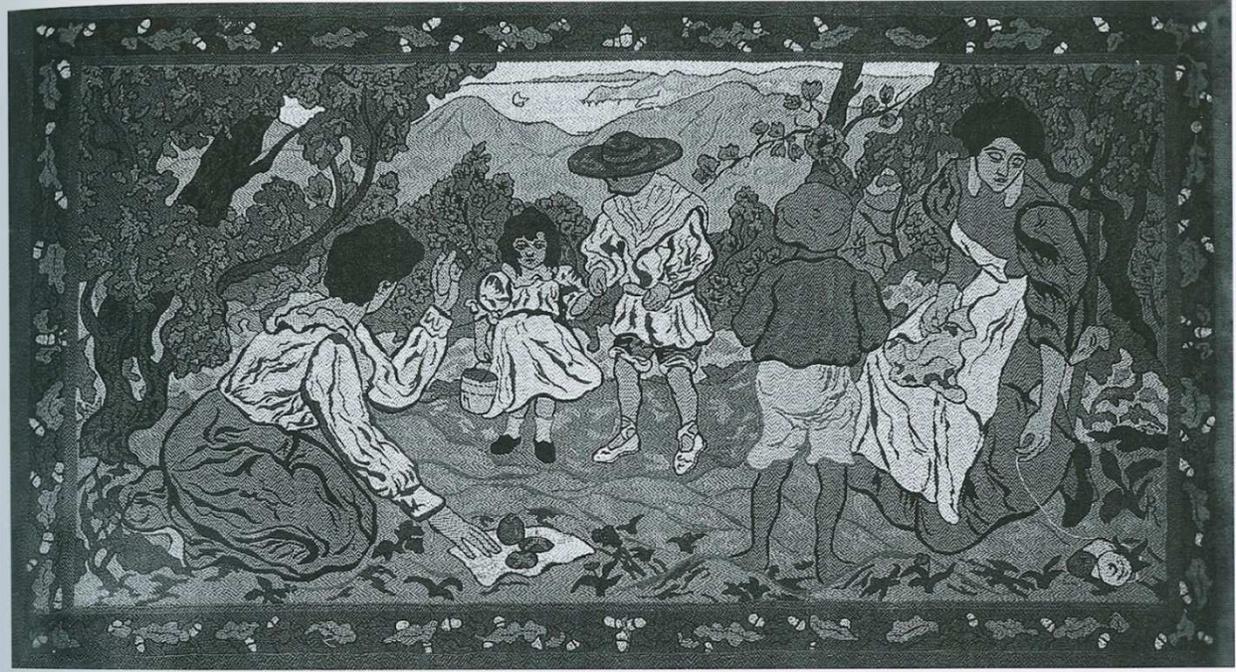
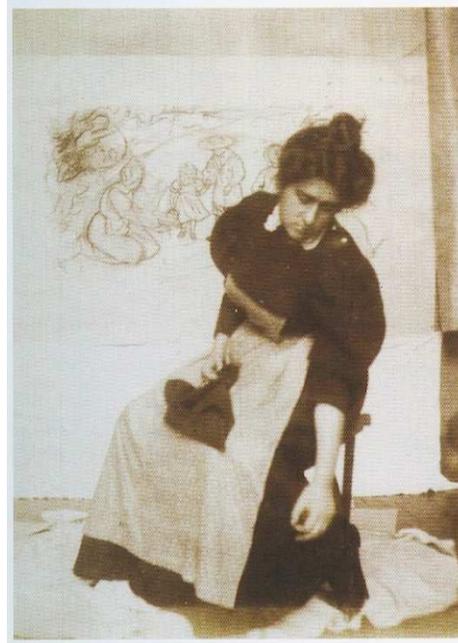


Plate 63: Ranson, *Snack in the Dunes*, 1897



Plates 64a-b: Photographs of France Ranson and the children of Dr. R., ca. 1897



Plate 65: Ranson, *Last Flowers*, 1898



Plate 66: Rippl-Rónai, preparatory sketch for *Idealism and Realism*, 1894-95



Plate 67: Rippl-Rónai, *Idealism and Realism*, 1895



Plates 68, 69: Details of Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, designed by Ödön Lechner, 1896



Plate 70: Cézanne, *Bathers*, 1874-75



Plate 71: Rippl-Rónai, *Azstrik transmitting the crown*, 1895



Plate 72: Brussels, *The Story of St. Stephen*, panel 9, ca. 1500



Plate 73: Imre Steindl, Parliament Building, Budapest, 1885-1904

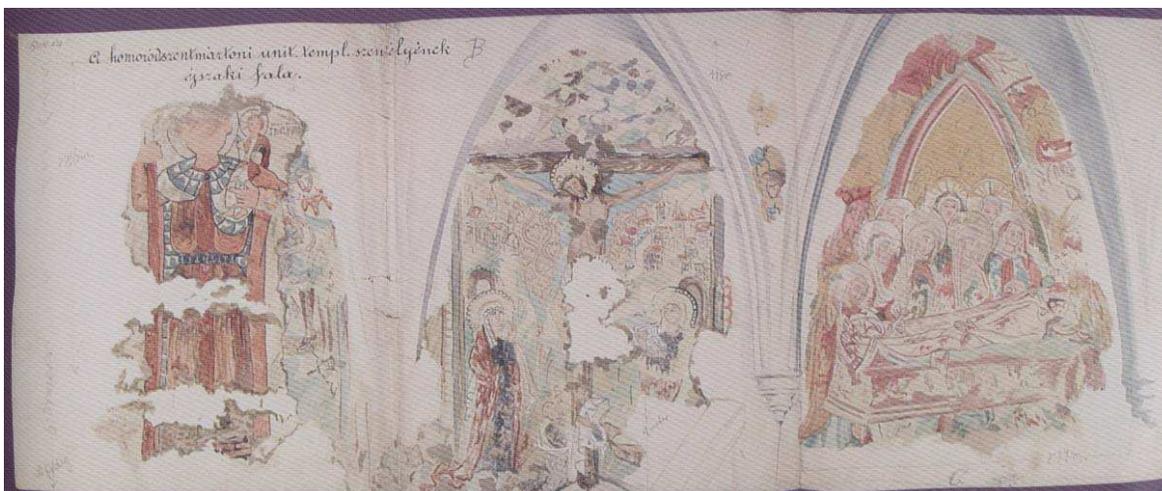


Plate 74: József Huszka, Mural, north wall of sanctuary in Unitarian church, Homoródszentmárton, [August] 1883



Plate 75: Man wearing a suba in Decs,  
a  
Hungary, 20<sup>th</sup> century



Plate 76: Inlaid mirror case depicting a herdsman in  
cifraszúr, 1856



Plate 77: Mihály Munkácsy, *Conquest*, 1893



Plate 78: Rippl-Rónai, *Woman in a Red Dress*, 1898



Plate 79: French and Flemish, *The Lady and The Unicorn: Taste*, late 15<sup>th</sup> century



Plate 80: Example of Matyó embroidery, 19<sup>th</sup> century



Plate 81: Embroidered bedsheet, Mezőkövesd, 19<sup>th</sup> century



Plate 82: Rippl-Rónai, *Young Woman with a Rose*, 1892

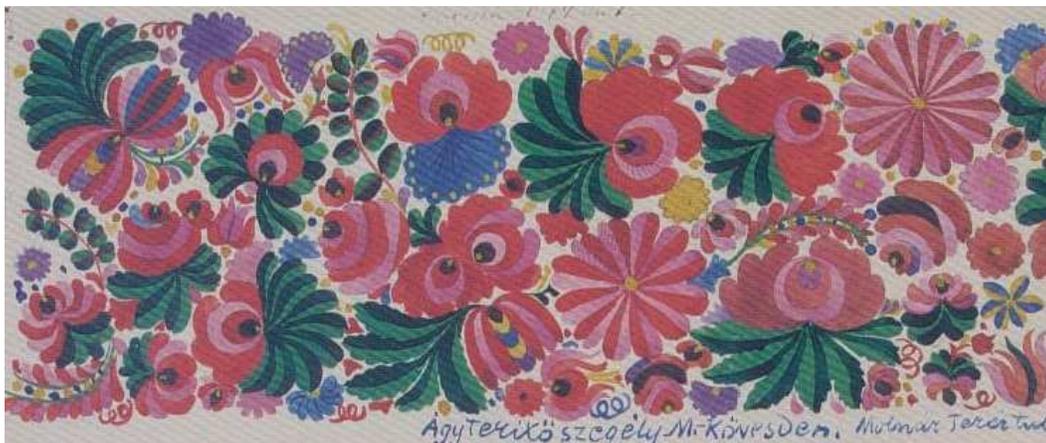
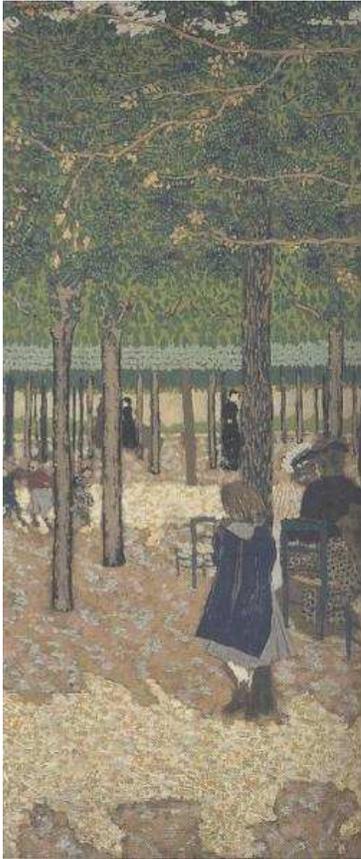


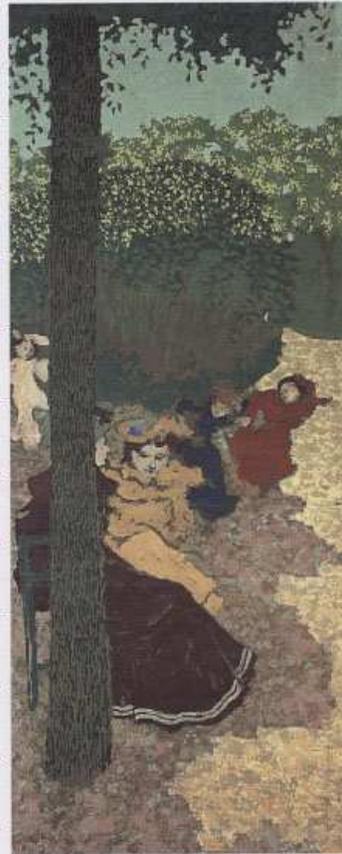
Plate 83: József Huszka, Drawing of an embroidered bedsheet, July 1886



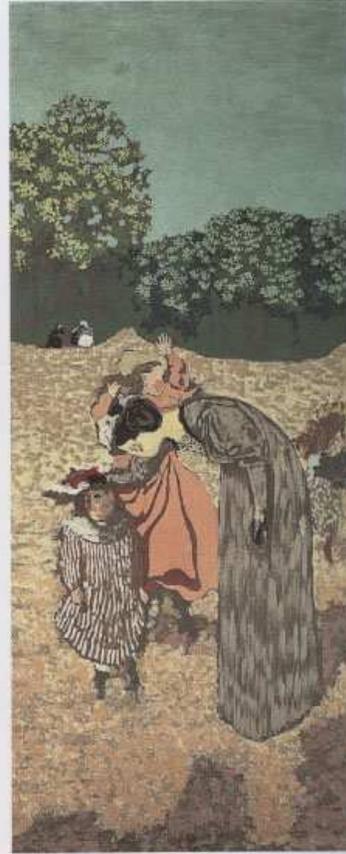
Plates 85a-c: Vuillard, *The Public Gardens*, 1894



*Under the Trees*



*Little Girls Playing*



*Asking Questions*

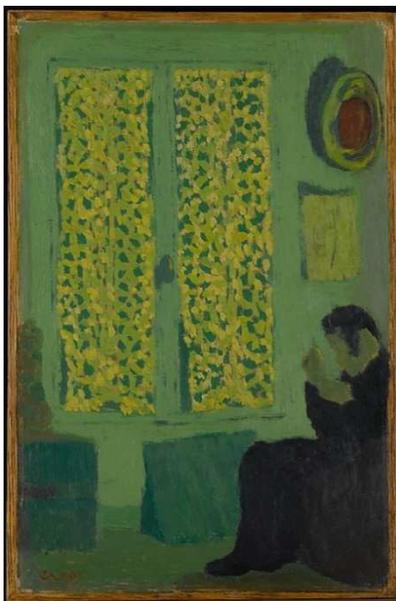
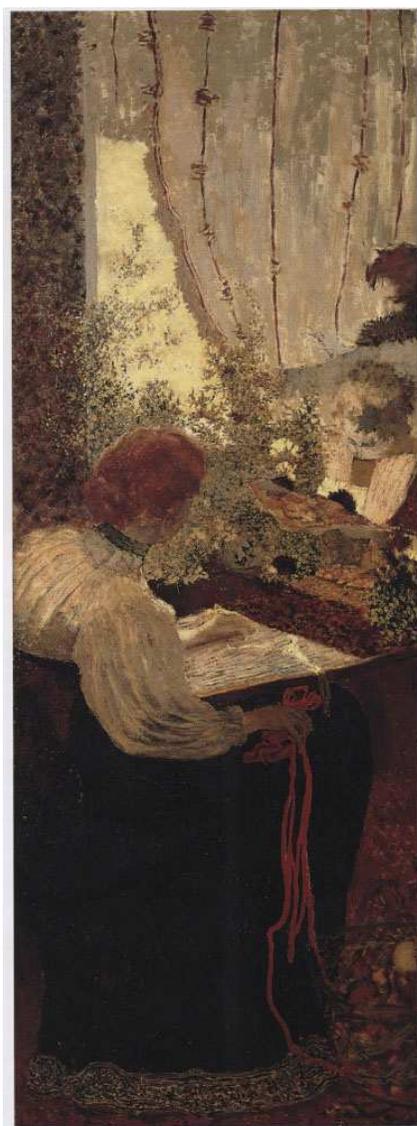


Plate 86: Vuillard, *The Green Interior*, 1891

Plate 88a-e: Vuillard, *The Album*, 1895



a. *The Embroidery*



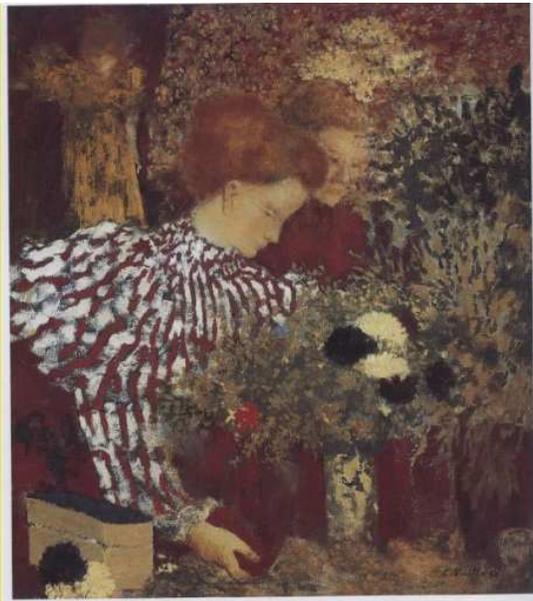
b. *The Dressing Table*



c. *The Stoneware Pot*



d. *The Album*



e. *The Striped Blouse*

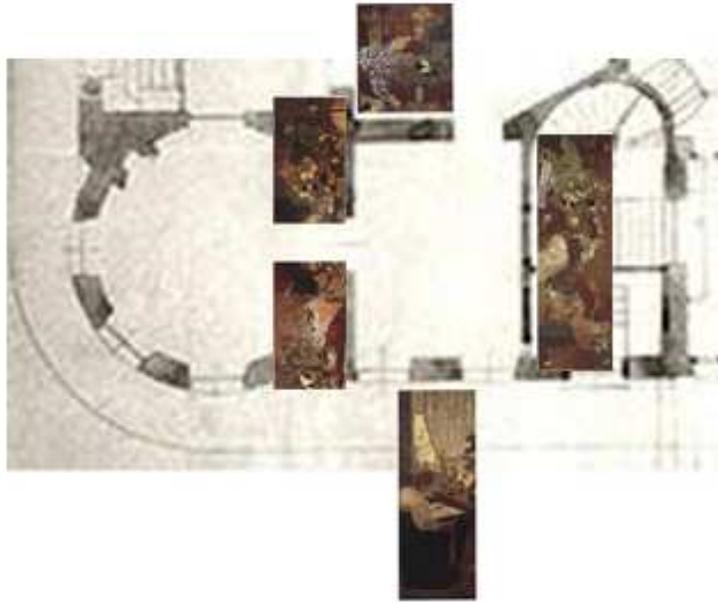


Plate 89: Reconstructed installation of *The Album*



Plate 90: Photograph of Thadée in the billiard room of Le Relais, Villeneuve-sur-Yonne, with *The Album* in the background, ca. 1900

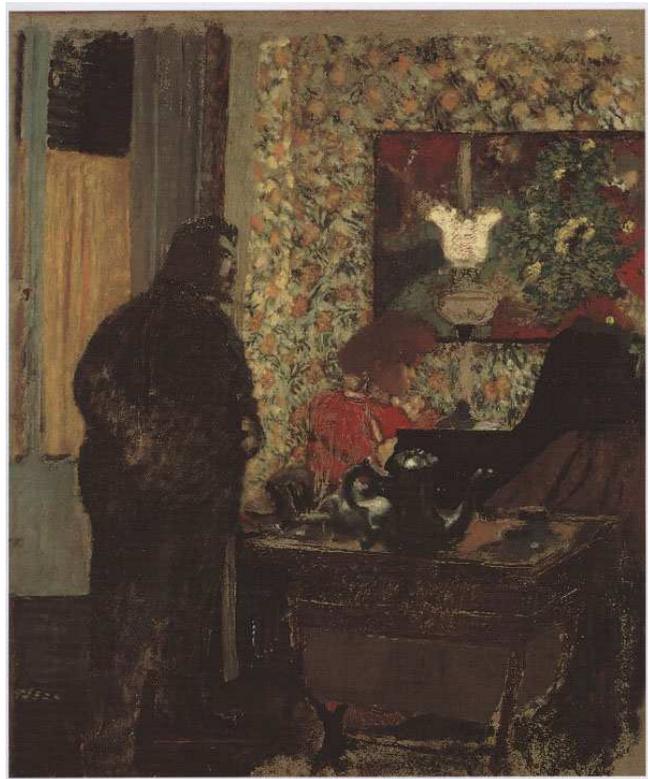


Plate 91: Vuillard, *Cipa listening to Misia at the Piano*, 1897/98

Plates 92a-d: Beauvais Manufactory, *Fragments d'Opéra*, designed by François Boucher, 1752-64



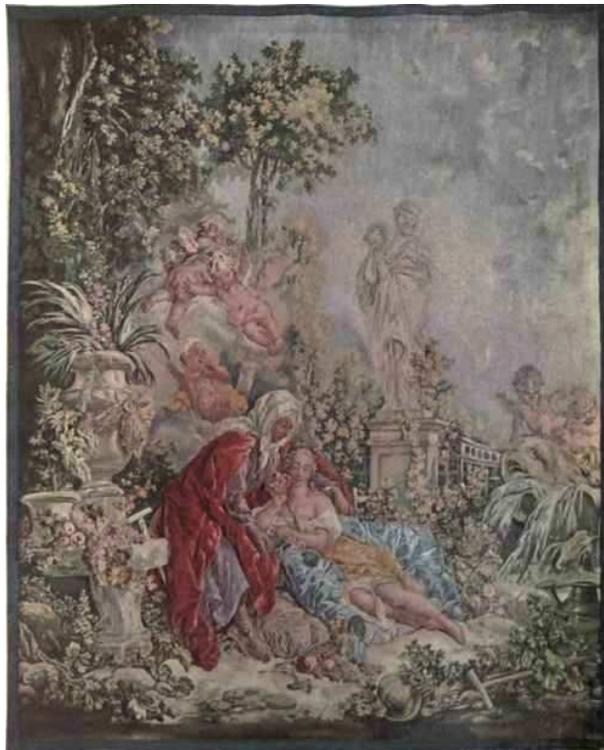
a. *Rinaldo Asleep*



b. *Venus and Putti*



c. *Apollo and Issa*

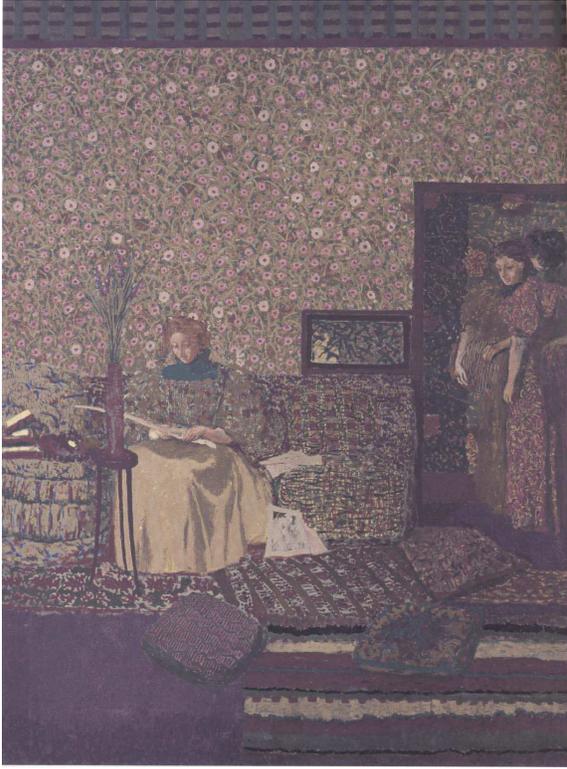


d. *Vertumnus and Pomona*

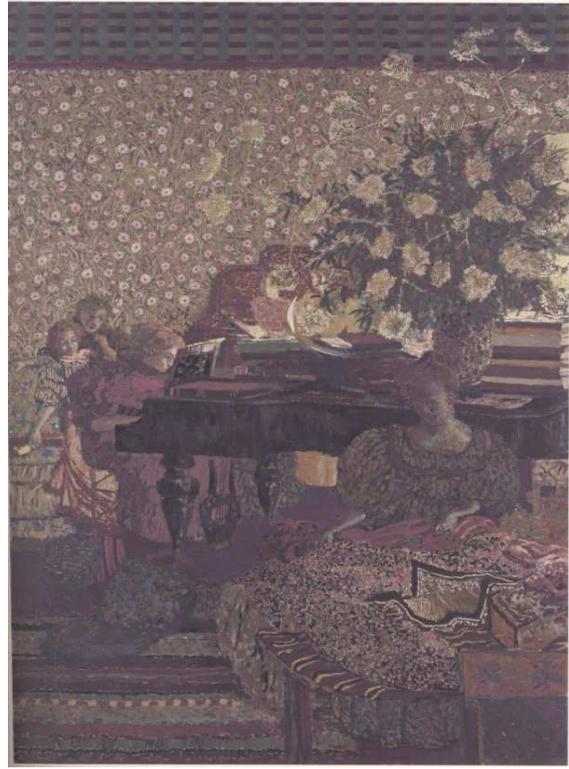


Plate 93: Maurice Denis, *Farandole*, from *The Love and Life of a Woman*, 1895

Plates 94a-d: Vuillard, *Interior with Figures*, 1896



a. *Intimité*



b. *Music*



c. *Working*



d. *Choosing a Book*



Plate 95: French and Flemish, *The Lady and The Unicorn: À mon seul désir*, late 15th century

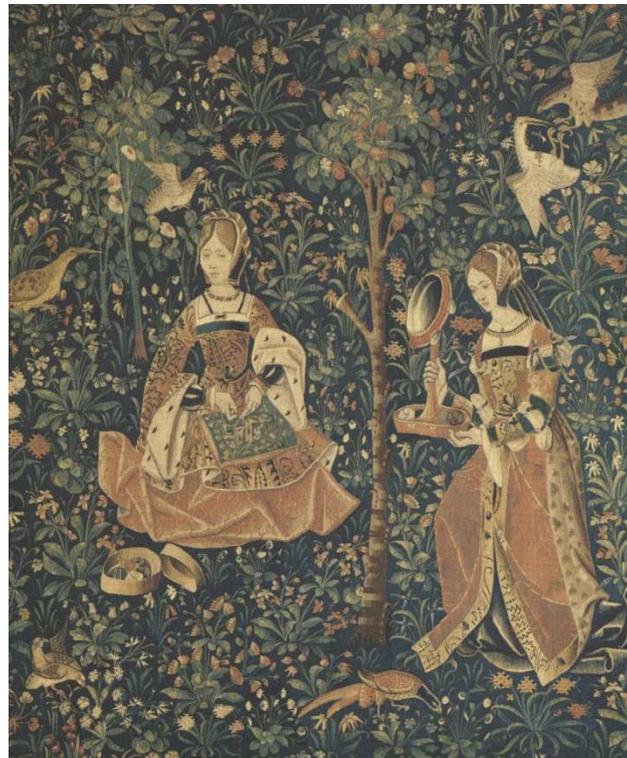


Plate 96: Southern Netherlands, *Seignorial Life: The Embroidery*, first quarter 16<sup>th</sup> century



Plate 97: Vuillard, *Misia at the Piano*, 1899

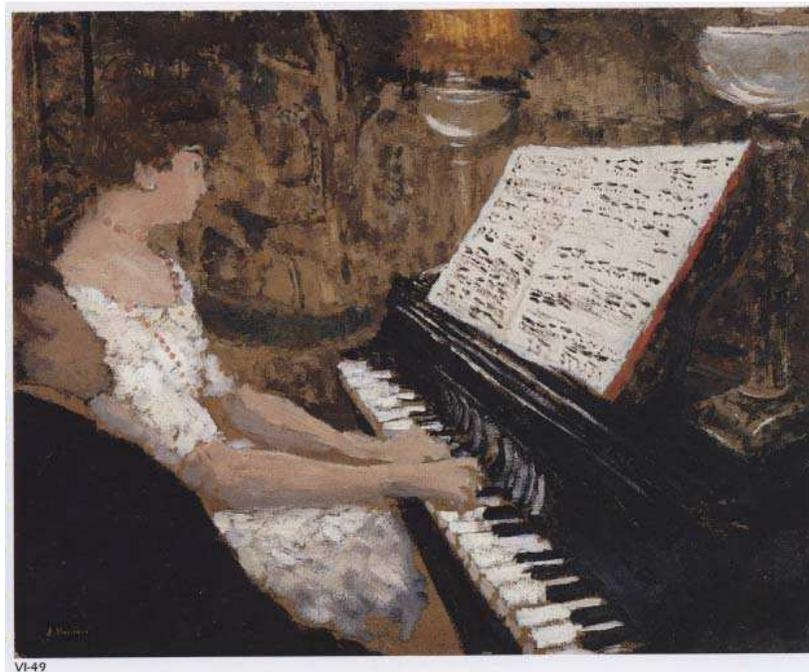


Plate 98: Vuillard, *Misia in White, Wearing a Red Necklace, and Playing the Piano*, 1899



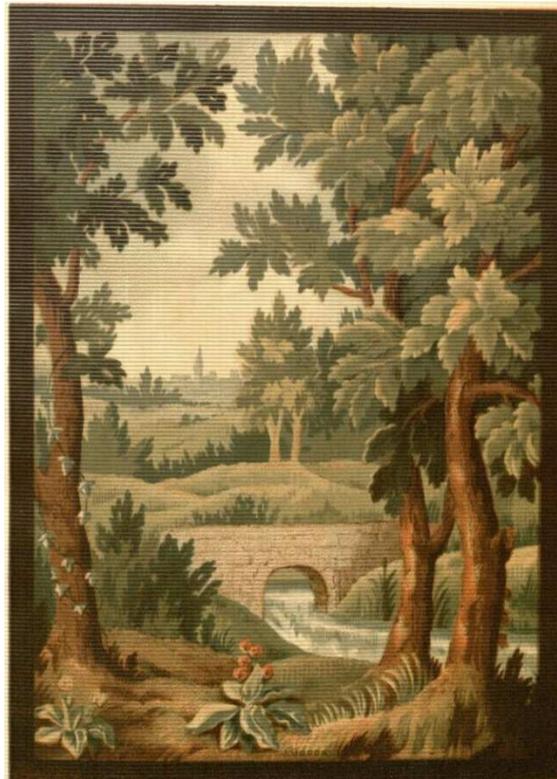
Plate 99: Vuillard, *In Front of the Tapestry*, 1899



Plate 100: Aubusson Manufactory, *La Ronde*, end of 17<sup>th</sup> century



Plate 101: Misia at the piano, rue Saint-Florentin, 1899



Plates 102a: Plate VI from Julien Godon, *La Peinture sur toile et tissus divers imitant les tapisseries...*, 2nd ed., Paris: Maison Binant, 1885.



Plate 102b: Plate VII



Plate 102c: Plate IX



Plate 103: Detail from *Vues du Brésil*, designed by Jean Julien Deltil for Zuber, first issued 1831



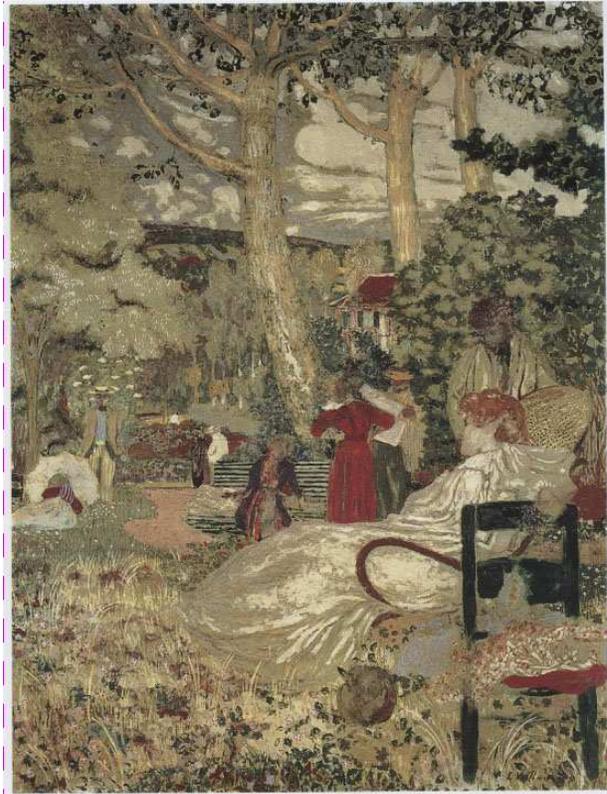
Plate 104: Wallpaper with tapestry motif, Danois workshop, Paris, ca. 1880



Plates 106a-b: Vuillard, *The Garden of Le Relais at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne*, 1898



a. *Women Reading on a Bench*



b. *Woman Seated in an Armchair*

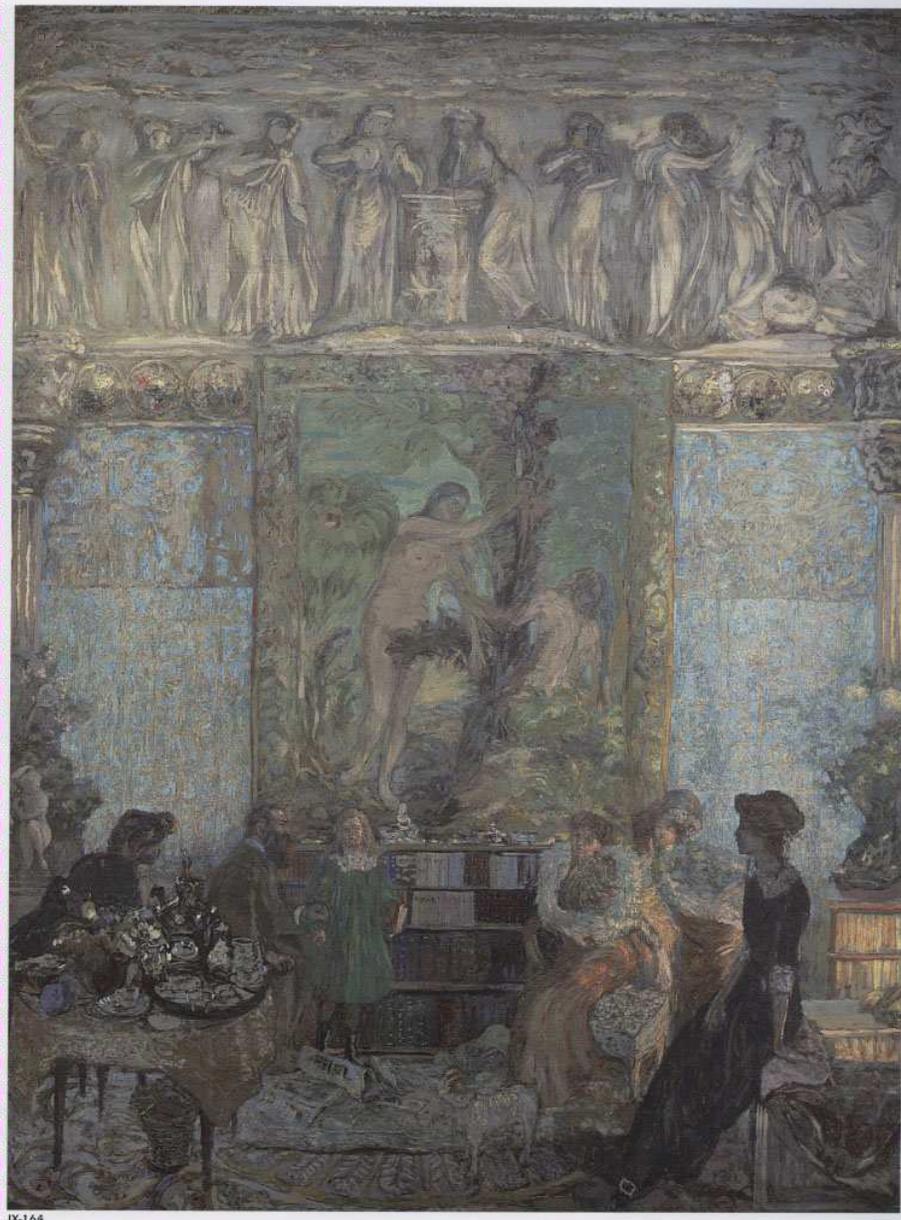
Plates 107a-b: Vuillard, *Île-de-France Landscapes*, 1899



a. *First Fruits*



b. *Window Overlooking the Woods*



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Plate 108: Vuillard, *The Library*, 1911



Plate 109: Vuillard, *Foliage – Oak Tree and Fruit Seller*, 1918

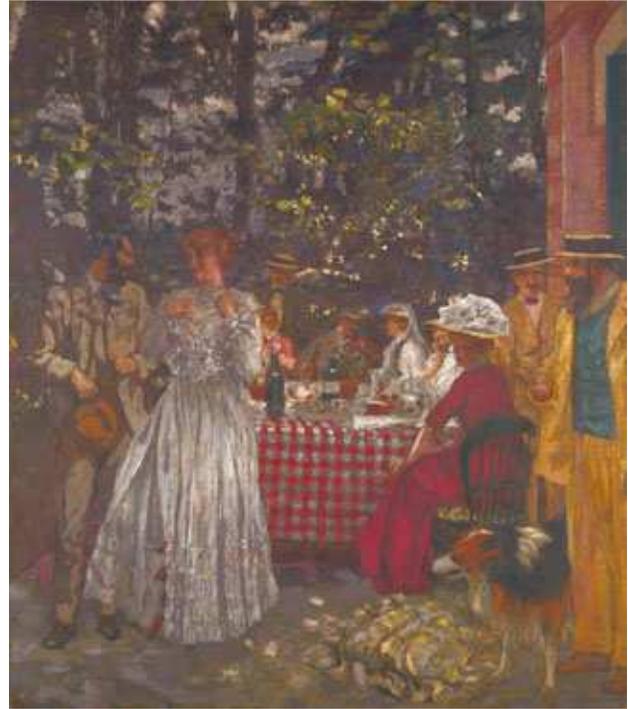


Plate 110: Brussels, *The Hunt of Maximilian: The Month of July*, designed by Bernard van Orley, 1531-33

Plates 111a-b: Vuillard, *The Terrace at Vasouy*, 1901, reworked 1935



a. *The Garden*



b. *The Lunch*



Plate 112: Matisse, *Harmony in Red*, 1908