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A

THE SYMBOLIST KEY
JAN VERKADE IN GERMANY

by

Marguerita J. Grecco

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

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Abstract**THE SYMBOLIST KEY: JAN VERKADE IN GERMANY**

by

Marguerita J. Grecco**Advisor: Professor Rose Carol Washton-Long**

In the autumn of 1906, the former Nabi and then Benedictine monk, Jan (Pater Willibrord) Verkade traveled to the German art capital of Munich to embark upon an extended period of study intended to revitalize his approach to art. He was to spend eighteen months in Munich. While there, he carried the credo of Symbolism and its corresponding Synthetist painting style to a new generation of painters. In so doing, Verkade served as a catalyst, spurring artists like Kandinsky, Jawlensky and Mūnter to pursue their quest to develop abstract styles of painting.

Verkade had spent the previous twelve years immersed in the stylistic direction of the founder of the Beuronerkunstschule, Pater Desiderius Lenz, and his mathematically-based "canon of sacred proportions." Feeling the sterility of the method and the coldness of the works produced according to canonic formulae, Verkade was intent upon returning to nature as a source of inspiration for his art. To do so, he looked to his earlier Symbolist roots, formulated during his association with his fellow Nabis and with Gauguin.

He also sought to rekindle the sort of direct involvement with contemporary developments in art, which he had thrived on as a young Nabi in Paris and Pont-Aven. His long-standing relationships with Maurice Denis and Paul Sérusier, with whom he had never lost contact, enabled Verkade to establish himself within the experimental artistic community of Schwabing. Denis, especially, helped Verkade gain entry to Munich's art society. Through Denis, Verkade met such men as Henry van de Velde and Julius Meier-Graefe.

Verkade's personality and easy sociability brought him into contact with several artists working in Munich, who were experimenting with new approaches to painting. What they shared with Verkade was a desire to restore to art its primary role as a communicator of a spiritual realm.

Verkade's own quest to revive the Symbolist/Synthetist character of his work, coupled with his interaction with the Munich avant-garde, resulted in an exchange among them that ennobled Symbolist ideology. Verkade's work, along with that of his Nabis colleagues, which he displayed proudly in his lodgings, and his constant talk of Gauguin and of Nabi sensibility, caused artists like Jawlensky, Werefkin, Kubin and others to explore again and experiment with Symbolist ideas and Synthetist technique. Verkade's direct involvement with Sérusier, who visited him in Munich, and with Denis,

whose Symbolist writing had been widely published, served to elevate Verkade's ideas in the eyes of his Munich colleagues.

As they began to formulate plans to establish the *Neue Künstlervereinigung, München*, these painters carried Verkade's message to Kandinsky and Münter, whose works from the period of 1908-1911, display the distinct character of a Symbolist/Synthetist approach.

Although the Munich sojourn left Verkade at a serious crossroads in his own life and career -- his new experiment with Symbolism made it impossible to return to Lenz's "canon" in earnest -- his significance in the history of art is imbedded in his influence on those experimental painters: Kandinsky, Jawlensky, Münter, etc., whose own work would change the nature of modernism.

Acknowledgments

When I first embarked upon the project that has at last resulted in the ensuing volume, I was barely thirty years old. In the score of years that has since elapsed, I have lived through a significant chapter of my adulthood, a chapter that has borne witness to my life's most challenging events. Both exhilarating and tragic, those events have shaped the person I am; in so doing, they have colored my perspective on Jan Verkade, a figure who, two short decades ago, was relegated only the briefest of footnotes in the then major art historical texts. Had I completed my investigation of Verkade while still in my thirties, as I had planned, I would have been far less able to understand and appreciate the turmoil that caused him to make a choice, as he was approaching fifty, between his art and his God. Having lived through my own turmoil has enabled me to engage with that of my subject and to comprehend it in a deeper, more thorough way.

Thus, I have come to the task of writing this dissertation with a fuller recognition of the idea of contribution, and of its meaning. In 1978, I could only define contribution in

terms of dramatic impact; thus, I was determined that I would have to prove, with hard evidence, that Verkade had been directly involved with Kandinsky and the latter's definitive effect on the development of modernism. I was sure that if I could not make such a case, then I could make no worthwhile case. I was young, and wrong. Through my personal experience, I have recognized that not all contribution is the direct result of dramatic interaction. Far more likely, the drama lies in the long range effect, and often, therein lies the value of the contribution.

Verkade did not know Kandinsky personally, as he had known Gauguin, and been instructed by him. However, Verkade's ideas were known to Kandinsky, and more importantly, Verkade's fervor in promoting those ideas was transmitted to Kandinsky. The ideas were not new to Kandinsky but they formed a structured and coherent whole at a time when Kandinsky was exploring new ways of thinking about art and formulating a unique conceptual basis for his work. The similarities in their artistic visions arose out of both men's responses to their shared moment in history, particularly the anti-materialist wave of sentiment that marked artistic endeavor at the turn of the century.

Verkade's concept of art created a link for Kandinsky, and others, between the seminal forces generating a modernist tradition, as exemplified by the mature work of Gauguin, and their ultimate, logical outcome realized in Kandinsky's style of abstraction. Such was the nature of Verkade's contribution; his vision encouraged a generation of painters, working in Germany in the first decade of the twentieth century to persist in discovering a means to express the spiritual in art.

Twenty years is both a long and a short time; short when years run into each other without notice, long when one recognizes that the roster of people, whose efforts have both supported and contributed to my completion of this dissertation, runs several pages in length. Professionally, I have benefited from the knowledge and research of scholars who broke ground in this area before me. Personally, I have been blessed with the support and encouragement of friends, colleagues and family members, who kept the flame alive, when I was afraid it had died. Often, these two groups have overlapped and I have been fortunate to have counted my professional mentors as friends. First among these is my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Rose Carol Washton Long, Professor and Executive Officer of the Art History Program at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, whose expert guidance has helped me across countless obstacles and to whom I owe a great debt of thanks. Dr. Long was the first professor I encountered when I began my graduate studies in 1971. She has shown me true friendship and compassion during the darker phases of my life and her professional guidance has been invaluable. Her groundbreaking work on Kandinsky has been pivotal to my understanding of his progression toward the development of hidden imagery, previously mistakenly considered non-objectivity by less astute observers. Dr. Long's work has provided inspiration not only for the methodical and painstakingly detailed research that supports it, but also for the straightforward and comprehensive manner in which it is presented in text. Her articles and books are superb models for students of the discipline; her dedication to her own students is the clearest indication of her position as a role model. I have benefited immensely from her scholarship and her mentorship.

When I returned to this project in 1989, after a seven year hiatus, I would have been at a loss to reestablish contacts for my research and to recoup lost time without the

help of my friend and colleague, Dr. Caroline Boyle-Turner, Director of the Pont-Aven School of Art and Associate Professor of Art History at the Rhode Island School of Design. A complete stranger to me when I first contacted her, Dr. Boyle-Turner literally opened her files on the Nabis to me and referred me to numerous scholars, collectors and museum officials in France, Germany and the Netherlands. It is to her that I owe the debt of my interview with M. Dominique and Mme. Claire Denis, the son and granddaughter respectively of Maurice Denis. Through the intercession of Dr. Boyle-Turner, I reestablished contact with the Verkade family; I also learned of the Endrich bequest, a private collection comprising a representative sample of Verkade's work during the Munich period, and I came to have access to the correspondence between Denis and Verkade, which has been so pivotal to my research. Moreover, Dr. Boyle-Turner's genuine enthusiasm for this project has been a constant source of support throughout the long process of writing, revising and refining; her friendship is a treasure.

To the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Jack D. Flam, Professor of Art History at Brooklyn College and The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York, whose scholarship and creativity I have long respected and admired, and Dr. Diane Kelder, Professor of Art History at the College of Staten Island and The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York, whose willingness to assist with this project in its final stages is much appreciated, my sincere thanks for their astute insights and suggestions, which have only improved the quality of the finished work, and for the time and energy they have expended in helping me bring this project to closure.

During the two phases of this project, I have come to know three generations of Verkades. The late Dr. Margaretha Verkade, the artist's niece and the late Dr. Eline Verkade-Cartier-van Dissel, the artist's sister-in-law both graciously welcomed me

into their homes and unveiled for me their collections of Verkade's paintings and drawings, none of which had ever been published, or even seen by the public at large. In addition to allowing me to study and photograph these works, they each offered many details about the Verkade family, which enabled me to create a context for the man and his motivations. My one regret is that neither of them lived to see the final stage of this project; I would have loved to have shared my newfound insights about him with them. Mr. Iwan Verkade, former Dutch Ambassador to Japan and son of Dr. Eline Verkade and Verkade's youngest brother, Eduard, was my first contact with the Verkade family. In addition to having granted me introductions to his mother and cousin, he provided invaluable help by translating from the Dutch, a number of Verkade's more important letters to Eduard. Most recently, I have had the great good fortune to have met and developed lasting relationships with Mme. Mats de Boer-Braat, the granddaughter of Verkade's twin brother, Ericus, and her husband, Mr. Ab de Boer. The de Boers' warmth toward me and their genuine interest in this project has been a great gift; moreover, they have both offered their extensive knowledge of their uncle's history and his work as it was passed on to their generation of the family. They have each answered a wealth of questions, allowing my work to proceed, and Ab de Boer has also assisted with the translation of important material from the original Dutch into English. I treasure their friendship and thank them for their help at seminal phases of my research.

M. Dominique Denis, son and Mme. Claire Denis, granddaughter of the painter, Maurice Denis, allowed me to interview them in their home in St. Germaine-en-Laye. They offered priceless insights into Verkade's character and the nature of his relationship with Denis. My visit to them, in the former home of the painter, allowed me to observe an exhaustive collection of paintings by Denis and the other Nabis, Verkade among them. I also owe them a significant debt for allowing me to study and excerpt from

the collection of letters between Maurice Denis and Verkade, which they have painstakingly conserved over the years. Dr. Marie-Amelie Anquetil, Director of the Musée du Prieure, St. Germaine-en-Laye, allowed me to see the Museum's collection in storage of works by Verkade, Denis and the other Nabis represented there.

To Fieke Pabst, Archivist of the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, I express my sincere thanks for opening the archives of the Museum to me on a cold, rainy Sunday night in November of 1990 and for countless other acts of generosity, especially for sharing with me numerous bits of information about Verkade and his peers and for keeping me abreast of new information that has come available within the Dutch art historical community. Her friendship has meant a great deal to me.

Dr. Adolph Smitmans, Director of the Städtische Galerie Albstadt discussed with me many of the details and works of Verkade's Munich period. Dr. Smitmans also provided the necessary introduction, which enabled me to gain entry to the home of Frau Weidelenner, of Buchau-am-Federsee, current owner of Verkade's bequest to his friend P. Erich Endrich. My sincere thanks go too to Frau Weidelenner for her willingness to assist with this study of Verkade, by allowing me to photograph the paintings in her collection.

Dr. and Frau Heinz Dehmel of Munich permitted me to study their extensive archive on Hugo Troendle, provided me with copies of the correspondence between Verkade and Troendle, along with countless other documents, and introduced me to the late Frau Marcella Vössler-Wolff, also of Munich and daughter of the banker and art collector,

Herr Alfred Wolff. The late Frau Vössler-Wolff invited me into her home, originally her father's home and the site of many of the gatherings at which Verkade had been present. She allowed me to photograph her extensive collection of turn-of-the-century French and German art, and offered countless childhood reminiscences about Verkade, Jawlensky, Werefkin, Franz von Stück, Henry van de Velde and others in the pantheon of early 20c art history.

The late P. Virgil Fiala, OSB and the late P. Willibrord Hermann Jaspers, OSB scoured the archives of the Benedictine Monastery of St. Martin in Beuron, to which I could not be permitted access, and brought countless letters, sketchbooks and notes of Verkade's for me to study. Without their assistance, much of the information about the tenor of the relationship between Verkade and P. Desiderius Lenz would not have come to light.

Herr Wolfgang & Frau Gertraude Fridrich of Hirschau, Tübingen allowed me to be a guest in their home while they assisted with my research into the *Gesellschaft für Christlicher Kunst* and painstakingly translated a number of Verkade's letters from the original German into English. Frau Fridrich's mother, Frau Weller offered invaluable assistance by translating letters, handwritten in Haute Deutsche, that constitute the early correspondence of P. Lenz to Verkade. Countless others have assisted with the translation of written material from the original German, first among these is my former colleague Dr. Joyce Rheuban, Professor of Film History at La Guardia Community College and the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. Ms. Rachel O'Brien, librarian at the Leon Beck Institute translated my English correspondence into German. I also owe sincere gratitude to Mrs. Jutta Corinne Kell,

graduate of Marymount Manhattan College for her help with, among other material, a particularly difficult letter written by Verkade to Alfred Kubin.

To my former colleagues at La Guardia, I owe a debt of gratitude for helping to keep the flame of this project burning in a storm. Among them are the late Dr. George L. Groman, who offered his support and encouragement throughout the years of our friendship and always nudged me gently to complete this degree. I regret that he is not here to see it finished. Dr. Joanne Romeo Anderson took it upon herself to guide me toward picking up the remnants of a work in progress and bringing it to closure. My friend, Dr. Neil I. Rossman, through endless discussion and investigation, helped me to recognize that a clearer understanding of myself could only lead to a clearer understanding of my subject. His insight has been invaluable.

Mr. Gary Vollo, photographer par excellence has my deepest gratitude for his careful and diligent work to reproduce the images that accompany the text. I value his friendship and appreciate the security of being able to rely on his skill; his humor made the final tasks associated with completing a dissertation almost pleasurable.

Sincere thanks also go to Mr. Eric Ment and Mr. Michael Gueft for having formatted and printed the text and photographs according to required specifications, thus sparing me the frustration of struggling with a computer in the eleventh hour.

My colleagues at Marymount Manhattan College, too many to name, have prodded, encouraged and delighted in my successful completion of each step in this final phase of the project. My sincere thanks to them all.

My wonderful family and a long list of exceptional friends provided sustaining emotional support at a time of crisis; I will never forget their acts of kindness and love. Each of them, in his or her own way, has also brought joy and laughter into my life. To name them all, both the living and the too-soon departed, would literally require pages, so I must trust that our relationships are such that they know who they are and understand the depth of my gratitude. I would be remiss, however, if I did not single out my sister, Joanne M. Grecco for her grace, her humor, her compassion and for having seen me through my darkest hour, which was, in some ways, hers as well. Without her inexhaustible strength and her boundless caring, I might not have endured.

Finally, there are four others to whom I owe an especially great debt. My late husband, Michael Vivo was with me at the inception of this project and I am convinced that his confidence in me and his respect for my vision, in large measure, motivated me to pursue what seemed to be a most elusive goal. My current soulmate and partner, John C. Melick has demonstrated such faith in my ability and has offered suggestion and encouragement whenever either was needed. I know that without his love and his support I might never have drawn this work to conclusion. Lastly, for their ever-present belief in me, for their selfless giving of their time, of their energy, of their love, I dedicate this work to my parents, Phyllis and Richard Grecco, with my greatest respect. The contribution they have made to this accomplishment is enormous and the thanks I owe them, simply immeasurable.

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Jan Verkade in Beuron in 1934
Photograph taken by Hugo Troendle

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Introduction

Symbolism as a Modernist Impulse: Verkade's Place Within the Avant-Garde

No measure of greatness is achieved without risk.

Jan Verkade¹

Within the last two decades, Symbolism² has come to be seen as the fertile ground out of which arose the development of abstract styles of painting. Definitive connections have already been drawn between Symbolist thinking and the modes of abstraction characterized by Cubism, Cubo-Futurism and Suprematism. In this climate, Jan Verkade's association with Symbolism renders him a figure worthy of investigation, since he is to be found at the heart of avant-garde developments in two decidedly pivotal moments in the history of modernism: the break with naturalism, as exemplified by the Synthetist/Symbolist style of Gauguin and his circle, and the pioneering move toward abstraction, as characterized by the stylistic advances of Kandinsky and his peers. Verkade's association with both groups, respectively, in the 1890s in France and from 1906 to 1908 in Munich, and his activities and affiliations in these contexts, all

¹"Rien de ce qui fait grand est sans danger." Unpublished letter from Verkade to Maurice Denis, dated June 13, 1907.

²The definition of the term Symbolism, with its overlapping interpretations, is a charged issue among art historians. To attempt to define *Symbolism* in a footnote would only result in an inadequate definition. For a detailed explanation of the term, as it is applied in this work, refer to pages 4-6 of the text.

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provide evidence of his position as a link between the two groups and help to advance the argument that a Symbolist ideology lay at the heart of abstraction in Germany.

Verkade's early association with the Nabis has been the principle milieu within which his life and work have been studied, while the latter part of his career has been largely ignored. Several factors have reinforced this approach. The Nabis constituted a formidable force in the Parisian avant-garde for nearly a decade; Verkade's affiliation with the group established his thinking within the context of a Symbolist ideology and brought him considerable exposure as an artist. Verkade undoubtedly created the larger portion of his finest work under the direction of Gauguin and the latter's chief adherents: Paul Sérusier and Maurice Denis. Third, Verkade's decision to enter monastic life in 1896 consumed the artist within him for a time and rendered much of his subsequent work (mainly religious commissions for Benedictine cloisters) largely inaccessible to the art historical community. Fourth, many of Verkade's later easel paintings and drawings were scattered, it seems purposefully, by the artist, thereby making it difficult to gather and assess his overall production.³ Finally, with the publication of

³Much of Verkade's Munich work that has been uncovered, as well as his collection of Nabi paintings, was left in the possession of his friend and fellow cleric the late Erich Endrich of Buchau-am-Federsee. Verkade befriended Endrich during his stay in Munich, when Endrich was a young man. Endrich kept Verkade's work; however, in his memoirs, Verkade claimed that he did not know the whereabouts of his Munich canvasses. The Beuron Monastery has tried unsuccessfully on two occasions to make legal claim to this collection. Because of this reality, the collection is largely inaccessible to interested viewers. Other paintings and drawings were given to his painter friends, among the Nabis: Denis, Ballin and Sérusier; among his Munich associates: Kubin, Jawlensky, Werefkin and Troendle. Still other works are in private collections, probably not all of which have been found. Verkade seems not to have kept an accounting of these paintings. We know from his letters to Denis that Verkade intended to keep any knowledge of his having painted certain subjects -- such as the nudes that have come to light, from his monastic superiors. Perhaps even the more conservative subjects would have met with disapproval since they departed stylistically from the principles of the *Beuronerkunstschule*. The works that are now in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, given by the Verkade family, are those that Verkade made during his sojourn in

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his memoirs in 1926, Verkade presented himself to the public largely as a religious convert, whose artistic endeavors were virtually subsumed by his monastic and priestly responsibilities. Thus, while we may read about his friendship with Alexei Jawlensky, and others whom he met in Munich in 1907, the substance of Verkade's remarks on such relationships and on his artistic activities in general lend little weight to a perception of him as a moving force in the developments taking place around him. Nevertheless, an examination of other documents: his letters and the personal reminiscences of many of his associates, brings to light a strikingly different character -- that of an artist thoroughly engaged in and exploring the most current developments of his own time, to be precise, the vanguard developments in Germany in the decade immediately preceding 1914.

To arrive at an appropriate point of departure for this specific investigation, it will be necessary to review two distinct bodies of literature -- one that describes the ongoing inquiry into a Symbolist legacy and which consequently indicates the need to direct this investigation into the arena of the prewar German avant-garde, and another that defines Verkade's current position in the art historical canon.

The years immediately following the turn of the century and capped by the outbreak of the first World War were witness to powerful developments in the history of art,

Jerusalem and sent directly to his brother in the Netherlands without their ever having been seen in Beuron. All of this makes for interesting speculation about whether Verkade may not have wanted any serious investigation of his work, at least during his lifetime. An unconfirmed story about Verkade having been forced by his superiors to destroy one of his paintings was related by Wladyslawa Jaworska. (See Jaworska's *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*, p. 172.) When questioned about the supposed incident, the Verkade family could supply no details except to confirm that something had occurred about which Verkade did not speak.

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many of which have been referred to as modernism. Among these, the most notable is the emergence of abstract styles of painting. Of the panoply of artists who have been associated with modernism or experimentalism are those whose mature achievements resulted in the gradual disappearance of objective imagery from painting. The move toward abstraction seems to have arisen more or less simultaneously in the work of artists active in several artistic centers in Europe and America: Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc in Germany, Robert Delaunay and (the Czech) Frantisek Kupka in France, Kasimir Malevich in Russia, Piet Mondrian in Holland, Arthur Dove and others in the United States. With such widespread activity motivated by similar intent, it is difficult to imagine that abstraction is the product of any particular culture or national origin. Much more likely is that there was a common motivating force (or forces) at work stimulating the pursuits of an international artistic community. The Symbolist movement, the ideology of which spread rapidly across that international spectrum in the final decades of the nineteenth century, is one such force and perhaps the most potent of any number of others.

In his last book,⁴ published posthumously, Robert Goldwater formulated a useful definition of Symbolism that specifies a particularly interdependent relationship between artistic style and the artist's idea. Goldwater acknowledged a general trend among artists toward the desire to express an idea in suggestive or evocative terms.⁵ To communicate a

⁴Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 1979).

⁵Goldwater suggests that even the work of certain exemplary Impressionist painters moved more or less logically toward the expression of more universal concerns, and that rather than a reaction against Impressionism, which Symbolism has long been thought to be, it may instead be read as a somewhat logical extension of Impressionism. Further, this emphasis on the expression of the idea in universally understood terms links Symbolist goals to both those of the painters of the Northern Romantic tradition, for example, Caspar David Friedrich and Philip Otto Runge, who had for generations sought after the expression of the sublime, and those of

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sense of the eternal, to convey a reality beyond that of the mundane, to see nature as a manifestation of the sublime, these metaphysical concerns, not limited to any national boundaries, lay at the heart of the Symbolist aesthetic. Their manner of treatment came to be seen as a quest to arrive at forms that would be universally recognized and comprehended. Thus the Symbolist painters wished to evoke and suggest their subjects in universal terms rather than to describe and relate the immediate appearance of them,⁶ "to objectify the subjective."⁷ In fact, owing to an understanding of the more all-encompassing nature of the Symbolist ideology, the term Symbolism has come to replace the term Post-Impressionism; the scope of the former has been broadened sufficiently to encompass a wider range of artistic endeavor during the *fin de siècle* than had been previously attributed to it. As an indication of this trend, we can point to John Rewald's

the early pioneers of abstract styles: Robert Delaunay, Wassily Kandinsky, and Kasimir Malevich, for whom these concerns were paramount. For a discussion of this connection, see Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

⁶By distinguishing between those painters who composed new styles through which they sought actually to characterize in paint the ephemeral ideas of the sublime they wished to express (Symbolists), and those whose notions of the sublime were transmitted essentially through allegorical narrative, imparted in quasi-naturalistic modes (*Gedanktemalerei* or "thought painters"), Goldwater's definition constructs an aesthetic of Symbolism that paves the way for an understanding of the movement as the seedbed of future developments in modernism, notably the evolution of abstract styles of painting. Indeed, the objective held by many artists to express transitory, ephemeral feelings about the nature of the sublime led them increasingly to reduce and "purify" forms, to rely on the expressive qualities of color and line, and to work toward an integration of these elements both with each other and with that idea for which expression was sought. The distinction that Goldwater drew between the particular stylistic devices employed by these different groups, however, does not dilute the claim that a concern with the "idea" or "thought" was overwhelmingly present within international artistic circles and formed the core of artistic endeavor during the years in question.

⁷"To objectify the subjective" was the catchphrase of a generation of Symbolist painters. See Maurice Denis, "Subjective and Objective Deformation," from "De Gauguin et van Gogh au Classicisme," *L'Occident* (Paris) May 1909, later published in *Théories*, Paris, 1920, 262-278.

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landmark study, *Post-Impressionism*, first written in 1956,⁸ as a singular source among the earliest investigations of the art of this period to recognize that a Symbolist ideology ran as a current through it; whereas, many more recent studies, cited below, have explored the artistic manifestations of the post-Impressionist period through a Symbolist lens.

Within the last two decades, a number of significant studies have brought to light myriad connections between Symbolism and the rise of various abstract styles of painting. The catalogue of the exhibition, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1945*,⁹ is a formidable example, drawing together, as it does, the work of a number of scholars who have documented the evolution of ideas from the nineteenth century movement to modernist abstraction in the work of artists as varied as Kasimir Malevich and Albert Pinkham Ryder. But, given the breadth of the Symbolist movement, connections between abstraction and Symbolism have only begun to be documented.

The most direct connection between Symbolism and abstraction that has been ascertained has largely been directed to its characteristic manifestations in France. Symbolism as a stylistic movement in literature, painting and theater with greatly varying factions began as a French phenomenon. Taking root first as a literary movement before attracting the attention of painters, the ideas attendant upon adherents of the movement were written about in the press, the resulting works were displayed in exhibitions, and these were christened with the name; all of which were used to denote the presence of a movement. However, to suggest that Symbolism is solely a French

⁸John Rewald, *Post-Impressionism*, 3d ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978).

⁹Maurice Tuchman, ed., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1985*, exhibition catalogue, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

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phenomenon and that, therefore, the French must, by default, have played a role in vanguard developments across the continent is to lose sight of the prolific creative output and spirit of the entire age and as well to undermine the significance of artistic experimentation outside of *la belle France*. Today, we recognize that Symbolist ideology was current in the period under consideration on an international scale. The desire to restore to art its perceived primary function as a communicator of a higher realm, to evoke the essence of the "idea", to activate the spectator into a spiritual communion with the artist and with their common world, to achieve more than the mere re-creation of the mundane, natural world -- these were goals that were shared by artists across national boundaries for the better part of the two decades that surrounded the turn of the century. Though they may have taken root in France during the 1880s, the Russian Symbolist group, the *Blue Rose* still flourished as late as 1907, and Mondrian, working in Holland, was exploring a Symbolist ideology, specifically one related to Theosophy, throughout his career. Symbolist concerns were taken up by many of the artists associated with *Les XX* in Brussels; they were a primary stimulus of the work of Edvard Munch;¹⁰ they were present in the ideologies of the secession groups in Germany and Austria. Symbolist ideology was not solely characteristic of the French artistic milieu; rather, Symbolism indeed carried itself across national boundaries precisely because its ideology identified and addressed problems directly confronting the very nature of humanity and human existence, issues that seem to be particularly exacerbated by the psychological effects of

¹⁰Arne Eggum, *Edvard Munch: Paintings, Sketches, and Studies*, trans. Ragnar Christophersen (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Publs., dist. Crown Publs., 1983).

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facing the end of an era.¹¹ That ideology was current and exerted a clear and direct influence over developments within and among the many groups that contributed to the German modernist impulse at the turn of the century and in the tumultuous decade leading to the outbreak of war in 1914.

Art historians concerned with developments in France and Russia generally assert a link between Symbolism and the more advanced stages of modernism. By contrast, the history of German modernism has rarely recognized the potency of this movement, although the presence of Symbolist ideas are generally acknowledged to have been "in the air" surrounding the move toward abstraction. In fact, that move is far more readily seen as being linked to the artists' explorations of either Expressionism or *Jugendstil*, or both.

To see Symbolism as uniquely French and to imagine it somehow systematically transported across the continent, or to limit studies of the relationship between Symbolism and abstraction to those locales -- France and Russia, where a Symbolist movement per se was in evidence, is to skew the picture of developments in Germany, depicting them apart from the international scope of the art world known to the artists whose very achievements we wish to elucidate. Similarly, to see developments in German art as virtually untouched by the pervasive Symbolist ideology is to present a distorted and isolationist view of events that would affect the character of art and artistic life on a global scale.

¹¹For some interesting ideas about the turning of a century seen as apocalypse, revelation and transformation, see Hillel Schwartz, *Century's End: A Cultural History of the Fin de Siècle From the 990s Through the 1990s* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

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Furthermore, Expressionism, *Jugendstil* and the development of abstract styles of painting are generally seen as decidedly German phenomena.¹² While they are quite accurately discussed within the context of German history, culture, the contemporaneous political circumstances, and the desire to achieve a national identity, nevertheless, German art did not develop totally apart from artistic developments in the rest of the world, or even apart from those in Europe alone. The fact remains that from the mid-nineteenth century onward, the startling manifestations of advances in science and technology did indeed make the world "a smaller place." That is to say that the opportunity for a cross-cultural and international exchange of ideas was expanded to never before believed dimensions, and many avenues of human discourse and interaction were attracted by the magnetic pull of the possibilities offered by such an exchange. The markedly international character of exhibitions of art in countries as far from each other as the United States and Russia in the years from 1900 to 1914, the international dissemination of local and national art magazines and journals, make clear that the artists of this age lost no time in availing themselves of these opportunities. A thorough exchange of ideas took place among artists in the major European art centers, and Symbolism, which is seen as the fertile ground of subsequent developments in French and Russian modernism, must also have provided a stimulus for the German avant-garde. Moreover, the rapid and dramatic inquiry into science, philosophy and technology that had been set in motion in the

¹²Several authors cast their definitions of these movements as German in character. For example, Gordon acknowledged the traditional view that "... Expressionism was primarily, but not exclusively, German." Peg Weiss, while affirming the international character of Art Nouveau, saw a distinction between it and what she called "the Art Nouveau/*Jugendstil* epoch." See Donald E. Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), xvi. See also, Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative *Jugendstil* Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 9.

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nineteenth century had shattering effects on human consciousness. Those effects were given visual, active form in the arts.

Much of the recent literature on abstraction discusses the impact of Symbolism. Both Virginia Spate¹³ and Sherry Ann Buckberrough¹⁴ have convincingly demonstrated Delaunay's attraction to the ideas and ideals of the Symbolist poets and painters and his own quest to arrive at forms that were to be read as signs of a higher order of relational harmonies, which Delaunay called simultaneous contrasts. Margit Rowell¹⁵ has written about the spiritualist activities and aspirations of Kupka. Charlotte Douglas¹⁶, John Bowlit¹⁷, Angelica Rudenstine and Margit Rowell¹⁸ have all provided evidence of Malevich's early association with the Russian Symbolist movement, the *Blue Rose*. They have shown clearly how his Symbolist tendencies, specifically his desire to reach beyond mundanity to evolve the pure forms that would express a reality beyond the natural world, would lead to his development of Suprematism. Both Welsh¹⁹ and Carel Blotkamp, while

¹³Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris, 1910-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

¹⁴Sherry Ann Buckberrough, *Robert Delaunay: The Early Years* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1978).

¹⁵Margit Rowell, *Frantisek Kupka 1871-1957: A Retrospective*, exhibition catalogue for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1975.

¹⁶Charlotte Douglas, *Swans of Other Worlds: Kasimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms Inc., 1980). See also, "Beyond Reason: Malevich, Matiushin and their Circles," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, exhibition catalogue for The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 184-191.

¹⁷John E. Bowlit, "The Blue Rose: Russian Symbolism in Art," *Burlington Magazine* CXVII, 881 (August, 1976), 566-575. See also, "Esoteric Culture and Russian Society," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, exhibition catalogue for The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 164-183.

¹⁸Angelica Rudenstine and Margit Rowell, organizers, *Kasimir Malevich: 1878-1935*, exhibition catalogue for The National Gallery of Art, The Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990.

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writing about Mondrian's membership in the Theosophical Society, also attested to his awareness of the work of the Dutch Symbolist painters, Jan Toorop and Johan Thorn Prikker and of a theosophical iconography that stressed a "... unity between a mathematical architectural order and nature, even the whole cosmos."²⁰ Charles Eldredge²¹ has pointed convincingly to Symbolist precedents for a whole spectrum of American abstractionists from Ryder to Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe and Marsden Hartley. All of these painters' abstract styles arose out of Symbolist origins.

What seems curiously minimal in the literature is a similarly strong assertion that Symbolism lay at the heart of the move toward abstraction in Germany. The two major figures working there to have developed abstract styles: Kandinsky and Marc, while their early interests in a Symbolist aesthetic have been ascertained, have generally been seen in the context of later, more site-specific milieu: especially *Jugendstil*, and the immediate political and social circumstances prevalent in Wilhelmine Germany. Their participation in the more fully international scope of developments dominant during this time is at best glossed over.

¹⁹Robert P. Welsh, "Mondrian and Theosophy," *Piet Mondrian*, exhibition catalogue for The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim, 1971).

²⁰Carel Blotkamp, "Annunciation of the New Mysticism: Dutch Symbolism and Early Abstraction," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, exhibition catalogue for The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 89-111. In the same volume, see also, Robert P. Welsh, "Sacred Geometry: French Symbolism and Early Abstraction," 63-88.

²¹Charles C. Eldredge, "Nature Symbolized: American Painting from Ryder to Hartley," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, exhibition catalogue for The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), pp. 113-130.

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For example, Peg Weiss²² saw Kandinsky's development of an abstract painting style as arising almost exclusively from his early associations with the *Jugendstil* movement in Germany. She believed that *Jugendstil* was the motivating force behind the pioneering achievement of Kandinsky's later career. The influence of *Jugendstil* is certainly a factor in Kandinsky's development; however, to attribute to it absolute supremacy over all other motivating sources seems to be overstating the case.

Frederick Levine, in his book on Franz Marc, entitled *The Apocalyptic Vision*²³ discussed Marc's sense of a humankind lost in a troubled and impersonal world. He contended that Marc's vision of the cleansing nature of apocalypse led him to search for truth behind the surface appearances of the natural world and to find solace in the primal responses of the animal kingdom. Levine accounted for Marc's sense of turmoil in terms of the philosophy of Nietzsche and of the scientific discoveries of Planck, Einstein and Bohr, which made the world and man's sense of himself in it uncertain and confusing. Levine also did not draw the obvious connection between Marc's ideas and the quite similar attitudes of the previous Symbolist generation. Donald Gordon²⁴ determined that abstraction arose out of Expressionism. Although he recognized the early Symbolist tendencies of some of the major abstractionists, especially Kandinsky, he suggested that these tendencies played a role in their early careers but that they had "moved on to other things" before developing abstract styles of painting.

²²Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

²³Frederick S. Levine, *The Apocalyptic Vision: The Art of Franz Marc as German Expressionism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

²⁴Donald E. Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

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A few scholars have stressed the relationship between the abstract styles of the German avant-garde and Symbolism but they are among the minority of voices speaking out on German vanguardism. In her book and in a series of articles, Rose-Carol Washton Long²⁵ has presented Kandinsky's development of an abstract painting style within the context of his enduring association with Symbolism. To do this, Long presented several related arguments. First, she noted Kandinsky's ideological concerns and their relationship to an earlier Symbolist aesthetic: his yearning for the dawning of an "Epoch of the Great Spiritual;" his anarchism and belief in the cleansing, regenerative nature of the apocalypse; his search for more universal forms that would communicate to a wider audience; his investigation of Theosophical texts; his striving to achieve the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as exemplified by culminative works such as the *Blaue Reiter Almanac*. Simultaneously, Long made clear the aesthetic and philosophical connections between Symbolism and *Jugendstil*, both of which prescribed the development of forms that were less descriptive and, hence, more suggestive vehicles of expression. The consequences of this argument are obvious: if Symbolism and *Jugendstil* shared similar ideological concerns, can abstraction in Germany be said to have arisen exclusively from the latter, while having had no relationship to the former? To tip the balance in favor of Symbolism as a critical source for the development of abstract styles of painting, we need only recognize that the desire to explore the "inner" world of the human being and to create forms to express it, the striving for *Gesamtkunstwerk* through synaesthesia and the concept of vibration, the yearning to return to a more primal state whether it be the South

²⁵Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). See also, "Kandinsky and Abstraction: The Role of the Hidden Image," *Artforum*, X, 10 (June 1972), 42-49; "Kandinsky's Vision of Utopia as a Garden of Love," *Art Journal*, 43, 1 (Spring 1983), 50-60; "Occultism, Anarchism and Abstraction: Kandinsky's Art of the Future," *Art Journal* (Spring 1967), 38-45.

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Seas of Gauguin or Marc's animal kingdom were the primary motivations of both the Symbolists and their descendants who experimented with abstraction.

Although the question of Symbolist precedents for the pioneering development of abstraction in Germany has been posed in print for well more than a decade now, still little has been written that pursues a comprehensive response to Long's argument. While it is still tentative and halting in tone among English-writing authors, the major assertion of a need to take seriously the Symbolist beginnings of this ground-breaking group of painters, has come largely from the German art historical community.²⁶

The catalogue from an exhibition entitled, *München Leuchtete*²⁷ contains several essays linking the spiritualist movement in German art, during the period in question, to its earlier Symbolist manifestations. In an essay written for an exhibition that she organized in 1990 for the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus in Munich, Annegret Hoberg²⁸ noted the familiarity of Alfred Kubin, a close associate of Kandinsky's, with the Symbolist precedents of his mysterious and haunting style and iconography. Bernd Fäthke, writing about Alexei Jawlensky²⁹ and Marianne von Werefkin³⁰, examined the

²⁶Both Armin Zweite and Anne Mochon make broad references to Kandinsky's and Mürnter's explorations of Symbolism; however, their assertions do not constitute a substantive argument in favor of a Symbolist impulse driving the development of their individual abstract styles. See Armin Zweite, *The Blue Rider in the Lenbachhaus, Munich* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1989), and Anne Mochon, *Gabriele Mürnter: Between Munich and Murnau* (Cambridge: Harvard University The Busch-Reisinger Museum, 1980).

²⁷Peter-Klaus Schuster, ed. *München Leuchtete: Karl Caspar und die Erneuerung christlicher Kunst in München um 1900*, Katalog zur Ausstellung d. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, 1984 (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1984).

²⁸Annegret Hoberg, "Kubin und München, 1898-1921," *Alfred Kubin*, exhibition catalogue for the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus (München: Edition Spangenberg, 1990).

²⁹Bernd Fäthke, *Alexej Jawlensky: Zeichnung, Graphik, Dokumente*, exhibition catalogue for the Museum Wiesbaden (Wiesbaden: Museum Wiesbaden, 1984).

³⁰Bernd Fäthke, *Marianne von Werefkin: Gemälde und Skizzen*, exhibition catalogue for the Museum Wiesbaden (Wiesbaden: Museum Wiesbaden, 1980).

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preoccupation of both artists with Symbolist ideas and Symbolist paintings. Most recently, Reinhold Heller, has noted the Symbolist characteristics of Gabriele Münter's work in his exhibition catalogue, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism*.³¹

One of the more intriguing details included in Long's survey of Kandinsky's development is her mention of a loose connection between Kandinsky and the ideas of the painter-monk, Jan Verkade. Outlining a myriad of connections that Kandinsky made to the ideas of the late nineteenth century movement, Long presented the following overview of Verkade and suggested that Kandinsky would have been familiar with his ideas:

Jan Verkade, . . . , was one more link between those associated with Symbolist painting and occult thinking. Verkade had been a member of the Nabis, but by the turn of the century, he had left Paris and joined a monastery in Beuron, not far from Munich. In October of 1906, he had been allowed to leave the monastery to study painting in Munich. He remained there until Easter 1908, and frequently painted in the studio of Jawlensky. Kandinsky was in Paris most of the time that Verkade was in Munich, but he would have learned of Verkade's interest in Shuré and Verkade's belief in a mystical number system as a basis for painting from Jawlensky.³²

Similarly, Hoberg, Fäthke and a number of essayists writing for the *München Leuchtete* catalogue mention that Kubin, Jawlensky, Werefkin, Karl Caspar³³ and others had contact with Jan Verkade and were aware of his ideas. In fact, the authors note that

³¹Reinhold Heller, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism*, ex. cat. for the Milwaukee Art Museum (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1997.)

³²Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 31.

³³Karl Caspar (1879-1956) German painter associated with the revival of Christian art in Munich at the turn of the century.

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Verkade's relationships with each of these artists endured for many years and that his thinking, with regard to art, had an influence upon their own.

What I propose for this study, however, is a larger claim: namely, that Verkade's position among the prewar German avant-garde is that of a potential catalyst, promoting the ideas of Symbolism within a climate ripe for experimentation with abstraction. Verkade forged formidable contacts within the Munich avant-garde and he epitomized in some way the ideals sought by its members.

Among scholars on Verkade, most focus on his Nabi period; however, several authors broadly suggest the possibility for deeper inquiry by referring to a perceived link between Symbolism and abstraction. H.R. Rookmaaker's *Synthetist Art Theories*³⁴ makes only fleeting reference to Verkade as a member of the Nabi circle, however Rookmaaker's analysis of Nabi theory, as exemplified by the writings of Sérusier, is remarkably astute and far-reaching, providing as early as 1959, an understanding of the logical development of Synthetist stylistic impulses toward abstraction. Agnes Humbert, in an under-utilized study entitled, *Les Nabis et Leur Époque: 1888-1900*, postulates an even more dramatic link between Symbolism and abstraction. She makes distinct connections between Sérusier's theories of geometric harmony and balance and those of Didier Lenz that were realized by the work of the Beuronerkunstschule and sees in them the seeds of the later development of Cubism, particularly in the work of Roger de la Fresnaye, a former pupil of both Sérusier and Denis. Humbert also suggests that:

³⁴H.R. Rookmaaker, *Synthetist Art Theories: Genesis and Nature of the Ideas on Art of Gauguin and His Circle*, trans. H. de Jongste (Amsterdam: Swete & Zeitlinger, 1959).

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The Nabis are unconscious sponsors of those works in which all objective representation is banished. The non-figurative art of a Kandinsky, of a Paul Klee, of a Mondrian presents us with works having an end in themselves, aiming toward a harmony of forms and of colors that reproduce nothing, imitate nothing and that suggest what one allows them to suggest.³⁵

Other extant writing about Verkade is particularly limited in scope. The standard works include: Chassé,³⁶ *The Nabis and Their Period*, and Jaworska,³⁷ *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*. These volumes are concerned fairly exclusively with the Nabi works, although Chassé briefly examines Verkade's place within the Beuron artistic community and acknowledges too that Verkade provides, through the medium of Lenz's "canon of sacred proportions," the link for the French artists' search for a means appropriate to the development of a "sacred art," a goal that was pursued vigorously by Maurice Denis. Jaworska's overview of Verkade's career is extremely brief and also highlights the Nabi period. Possibly due to inconsistencies in translation, this account contains some serious errors with regard to dating (Jaworska places Verkade in Munich squarely in 1907) and to the particular character of Verkade's Munich sojourn, which is here described as a "visit (to) the Bavarian capital in order to buy materials for future religious paintings"³⁸ The significance of Jaworska's text lies in her recognition of the

³⁵"Les Nabis sont les parrains inconscients de ces toiles ou toute representation objective est bannie. L'art non figuratif d'un Kandinsky, d'un Paul Klee, d'un Mondrian nous donne des oeuvres ayant une fin en soi visant a une harmonie de formes et de couleurs qui ne reproduit rien, n'imité rien et suggère ce qu'on veut lui faire suggérer." Agnes Humbert, *Les Nabis et Leur Époque: 1888-1900* (Geneve: Éditions Pierre Cailler, 1950), 142.

³⁶Charles Chassé, *The Nabis and Their Period*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publs., 1969).

³⁷Wladyslawa Jaworska, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*, trans. Patrick Evans (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1972).

³⁸Jaworska, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*, 172

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dramatic effect of Verkade's conversion and ordination on his Nabi colleagues: "the conversion and ordination of Verkade administered to some members of the group a shock which permanently affected their life and art. ... His influence was considerable."³⁹ Moreover, Jaworska acknowledges Verkade's strong talent despite the influence of his peers: "where Verkade is concerned there can be no question of either mere copying or of pastiche. His undeniable mastery of drawing and his great sensibility to colour make it clear that his borrowings were made deliberately and for definite reasons."⁴⁰ Finally, Jaworska confirms that Verkade absorbed a Symbolist ideology and retained it as a life choice for the remainder of his years, giving himself fully to a realization of its ideals.

The most recent work on Verkade is contained in the catalogue for the exhibition, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, prepared in 1989 by Caroline Boyle-Turner et al., for the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh.⁴¹ Included in this catalogue,⁴² is a brief essay written by J.A. van Beers, which is a biographical account of the major events in Verkade's life, and is a distillation of van Beers' master's thesis, submitted to the University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands) in 1982. That longer work was also basically biographical in format, and while it did attempt some analysis of the paintings and drawings, that analysis is limited to the Nabi works. Additionally, Tim Huisman's essay⁴³ examined Verkade's influence on three of Verkade's Dutch contemporaries: the painter/poet R.N. Roland-Holst, the painter Jan Toorop, and the architect, Jan Stuyt. As

³⁹Jaworska, 170.

⁴⁰Jaworska, 172.

⁴¹Caroline Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, exhibition catalogue for the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh (Zwolle: Uitgeverij Waanders, 1989).

⁴²J.A. van Beers, "Jan Verkade en Nederland," *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 36-47.

⁴³Tim Huisman, "Invloeden van de Beuroner Esthetiek in Nederland," *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 65-72.

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is the case with van Beers, Huisman's essay was drawn from a master's thesis, submitted to the University of Leiden, in 1988, which treated the aforementioned theme exclusively. It is instructive to note that much of the work that takes Verkade as its main subject illustrates his influence on other artists, thereby establishing a context within which to examine his overall influence upon a generation.

The most thorough and significant investigation of Verkade's French period is the work of Boyle-Turner, herself, which forms the core of the catalogue. In her lengthy essay and concluding remarks, Boyle-Turner examined the development of Verkade's art and life from his early years in Hattem, Paris and Pont-Aven to his entrance into the Beuron community. At each stage, she placed Verkade within an historical context demonstrating how and why he was prone to being influenced by the prevailing attitudes of his time: antiacademism, anti-Positivism, a search for spiritual harmony in one's own life, and the desire to realize the idea that "art was not an isolated entity but existed as one factor in a larger context, which was both physical and spiritual."⁴⁴ Boyle-Turner further imparted that while Verkade's chosen path of spiritual reaffirmation was not particularly unusual among artists of the late nineteenth century, nevertheless, he came to hold a significant position among the Nabis. He was seen as the member whose life and demeanor exemplified Nabi thought and sensibility. This was due largely to Verkade's conversion to Catholicism, which the Nabis viewed with varying degrees of

⁴⁴Boyle-Turner, 74. Quoted from the original English manuscript from which the Dutch catalogue was translated. My sincere thanks to Dr. Boyle-Turner for allowing me access to this important work in English.

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astonishment and praise. As Sérusier remarked upon hearing of Verkade's decisive step, "C'est bien Nabique!"⁴⁵

Although she did present an analysis of several later paintings and an overview of the remainder of his life, Boyle-Turner's work on Verkade culminated with the artist's entrance into a monastic environment and lifestyle. This was the turning point at which Verkade's work changed radically in appearance; it was also the moment of withdrawal and solace during which Verkade isolated himself for a time in order to make a full commitment to his monastic orders and consequently did little painting. Boyle-Turner's contribution to the literature on Verkade as a Nabi is formidable; nevertheless, the subsequent period of his career, his work and influence in Germany, remains largely untapped as a field of exploration and research.

The 1989 van Gogh Museum catalogue contains one other essay, which attempted to treat Verkade's work from the German period. In this piece,⁴⁶ entitled "Silence in the Midst of the Avant-Garde: Willibrord Verkade," Adolph Smitmans suggested that Verkade's position among the German avant-garde is of greater significance than has been heretofore ascertained. Smitmans was aware of the correspondence in their work, and thus, of the relationship between Verkade and Jawlensky and its potential impact on Kandinsky. He presumed that, via Jawlensky, Verkade's ideas must have been passed on to Kandinsky and Mûnter, however, he provided no documentation or substantive

⁴⁵Verkade, *Le Tourment de Dieu*, French translation of volume I of his memoirs. Sérusier's pronouncement upon hearing of Verkade's religious conversion was included in the French translation of *Die Unruhe zu Gott*. It is likely that the phrase was meaningless to the English translator, who evidently chose to omit it.

⁴⁶Adolph Smitmans, "Verinnerlijking te midden van de avant-garde," *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 48-64.

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evidence to support this conclusion, nor did he speculate as to the possible effects of Verkade's thinking on either Kandinsky or any of the other members of the Munich avant-garde. The main thrust of Smitmans' article concerned the similarities in the stylistic development of Verkade and Jawlensky; Smitmans claimed that both men were inspired by a similar desire to express in their art those emotions aligned to spiritual life. Smitmans recognized that although their paths were divergent, the two artists' work shared a common tension in pursuit of this goal that manifested itself in their work.

Given Verkade's initial successful, albeit brief, connection to the predominant avant-garde movement in France and his subsequent "seclusion," Verkade, rightfully, has most often been considered a Nabi, the broader spectrum of his Symbolism in the post-French period having been relegated to the obscurity of his monasticism. Since the body of literature on Verkade has only begun to have been written, it is justifiable that its major focus thus far has been the French period precisely because that period is a seminal one. It establishes a systematic framework for exploring the remainder of Verkade's career and its impact. Having provided just such a framework is clearly the merit of Caroline Boyle-Turner's work.

Using Boyle-Turner's work as a starting point, what I propose to present in the following pages is an investigation of Verkade's later career and his effect on important members of the German Expressionist vanguard.⁴⁷ Fleshing the remainder of Verkade's

⁴⁷This study is an outgrowth of my own master's thesis, "Jan Verkade, From Pont-Aven to Beuron," submitted to Queens College/CUNY in 1975. This first piece of writing on Verkade is an introductory monograph, presenting an overview of the significant events in Verkade's life and a stylistic analysis of some of the major works and trends in Verkade's development. In this manuscript, I raised questions about the potential of Verkade's having influenced the

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history is of significance because it proposes to establish not only a more thoroughly comprehensive portrait of an intriguing personality working within the artistic community of the early modernist era, but primarily because Verkade's career provides a missing link between two heretofore only tangentially related movements in the progression of a modernist aesthetic towards abstraction.

Drawing upon Verkade's autobiography⁴⁸ to establish a relatively accurate chronology of his life and work, I will augment our understanding of the events he presented by examining several bodies of unpublished correspondence, written just prior to and during the Munich period, and as well, information about and assessments of his position, culled from personal interviews with individuals who knew Verkade during his lifetime. Although the two volume autobiography chronicles the events of Verkade's life, it is not always the most reliable source of information about him.⁴⁹ In his

vanguard artists working in Germany in the early years of this century. Those questions spurred the investigation culminating in this dissertation.

⁴⁸Dom Willibrord Verkade, O.S.B., *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, trans. John L. Stoddard (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, Publs, 1930), original German edition, *Die Unruhe zu Gott* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder & Co., 1926). Dom Willibrord Verkade, O.S.B., *In Quest of Beauty*, trans. by John L. Stoddard (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, Publs, 1935), original German edition, *Das Antrieb ins Volkommene* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder & Co., 1931).

⁴⁹The autobiography's lack of reliability can be attributed to several causes: first, it is a retrospective account, volume one having been published in 1926 and volume two in 1931, more than twenty years after Verkade's arrival in Munich; thus, both volumes were largely written from memory and are not always precise in recounting detail. Second, Verkade's account of his life is presented within the context of his religious conversion; it is the search for God that informs the events as he describes them, thus, making any analysis of his artistic career and the events that comprise it ancillary to the theme of both books. Third, Verkade's decision to cease painting in mid-life may have been the direct result of his experiences in Munich, which set his religious goals into conflict with his artistic ones; his manner of treating the artistic events of his life, particularly those that occurred in Munich give support to this claim and to the idea that his monastic superiors would not have condoned his activities in Munich. Verkade's memoirs were written under the Church's *imprimatur*; the volumes would never have been granted such approval had they expressed any sentiment even obliquely

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memoirs, Verkade presented himself to the public largely as a religious convert, whose artistic endeavors were virtually subsumed by his monastic and priestly responsibilities. Thus, while we may read about his friendship with Alexei Jawlensky, and others whom he met in Munich in 1907, the substance of Verkade's remarks on such relationships and on his artistic activities in general lend little weight to a perception of him as a moving force in the developments taking place around him. Nevertheless, an examination of other documents: his letters and the personal reminiscences of many of his associates, brings to light a strikingly different character -- that of an artist thoroughly engaged in and exploring the most current developments of his own time, to be precise, the vanguard developments in Germany in the decade immediately preceding 1914. In order to establish Verkade's position in this milieu, I will first review his Symbolist legacy. Verkade's Symbolist beginnings not only informed his work and his ideas throughout his career, but also provided the firmament for the influence he exerted upon the next generation of modernist painters.

contrary to Church dogma. Intended to promote religious proselytizing; the volumes were each translated into twenty-two languages and distributed around the world as a testament to the soulful benefit of religious conversion. Lastly, the translations of Verkade's words vary widely from language to language -- the English version being especially poor, as compared with the French.

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The significant events in Verkade's life can be summed up briefly as follows:¹ Born to a middle-class Dutch family in 1868, Verkade demonstrated an early talent for drawing. His father first provided him with a private tutor, H.J. Haverman² and in 1888 agreed to allow the young man to continue his studies at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam. After two and a half years, however, Verkade's disenchantment with academic instruction eventually led him to seek artistic guidance from other sources. His first venture away from traditional, academic training led him to the small village of Hattem to study with his sister's husband, the painter Jan Voerman.³ For two years, Verkade worked diligently and closely with Voerman to master the skills of drawing and painting, using the rural landscape and local townspeople as his primary models and sources of inspiration. For the remainder of his career as a painter, Verkade would return to the "depiction" of his immediate environment and its inhabitants as subject matter during periods that were transitional and exploratory and at the times when his art was "in crisis."

¹For more detailed information on Verkade's early life and its implications for his future development as an artist, consult chapter 1 of the author's master's thesis, "Jan Verkade, From Pont-Aven to Beuron," submitted to Queens College/CUNY in 1975. An introductory monograph, this work presents an examination of the significant events in Verkade's life and a stylistic analysis of some of the major works and trends in his artistic development.

²Hendrik Johannes Haverman (1857-1928) was considered one of the foremost portrait painters of his day. According to a letter written by Verkade's niece, the late Dr. Margaretha Verkade and dated Sept. 7, 1974, Haverman painted portraits of Verkade's grandfather and the older man's second wife. He also instructed Verkade's father as well as the artist himself in drawing, watercolor and oil painting.

³Jan Voerman (1857-1941), a landscape painter and Verkade's brother-in-law. For more information on Voerman, see Anna Wagner, *Jan Voerman: Ijsselschilder* (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning Boeken B.V., 1977).

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Though he learned much from Voerman, Verkade soon sensed a need to experience first-hand the artistic milieu outside of his native Holland. In 1891 he traveled to Paris to become acquainted with new developments in art in a post-Impressionist era. On his journey he carried with him a letter of introduction to the Dutch painter, Meijer de Haan, who was then a member of Gauguin's broad circle of followers. Through de Haan, Verkade was introduced to Gauguin and accepted rather quickly into an entourage that extended from Paris to Pont-Aven. Its members applied the principles of Synthetism to their painting, even if the painters themselves were only tangentially connected to Gauguin. Among the Paris group, who called themselves the Nabis,⁴ Paul Sérusier and Maurice Denis would have the most significant impact on Verkade's career. He would develop long-term relationships with both men, and Denis would become his lifelong friend and confidante. At the start of their relationship, it was Denis' sincere

⁴The formulation of the Nabis was largely the work of Paul Sérusier. Working under Gauguin's instruction in Pont-Aven in 1888, Sérusier painted a small landscape of the *Bois d'Amour*, which soon came to be known as "*The Talisman*" because it carried within it Gauguin's informal theories of Synthetism. Based on an expressive use of color applied in flat, broad planes, Synthetism incorporated several major elements that Albert Aurier would later proclaim as a program for a new art, that is, that it be: ideist, symbolist, synthetist, subjective, and decorative. Aurier, a major critic of the period, laid out these principles in a landmark article written in March 1891 for the *Mercure de France*, and which he began as a study of the painters of Pont-Aven, who had adopted this style. Recognizing Gauguin's prominence as a formulator of this style, Aurier's theoretical description of "Symbolism in Painting," ultimately focused on Gauguin as its only exemplifier. (See Robert Goldwater. *Symbolism* London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, Ltd. 1979, 183-184.) Sérusier's painting was the embodiment of these principles. Like Aurier, Sérusier was given to formalizing and recording Gauguin's ideas and pronouncements; these he transmitted energetically to his fellow students at the independent Académie Julian in Paris. The Nabis arose from this group and included the painters: Paul Ranson, Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Félix Vallotton, and the future sculptor Aristide Maillol, to name the most important. What they shared was a desire to communicate the "sensation" of the grand design of the universe behind natural appearances. To foster their awareness of these sensations, they explored esoteric philosophies and the occult, and believed themselves to be a small, but elect brotherhood, singularly unique in their search. The name, Nabi is a Hebrew word meaning "prophet" and gives evidence of the esoteric character of the group.

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manifestation of his own Christian beliefs that was a motivating factor in Verkade's investigation of Roman Catholicism and his consequent conversion to that faith in 1892.⁵

His new-found spirituality led Verkade to view his art and his personal life within the context of his commitment to Catholicism. By 1896, after serious consideration, he entered the Benedictine Monastery of St. Martin in Beuron. The Beuron community was an artistic one; painters, poets and composers could be counted among its congregants, but the painters were by far the most acclaimed group. Owing to the efforts of its founders, P. Desiderius Lenz and P. Gabriel Wüger, the *Beuronerkunstschule* had become renowned in Germany and in the Catholic art world for its monumental representations of religious themes drawn largely from the New Testament and the lives of the saints. The works produced by this group of painters were created in a spirit of communal endeavor and according to a set of laws laid out by Lenz in his "canon of sacred proportions."⁶ What appealed to Verkade about Lenz's thinking was the latter's pursuit of an ideal expression of spiritual truths that were to be conveyed appropriately through means that exalted their inherent monumentality. Lenz's belief in and reliance upon the "mystical property of numbers," rooted in his investigation of *gematria* and the monuments of the "ancients," held sway for Verkade as a formalized extension of all that he had learned from Sérusier and his fellow Nabis. Despite the fact that he at first felt the works of the *Beuronerkunstschule* expressed little in the way of human emotion, which he attributed to the canon's strict adherence to geometric formulae, Verkade succumbed to the theories formulated by Lenz; these, it seemed, aspired to the very

⁵Verkade was baptized a Roman Catholic on August 26, 1892 in the little village of St. Nolff in Brittany, with one of the local townsmen, acting as his sponsor.

⁶The principles of Lenz's "canon" will be explored more fully in Chapter 3.

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artistic goals that Verkade had set for his own art, and which he had absorbed from his association with the Nabis.

Thus, Verkade's decision to enter the Beuron community, rather than another monastic congregation, was based on his highly positive impression of and agreement with Lenz's ideas and ideals. Verkade seems also to have expected that while pursuing his spiritual goals within the confines of a monastic life, he would simultaneously be allowed to pursue his artistic goals. He could not, at this early stage, have anticipated that he would one day relinquish his art in the service of God. Finally, of significance for him too was the communal nature of the artistic activity at Beuron, which formalized the communal spirit of the informal brotherhood of the Nabis.

Between 1896 and 1902, Verkade was largely occupied by the preparatory ritual and study associated with the acceptance of monastic vows. Apart from learning the formulae of the canon and applying them to countless sketches of stylized motifs, Verkade had little time to devote to serious artistic endeavor. Nevertheless, an earnest member of the spiritual community and, at first, a zealous convert to the canon as well, Verkade was soon carrying out commissions for various religious communities. By 1902, he had been sent to Monte Cassino to join his fellow painter-monks and P. Lenz in decorating the famous crypt.

Perhaps surprisingly, as early as 1904, Lenz's artistic formulae, began to engender a quality of rigidity in Verkade's work that he found stifling. He began a period of questioning, challenging, and refuting what he had come to accept as his own. Like most periods of artistic transition, this was one of turmoil. Sensing this, the Abbot of Beuron, Placidus Wolter arranged for Verkade to spend a year and a half, between the autumn of 1906 and the spring of 1908, in Munich, during which time he was to resume the study of painting, although an underlying purpose seems to have been to separate him

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from Lenz and the latter's authority. Once there, Verkade quickly came into close contact with the German avant-garde and pursued the development of an artistic style much closer to that of his earlier work. He relinquished the ruler for a freely drawn line, returned to painting from nature, and began again to use color for its expressive rather than its descriptive ends.

In addition to savoring a regained artistic independence, Verkade also reentered a social and cultural milieu he had long ago relinquished but which was familiar to him from his own family's social standing and the environment in which he was reared. In Munich, Verkade met not only artists, but critics and patrons of the arts with whom he socialized, often in the company of his artist colleagues. Simultaneously, he became engaged with a growing movement in southern Germany to preserve religious, especially Catholic, art. Thus for a time Verkade seems to have strayed from his commitment to a monastic lifestyle, while retaining certain ties to the religious community; however, these ties were bound to his vision of himself as an artist rather than as a monk. He immersed himself totally in artistic activity and for a time the artist within him flourished once more. The period would mark a turning point for his career. Nearly 40 when he returned to Beuron, Verkade would begin to face that crisis precipitated by the approach of middle age that causes a reassessment of one's prior goals and achievements. Barely six years later, that is, in 1914, he ceased painting permanently,⁷ although he was only 46 years old at the time. For the remainder of his life, he actively pursued his interest in art but he did so without engaging in the process of painting. He spent the

⁷Actually, Verkade executed one more fresco, in 1924, for a Carmelite convent in Vienna-Döbling. He agreed to do so only at the request of a good friend, the architect Joze Plecnik, who had designed the chapel in which the fresco would be painted as a pendant to a 1914 fresco which Verkade had executed and that he had deemed would be his last. My thanks to Dr. Adolph Smitmans for this information.

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better part of his time writing, translating poetry and treatises on art, directing the monastery's printing shop, maintaining his contact with the art world through his correspondence, and acting as spiritual advisor and confessor to countless pilgrims, converts, and communicants, and to those colleagues and friends in artistic circles, with whom he remained in contact. His death came in 1946, shortly following the end of the second World War.

Chapter 1

Verkade in France: The Formation of a Symbolist

My eye perceived the beautiful and my heart embraced it with eager joy, but I could not yet give it form.

Jan Verkade¹

Before it can be made clear to what extent Verkade participated in stylistic advances in Germany, it is necessary to review his involvement with the French avant-garde, namely the Symbolists, in the years immediately following his arrival in Paris in 1891. Verkade's commitment to a Symbolist ideology, particularly his unique perception of its basis and its goals, was a determining factor in his decisions to convert to Catholicism and to enter monastic life. The effect of these decisions influenced his subsequent activity in the two spheres of religion and art for the remainder of his life. Verkade's perception of a Symbolist ideology and of its accompanying aesthetic were formulated in France and were integral to his understanding of art and of its place in his life throughout his entire career.

¹Dom Willibrord Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, trans, John L. Stoddard, New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1930, 25.

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By the time Verkade left Hattem, he had made progress with the technical skills of drawing and painting that he had been taught by his brother-in-law, Jan Voerman. But the artist had not yet arrived at a vision. His experiences in Paris and Brittany helped him to achieve the integration of life and art necessary to formulate such a vision. Those experiences turned Verkade towards Symbolism in far more than stylistic terms alone. His complete embrace of a Symbolist ideology led to such personal decisions as are manifested in his religious conversion, his commitment to monastic life, and his ordination to the priesthood. That vision, or ideal, Verkade wished to communicate through a Synthetist painting style. The search for universals that engendered an understanding of the spiritual dimension of life, was one that he came to feel was equally communicable through his life. In time, the two became indistinguishable to him. Verkade's life became a striking example of the philosophical concepts guiding a Symbolist aesthetic, within which his painting first matured and flourished but into which it was ultimately absorbed.

Several questions immediately arise when one examines the impact of the French sojourn on Verkade's artistic sensibilities and on his life in general. What motivated Verkade's attraction to Symbolist thought? How did he become formally associated with the Nabis? How did the specific influences he absorbed as a member of the Nabis congeal to cause him to seek a spiritual awakening or rebirth both religiously and artistically? Where did Verkade stand in relation to Symbolism before leaving for Paris? How much did he know of the movement and its ideas beforehand and to what extent did he seek out the social and cultural milieu that would encourage his absorption into a Symbolist frame of reference?

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Verkade's awareness of Symbolist thinking progressed from an earlier interest in Naturalism and predated his arrival in Paris; by the time of his arrival, the seeds for his future growth had already taken root. In his memoirs, he attested to a familiarity with contemporary literature at least as early as his time at the Amsterdam Academy. The list of authors whose books he read there -- Daudet, Zola, de Goncourt, Flaubert, among the French; Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, among the Russians, constitutes a brief survey of international, Naturalist literature. His comments on these works in general attest to his fascination with the psychological issues they raised and suggest that their ideas exerted an influence on Verkade's later religious development:

Both in France and in Russia positive Christianity had planted its roots too deeply for it not to come to light continually in the phenomena of daily life, and in the views, habits and customs of the inhabitants of these lands. And so it occasionally breaks into view in the works of those writers, who have chosen for the material of their fiction the daily activities of these peoples. . . . in Zola's *La Faute de l'Abbe Mouret* as well as in his *La Reve*, in Goncourt's *Germinie Lacerteux*, and in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, I came upon many a passage of genuine Catholic human nature, characterized by a warmth and a comprehensive universality such as I had never found in my Dutch environment.²

These words reveal the onset of a critical perception within Verkade that his own religious tradition was in some way lacking in intensity. His perception proved to be pivotal to Verkade's future decisions regarding the course his life would take. It was precisely the lack he sensed in his spiritual life that produced the dramatic effect upon

²Verkade, 26-27.

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him of men like Paul Sérusier and especially Maurice Denis, and that led eventually to his conversion of faith. At this early stage however, having essentially turned his back on religion, Verkade was content to find his spiritual solace in the creation and enjoyment of art. In a manner typical of youthful enthusiasm, Verkade gave art a position of supremacy in his life. Art clearly provided him with the kind of spiritual communion more commonly reserved for faith. Verkade's need for some manner of spiritual dimension in his life was revealed in this simple act of transference. That need, combined with the powerful impact of the literature he investigated, paved the way for a further examination of ideas, ones that were less tied to mundane events but which seemed instead to reach out to a more ephemeral and universal force.

The list of works Verkade read while in Hattem includes some of the predominant Symbolist literature of the day: *A Rebours* by J-K Huysmans, and the poetry of Baudelaire and Verlaine. In addition to his awareness of Symbolist literature, which he applied quite personally to his own spirituality, Verkade was also aware of the efforts of contemporary painters to absorb Symbolist ideology and apply it to their styles of painting. By 1890, he was already expounding the merits of the Belgian artists' group, *Les XX*, one of whose annual exhibitions he had seen prior to the autumn of that year.³ In a consoling letter to a friend whose work had received harsh criticism from a writer identified only as "X," Verkade drew a distinction between "daubers"⁴ and a newer breed

³Although Verkade did not give the specific date of his visit to this exhibition, he made reference to the group in a letter reproduced in his memoirs, which is dated autumn 1890. Later, when reviewing his first trip to Paris (p.57), Verkade noted that his visit to *Les XX* in Brussels was the second of such shows that he had seen. Dom Willibrord Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 51, 57.

⁴Verkade often used the word *Schmiererei* (his word for academicians), in a very derogatory way, to refer to painters for whose style he had little regard. The connotations of this word in

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of artists who "find a great intellectual delight in the combination of their colors"⁵. After relating that "I shall go to Paris this winter, and study all the new styles of painting," he concluded the letter with the following comment; "If "X" had seen more of *Les Vingt*, he would not have made use of such a common [vulgar] expression to you."⁶

That Verkade knew about *Les XX* is of significance because it points to his awareness of avant-garde developments, and indicates that he kept abreast of events occurring in major art centers outside of Holland, yet not limited to France. In addition, the works of the French artists, who are counted among those at the very core of the French Symbolist movement, were on display at these exhibitions. When Verkade made the trip to Paris in 1891, he did so via Brussels; there, he saw his second exhibition of *Les XX*. From checklists of this exhibition, we know that Verkade had to have seen there the work of James Ensor, Fernand Khnopff, George Minne, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, Georges Seurat, and Theo van Rhysellberghe, as well as that of Charles Filiger, Jan Toorop, Henry van de Velde, all of whom he later came to know, and most importantly, that of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin.⁷ All of this serves to make clear that Verkade had

German parallel those of the English words "greasy" or "smearer," which adds an interpretative layer to the connotations of a "dauber" as one who is a dilettante.

⁵His description makes an obvious reference to the artistic experimentation characteristic of the avant-garde.

⁶Dom Willibrord Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 52. Here again the English translation of Verkade's autobiography proves weak; although the actual word *gemein*, is translated in this quote to mean "common," it is clear from Verkade's tone in this letter that he intended to convey the stronger tone of the word, "vulgar."

⁷Jane Block, "Les XX: Forum of the Avant-Garde," *Belgian Art: 1880-1914*, exhibition catalogue for The Brooklyn Museum, 1980, 36-38.

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been exposed to and was receptive to artists imbued with Symbolist ideas before he was to set foot in France.

Verkade's first contact with artists associated with Symbolism was through his meeting with Meijer de Haan. His introduction to de Haan seems to have been a serendipitous event for the young painter's future development, although whether or not he knew in advance of de Haan's affiliation with Gauguin is unclear. De Haan, a Dutch painter then working in Paris, was a logical contact for Verkade to make upon his own arrival there.⁸ However, in his memoirs, Verkade gave no indication as to either how he knew of de Haan or what he knew about him. He noted only that on his journey he carried with him a letter of introduction to de Haan.⁹ De Haan soon introduced him to Gauguin.

⁸Wladyslawa Jaworska. *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*. trans. by Patrick Evans (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1972), 95-97 passim. According to Jaworska, de Haan had traveled to Paris in the autumn of 1888 and shortly thereafter took up residence with Theo van Gogh, who carried on a fair amount of correspondence about de Haan and his work, with his brother, Vincent. At the time, Gauguin was staying with Vincent in Arles and is likely to have participated in conversations about the Dutchman, as well as to have seen the sketches by de Haan that Theo sent periodically to Vincent. Jaworska suggests that when de Haan, Theo and Vincent discussed an appropriate apprenticeship for de Haan, Gauguin was considered the best choice. When Vincent and Gauguin parted after the tragic events at Arles, Gauguin returned to Paris. Shortly thereafter de Haan was introduced to Gauguin, probably by Theo. Within a brief period, de Haan requested that Gauguin take him on as a pupil at Le Pouldu. There, they lived at the inn of Marie Poupée, where Gauguin hung on the wall of the dining room, de Haan's portrait of *Marie Henry Suckling Her Child*, (1889). (Later Marie Poupée gave birth to de Haan's daughter.) De Haan's style was certainly influenced by that of Gauguin; the two men at times worked side by side, painting the same subject in similar modes. Gauguin's portraits of de Haan are among his more significant works and are interesting because they seem to disclose the particularly stormy relationship between the two men that developed due to their competitive pursuit of Marie Henry. The portraits provide clear examples of Gauguin's interest in esoterica and the occult manifesting, as they do, the primitivizing elements that are characteristic of the Symbolist/Synthetist aesthetic.

⁹Who may have provided him with that letter? Two possibilities seem reasonable although no firm conclusion can be drawn. The first is de Haan's father, who, like Verkade's father, was also a manufacturer. The elder Verkade owned a bread and biscuit factory, while de Haan's father was a manufacturer of unleavened bread. It is likely that the two men knew each other; further, it is plausible that Verkade's father, concerned about the well-being and whereabouts

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In his memoirs, Verkade described his initial meeting with Gauguin, indicating that the master's posture was one of disinterest. "He lifted his eyes with a look which seemed to say, 'What sort of blockhead is de Haan bringing me this time?'" Although the reception was not one that an aspiring young artist might have desired, nevertheless, Verkade was duly impressed by Gauguin's stature and presence. It seems safe to assume that by the time Verkade had his first glimpse of Gauguin, "sipping his soup"¹⁰ at the Montparnasse restaurant where he usually dined, the younger man must have already had a perceptual understanding of the master's artistic sensibilities. Given Verkade's awareness of an international avant-garde, extending at least from Paris to Brussels, and his familiarity with Symbolist thought and literature, and the fact that Gauguin's work was included in the 1891 exhibition of *Les XX*, which Verkade had seen, de Haan's presentation of Gauguin to Verkade could hardly have been Verkade's introduction to him or to his ideas.

Once in Paris, Verkade was quickly absorbed into the circle of painters around Gauguin, for whom the latter's theories provided a basis for an aesthetic. Consequently, Verkade's painting style took on formal characteristics aligned with Synthetism: reduced forms drawn with a simplified line, a broad, flat application of paint, the use of highly expressive and decorative color, and a radically flattened, two-dimensional space. Moreover, Verkade became committed to the aim of Synthetism: the desire to give visual

of his twenty-three year old son traveling unaccompanied in Paris, would have been moved to secure for him the more stable companionship and influence of a pseudo older brother. The second possibility is that Jan Voerman provided Verkade with the letter in question. Several years before he tutored his brother-in-law, Verkade, Jan Voerman likewise tutored the younger de Haan. If Voerman knew that de Haan had settled in Paris, then we might suggest that, as a teacher directing his student, Voerman sent Verkade to de Haan.

¹⁰Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 60.

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representation to a non-narrative idea, one that sought to communicate a realm beyond that of the temporal world. Thus, for the Synthetists, and for the broader spectrum of Symbolist painters, the accurate rendering of retinal sensations produced by direct observation of life, was viewed as a misguided concern with the mundane. Naturalistic representation was seen as inappropriate in both form and content to the higher calling of art. In particular, this higher calling took on a specifically spiritual tone among the Nabis, into whose ranks Verkade had recently been admitted.¹¹ The desire for spiritual communion had been also a motivating factor in the establishment of an informal brotherhood among the Nabis. Initially, they looked to earlier groups, such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and to van Gogh's stillborn plans for an artists' community in the South, as models for their own society, the goal of which was to create works in the spirit of communal endeavor.¹²

Such a community of artists was particularly well-suited to bring together all of the arts in a unified and harmonious expression. For the Nabis, a Synthetist painting style was seen as a counterpart to Symbolist poetry and literature. The development of a visual form aligned to literary models seemed an appropriate and welcome manifestation of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the Wagnerian concept, much admired by the French Symbolists.

¹¹Verkade's acceptance into the Nabis seems to have been the result of a combination of factors: his likemindedness in his rebuke of academic and Naturalist styles; an informal sponsorship by de Haan; and the support of Sérusier, who was likely seeking adherents to his newly founded community. See Verkade's recounting of his response to the art he sought out and studied in his first days in Paris. *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 59.

¹²In time, some members would actually design plans to establish more formal societies devoted to the creation of spiritual art, such as Denis' and Georges Desvalliers' *L'Atelier de l'Art Sacre*, which was founded by them in 1919 in Paris in the rue Furstenberg. The teaching was based on the painting of the *Trecento*. (See Jaworska, 245, n.118.)

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Most of the objectives of the Symbolist poets would be assumed and transformed by the Symbolist/Synthetist painters.

In Paris, and later in Brittany, Verkade immersed himself in Symbolism, becoming familiar with more of the literature and engaging in much of the activity of the Nabis. Once accepted into the group whose members included Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), Maurice Denis (1870-1943), Paul Ranson (1864-1909), Ker-Xavier Roussel (1867-1944), Félix Vallotton (1865-1925), and Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940), Verkade, according to Nabi custom, was given a nickname, "le Nabi obeliscal" because of his towering height.¹³ The activities of the group included weekly soirées first at the Café Voltaire and later at the "Temple," as Paul Ranson's studio was so christened. At these gatherings the members discussed philosophy, literature, the occult, religion, music and theater, in addition to art. Sometimes they invited guests to participate in their discussions. Among these were the musicians Pierre Hermant, Claude Terrasse, and Dutueil d'Ozanne, the writers Paul Percheron, (whose subsequent entrance into the Mardesous Monastery of the Order of the Blessed Sacrament would have an effect on Verkade's monastic aspirations)¹⁴ and Maurice Barrès, and the actor Lugné-Poé.¹⁵ In addition, "they attended regular sessions with a Dominican priest, Père Janvier, to

¹³The nicknames of the Nabis have no certain mystical content. Rather, each was based generally on some physical characteristic of the member. It is interesting to note, however, that given the Egyptian origin of the obelisk form and Verkade's later attraction to Lenz's "canon of sacred proportions," which was largely based on an Egyptian system of measurement, this name has a coincidentally portentous connotation.

¹⁴See Chapter 2, 61, n. 6,7.

¹⁵Caroline Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983, 35. Dutueil d'Ozanne was the Director of the Chorale Euterpe, of which Paul Sérusier was a member.

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discuss Catholicism, Theosophy and eastern religions."¹⁶ In accordance with the particularly spiritual character of Nabi Synthetism, their investigation of these religious sects motivated many of the Nabis to attempt to transform the abstract questions and issues raised in their discussions into tangible form on their canvases.

In addition to direct investigations of spiritual issues and questions, the Nabis further pursued the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* by exploring Symbolist manifestations in other media. They attended the Concerts Lamoreaux; they explored the medium of theater by writing and producing marionette plays and designing sets for a production of Maeterlinck's *Les Sept Princesses*; they met and engaged in discussions with Symbolist writers and poets at the Café Voltaire. Verkade participated in all of these activities. With his fellow Nabis, he read the works of the Symbolist poets, and became initiated into the ideas of Theosophy and the occult. At the suggestion of Sérusier, Verkade read Edouard Shuré's *Les Grandes Initiés*, a work which was to have a significant impact on his later religious development. In his memoirs, he also recounted his association with Jean Moréas, Paul Verlaine, Albert Aurier, Charles Morice and, Stéphane Mallarmé. It was Mallarmé who organized Gauguin's farewell banquet given on March 23, 1891, at the Café Voltaire, at which Verkade was present. Verkade's set designs for the marionette production of *Les Sept Princesses*, which survive in the form of drawings, (llls. 48 & 48A) attest to his ready adoption of a Synthetist painting style, in their simplified line, flattened space, broad application of color, and childlike treatment of imagery.

¹⁶Caroline Boyle-Turner, "Verkade als Nabi," *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin.*, exhibition catalogue for the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, March-May, 1989, 10.

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In the brief two months between Verkade's arrival in Paris in February of 1891 and Gauguin's departure for Tahiti on April 4 of that year, Verkade had the benefit of several sessions of painting instruction from Gauguin. He noted later that Gauguin had warned him against his "manual dexterity, which can too easily degenerate into tricks and artifices. Gauguin hated, in painting, the slavish copying of nature."¹⁷ Imbedded into Verkade's introduction to a Synthetist theory of painting was the underlying premise that he encountered over and over again, namely that nature provided no more than the starting point for an artist's expression. The artist's task was to transform nature via his own perception into a search for "truth" that depended not on appearances but on what Sérusier would call the immutable laws of aesthetics; these could only be arrived at through the harmony of the overall composition, which depended upon the purity of forms and of colors interwoven to achieve an expressive, decorative result. Within this synthesized presentation of the natural world, the "idea" would be given form.

The first works that Verkade executed in Paris already show evidence of his understanding and absorption of Gauguin's formal principles. His *Still Life with Quimper Bowl* (Ill. 1) of 1891, probably executed in Sérusier's studio,¹⁸ manifests a Synthetist harmony that Gauguin had counseled the younger man to seek. A relatively simple composition, the *Still Life* depicts three apples and a traditional Quimper bowl in a seemingly random arrangement on a white cloth poised on the corner of a table. The edges of the composition have been deliberately cropped to tighten the space and

¹⁷Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 67.

¹⁸According to Caroline Boyle-Turner, the Quimper bowl, a characteristic example of the pottery of Brittany, was more than likely one of a number of such pieces that Sérusier had brought back to Paris with him from his three previous trips to that region.

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eliminate any hint of a horizon line. The table top has been tipped forward, which further serves to flatten and tighten the space. The corner of the table occupies the closest area of the picture plane and forms an inward moving triangle in the lower third register of the frame. The apples form a triangle that echoes the one formed by the table's corner. These traditional indicators of three-dimensionality, however, are counteracted by the placement of the bowl which is tipped forward to lie on its side and cut off by the upper frame of the canvas. Creating a diamond shape with the apples, among which it is arranged, the bowl occupies a much closer register of the picture plane and competes with the other pictorial elements for the viewer's attention. The simplified forms, limited to circles and triangles, unify the composition and create a rhythm that unfolds through the design in a circular motion that consistently holds the picture plane. This rhythm is reinforced by the palette of the painting, which, following Gauguin's advice, is limited to four colors: red, green, yellow, and white. By distributing these colors evenly across the picture plane, Verkade further flattened the space and increased the harmony of the overall result. The softened triangular folds of the cloth, in which varying shades of the compositional palette are used to create shadows, form a unifying transition between the harder-edged forms of the fruit and bowl and the tabletop on which they rest and reinforces the rhythm of the composition's design. The result is a closed, unified and self-contained work that exudes a delicate harmony of forms and colors.

Verkade's receptivity to the Synthetist theories of Gauguin and Sérusier would only have been reinforced by the publication in the *Mercure de France* of Albert Aurier's article on Gauguin in March of 1891. Although Verkade did not mention this work in his memoirs, he did recount having often been engaged in discussions with a circle of

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literary Symbolists, among whom he named Aurier. Given his personal association with both Gauguin and Aurier, it is not surprising that Verkade would have read Aurier's article. In her study on Sérusier, Boyle-Turner has shown that Aurier's article contains a point by point correspondence to ideas that Sérusier had laid out in a letter to Maurice Denis two years earlier, in 1889.¹⁹ This article, Boyle-Turner states, "bears the stamp of many long discussions with Sérusier. It is an important effort to place Gauguin and the Nabis into a context of contemporary Symbolist thought, and it provides an indication of Sérusier's own thoughts concerning painting and Symbolism."²⁰

With Aurier's article, the formal elements of the new style and the factors that motivated them, first explained by Maurice Denis in his "Definition du Neo-Traditionnisme" (published in August of 1890 in *Art et Critique*), were again formalized in print. The fact that Aurier was a Symbolist writer and critic, while Denis was a painter and critic, helped to fuse the bridge among the arts that became a hallmark of the era.

Denis' principles, as described by Aurier, were ones that Verkade was struggling to apply to his own work.

Before my sojourn in Paris I had, in the practice of my art, abandoned myself almost entirely to the promptings of my temperament, not to say of my moods. Now it was my duty to use circumspection. Up to that time I had

¹⁹Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier*, 46-47. For a discussion of Sérusier's theories vis à vis this letter, see also 24-27. A summary of Sérusier's ideas as they pertain to Verkade will be taken up in Chapter 2.

²⁰Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier*, 46.

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pursued the ever-changing appearance of things, like a boy chasing butterflies. Now I was taught that my mind was the guiding principle in the phenomena which present themselves in nature.²¹

Verkade's handling of the forms and the composition of *Still Life with Quimper Bowl*, discussed above, exemplifies the struggle that his words described. The importance given to the "idea" in art by all three men propelled Verkade to a more thorough investigation of the philosophical ideas he had begun to entertain, both on his own and in conjunction with his Nabis colleagues. This exploration began slowly, first through an examination of Theosophic and occult texts that was guided largely by Sérusier and Ranson; it led ultimately to Verkade's investigation of Catholicism, inspired by the example of Denis, whose evident spirituality moved Verkade to search for greater spiritual awareness and fulfillment in his own life. From their initial meeting, Verkade felt great admiration for Denis. The words he used to describe his reaction to the young Frenchman clearly indicate the force of Denis' impact on Verkade:

Beside this highly gifted young man I felt myself very insignificant. I have seldom been so profoundly conscious of the narrowness and defectiveness of my education. I divined instinctively how greatly his faith had enriched this youthful artist who, as Sérusier told me, had grown up as a believing Catholic, and at a very early age had already passed a brilliant examination in philosophy for admission to the university.²²

²¹Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 69.

²²*Ibid.*, 70-71.

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The influence of Sérusier and Denis on Verkade's awakening spirit cannot be overestimated. Of the impact of Sérusier's philosophy, he wrote:

At the end of a month, I had already acquired the conviction that there was a higher reality than that which we perceive with our senses, and quite imperceptibly I came again to believe in the existence of the soul and its immortality in some form or other.²³

Verkade's experiences during his first two months in the French capital caused a number of changes in his view of art and in his view of the nature of life. By April, when he saw Gauguin off at the train station as the latter departed for Tahiti, Verkade, too, was at a crossroads. His desire to continue along the dual path of growth on which he had embarked, involved serious commitment with all of its inherent and unforeseen difficulty. He was not yet aware of the need for such commitment; instead, his preoccupation was with the excitement and exhilaration that new exploration brings. The immediate difficulty that presented itself, in view of Verkade's wish to remain in France was his rapidly diminishing source of funds. Sérusier offered a solution, with the suggestion that Verkade spend some time in Brittany, specifically Huelgoat, "where one could be lodged well and cheaply."²⁴

During the remainder of his time in Paris, Verkade continued to paint with Sérusier as his guide, and also spent a considerable amount of time at the Louvre. There he

²³Ibid., 79.

²⁴Ibid., 82.

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became enthralled with the work of the Italian Primitives ²⁵ because he saw in their painting

the spontaneous expression of spiritual life. The thought which impressed itself upon me at every visit was that, without religion, there is no really great art, and that all great art has stood in the service of religion. This perception drove me, therefore, to seek a religious philosophy of life.²⁶

Verkade soon began to seek a confluence between the spiritual dimensions of life and of art. In a very short period of time, his association with the Nabis produced a dramatic effect upon the young Verkade: he had begun to formulate a "vision." His experiences in Brittany provided the firmament for the dramatic turn his life soon took, namely his conversion to Catholicism; this decision consequently crystallized his vision as an artist and as a man.

When Verkade left Paris for Huelgoat, he was accompanied by Mogens Ballin. Ballin was a Danish painter of Jewish origin, who had been living in Paris since 1889 and whom Verkade had first met at Gauguin's farewell banquet at the Café Voltaire on March 23, 1891. On two subsequent occasions when they met,²⁷ Ballin expressed his

²⁵In keeping with the artistic tenor of the period, which was essentially anti-Positivist, many of the artists heralded the work of the Italian pre- and early Renaissance painters, then known as the Primitives. Some of the Primitives to which the late nineteenth century artists looked for inspiration were: Giotto, Fra Angelico, Andrea Mantegna, Domenico Ghirlandaio, and Sandro Botticelli. The works of Giotto and Fra Angelico constituted an abiding source of inspiration for Verkade throughout his career, as his numerous references to them, in letters to Denis, confirm.

²⁶Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 89.

²⁷After their first meeting, Verkade ran into Ballin at the *Bal Bullier*, a dancehall in the Latin Quarter. It was on this evening that Verkade proposed that Ballin accompany him to Brittany.

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disenchantment with life in Paris. He complained that the city offered too many distractions and inhibited a painter's inclination to do serious work. At Verkade's suggestion, Ballin considered traveling with him and Sérusier to Huelgoat. Shortly thereafter, Verkade and Ballin made their way to Pont-Aven to await the arrival of Sérusier several weeks later.

The peace and solace that both men experienced in Brittany allowed each of them to begin an introspective phase that combined serious work with a careful investigation of current philosophical and religious ideas. In Pont-Aven, Verkade and Ballin settled at the Pension Gloanec, where the dining room walls were covered with paintings, some of them by Gauguin.²⁸ Also residing there, at the time, were the painters Armand Seguin

Their next meeting occurred at the Gare de Lyon on April 4, where they had both come to see Gauguin off. See Boyle-Turner, 13.

²⁸The Pension Gloanec was the dwelling place of Gauguin on his earliest trips to Pont-Aven. He stayed there with Émile Schuffenecker in 1886 where he met Charles Laval, who was to travel with him the following year to Martinique, and Émile Bernard, although the two did not seem to have a favorable opinion of each other at the time. In 1888, Gauguin was again in residence at the Pension Gloanec; that August, Bernard arrived with greetings for Gauguin from van Gogh. Since their interaction was more favorable, Bernard, who had also been striving for a new means to express his ideas, was disposed to showing Gauguin his *Breton Women in a Green Meadow*, a painting that demonstrated a radical synthesis of forms and colors in a severely flattened two-dimensional space. Bernard's ideas were derived in part from Medieval stained glass, textiles, cloisonné enamel, and Japanese prints. What Gauguin absorbed from Bernard's discussion of his ideas prompted the former to conceive his monumental *Vision After the Sermon* (1888), the success of which solidified Gauguin's reputation as the master of a newly founded style, Synthetism. Gauguin's work attracted the attention of many young painters, who came regularly to Brittany, among them, the Nabis. In each location where he stayed, Gauguin could claim "followers," who together have generally been referred to as the Pont-Aven School. (See Jaworska, 16-25) Note: Although the Nabis are considered a part of the Pont-Aven group, the two terms are not synonymous and do not encompass the same artists. The Nabis came together, as a group, in Paris as a result of Sérusier's efforts to establish an artistic community devoted to a Symbolist ideology and a Synthetist painting style. Many of the Nabis traveled to Pont-Aven; while there, they met and worked with other artists who had also known and worked with Gauguin -- Bernard, Filiger, Chamillard, Laval, etc. -- who were

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and Ernest de Chamaillard, both of whom had been pupils of Gauguin during his earlier stays in Pont-Aven. What Verkade recounted of Chamaillard was the latter's inclination to read aloud to the others verses from Paul Verlaine's *Sagesse*, and subsequently, to explain the Catholic dogma found in the sonnets. Apparently, however, the intensity of both Verlaine's poetics and Chamaillard's discourse were too threatening to Verkade in this period when his emotional yearnings were moving him towards Catholicism while his reason and tradition were holding him back. What he later wrote in recalling his initial response to Chamaillard's enthusiasm clearly reveals Verkade's hesitancy about and denial of his growing intrigue with Catholicism:

I felt, however, extremely ill at ease, like one who walks alone at night through a dark forest ... I became even suspicious and looked at him (Chamaillard) often furtively, with the thought, "Does he really believe what he says?"²⁹

Sérusier's arrival in Pont-Aven intensified Verkade's direct confrontation with questions of faith, since the former consistently introduced the question of the existence of God into discussion. Such discussions were a continuation of similar ones that had engaged the group of Nabis on numerous occasions in Paris. In the Breton countryside, however, Sérusier strongly urged Verkade to read two books that would prove seminal to Verkade's spiritual quest: Balzac's *Seraphita* and Shuré's *Les Grandes Initiés*. In

never members of the Nabis. For more information, see Caroline Boyle Turner's work on the Pont-Aven and Nabis artists.

²⁹Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 97.

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Seraphita, Balzac explored the theosophy of the philosopher, Swedenborg. While Verkade did not evaluate the accuracy of Balzac's interpretation of Swedenborg, he indicated that he was profoundly influenced by Balzac's conviction of the existence of a benevolent Supreme Being, and of the invaluable power of prayer:

Of all the books I have ever read, *Seraphita* was the first in which one speaks of God with enthusiasm as the supreme Good. The ardent words with which the power of prayer is there described, impelled me mightily to try this indispensable means of attaining blessedness with God. In fact, the expressions of Balzac remind one of the most beautiful words that Christian mystics have ever uttered about prayer, and he undoubtedly gained his inspiration from their writings. Thus, by the reading of his *Seraphita*, I drank for the first time from the fountain of Christian mysticism.³⁰

Furthermore, Balzac represented man as one small facet of a cosmic whole, which can be divined through a study of the visible world, i.e., of the laws regulating nature and thereby leading to an understanding of a higher cosmic perfection, at least for the initiated few. This metaphysical belief corresponded directly to theosophical philosophy, in Sérusier's view. Moreover, it bore correlation to Sérusier's adaptation of theosophy to his developing theories of painting through which he hoped to instruct Verkade. For his part, however, Verkade was more strongly affected by the significance of Balzac's ideas in relation to his quest for a spiritual awakening.

In Shuré's book, Verkade recognized many of Sérusier's religious ideas, which Sérusier, himself felt were expressed by Shuré's Neo-Platonic view of the physical and

³⁰Ibid., 103.

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spiritual world. The parallels drawn by Shuré among the views of the "initiated," among whom he included Jesus, Moses and Buddha, corresponded to the contemporary search for a universal harmony in nature and in the cosmos, of which human beings were an ontological part.

At this point in his life, Verkade interpreted this striving for harmony in wholly personal terms. His response to the literature was manifested in his yearning to reconcile his fears and his feelings about his own spirituality. In Huelgoat, where he and Ballin and Sérusier arrived in June, and later in Le Pouldu, Verkade continued to investigate Catholicism. He found numerous models for guidance among the simple and pious Breton people. He began to attend Mass and continued his conversations with the priests of the villages in which he made his temporary homes. By mid-summer of 1891, Verkade had settled in Le Pouldu at the famous inn of Marie Poupée,³¹ where he met the painters Maxime Maufra and Charles Filiger. A series of letters from Filiger to Verkade attest to a friendship between them that endured at least until 1894, although the particular character of it can only be inferred from the discrepancy between the tenor of the letters and Verkade's retrospective, summary comments written many years later. The commonality in the two "accounts" however, indicates that Filiger had some influence on Verkade both in matters of religion and of painting. Verkade concluded three pages of commentary on "Drahtmann"³² with these words:

³¹See note #8, earlier in this chapter.

³²In his memoirs, Verkade refers to Filiger by the name of Drahtmann. Historians generally agree that since Verkade was about to publish some rather derogatory comments about Filiger, he sought to protect the latter's identity. Boyle-Turner has demonstrated the direct translation of Filiger's name: "fil" in French, meaning "wire," is "draht" in German; "ger" becomes "gar" meaning "man" in French, which is "Mann" in German. (See, Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 19, n.31.)

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Drahtmann's opinions and outpourings of sentiment drove me now hither, now thither, yet fortunately more towards what was good than towards what was evil. I am at least indebted to him for many theories of life and art, which thus far have proven to be correct. He treated me as his pupil and showed me the affection of a master.³³

Verkade was attracted by Filiger's Catholicism, and recalled:

He was by nature essentially Catholic, in the sense that no other faith would have ever suited him. Catholicism was in his blood, as it is in that of so many Frenchmen, even though they may assert that they have their own conception of religious things and seldom or never go to church.³⁴

³³Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 111-112. Jaworska speculated that Filiger's homosexuality, and certainly his drinking, may have been an encumbrance for Verkade. His euphemistic comments allude to a troubled soul given to excesses, "one of those unfortunate men who sometimes, through inherited weakness, cannot resist doing that which, being done, grieves and disgusts them unspeakably ... they finally take revenge upon themselves and on society, commit the most frightful excesses, and try to drag others also with them down to ruin, with ever-increasing torment to themselves. They are men who suffer terribly." (Ibid., 109. See also, Jaworska, 162-163.) The issue of Verkade's sexuality, not treated in the present investigation, is appropriately raised in the context of his relationship to Filiger; this is particularly so when one examines Verkade's paintings of St. Sebastian, which were so evidently influenced by Filiger's work. The androgynous quality of the figure in these paintings, which Boyle-Turner confirms were painted according to Filiger's method, that is, from memory rather than before the model, gives credence to the possibility of Verkade's having experienced homosexual tendencies himself. Whether overt or latent, such tendencies would explain Verkade's especially strong reaction against Filiger in retrospect. I would speculate that Verkade was likely to have struggled with the question of his sexuality and that the issues raised by a presumed homosexuality would provide yet another interesting lens through which to analyze both his art and his decision to live his life within a community of men, as a monastic.

³⁴Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 111.

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He was also attracted by the particularly Byzantine character of Filiger's work, which was decidedly spiritual in content and was carried out in a simplified, geometric form.

I know some little paintings of his in watercolors, which are very beautiful. They are principally religious pictures with a strong suggestion of the works of the Byzantines and the Italian Primitives, yet withal thoroughly individual and imbued with modern sentiment.³⁵

Both qualities were important for Verkade at this time. In the quietly pious region of Brittany, Verkade was moving closer and closer to embracing Catholicism. Aside from his purely personal desire to enrich his life by making a spiritual commitment, Verkade was also becoming increasingly convinced that "all great art has stood in the service of religion."³⁶ The roots of Filiger's art, which Verkade saw in the work of the Italian Primitives, and in which he saw "not so much a product of aesthetic observation and technical effort, ... but the spontaneous expression of spiritual life,"³⁷ enabled him to view Filiger's efforts in this light, and thus to accept the latter's thinking as a guide to his own artistic intentions. At the inn of Marie Poupée, Verkade encountered an impressive collection of Synthetist works, particularly those of Gauguin, Bernard, de Haan, and Sérusier, all of whom had been in residence there the previous summer, and with whom Filiger had also worked. It seems reasonable to suggest that Verkade's struggle to "find God" in an environment that had seen the development of Synthetism,

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 89.

³⁷Ibid.

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while simultaneously experiencing the larger context of Brittany, which he called "the land of Calvaries," would bind Catholicism and Synthetism inextricably for Verkade. His artistic development, which led him eventually to the Beuroner aesthetic of Didier Lenz, and his later disenchantment with that decision, both emerged out of his earliest, and most strongly-felt goal: to create works of spiritual power that came forth from the soul of the artist, and to do so in a manner that revealed the deep, spiritual commitment of that soul.

Although Verkade left Brittany temporarily in October of 1891, when the "Tourment" or "Unruhe"³⁸ became so exacerbated as to leave him no rest, he returned the following Easter to continue along on the path he had by now come to feel was almost destined for him. In the six month interim between his sojourns in the Breton countryside, Verkade took part in far more artistic activity than his memoirs indicate.

On the trip from Brittany, Verkade stopped briefly in Paris, where he may have inquired about the success of the exhibition, "Les Impressionistes Symbolistes," held in St. Germain-en-Laye from August to September, in which he showed at least one still-life that received an admirable mention in *La Plume*.³⁹ Subsequently, Verkade traveled to Holland, where he spent time with his family and later returned to Paris and the

³⁸The first volume of Verkade's memoirs chronicles the path toward his religious conversion. Its title, in the original German, *Die Unruhe zu Gott* and its title in French translation, *Le Tourment de Dieu* both give evidence of Verkade's wish to describe his struggle to pursue and ultimately embrace this path to faith. The rather pedestrian title of the English translation characterizes the work strictly as a memoir and gives the reader no clue about the turmoil the author experienced.

³⁹Georges Roussel, "Critique d'Art: Les Impressionistes Symbolistes a l'Exposition de St. Germain," *La Plume*, [October 1, 1891], 341. Also quoted in Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 19.

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Nabis. In Holland, Verkade made contact with several Dutch artists, notably a devotee of van Gogh, Roland-Holst, with whom Verkade carried on a subsequent correspondence.⁴⁰ In February, when Sérusier visited Verkade in Amsterdam, the two paid a visit to Jo Bongers, the widow of Theo van Gogh, specifically to see Vincent's paintings. Verkade had written to her that he had seen Vincent's works in Paris in the shop of Père Tanguy, and that he would like to see others.⁴¹ At the same time, Verkade corresponded with Filiger about the possibility of exhibiting with the Rose-Croix, although this never became a reality.⁴² Verkade's memoirs attest to none of these activities; his short account of his visit with his family is consumed by his recollection of the profound impact on him of the Catholic *Credo*, which he had read for the first time during a rehearsal he attended of Bach's Mass in G minor. While it is probable that his growing commitment to Catholicism had not waned during this respite, it seems clear from his letters that he had at least put aside his turmoil to a greater degree than his memoirs affirm.

Verkade did present an account of some of his activities during his 1892 stay in Paris. With the Nabis, he became involved in the marionette production of Maeterlinck's *Les Sept Princesses*, for which he painted a curtain, actually a cardboard screen of a background landscape. Both the work itself, now in a private collection, and a preliminary drawing for it, (Ills. 48 & 48A) found in one of his sketchbooks in Beuron,

⁴⁰Unpublished letters from Verkade to Roland-Holst, Verkade Family archives.

⁴¹Unpublished letter from Verkade to Jo Bongers, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh. Verkade discussed his contact with Tanguy in his account of his first trip to Paris. (See Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 80-81). Although he never mentioned his meeting with Jo Bongers, it is not surprising that Verkade sought out Vincent's work; van Gogh's sensitivity was motivation enough. Further reinforcement was van Gogh's relationship to Gauguin and the fact that van Gogh shared a national heritage with Verkade.

⁴²Unpublished letter from Filiger to Verkade, Winter 1892.

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reveal Verkade's adoption of a Synthetist style. In fact, while the sketch manifests a more naturalistic approach to three-dimensional space, and a fluid line reminiscent of the natural landscape, the finished work demonstrates a harmonious synthesis of forms that have been simplified to reveal their geometric structure, and which are composed in layers built up from the lower register of the cardboard, and organized into a composition that is both symmetrical and flat.

The Nabis production of *Les Sept Princesses* had a side-effect that was important to the group: it brought them into even closer contact with French literary circles. This result came about through the staging of the production in the home of Jean-Claude Coulon, a government official (conseiller d'Etat), then living in Passy. Verkade wrote: "the production was a great success and the Nabis by this incident were introduced into a wider circle of acquaintances."⁴³ According to Boyle-Turner, one such result was a major article by Aurier that made ample mention of the Nabis.

Albert Aurier . . . published a major critique of the Symbolists in April, 1892. Aurier singled out for praise many of the Nabis, whom he called "Ideistes... ." These painters, he felt, belonged to a tradition going back to the Assyrian and Egyptian artists, which had been kept alive by medieval artists, 14th century Florentines and 15th century Germany. Aurier's praise of especially Egyptian, German and Florentine painters may have helped guide Verkade's interest to them for the first time; they became his principle inspiration in the years following 1892.⁴⁴

⁴³Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 122.

⁴⁴Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 21. Since the art of these cultures was the major inspiration driving the theories of Desiderius Lenz, Verkade's investigation of them eventually provided him with a logical link between Synthetism and a Beuroner aesthetic, and thereby eased his transition from one to the other. In the same article,

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In 1892, Verkade seemed most anxious to exhibit his work to the public. He showed at the Independents, along with the other Nabis, although, according to a letter to Roland-Holst, he thought his entries were "too vague" to gather much notice.⁴⁵ He seems also to have written repeatedly to Roland-Holst about the possibility of exhibiting his paintings in Amsterdam, although this would not occur until 1894. In 1892, Verkade also met Émile Bernard, with whom he would develop a lasting friendship, based primarily on their shared religious ideals. That year Bernard edited an issue of *Le Livre d'Art*, in which prints and reproductions of drawings by himself, Gauguin, Roussel and Verkade were included. On the cover, Verkade's small drawing of the *Head of a Breton Woman* (Ill. 2) was reproduced. In a short period of time, his efforts to display his work to the public met with fair success. Still, this activity could not keep him in Paris and by Easter of 1892, Verkade left again for Brittany. His correspondence with Bernard and his attendance at the Nabis' weekly discussions with the Dominican priests seem to have prepared Verkade to take up once again the religious questions that had so preoccupied him the previous year.

The peaceful solitude he found in the Breton countryside, in particular the little village of St. Nolff, offered Verkade an environment most conducive to the contemplation of spiritual questions. Armed with the ideas of Shuré, Augustine, Pascal and Thomas à

Aurier presented painters with "a challenge to abandon easel painting in favor of monumental frescoes." This too came to be a prognostication of Verkade's future endeavors.

⁴⁵Unpublished letter to Roland-Holst, March 1892, Verkade Company Archives.

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Kempis, whose works he had been reading in Paris, Verkade sought out the guidance of a Jesuit, Father R.P. Mathurin le Texier. Le Texier encouraged Verkade to pray for spiritual revelation.⁴⁶ In the ensuing months, and following considerably more turmoil, Verkade eventually came to the decision to be baptized a Roman Catholic. To partake of the rite, he traveled to Vannes to the Chapel of the Jesuit College, accompanied by the Rector of the St. Nolff church and by a young miller, Jean Gachet, whom Verkade had chosen as a sponsor. Although for months he had discussed questions of religion with Ballin, who seemed to be following a similar course, and with Rasseti, Bernard and Filiger, Verkade did not tell anyone of his religious conversion until after the fact. His family would not learn of it until his next trip home.

In his memoirs, Verkade wrote almost exclusively of his tumultuous path toward religious conversion, during this stay in Brittany. From the paucity of commentary on artistic production in these pages, it would appear that from the spring of 1891 until August of 1892, he was so immersed in a personal struggle between his inner striving and a lingering doubt that he was nearly paralyzed. Yet, in his account of the early days of the Breton sojourn, he wrote :

This magnificent landscape incited us at once to joyful work, and soon picture succeeded picture on the walls of my room. My friend Sérusier was pleasantly surprised when he arrived three weeks later.⁴⁷

⁴⁶According to Boyle-Turner, Le Texier's idea that "true belief and understanding would only come after baptism reminded Verkade of the initiation rites described by Shuré in *Les Grands Initiés*. Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 22.

⁴⁷Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 94.

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Verkade's words, in this passage, give the impression that he created a great many works in very short period of time, yet relatively few works can be attributed to his entire Breton period. While there can be no doubt that spiritual questions consumed much of his time, the relatively small number of works he produced during this period cannot be attributed to his spiritual quest alone. It is reasonable to suggest that a fair portion of his artistic output has been lost, especially when one considers the ease with which Verkade often gave away his drawings to the young men and women who had posed for him. Whatever the number of canvases, however, Verkade produced some of his finest works during his stay in France, the greater portion of which was spent in Brittany. *Decorative Landscape I and II* (Ills. 3 & 4)⁴⁸ of 1891-92 are powerful examples of Verkade's mastery of a Synthetist painting style, not only with regard to their harmonious synthesis of forms, but also as concerns their ability to impart the stirring passion extant in the mind and heart of their creator. Together with his *Farm at Le Pouldu* (Ill. 5) and several still-life compositions of the same period, these works form a testament to Verkade's intense struggle with the questions of faith that occupied him during this time. His success at achieving harmony and balance in these paintings, despite the strong tension they exude is a clear manifestation of his attempt to achieve the same harmony and balance between the physical and metaphysical spheres of his life, which were in complete opposition at the beginning of his quest but which were to be reconciled with his conversion.

⁴⁸Interestingly, these two paintings have been intermittently attributed to Gauguin. In fact, *Decorative Landscape II* was purchased by the National Museum of Stockholm when it was thought to be a Gauguin. In an article for the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, "Gauguin or School of Pont-Aven: Concerning the Attribution of Two Panels in Stockholm," (*Gazette des Beaux Arts*, s.6, v.74: 305-310), George Mauner has established Verkade's authorship of both panels.

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From Sérusier to Lenz: A Logical Stylistic Progression

The ancient artists of India and Egypt were well aware of the mysterious correspondences between beautiful forms and beautiful sentiments.

Maurice Denis¹

Verkade's conversion to Catholicism marked a high point but not the culmination of his search for spiritual harmony in his life and work. A monumental step in achieving that harmony came in 1894, when Verkade sought entry into the Benedictine Monastery of St. Martin at Beuron.² In so doing, he relinquished his life to the Catholic Church and his artistic talents to Desiderius Lenz, the founder of the *Beuronerkunstschule*. Thus, over a brief span of only two years, Verkade initiated dramatic changes in his life, which came to have serious ramifications upon his future development as an artist. Two essential factors played equivalent, primary roles in his decision-making process: first.

¹"Les anciennes races artistes de l'Inde et de l'Égypte connaissaient bien ces mystérieuses correspondances entre les belles formes et les beaux sentiments." Maurice Denis, "Définition du Néo-Traditionisme," *Théories du Symbolisme au Classicisme*, Texte réunis et présentés par Olivier Revault D'Allonnée, *Miroirs de L'Art* (Paris: Hermann, 1964), 73.

²The Benedictine Monastery of St. Martin at Beuron, at the turn of the century, was an artistic community; most of the monks were engaged in some form of creative work. In addition to the *Kunstschule*, the community was known for its composers, writers and poets. For additional information, see P. Suso Mayer, OSB, *Beuroner Bibliographie: 1863-1963* (Beuron Hohenzollern, 1963).

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in recognizing his vocation, Verkade saw monasticism as a means of expressing and structuring his commitment to the Symbolist ideology that had taken on a personal significance for him through his experience of Catholicism; second, in submitting to the artistic rigor of Lenz's program, Verkade recognized a direct correspondence between the stylistic theories and aesthetic goals of the Nabis and those of the *Beuronerkunstschule*. Verkade's activities, in the two years between his acceptance of baptism and of a religious vocation, allowed both of these realizations to flower. The interrelationship between the two became clear to him in Italy. The interesting series of occurrences and contacts that Verkade made during this period, when viewed as related events, rather than as isolated fragments, seem to form a tapestry, the finished image of which leads decidedly to Beuron. The monastery provided Verkade with permanent residency close to the heart of Mother Church, while simultaneously offering him the artistic structure and guidance he believed would enable him to reach his artistic goals.

While Catholic doctrine directed Verkade's life from 1892 on, the desire to achieve in his work the sought-after monumentality and universality appropriate to the spiritual goals of Symbolist art, and made possible by his newborn faith, preoccupied his further artistic development and direction. Having made manifest his personal commitment to God, Verkade was now ready to set out on this corresponding path. His goal of achieving a truly monumental and spiritual art had now become far more meaningful to him personally than it could ever have been before, when his attachment to it had taken the form of a youthful examination of exotic beliefs.

Verkade's respect for the profound spiritual devotion expressed in the works of the Italian Primitives led him to consider making his first trip to Italy to seek out the

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artistic guidance that these works might afford him. Spurred on by the enthusiasm of Ballin, who was also approaching conversion to Catholicism, Verkade set out for Florence with Ballin, in September of 1892. What he had planned to be a short visit (he had barely sufficient funds to make the journey) lasted for fourteen months, until November of 1893. Verkade had hoped to take away from Italy a deeper understanding of the aesthetic principles of the Italian Primitives, for which he felt his religious conversion had prepared him. The trip to Italy, however, provided more than a stylistic impulse for Verkade's future. It opened the door to his subsequent desire for monastic commitment, and in so doing, brought about the realization of his desire to conjoin his life and his art in a more structured way. He soon believed that his commitment to the *Beuronerkunstschule* and to monastic life would provide the vehicle for his development as an artist dedicated to a revival of spiritual art. By this time, his goal in this endeavor was aligned with that of some of his closest associates, notably Filiger, Bernard and Maurice Denis.

It should not seem surprising that Verkade's earliest musings about the possibility of joining a monastic community would arise in the context of his study of Early Renaissance art. Given his belief that "all great art stood in the service of religion,"³ and his new-found religious zeal, not uncharacteristic of new converts, Verkade was duly primed to absorb the full impact of the religious devotion expressed by these works. It is only natural, then, that he would to seek to emulate the religious fervor he believed to have been characteristic of the age that produced them and of their creators. His attraction to monastic life came early in the Italian sojourn, when, together with Ballin,

³Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 89.

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the two sought out the guidance of a French-speaking priest, who would provide Ballin with the appropriate instruction for the latter to follow in Verkade's footsteps and make his own conversion to Roman Catholicism. They found such a priest in the Franciscan monastery of Fiesole.

An investigation of the relevant events makes clear that the Italian sojourn, whether by coincidence or design, provided Verkade with the setting for a variety of necessary and relevant factors to congeal; it thereby made possible, if not altogether likely, his decision to enter the Beuron community. Yet, aside from noting that Verkade first began to explore the possibility of joining a monastic community while in Italy, little attention has been paid to the complexity of this phase of Verkade's life. In a few pages, Boyle-Turner chronicles Verkade's activities in Florence and Rome. She notes: "One might draw a parallel between Verkade's desire to join the Nabis, a group which provided him not only friendship and acceptance, but also artistic and spiritual companionship, with his fascination with the group of monks around St. Francis."⁴ This chapter will expand upon this view to demonstrate that this link is only a part of a larger and more complex chain of events.

Verkade's attraction to monastic life emerged early in his Italian stay. Both he and Ballin were enraptured by the peacefulness and simplicity of the monks' lives, even to the extent of wanting to adopt their ascetic habits and of requesting permission to live among them for several months. At the time, Verkade was carrying on a correspondence

⁴Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 24.

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with a lesser-known Nabi, Paul Percheron, whom he had met in Paris⁵ and who was then making his novitiate in Brussels at the Mardesous Monastery of the Order of the Blessed Sacrament. While none of the letters have survived, his memoirs and other events suggest the positive impact of Percheron's plausible commentary on Verkade's view of monastic retreat. Verkade's remarks about Percheron are made within the context of his overall positive response to services he attended in Rome that were conducted by the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament.⁶ In May of 1892, Maurice Denis, then in a state of emotional stress, wrote in his Journal, "all my strength abandons me. I suffer a great deal. I must escape to Belgium, where I hope to meet Percheron."⁷ In that same month, Denis mentioned Percheron in a letter to Verkade, making known both his distress and his anticipation that he would find solace in the company of Percheron in the environment of the Blessed Sacrament cloister.⁸ It should be pointed out, however, that at this early stage, Verkade did not envision more than a temporary retreat behind the walls of the cloister. Simply living among the monks would not be enough to persuade him to seek such retreat on a permanent basis. Instead, what he desired was to nurture his new faith in an environment that would afford him no distractions.

⁵Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 205. The English translation of Verkade's first volume mistakenly identifies Percheron as "the Nabi, Paul B." but the French translation accurately indicates his identity as "Paul P." In either case, the succeeding comments are sufficient to make clear that Verkade's reference is to Percheron.

⁶Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 205. Verkade's words and tone, when referring to Percheron's experience, suggest Percheron's complicity in describing the reverence expressed by the priests of this Order. Impressed with Percheron's description of the services he attended, Verkade was motivated to seek out services conducted by the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament in Rome.

⁷Maurice Denis, *Journal*, v. I, 1884-1904 (Paris: La Colombe, 1957), 95. "toutes mes forces m'abandonnent, je souffre trop. Il faut que je me sauve en Belgique, où j'espère rencontrer Percheron."

⁸Unpublished letter from Denis to Verkade, dated May 1892.

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While awaiting the approval of their request to live at the Franciscan Monastery, Verkade and Ballin continued their study of Italian art, with which they had been exceptionally impressed. Boyle-Turner remarks: "For both Ballin and Verkade, the discovery of early Italian Renaissance art was a revelation. They scoured the churches and nearby museums for works by Duccio, Lorenzetti, Simone Martini and Giotto."⁹ Verkade, himself, wrote at length extolling the virtues of the Florentines and the Sieneese. Among the Florentines, he most admired Cimabue, Orcagna and Angelico. "Their paintings are the result of the religious enthusiasm which the appearance of St. Francis had called forth in Italy."¹⁰ Of the Sieneese, he wrote:

The school of painting there has never wholly abandoned its original, primitive character, and even there, where influences of the early renaissance are powerful, it remains true to its tradition and its lyric art, and never descends to naturalism.¹¹

Verkade noted that , in Rome, he admired Michelangelo's *Sistine Ceiling* frescoes but "preferred the frescoes of Botticelli, Perugino and Pinturicchio on the side walls of that famous chapel." To Raphael's *Stanze* frescoes, he compared those of Angelico in the chapel of Nicholas V, which he "considered much more beautiful in color."¹²

⁹Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 24.

¹⁰Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 198.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 204. The frescoes in question had been rediscovered in 1778 by the German archaeologist, Alois Hirt, who then "...had them engraved for wider publication." [See Keith Andrews, *The Nazarenes: A Brotherhood of German Painters in Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon

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Verkade responded to two fundamental elements in the art of the Italian Primitives: the religious fervor the works expressed, and the artists' choice of forms that had been abstracted from nature for the purpose of calling forth a corresponding devotional attitude in the spectator. For Verkade, the appropriate form was not naturalism, which, he determined, was far too concerned with the appearance of things and, consequently, allowed the spectator a distraction from his/her devotion. The works of the Primitives differed from those of the High Renaissance masters in this regard. Forms that eschewed naturalism in favor of simplified drawing and compositional arrangements retained a solemnity and grace more fitting and appropriate to the expression of spiritual themes, which required a monumental presentation. Verkade's adherence to this principle of the interaction of form and content was the direct result of his affiliation with the Nabis and their thinking; it was as well the stylistic and theoretical impulse behind Verkade's attraction to the theoretical basis of the art of the *Beuronerkunstschule*.

Press, 1964.)] Andrews notes this event in conjunction with others of similar kind, all of which he sees as initiating a reawakened interest in the late 18th century among German artists in the works of the Italian Primitives, which were recognized as models for those, specifically the Nazarenes, who sought to reestablish and achieve the goal of reviving a spiritual art. Thus a connection can be asserted between Nabi and Symbolist concerns and a similar intent or mood existing even earlier among German artists toward achieving those same goals through art. Given Lenz's association with the Nazarenes (he had studied with Cornelius) and the zeal with which he pursued this ideal, one can find a direct thread from the earliest stirrings of German Romanticism to the Nazarenes to the *Beuronerkunstschule* and to Verkade who already carried these ideals within him as a result of his association with the Nabis. It is not surprising that Verkade proselytized among his French colleagues in favor of Lenz's structured formulae; those formulae seemed to him at first to be the means through which these artists, who shared a common purpose, might find the form through which to achieve their goals. Verkade's assessment of the common thread between Nabi and Lenizian theories takes him full circle and establishes the significance of his catalytic position among, and shared community with, both the French and German groups.

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A correspondence between Nabi theory and that of Desiderius Lenz, one of the founders of the Beuron school, has been generally acknowledged by scholars writing on the subject. However, much of their discussion emphasizes the impact of that correspondence on the post-Nabi work of Sérusier, rather than its initial effect as a stimulus for Verkade's future development. In her work on Sérusier, Boyle-Turner makes this assertion:

Lenz's ideas offered reinforcement for some of Sérusier's already well-established stylistic practices. His preoccupation with decorative forms throughout the early 1890s paralleled Lenz's demand for simplicity. Movement, so decried by Lenz, is rarely present in Sérusier's works. In addition, the lack of atmospheric perspective in the painter's works gave them an airless, static quality that was encouraged by Lenz. Lenz's canons, therefore, offered Sérusier an established system around which he could weave his already formulated ideas.¹³

Chassé notes that in 1905, Sérusier translated and published Desiderius' booklet on the Beuron school. And Jaworska claims that Lenz's ideas had a stronger effect on Sérusier than they did on Verkade.

It can be reasonably assumed that Desiderius' cherished ideas of modernizing religious art, partly by a return to Greek and Egyptian models,

¹³Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier*, 116.

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partly by purely geometrical calculations, had more effect on Sérusier, when he came to Beuron as a visitor, than on the newly-ordained painter-monk.¹⁴

It may very well be the case that the impact of Lenz's thinking had a longer-lasting effect on Sérusier. The results of their artistic affiliation continue to be in evidence in Sérusier's late work. Nevertheless, the fact remains that as early as 1893, when Verkade was first introduced to Lenz's principles, the former recognized that a relationship existed between the theories of Sérusier and Lenz. It was Verkade who enthusiastically introduced Lenz's ideas to Sérusier in 1896;¹⁵ he anticipated that Sérusier would have a positive response to them, given their similarity to Sérusier's already formulated ideas about painting. Interestingly, we might assume that, in what was becoming his characteristic fashion, Verkade acted as a catalyst for Sérusier's later formulations about artistic process.

Of significance for our purposes, however, is Verkade's recognition of a correspondence between the ideas of Sérusier and those of Lenz. That correspondence, endorsed by Sérusier, made possible Verkade's own absorption of the precepts of the *Beuronerkunstschule*. Tangentially, it also set in motion his contemplation of the possibility of a monastic life.

A marked difference in the physical appearance of Verkade's secular, or Nabi, work and his religious work, carried out according to Lenz's canon, is evident. To illustrate

¹⁴Jaworska, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*, 172.

¹⁵Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier*, 109.

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this difference, we need only to examine Verkade's 1894 *Madonna and Child* (Ill. 6). This anti-naturalistic painting most closely resembles Byzantine icons: its structure has been subjected to hieratic, geometric formulae; the overall image not only departs from the natural appearance of the figures and the space they inhabit, but limits the expression of emotion through its almost sterile codification of forms, which dehumanizes both the Christ Child and His mother. *Madonna and Child* is an image intended to stir religious devotion coupled with awe. It contains none of the human emotion of Verkade's Nabi paintings, such as the simple drawing of the *Head of a Breton Woman* (Ill. 2). How is it possible to reconcile Verkade's seemingly easy transition from one style to the other? Only the recognition, similar to Verkade's own, of the similarity in the theories of Sérusier and Lenz can account for the seamless transition in style that Verkade made. He gleaned in Lenz's approach to painting an even more conceptual formulation of Sérusier's already elaborate conception of painting technique. Always persuaded by theory, Verkade readily adopted Lenz's prescribed formulae with little hesitation.

In the present consideration, Verkade's stylistic approach to the secular and the religious becomes less distinct than had been previously imagined: the two genres can no longer be seen as opposites but rather as forming a unified path of development. What must be recognized, in support of this, is that there are fundamental similarities within the abstract theories of both Sérusier and Lenz. It was their common viewpoint that served as a bridge for Verkade's

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transition from the fluid, expressive, interpretative works of the Nabi period to the structured, rigid, religious frescoes of *Beuronerkunst*.¹⁶

In her catalogue for the Verkade exhibition, Boyle-Turner adds that

The system of artistic creation developed and practiced by Lenz and his followers incorporated some of the ideas Verkade had been exploring over the previous few years, but provided a firm framework for them within a Catholic context. ... If Verkade was still not enamored of the actual art, he was fascinated by the system.¹⁷

Like Sérusier, then, Verkade was attracted to theory and theorizing. His keen intellect, a trait he shared with Sérusier, was an important element, recognized early in their association, that enabled them to develop both a professional affiliation and a personal friendship. Through their relationship, Verkade explored the theory and ideology of the Theosophists, the mysticism of the occult and the tenets of Christianity. Verkade came to his religious conversion with wholehearted sincerity; in the principles of the *Beuronerkunstschnule*, he saw the logical extension of his earlier artistic goals. His later decision to enter monastic life provided a blending of art and life that Verkade saw as the ultimate expression of Symbolist ideology.

¹⁶Marguerita J. Grecco, *Jan Verkade: From Pont-Aven to Beuron*, unpublished master's thesis, Queens College, The City University of New York, 1975, 42-43.

¹⁷Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 28-29.

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In 1893, when Sérusier visited the younger man in Florence, he learned for the first time of Verkade's recent conversion; Sérusier's astonishment at this news prompted him to discuss the issue with Édouard Shuré, who had coincidentally passed through Italy at this time. The theosophical orientation of both Sérusier and Shuré led them to conclude that Verkade's conversion should be interpreted as his reward to himself for his having come through a struggle to find God. In a sense, their conviction that Theosophy held supremacy over more conventional belief systems, and Verkade's conversion, which presented a direct challenge to that idea, caused them to minimize his action and his seriousness of mind. When Sérusier explained his and Shuré's thinking to Verkade, the latter objected, explaining his baptism as the means of attaining "a mystical communion and spiritual unity with Christ and His Apostles."¹⁸ Sérusier's reply to Verkade's ideas, "C'est bien Nabique!" reveals Sérusier's recognition of the interrelationship between Verkade's spiritual and rational/artistic goals. Within a spiritual realm, Verkade's "mystical communion" with the Lord and His disciples paralleled the artistic union of the philosophically like-minded Nabis. Sérusier's statement underscored the connection between Nabi ideology and its structural roots in Christian communal societies, wherein collective endeavor was aimed at the achievement of a common goal. Sérusier acknowledged this correspondence, but only after Verkade's explanation implied it.

Artistically, Verkade's style had already begun to undergo a change toward a more naive approach to his chosen subjects, even before his arrival in Italy. This shift is due in some measure to his association with Filiger, whose influence is discernible in

¹⁸Verkade, *Le Tourment de Dieu*, French translation of *Die Unruhe zu Gott*, (Paris 1926), 211.

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several of Verkade's paintings of late in 1892. The most characteristic of these are Verkade's three versions of *St. Sebastian*, (Ills. 6, 7 & 8) in which he represents the saint as a rather lithe, androgynous form¹⁹ whose transcendent gaze and pose render him physically unaffected by the arrows that have pierced his body. The arrows themselves are depicted as little more than thin pencil lines, virtually incapable of destruction; consequently, they seem to be more the symbolic instruments of Sebastian's demise, and ultimate salvation, than actual weapons against the flesh. In keeping with the more transcendental quality of the figure, the color of these works is also far removed from that of Verkade's earlier Paris and Pont-Aven paintings. Unlike the deep, intensely rich palettes he used in works like *Decorative Landscape I* (Ill. 3) and *Farm at Le Pouldu* (Ill. 5), Verkade painted two of the *St. Sebastian* images in thinly-layered gouache, relying on muted tones, again to heighten the beatific and hence, spiritual connotation of the subject. Symbolic references, conveyed through the details of the compositions, reinforce the overall ephemeral effect of the work.

Although Filiger is generally acknowledged as the source of Verkade's inspiration for the *St. Sebastian* paintings, Verkade's general approach in conceiving them would have been given reinforcement through his contact, in Italy, with the painter, Spencer Stanhope. A Pre-Raphaelite, Stanhope was a devotee of Rossetti and had been one of a

¹⁹Verkade's characteristic representation of St. Sebastian is tinged with sexual overtones. The androgynous quality of the figure, in each of these paintings, coupled with the simplified rendering of the form makes this representation comparable not only to the work of Filiger but also to representations of the young male figure in the work of George Minne, and although far less flamboyant, even to representations of the male poet in the work of Aubrey Beardsley. All of these artists expressed a predisposition to homosexuality, which was revealed in their depiction of the male nude. Although the issue of Verkade's sexuality is not considered in the present investigation, it presents another avenue of inquiry into the life and work of this complex individual. (See also Chapter 1, 50, n.33.)

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group of painters responsible for decorating the walls of Oxford University's Union Society's debating room with a cycle of frescoes representing the *Morte d'Arthur*.²⁰ Verkade met Stanhope in Rome and was invited to his studio there. Not surprising given his adherence to Rossetti's ideals, Stanhope's work is characterized by this same transcendent quality with which Verkade had been experimenting in his own work. The two artists' likeness of mind is readily discernible by comparing Stanhope's painting, *Venus Rising from the Sea* (Ill. 10), with Verkade's *St. Sebastian* series, especially in terms of the androgynous quality of the figures and the fluid line with which they are drawn, and which renders them lithe and ephemeral and not of this world.

Stanhope, himself, would have been of interest to Verkade, because of his association to the Pre-Raphaelite "brotherhood." The Nabis had looked to the Pre-Raphaelites for a model on which to establish their own group; the idea of a community of artists working together toward a common goal was an ideal for Verkade, first, due to his initial association with the Nabis, and later intensified by his conversion and inclusion within an organized and devout, spiritual community. Furthermore, Stanhope had already experimented with the fresco technique, which Verkade was eager to attempt as well, owing to his enthusiastic investigation of the techniques of the Italian Primitives.

Another contact that Verkade made in Rome was with the German painter, von Rhoden.²¹ According to Verkade, von Rhoden, a religious convert, had been associated

²⁰William Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Dream* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 100-102. See also, Percy Bate, *The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters* (New York: Books for Libraries Press 1901, 1970).

²¹Verkade mentions von Rhoden in his chapter on Italy (*Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 176-216); however, no information about him is available beyond Verkade's description. It is conceivable that von Rhoden was a descendent of Johannes Martin von Rohden (1776-1868), a

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with the Nazarenes²² and through that association, had had contact with Desiderius Lenz and the *Beuronerkunstschule*. At the time he met Verkade, von Rhoden possessed photographs of the works of the artists of Beuron and showed these to Verkade, but the latter was unimpressed, feeling the works to lack "the Franciscan warmth of Giotto."²³ Verkade had the same reaction later when he finally saw the works of Beuron in the original but, by that time, Lenz's theories had provided the element necessary to convince Verkade of the overriding merit of Lenz's goals and their clear-cut correspondence to his own and Sérusier's ideas.

The significance of Verkade's association with Stanhope and von Rhoden lies in their affiliation with communities of artists working to achieve common goals. Both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Nazarenes conceived of their organizations as brotherhoods engaged in a collective artistic endeavor. Verkade's sense of loss, engendered by his distance from his Nabi colleagues, would have drawn him to men whom he believed shared his principles regarding the communal creation of art. Moreover, his correspondence with Percheron, mentioned earlier, together with Denis' decision to seek emotional solace at

member of the Nazarenes, who worked in Rome with Cornelius. The different spellings of the name can be attributed to a faulty English translation of Verkade's memoirs or to Verkade's own mistake in recording the name of his friend. (Verkade made a similar mistake with the spelling of Meier-Graefe's name, recording it as Meyer-Graef.)

²²The connection of Verkade's friend, von Rhoden with Johann Martin von Rohden would explain Verkade's assertion that his colleague was associated, albeit indirectly, with the Nazarenes. (See note #21 above.) Considering von Rhoden's enthusiasm for the ideas of Desiderius Lenz, we may also assume that von Rhoden was perhaps affiliated with an unofficial and later generation of the earlier Nazarenes; this younger group maintained the earlier group's principles as a directive for their art.

²³Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 207.

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the Mardesous Monastery,²⁴ probably had at least an unconscious effect on Verkade's gradually developing idea of committing to monasticism as a life choice.

It is also reasonable to suggest that the reaction of Verkade's family to the news of his conversion contributed to his sense of loss and increased his need to belong to what he hoped would be a group of like-minded individuals. Although his family never abandoned or disowned him, his parents were markedly disturbed by what they perceived to be a betrayal of trust on the part of their son, who had made the decision to convert in isolation, without consulting them, and had then kept his conversion secret from them until December of 1892.²⁵ While it is likely that all of these factors played a part in Verkade's brewing thoughts, his decision to enter the Beuron Monastery could only be realized after he became convinced that subscribing to Lenz's artistic system would enable him to achieve his already formulated artistic goals.

Apart from the initial introduction to the art of Beuron, provided by von Rhoden, Verkade learned of Lenz's school through one of the Franciscan monks among whom he was living in 1893. In keeping with the plan, of which he had informed his father, of spending his life painting religious works for cloisters, Verkade began at the Fiesole Monastery by painting a fresco of St. Francis (Ill. 11). The priest who assisted him with this task spoke often and enthusiastically about the art of Beuron and the methods employed in creating it. His comments included mention of the designs for Monte

²⁴Denis, *Journal*, v. 1 (1884-1904), 95.

²⁵Verkade wrote of having informed his twin brother about his conversion in a letter bearing that date. (*Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 208) Verkade did not, however, engage in any discussion of his action with members of his family until he returned home in November of 1894, at which time he was already considering joining the Beuron community.

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Cassino, which had been carried out under the direction of P. Lucas Steiner, a close associate of Lenz, whom Verkade learned was the leading force behind this system of organized artistic activity. At the Franciscan's urging, Verkade wrote to Lenz. This initial contact blossomed quickly into a continuous correspondence in which each man explained his theory and concepts of art. Thus, before ever experiencing the art of Beuron (he had only seen small photographs of some paintings), Verkade's mind was absorbed by and engaged in assimilating the principles of *Beuronerkunst*. If we presume that it was the theory of *Beuronerkunst* that ultimately captivated and captured Verkade, that premise becomes all the more readily verifiable from the correspondence which provides the evidence that Verkade was immersed in the theory before arriving in Beuron for a first-hand look.

Although the letters from 1893-4 seem to have been lost,²⁶ Lenz's letters to Verkade, dating from as early as 1896, contain ample commentary on artistic method and purpose, which we may assume to be similar to the thoughts he expressed from early on in their correspondence. Moreover, Verkade's recounting, in his memoirs, of his early contact with Lenz supports this assumption. He stated simply that after receiving

²⁶Access to Verkade's files and other archival matter, currently in possession of the Beuron Monastery, is rather limited. I was not allowed entrance into the Monastery's library or archive and had to rely on the willingness of one of the priests, coincidentally P. Willibrord, to retrieve material that I requested for review. It was clear to me that the monastic authorities were resistant to showing me everything in their possession. After several weeks of requesting to see pertinent documents and letters, beyond the literally hundreds of letters that Verkade received from converts throughout his life, I was quite unexpectedly handed a file that contained letters from Lenz to Verkade and that were crucial to my investigation. These letters date from 1896 to 1904, although due to the sporadic and irregular nature of the selection, they do not form a unified whole. Both Boyle-Turner and Smitmans have been to Beuron with similar requests for information; both acknowledge that neither was shown this file. The file is incomplete however; I am certain that there is more to be found. Perhaps these "lost" letters are among the missing papers.

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an initial reply from Lenz, "I now entered into a correspondence with Father Desiderius, and received much information from him about Beuron's principles of art and the technique of painting."²⁷

What were those principles and how clearly did they correspond to Verkade's own thinking about art to convince him sufficiently that he might consider submission to the ideals they postulated? Further, what aspects of Lenz's thinking made it possible for Verkade to ascertain that Lenz's canon represented a more formal and structured approach to the theories of Gauguin and Sérusier? Desiderius' letters do not describe the precise formulae of the canon, although by 1896, the date of the earliest letter, Verkade, by then a novice, was sufficiently well-versed in the principles of measurement and geometry, which were essential to its structure. What we do find among Lenz's comments, in the 1896 letter, is praise for the noble and lofty goals of the artists whose works were representative of the ages of faith: the painters of the Middle Ages, the Early Christian and Byzantine periods, and, above all, the architects of Ancient Egyptian civilization. He noted, too, the spirituality of these painters and the need for his own contemporaries to exhibit similar commitment and devotion to God. Lenz's admiration for works that reveal "truth" in universal terms is also clearly expressed:

The old masters of the early Middle Ages are "tender" and ideal. We cannot be without feeling when we see the simplicity and religiosity of these painters. ... Everything is possible but the artist must have the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God waits only for the artist to give Him room. ... You must go to Antwerp and

²⁷Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 235.

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London where you will see more of Early Christian and Byzantine art. But you must not miss the Egyptian works; you will see that they are very original and you will understand that this art demonstrates the universality of truth.²⁸

By 1898, Lenz wrote to Verkade complaining that the artists, with whom he was working at Monte Cassino, did not appreciate his theory, specifically his insistence on numbers and measurement.

They cannot understand the importance of measurement and its relationship to expression. Measurement is important because, as with ancient art, measurement is what makes it classical. Eventually people will understand this, but it will take some time.²⁹

Several months later, Lenz reminded Verkade, "when you express your spirituality, you cannot do so without a stylistic basis in geometry that provides for a clear style."³⁰

Although much of the text of these letters is taken up with details of Lenz's various projects, he continually expressed his belief that art must aim beyond the mundane. A letter from early in 1900 contains a lengthy discourse on the role of nature in art and what Lenz perceived to be the artist's primary goal:

²⁸Unpublished letter from Desiderius Lenz to Verkade, dated Sept. 15, 1896.

²⁹Unpublished letter from Desiderius Lenz to Verkade, dated Oct. 29, 1898.

³⁰Unpublished letter from Desiderius Lenz to Verkade, dated Feb. 23, 1899.

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It is true that God has created nature but to paint nature without seeking a higher truth does not pay homage to God. Nature comes first but pure art must supersede it. In earlier times, pictures represented the realm of God. A painter cannot be occupied only with nature but must be filled with the spirit of the Holy Ghost and aim for something higher. Individuality must not be present. Form plays a great role as does harmony. When you enjoy beauty, you must enquire after the plan. You must paint the secrets. A painter must be above daily, temporal things.³¹

Verkade had, of course, heard similar ideas before. Early on in his relationship with Sérusier, the younger man had begun to entertain just such a philosophy regarding the purpose of art and the ideal goal of the artist. There are three major ideas that came to be shared by Sérusier, Verkade and Lenz: first, that there must be, in art, an expression of an idea, a universal truth that rises above mundane reality and evinces the existence of a higher, spiritual realm; second, that the formal properties best suited to the expression and communication of that idea must necessarily arrive at a synthesis of form and idea; and third, that such a lofty purpose could only be attained if the works were produced through the communal efforts of artists sincere in their personal spirituality. Sérusier, Verkade and Lenz all found their most appropriate models in the art of periods that predated the rise of naturalism and its logical derivative, Impressionism, with its subsequent persistent attention in artistic style to portraying the appearance of the natural world. Anti-naturalist ideas were already in evidence in

³¹Unpublished letter from Desiderius Lenz to Verkade, dated 1900.

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Sérusier's work and theory years earlier, when Verkade arrived in Paris in February of 1891.

At that time, Sérusier was becoming involved with Symbolist theater, through his association with the Symbolist writers, whose thinking led them towards this collaboration. In his work for the Symbolist theater, Sérusier revealed his adherence to the first and last of the premises described above. According to Boyle-Turner,

Sérusier looked upon his activities in the Symbolist theater as a fulfillment of the notion of artistic collaboration. He had always felt that the Nabis should work together in their aesthetic pursuits, sharing ideas and painting on the same canvases, as had the medieval craft workers. In the theater, Sérusier found an atmosphere of joint pursuit of one artistic goal; the goal being the expression of the Idea suggested by the Symbolist text.³²

Boyle-Turner's discussion of the models to which Sérusier looked establishes his adherence to the second element described above. She writes: "In the art of other people and movements, Sérusier sought forms that would be expressive in themselves, as defined by Denis in his "Définition du Néo-Traditionnisme," and not merely slick imitations of natural beauty." ³³

We have already examined the impact of the ideas not only of Sérusier but also of Denis and Aurier on Verkade's thinking during his early French period. An examination

³²Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier*, 58.

³³*Ibid.*, 63-64.

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of the philosophies of both Sérusier and Lenz reveals more than their similarity of attitude. What is equally important in understanding their joint effect on Verkade is that each of them was fully immersed in the mature formulation of their ideas at precisely the time that Verkade became acquainted with them. Lenz's primary insistence on creating art that honored the Christian God, was an element in his theory that Sérusier, given his theosophical leanings, did not define with equal specificity. Nevertheless, he did admire the Breton people for just such devotion because he believed that through that devotion, they "embodied the mystery suggested by Aurier."³⁴ Furthermore, Sérusier not only sought out the Breton people and countryside precisely for the spiritual characteristics they evinced, but he brought Verkade to Brittany to have him experience the spiritual context of the place and its inhabitants. In this atmosphere, Sérusier had hoped to offer Verkade an experiential understanding of his belief that "Art is a communication between souls," and to bring out in his "pupil" -- once ensconced in this other-worldly environment, a more fully developed realization of the latter's painterly talents.

The path that Verkade ultimately chose, through his association with the Bretons, was one that Sérusier could not have envisioned at the time. His reaction upon learning of Verkade's conversion is sufficient to attest to his lack of foresight in this matter, and to suggest that, despite the closeness of their relationship, Sérusier had not yet come to

³⁴Ibid., 64. In Brittany, Sérusier found people he felt were "primitive" and honest in their religious beliefs; he believed that their indigenous art reflected a naive but sincere expression untainted by post-Renaissance definitions of beauty and photographic reality. He shared Aurier's belief that it was in the "paradisiques heures de la primitive humanité" that he could find "les charmes ineffables du Rêve et du Mystère."

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measure adequately Verkade's zealous commitment to Sérusier's idealistic proselytizing. For the artists with whom he later worked, Verkade's conversion proved to be a pivotal element in establishing Verkade's authority as an intermediary between ideas that stretched from Gauguin and the Nabis to Kandinsky and the *Blaue Reiter*. It was the one remaining necessary factor that made possible Verkade's acceptance of Lenz's theories, which, in turn, propelled his search for a means suitable to the expression of his personal fervor. Within the walls of Beuron and the fabric of Lenz's canon, Verkade's commitment to the expression of the spiritual in art became clearly focused. Without his personal devotion to God, which required an act of submission on his part, Verkade would have been far less likely or able to submit to the rigor of the school of Beuron, or to the will of its master, or to the strict discipline and loss of personal freedom required by a commitment to monasticism.

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Verkade in Germany: Euphoria to Disenchantment

What are the means that correspond to my expression?

Jan Verkade¹

Verkade settled permanently in Germany in 1894,² two years before Kandinsky would arrive there from Russia. Interestingly, he chose to accept monastic seclusion following a fruitful period of artistic activity. Early in February of 1894, due to the efforts of his friend, Mogens Ballin, Verkade's paintings and drawings were exhibited in the *Bredgade*, in Copenhagen. The well-attended exhibition -- both the Danish writer, Johan Rohde and Gauguin's wife, Mette were in attendance,³ was both a critical and a popular success. Verkade recounts that most of the works were sold and that the larger newspapers devoted long articles to the "Dutch painter, Verkade." He provides a plausible insight into the reason for his success, the rise of Symbolist thought pervading all of Europe:

¹"*Quels sont les moyens qui correspondent à mon expression?*" Unpublished letter to Maurice Denis, dated March, 1906.

²Verkade entered the Beuron monastery as a visitor in April of that year and was accepted into the novitiate in June.

³According to a report in the February 1894 issue of *Taarnet* (239). Cited by Caroline Boyle-Turner in *Jan Verkade*, 30, n. 2.

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I had come to Copenhagen at just the right time. In Denmark, symbolism, synthetism and traditionalism, of which we were the ardent apostles, had just found a foothold, and my modest beginnings possessed at that time all the attractive power of the new.⁴

Implicit in this comment is an indication of the scope of the pan-European wave of Symbolism that spread through the continental vanguard in the last decade of the twentieth century. Why would Verkade choose monasticism, with its inherent anonymity, at the precise moment that he began to achieve personal, critical acclaim? Verkade's activities, both within the Symbolist vanguard and the Beuron community are rooted in his deep commitment to Symbolist ideals. He believed that, even at Beuron, he would be able to continue his work as an artist, despite the normal restrictions imposed by a monastic life, not only because he had chosen to enter an *artistic*, religious community,⁵ but because, in doing so, he saw himself accomplishing a true interweaving of Symbolist ideals by joining his commitment to art to his dedication to God. Since he wished to amplify and strengthen this blending of spheres, Verkade probably never envisioned himself withdrawing from the current activity of the secular painters whom he counted among his friends. Thus, he was able to enter an environment of solitude after having exhibited his work in the secular art world and after having achieved a modicum of success in the commercial art community. We may suggest that he imagined himself continuing to participate in the activities of the secular community; indeed, if his future activities can provide any indication of his foresight, what he imagined, he

⁴Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 281.

⁵See Chapter 2, 59, n. 2.

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brought to fruition. Thus, all of his post-monastic secular activity and moreover, his eagerness to contribute to and partake of secular endeavor, can be seen as a continual process of his attempt to conjoin the secular and the religious, albeit with spiritual overtones. He virtually never lost contact with the secular worlds of art or literature and the contact he maintained served as a significant factor in his overall contribution to the art of this period. Verkade's continued, post-monastic immersion in the cultural thought and events of his time enabled him both to reassert his Symbolist origins, during his own moment of artistic crisis, and to offer inspiration to many younger painters, whose mature artistic visions were in their formative stages when he first became acquainted them.

At his 1894 Copenhagen exhibition, Verkade met the Danish poet, Johannes Jørgensen, who was then also exploring Symbolism as a means of expression. The two men would develop a lifelong friendship.⁶ At the time of their meeting, Jørgensen, who was publishing the review *Taarnet*, provided Verkade with yet another opportunity for exposure within the secular art community; he asked Verkade to make some illustrations for the February, 1894 issue of *Taarnet*. Several drawings by Verkade appear in this issue and present a representative sample of his recent work. Included were an 1892 drawing of *Marianne and her Cow* (Ill. 12) that Verkade had completed in Brittany, and another of a *Monk Asleep* (Ill. 13), also of 1892, that seems likely to have been done in Italy. Both works present a simplified composition and drawing style, and a peaceful, redolent calm associated with Nabi spirituality.

⁶In later years, the poet would seek Verkade's spiritual guidance, when, at a time of deep trouble in his life, Jørgensen ultimately made his own conversion to Catholicism. To say that Verkade was instrumental in Jørgensen's decision would not constitute overstatement.

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Like many cultural journals of the period, *Taarneret* embraced many subjects. The February issue included an article on the Breton mystic, Ernest Hello, which was introduced by a Verkade illustration of St. Sebastian (Ill. 14). This drawing is probably a loose interpretation by Verkade of one of his 1892 versions of *St. Sebastian* (Ill. 6), a gouache which he was carrying with him and which he later gave to Ballin. According to Verkade, "He (Jørgensen) asked me to make some illustrations for his review *Taarneret*. ... and so the February number contained some drawings by my hand"⁷ By 1894, Verkade was familiar with Hello's ideas, both through his own reading and through discussions with Sérusier and Denis; so it is reasonable to suggest that he would have offered his work as an accompaniment for this article, although, since the drawing is unsigned, absolute attribution cannot be made.⁸

Thus, despite the secular nature of their contexts, Verkade's activities just prior to his entrance into the Beuron community were no doubt tinged with spirituality as well as with his already growing commitment to Lenzian principles.

The importance of monumentality is the key to understanding Lenz's ideas. He wished to create a new form of sacred art in which a perfect harmony and monumentality would reside. Lenz proposed that artistic style be based on number and measure. He established his "canon of sacred proportions," a set of geometric proportions derived from his measurement of ancient monuments and his symbolic interpretation of the numbers and measurements he discovered in the Scriptures, as a result of his study of the art of the ancients, particularly the Egyptians, whom he believed understood

⁷Verkade, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, 282.

⁸Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 38, n. 5.

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mathematics symbolically. He prized the architectural underpinning of Egyptian monuments and paintings for the deep, spiritual sense with which they were imbued. Coupled with particular symbols that were germane to Christianity, such as that of the Trinity, Lenz's "canon" established a rigid and rigorous method for the production of art, which divested it of all human emotion and left no room for freedom of expression to the artists entrusted to his training.⁹

Verkade's approach to the subject of St. Sebastian, in the Taarnet illustration, while retaining ample references to the influence of Filiger, already reveals a basic understanding and limited application of Lenzian formulae.¹⁰ Such application is particularly evident in the circular shape of the figure's head, the angularity of the back and right leg, and the stylized and elaborately detailed halo; this last detail represents the most significant departure from Verkade's reliance on nature toward his growing reliance upon symbolic referents in his work.

Thus, the artistic period from 1894 to 1906 is perhaps most clearly defined by Verkade's shift in allegiance between the Symbolist ideology of his youthful and formative artistic investigations and the subsequent assimilation of *Beuronerkunst* principles. But by 1906, Verkade would turn away from his absorption and application of Lenz's "sacred canon." The path that caused him first to challenge and ultimately to dismiss the canon was one that was marked by religious, monastic commissions, which at

⁹For a more detailed and analytical discussion of Lenz's theories, see Chassé, *op.cit.*... 83-89. Also see, Grecco, *op.cit.*, 11-12.

¹⁰Boyle-Turner acknowledges this character of the St. Sebastian paintings. *Ibid.*, 31.

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first marked his total dedication to Lenz, and then marked a reversal of those steps. Verkade's approach to these commissions was often colored by his discourses with other artists, both secular and monastic, whose thinking he respected. His correspondence reveals his rigorous and thorough immersion in the world outside the monastery, both before and during his tenure there. His memoirs alone provide evidence of regular communication with many of his former colleagues, and sufficient bodies of unpublished correspondence survive to attest to what the memoirs do not tell us.

The decoration of the church of St. Gabriel's Abbey, a Benedictine cloister in Prague, was among his earliest commissions. Verkade was sent there to assist with this project, from August of 1895 until the spring of 1897. At this early stage, merely a year after his first-hand introduction to Lenzian precepts, Verkade's acceptance of the "canon" was relatively unconditional. It is important to note, however, that the goals fulfilled by his participation in this project bear a strong likeness to those espoused by the Nabis. He wrote that his participation in an almost guild-like communal task caused him to think often of his days among his French colleagues:

During these days in Prague, my thoughts traveled often back to my artist friends in Paris, now that I was once again associated with a group of collaborators in the production of a work whose perfection was the care of all.¹¹

¹¹Jan Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty* (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1935), 22.

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His words reveal the Symbolist character through which he perceived Beuron; the monastery became for Verkade the actualization of a major Nabi ideal -- collaborative and anonymous undertakings, and the *Beuronerkunstschule* provided the system, with its particular emphasis on measurement, through which the creation of monumental works was made possible.

The impetus stirred by the communal efforts of the monks at Prague compelled Verkade to write to Sérusier. In several letters, one of which is reprinted in Sérusier's *ABC de la Peinture*, Verkade explained the importance of measurement for the achievement of a monumental form and expression. He acknowledged that it was precisely such measurement that was lacking in the Nabi program, and seemed, in fact, to be offering Sérusier a solution for what both of them perceived to be a still unresolved problem for the Nabis:

Surely, we have followed good roads, seeking the "idea" expressed by decorative forms, explained by simple colors; but we have forgotten a fundamental thing, and that is measure, forgetting that God made everything in the Holy Spirit according to measure, number, and mass.¹²

¹²"Décidément nous avons suivi de bonnes voies, cherchant l'idée exprimée par les formes décoratives, expliquée par les couleurs simples; mais nous avons oublié une chose fondamentale, c'est la mesure, oubliant que Dieu a tout fait dans l'Esprit-Saint selon mesure, nombres et poids." Letter from Verkade to Sérusier, 1896, published in Sérusier, *ABC de la Peinture*, 77.

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Thus, in Verkade's view, measurement became the method of God's own creative pulse, and would, therefore, necessarily produce the most appropriate forms for the construction of a monumental expression. Although we can be certain that this idea was transmitted by Lenz, and we can hear Lenz speaking again through Verkade when the latter described for Sérusier the effects of Egyptian art, it is clear from Verkade's tone that what he wished to share with Sérusier was a reassessment of and new direction for their former ideas.

We haven't understood that the great impression that Egyptian works made upon us was possible because that were constructed with the archetypical measurements of regular forms: the circle, the triangle, the square, etc. Egyptian art is a man coming forth from the hand of God, harmonious, full of knowledge and of reason.¹³

Thus, although he was formally converted to the ideas of *Beuronerkunst*, Verkade's enthusiasm for them, at this early stage, emanated from his earnest belief that he had found the means that the Nabis had all been seeking several years earlier. Sérusier's response to what Verkade imparted in this letter was equally enthusiastic, apparently for the same reasons. Having become disenchanted with the growing tendency among many of the Nabis to assert their individuality, which Sérusier called "personalité," he

¹³"Nous n'avons pas compris que la grande impression que nous font les oeuvres égyptiennes vient parce qu'elles sont construites avec les mesures architypiques des corps réguliers: cercle, triangle quadrat, etc. ... l'Art égyptien [est] un homme sorti de la main de Dieu, harmonieux, plein de sagesse et de raison." *Ibid.*, 77.

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saw Verkade's new-found system as a source of new life for ideas with which he had been struggling for several years.

Your letter was truly providential. It brought me great consolation.... There are times when I think of these proportions as flowing from simple numbers. One man, by himself, cannot reconstruct all that; it requires many to do it, in informal communities. That would have been the goal of those whom I proudly called the Nabis. But the rediscovery of "individuality," an invention of journalists, has dispersed all of that beautiful force¹⁴

Sérusier's desire to construct "scientific systems of composition and color,"¹⁵ which he had been unable to achieve, led him to visit Verkade in Prague in 1896; once there, he gained a first-hand orientation to the theories and system of Desiderius Lenz. In addition, Sérusier's visit to Verkade, brought him into direct contact with Lenz, and resulted in Sérusier's eventual translation of Lenz's theories into French. Furthermore, the contact between Lenz and Sérusier, brought about through Verkade's intercession, is representative of a long series of contacts that Verkade initiated and arranged, during his life, between his French and German colleagues.

¹⁴"Ta lettre fut véritablement providentielle. Elle m'a apporté une grande consolation.... Il y a des années que je pense à ces proportions d'après les nombres simples. Un homme ne peut pas, à lui seul, reconstruire tout cela; il en faut plusieurs pour le faire, par tentatives communes. Cela aurait été la devoir de ceux que je nommais fièrement les Nabis. Mais la recherche de la personnalité, une invention de journaliste, a dispersé toute cette belle force." Letter from Sérusier to Verkade, 1895, published in Sérusier, *ABC de la Peinture*, 69.

¹⁵Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier*, 110.

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What is perhaps most significant about the contact between Sérusier and Lenz is that it provided Verkade with added stimuli for wholeheartedly embracing Lenz's ideas. The latter's stance opposing naturalism and his insistence upon the strict application of regular mathematical proportions were ideas that Sérusier easily accepted; they systematized the ideas that he and Denis had discussed years earlier and that Denis had put down in his famous "Définition du Néo-Traditionnisme" first published in 1890.¹⁶ Lenz's reliance on the ratio of 1:3 as a basic organizing principle of all compositions and figures cohered perfectly with Sérusier's and Verkade's understanding and application of similar concepts found in the Theosophical writings of Blavatsky, Balzac's *Louis Lambert*, and Shuré's *Les Grandes Initiés*. Furthermore, the practical application of Lenz's formulae necessarily resulted in a highly abstracted form; despite the specifically Christian subject matter of the works, this result appealed particularly to Verkade and Sérusier, since the abstraction of forms corresponded to the Symbolist departure from naturalism.

Verkade remained in Prague until March of 1897; upon his return to Beuron, he was admitted to the novitiate, which occupied the major portion of his time for the next three years. Little, if any, time at all was spent on painting specific works, although he spent considerable time learning the formulae of Lenz's "canon." The pages of his sketchbooks, made during these years, are filled with decorative schemes based on Egyptian motifs, such as the lotus, and highly stylized, geometric patterns. Drawings of the figure are carried out according to the formulae of the "canon" and little evidence of nature can be

¹⁶Maurice Denis, "Définition du Néo-Traditionnisme," *Art et Critique* 2 [August, 1890]. Republished in Maurice Denis, *Du Symbolisme au Classique, Théories* (Paris, 1964), 33-46.

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found. By 1900, Verkade was contributing to the completion of several collective projects: the decoration of the exterior of the Beuron church, carried out according to Lenz's design and that of the *Gnadenkapelle*, a recently-built annex to the church, following the design of P. Paul Krebs.¹⁷ Although Verkade claims that the latter project allowed the artists "considerable room for independent work,"¹⁸ the individual styles of the monks participating in this project are not discernible and Verkade's hand is lost within the general form and structure of the whole.

Despite his early enthusiasm for the theories supporting the "canon," and his willingness to give himself over to its principles, the lack of warmth of the works following Lenz's formulae began to affect Verkade's emotional response to them. Slowly, Verkade's own style began again to emerge and reawakened his desire to return to nature as a model. By 1904, Verkade was in Monte Cassino, directing the work of his colleagues on the crypt; while there, he received a visit from his Nabi friends, Denis and Sérusier, whose presence must have intensified his growing desire to disengage himself from Lenzian precepts. Although Sérusier was sufficiently committed to Lenz's theories to have completed a translation of them into French and even Denis found a certain grace in Lenz's ideas; nevertheless, Denis, remained ultimately resistant to the "systematization" of art, which he perceived to be the result of the method and the work produced through

¹⁷P. Paul Krebs (1849-1936) was a painter and a member of the Beuron monastic community, which he entered in 1890. Among the many frescoes he carried out within the confines of the monastery and the Benedictine community, is the decoration of the *Gnadenkapelle*, on which he worked with Verkade. His designs were highly regarded by P. Lenz. For more information, see P. Suso Mayer, *Beuroner Bibliographie*, cited in the previous chapter.

¹⁸Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 57.

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adherence to Lenz's canon.¹⁹ Mutual respect and admiration existed between Denis and Verkade; Denis, who carried on a steady correspondence with Verkade for his entire life, encouraged Verkade to follow his own path in the development of his life and work.

Later that year, Verkade wrote openly to his abbot about the negative effects of Lenz's prescriptions on himself and his fellow artist-monks. A lengthy letter, dated September, 1904, contains many clear remarks and pronouncements that allow us not only insight into Verkade's growing dissatisfaction with his current artistic state but provide us with a summary assessment of the evolution of his thoughts about his own career.

When I was just finishing the last figure in our *Gnadenkapelle* a year ago, I looked at the whole with a certain satisfaction and I offered to God, with a thankful heart, all of the suffering but also all of the joy and the bliss that this work had given me. I thought "there is something wonderful about art ... the dumb, empty walls now speak to and enlighten you." But, at the same time, I had the feeling of ending a small period of my career as an artist. It's true, I thought, this is a uniform, respectable piece of work, which is admirable, especially in our time, but in the future I want to do something different, something more lifelike, more I don't know what. I said to myself, "No,

¹⁹According to Boyle-Turner, "Denis had already admitted ... that Lenz's theories held some truth. 'Je ne suis plus effrayé par l'idée d'un canon comme j'étais avant d'aller près de vous; je commence à croire qu'il y a des limites à l'interprétation originale, à la déformation du dessin et qu'il faut sacrifier souvent dans la peinture décorative le caractère individuel à la Beauté.' (Unpublished letter from Denis to Verkade, dated 1903). Despite these sentiments, Boyle-Turner also notes that "When Denis decided to paint a portrait of Verkade, Lenz, and Verkade's good friend, F. Adalbert, however, he preferred to record not the style of the Beuron monks, but their warm community spirit." Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 50. In other words, Denis did what he always encouraged Verkade to do, namely, to be true to himself and not to rely too heavily on theory.

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Willibrord, you have learned a lot; you have laid a good foundation. First, you built only on feeling; individuality was all to you. You were a slave of the happy moment. You didn't know anything about objective beauty; the secrets of measuring were unknown to you; laws of the beautiful hardly existed for you. And now you are allowed to go to Italy. There the old love of the Byzantine and of Giotto and his school will come alive in you again and Ghirlandaio, Perugino, Mantegna, Raphael and Titian will delight you again. Only a few glances at them and you will know what is missing in you and in your work." And I went to Italy and I saw the old friends again (the works of the Italian Primitives), many with joy and some with disappointment and I made new friends. I came to Cassino and I got work. I started with enormous zeal but that zeal was soon killed by the very will and by the different taste of Desiderius. Terrible days followed where I was full of wanting, demanding, striving but where the duty to work just as I was told always oppressed me.... I started work and I hammered at the work but often my heart was hammering, my heart which was so full of so many new impressions and it was impossible for me to give them form.... But like a sweet fruit hanging from a thorny bush, I found what I was longing for unconsciously. Love of nature had risen again in my true Dutch heart, stimulated by the beautiful little heads of the dear boys and by the wonderful, solemn, truly classical beauty of the landscape around Monte Cassino.... I drew my dear people in the evening.... Some good little works have come about; they have something of what I want and of what I didn't reach in the chapel.²⁰

Verkade's own words provide the clearest explication of his gradual turning away from Lenzian precepts. What's more his overview of events, put forth in this letter, provides evidence that his subsequent direction was one that was preceded by careful thought and a thorough examination of the choices he had made and their effects on his

²⁰Unpublished letter to the Archabbot, dated September, 1904.

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career.²¹ His plea to the abbot, which follows this exegesis, seems likely to have set in motion the series of excursions, away from Lenz that the next several years would bring. In the same letter, he continued:

My dear reverend Father, I would like to stay in Italy for a while. I would like to be alone for a while and to make one or two paintings without being influenced by anyone, paintings that I have been thinking about for a long time and in a place where I would, at the same time, have the opportunity to study the works of the masters, which you look at with quite a different eye when you have had the experience yourself and when you see what you can't do and what you have to study. I'd like to put down in a work everything that I have learned, felt, and thought by now and which, at the same time provides the best occasion for learning a lot by studying nature and by looking at the great masters. If I were to succeed in doing something good, we could exhibit it, for example, in Holland and this would give pleasure to my dear father, who has had so little joy from me, and I think I could sell it easily and then the cost of the journey would be paid for. But this last remark, I mean the exhibition, is not important. Whenever I have worked alone and quietly for some time in my life, I have made progress. I say "for some time" only because closing yourself off wouldn't only be un-monastic but also the death of the artist's gifts. The Rev. V. once told me, "Be true to yourself but keep what you get from the

²¹As noted above, Verkade's assessment of his career, set in motion by his evaluation of his own work for the *Gnadenkapelle*, was likely to have been reinforced by the visit of Sérusier and Denis and by his continual contact with members of the Nabis. That same spring, Verkade was also visited by Émile Bernard, with whom he took a short trip to Naples and Pompeii. By late summer, Verkade was ill, suffering from heat prostration, and was sent to the Abbey of Monte Vergine to recuperate. It was from that retreat that the letter in question was written, the recuperative period obviously allowing him ample time and the occasion for reflection and introspection. (For a reference to Verkade's illness and general state of being, see Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 107-109 passim.)

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Lord." And this is what I want to do now; I want to be more myself without losing the excellent principles of the *Beuronerkunstschule* from my eye.²²

This last remark makes clear that Verkade's definition of "what he has gotten from the Lord" was the very essence of *Beuronerkunst*. Although, with this letter, he presented a challenge to the rigor and inflexibility of its founder, Verkade's interest in and appreciation for the goals of *Beuronerkunst* remained firm. To reinforce his acknowledgment of the merits of the school, Verkade closed his plea to the abbot with a thought about the direction that the school would have to take if it were to retain its esteemed position within the world of Catholic art:

The Beuron art school cannot have any future without new personalities; indeed, it couldn't have come about without these. If we don't add anything new, the school will die because we don't have much of what the first ones had by way of their gifts and education. The new and different must be nothing less than the special thing each one among us has received from God, but such things don't develop alone, they must have the opportunity to prosper.²³

If the Abbot was not quick to grant Verkade's request, he would eventually come to hear the turmoil in the artist's plea. Although Verkade was made to return to Monte Cassino for another year, by the following summer his "health threatened to break down

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

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again"²⁴ and this caused him to be sent back to Beuron. Upon his arrival there in August of 1905, he was apprised of an invitation extended to the Beuron School by the Vienna Secession to participate in an exhibition of religious art being organized by the Secessionists. Verkade was sent to Vienna to assess the proposed merits of the exhibition and to determine whether or not the Beuron community should accept the invitation. This was to be the first of several successive excursions that Verkade would be allowed to take, each of which would provide him with greater and greater degrees of the solace and freedom of expression he so desired.

The decision to join the Secession exhibition was reinforced by the participation of the Munich *Gesellschaft für christlicher Kunst*, which cast aside any doubts the Beuron group may have had about the sanctity of the exhibition. Verkade's contribution to the show required that he complete a new work to serve as one of several panels forming the backdrop for the Beuron group's entries.

Our plan was to have a monumental representation of the Sacrament of Baptism as a setting for the samples of Beuron art we were to bring. This was to be painted by the artists of the Secession group in seven subjects.... But as none of the artists felt willing to undertake the second subject (Original Sin), I was commissioned to do it...²⁵

²⁴Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 112

²⁵*ibid.*, 117.

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The matter-of-fact manner in which Verkade made this pronouncement lends credibility to the thought that he needed little coaxing to take on this task for it presented him with an opportunity to work with the Secession members, in Vienna, without the influence of Lenz or of any other monastic superior. Perhaps he felt that this piece could be one of the works he longed to paint that would contain everything he had "learned, felt and thought by now." This, however, was not to be the case. Both the pencil sketch and the charcoal cartoon for the final panel were carried out at Beuron and Verkade complained of "keenly feeling the lack of female models"²⁶ from which to compose his image.

The panel Verkade painted to represent *Original Sin* depicts the figures of Eve and Mary as counterpoints of each other. Although the painting has been lost,²⁷ the sketch (Ill. 15) and the charcoal drawing (Ill. 16) are instructive with regard to what they reveal about Verkade's spontaneous approach to his subject and the subsequent influence of *Beuronerkunst*. The basic composition of all three versions places Mary on the left-hand side with her hands folded in prayer. Eve kneels on the right-hand side and her gesture is one of contrition; her right hand cradles her bent head, which leans into the composition and toward Mary, and her left hand is pressed against her breast as though she were declaring "mea culpa."

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷The painting of *Original Sin (Eva and Maria)* was purchased by the Wittgenstein Palace in Vienna, shortly after the close of the exhibition, as Verkade notes in his memoirs. (See Ibid., 119.) Recent inquiry into the current whereabouts of the collection of the Wittgenstein Palace, however, have not turned up any clues about the current location of Verkade's painting. A photograph, taken of the entire scheme *in situ*, affords the viewer only a glimpse of the final composition due to the small size of the print and the distance from which it was taken. It is reproduced in the catalogue for the exhibition *München Leuchtete* on page 264. The ownership of the photograph is not noted.

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In terms of style, however, the pencil sketch and the charcoal study differ significantly. The pencil sketch is extremely loose, fluid and expressive, and makes little distinction between the biblical role in which each figure is cast. Both figures are in motion, with each moving toward the other. They are situated in a landscape that is not unlike Verkade's landscape paintings of Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu. A series of low hills traces an incline that extends upward and into the picture plane, while along the right edge of the frame, Verkade has drawn a tree trunk, the foliage of which reaches leftward and across the upper register of the middle ground behind the figures and encompassing them. Mary and Eve, respectively, stand and kneel in the tall grass that covers the foreground. The drapery that covers both of the figures sways freely with the implied motion of their bodies; the rough outline of Mary's legs, seen clearly beneath her gown, reveals the contrapposto stance in which Verkade has posed her. Most importantly, the figure of Mary moves toward that of Eve and her head is inclined toward her, while her eyes gaze at her, thereby establishing a human connection between these two biblical mothers, one heavenly, the other earthly. The "halo" surrounding Mary's head is more of a radiating light that indicates her heavenly realm rather than a symbol of her status as Eve's superior. The spirituality of this work arises out of its human expression which is rooted in nature and human interaction rather than having been contrived through the imposition of traditional symbols applied through formal means.

When the work is processed through the formulae of *Beuronerkunst* as is exemplified by the charcoal study for the painting, the effect is more contrived. Both figures have become highly stylized and columnar; the form of Mary, in particular, resembles that of a caryatid, except for the slight forward incline of the head. Her eyes are downcast and almost closed as she concentrates on her prayer; she no longer looks at Eve but exists

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quite apart from her now more obviously sinful counterpart. The gestures of both figures are more composed than in the sketch and far less fluid. Eve more certainly seeks forgiveness for her sin. In this version, the somewhat ravaged figure of Eve seems modeled on Donatello's characterization of *Magdalene*²⁸(Ill. 17), as she is portrayed in his 1454 wood and polychromed figure now situated in the Baptistry in Florence, which Verkade is likely to have seen there. Eve's garment and long, wavy hair create one continuous texture covering her form, and emphasizing the ravages caused by a sinful life. Like the Magdalene, whose moral reform was responsible for her subsequent sanctity, and who, consequently, is usually portrayed with a halo, Verkade's Eve is also graced by a halo. Perhaps Verkade is suggesting that in the presence of Mary, Eve would be shamed by her original sin and moved to similar retribution as Magdalene was in the presence of Christ. The major difference between Donatello's Magdalene and Verkade's Eve is that the excruciating expression of the figure in Donatello's hands is completely tamed by the precepts of *Beuronerkunst*. Verkade's figure is remarkably calm; even her gesture of fault is minimized by its apparent symbolic content, which here lacks any discernible relationship to the emotional turmoil that has generated it.

In the charcoal sketch, the natural landscape setting of the drawing has been replaced by a solitary tree that now stands between the figures, separating them and obliterating any view of background space, which becomes flat if only due to its darkness. The tree trunk plays host to a symbolic serpent whose body is wrapped around its trunk; its head,

²⁸It is also interesting to note that Eve and Mary are representative of respectively the Old and New Testaments. In keeping with his high regard for the principles in Shuré's treatise, Verkade was likely aware that his characterization of these figures in the sketch created a seamless image of womanhood.

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with gaping mouth, is pointed at the feet of Mary. The stylized leaves and branches of the tree hold equally symbolic apples. Rather than the conciliatory gesture that Mary's prayer suggests in the sketch, in the charcoal version, Mary seems to be praying for Eve, for her ultimate reformation and salvation. The difference in the halos that adorn the two figures further separates them; Mary's halo is an elaborate, multi-layered disk embossed with a pattern that represents an inverted stylization of a lotus, a common decorative form in Lenz's schema, while that of Eve is flat and unadorned. Clearly, they occupy separate ranks within the spiritual realm and make no human contact with each other. The symbolic content of the charcoal study is quite traditional; Mary and Eve have been represented as moral antitheses of each other. In this version, it is Eve's lower torso, including the groin and belly, that is visible beneath a garment that has been shortened from that in the sketch to reveal the lower legs. Her arms and head are uncovered indicating a shamelessness that is unapparent in the sketch. Eve is clearly the sinner; Mary, covered from head to toe and in complete repose, is the embodiment of purity and chastity. Rather than convey the multi-dimensional character of the human female, which is the clear expression of the sketch, the charcoal drawing completely divorces the two aspects of female sexuality and establishes a hierarchical separation between them. Obviously, such an expression would have been more in keeping with the Church's stand on the subject, from the point of view of content; however, the human character, so deftly managed in the sketch delimits the potential for monumentality prescribed by Lenzian precepts; it introduces an earthly realm into an image that, according to *Beuronerkunst*, should invoke a heavenly one. Thus, the spirituality of the charcoal study is largely reliant upon traditional symbols and becomes a contrived metaphor rather less able to touch the viewer emotionally than the pure and

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unencumbered expression of the sketch. Nevertheless, the charcoal sketch does attain the sought-after, hierarchical monumentality that was germane to Lenz's system. It was most likely this quality that made it difficult for Verkade to reject outright the principles of *Beuronerkunst*.

To be sure, Verkade took liberties with the formulae of the Beuron "canon;" the charcoal sketch of Mary and Eve (*Original Sin*) does not subscribe absolutely to its tenets. Verkade has resisted the required frontal or profile views of the figures in favor of the three-quarter pose. Neither are the figures rigid, and this lends them a softness not found in the drawings of Lenz; both figures are much closer in their serenity to Verkade's own characterization of *St. Sebastian*. The bone and muscle structures of Eve's arms and legs make clear that Verkade wished to root these figures, or at least Eve, who represents earth, in nature, while maintaining a level of simplification that would set them apart from a realistic, perspectival interpretation. Verkade's variations on "canon" law are subtle and not unlike the liberties he had taken with the prescribed order on earlier occasions. In the context of the Secession exhibition, however, they provide us with a glimpse, but only a glimpse, of what was to come in the near future. The trip to Aichhalden marked the turning point in Verkade's retreat from Lenz's formulae; it made possible both the direction his own art would take and the influence he would be able to exert on the avant-garde during his subsequent sojourn in Munich. "What he had gotten from the Lord" would be allowed to take its own form in Aichhalden, where Verkade would subject its rigor and formality to his desire to be true to himself.

Yet another event exerted some influence over Verkade's evaluation of his work in the period leading to the Aichhalden excursion. During a visit to his family, in late 1905,

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Verkade met with the Dutch Symbolist painter Jan Toorop, who came to see him at the family residence. Verkade had brought with him some of the charcoal drawings that he had completed at Monte Cassino, as well as other sketches; these he had wished to share with his parents. Toorop was quite enthusiastic upon seeing them and arranged for an exhibition of them at the establishment of the art dealer, van Gogh in Amsterdam. In his memoirs, Verkade recounted that the exhibition was something of a success; it was very well-attended, extended for two weeks, and written about in the papers. He described his reaction to seeing his works exhibited together in this way:

I realized ... that my drawings lacked the robust synthetic character that had stamped my works in the Parisian period, and that I had, therefore, perhaps deteriorated from a purely artistic point of view. But what I had succeeded in portraying was something that had been born within me since that time: a dim vision of Unseen Beauty, a love for an Ideal that far transcended all things earthly,²⁹

Although Verkade was likely extolling the virtues of *Beuronerkunst*, and certainly of his Catholicism, which he credited with having engendered in him the capacity to reveal "Unseen Beauty" and to comprehend and transmit the "Ideal," it is, nevertheless, clear that these same goals lay also at the heart of the Symbolist ideology. No doubt, Toorop saw this in the works he had sought to exhibit.

²⁹Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 129.

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Beyond his own growing dissatisfaction with the coldness and sterility produced in his paintings by the application of Lenzian precepts, Verkade's movement away from the "canon" was reinforced by his continuous contact with Maurice Denis. Denis, of course, had cautioned both Verkade and Sérusier against too heavy a reliance upon mathematics for the creation of works of art. While Denis' attitude caused Sérusier some chagrin and disturbed their relationship for a time, Verkade increasingly paid heed to Denis' ideas about nature, spirituality and compositional structure. Verkade trusted and respected Denis; the letters exchanged by the two friends contained candid assessments by each of them regarding the power and efficacy of the art of the past and the present. Verkade often confided in Denis and divulged information about his activities that he had no intention of divulging to anyone else, and that often contradicts information he later wrote about for publication. In addition, the letters provide useful information about the two men's current activities, including what books they were reading, where their works were being exhibited, the colleagues and associates with whom they interacted. In short, the letters offer a thorough and very private context in which to view Verkade's works and deeds.³⁰ Moreover, the letters make clear that Denis was, at times, the source of the contacts that Verkade would make in Munich. In all, the letters provide a detailed and certainly more plausible background against which to interpret Verkade's memoirs.

Early in 1906, Verkade wrote a letter to Denis in which he reaffirmed his deeply felt connection to the Nabis and the artistic principles they had espoused as a group. His

³⁰Sincere thanks are due to M. Dominique Denis, Mme. Claire Denis and to Caroline Boyle-Turner for allowing me access to this body of material. I have in my possession the complete correspondence dating from April of 1903 through May of 1909.

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expression was occasioned by his reading of Meier-Graefe's recent book. *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*:

Your image and those of my friends from 1892 have been continually before me these last days because of my reading of Meyer-Graef's (sic) book, which is truly interesting.³¹

This recent publication impressed him and confirmed his own assessment of the stylistic contradictions inherent in artistic endeavor. Verkade battled this problem, epitomized for him in his struggle to reconcile the tenets of *Beuronerkunst* with his Symbolist ideology, consistently during his career; but it was heightened and more intense at this moment of questioning and transition. It is revealed by the earnest question posed in this letter: "Quels sont les moyens qui correspondent à mon expression?" About his own work and Meier-Graefe's book, he wrote:

The more I think and read about art, the more I say, my God, where would we be without Christian revelation. If those things that we see and make ourselves are so difficult to comprehend and to define, what then must constitute knowledge of the Incomprehensible through which God makes Himself known. Beauty is indefinable, that is why we will never know it fully. As well, Meyer-Graef's (sic) book is full of contradictions, but just the same, it is extremely

³¹"Votre personne et celles des amis de 1892 était continuellement devant moi les derniers temps par la lecture du livre de Meyer-Graef [sic] qui est vraiment intéressant." Unpublished letter from Verkade to Maurice Denis, written in Beuron, dated March 1906.

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compelling and urgent for work and for the spirit. More and more I see that there are two arts: a monumental art and an art of pure sentiment -- take as a bad example -- Puvis, Ingres and Delacroix. In short, all the struggle is ultimately between these two things, and well, I am convinced that the future will bring about their reconciliation. The art of Delacroix begins above all with Giotto and the latest manifestations of it are the Independents, about which you have written me. This development is logical. It must be that as humanity was portrayed in classical art, just at that point, it could be objective; as portrayed now, just at this point, it can be subjective. Classical art is cold; it is so necessarily; subjective art has become madness. Meyer-Graef (sic) says very well that it has always been a question of expediency between Spirit and sense. To have too much good sense or too much sense, there is the objective. I believe that we will come to have two "studios," one for the creation of a highly intellectual art, that is to say, where one works with all the spiritual means one can find: theories of measurement, colors, etc., and one where one plays, where one strives to explain the slightest sensation, a look, ... a playful idea that passes.³²

³²"Plus que je pense et je lis sur l'Art, plus que je dis: mon Dieu où serions-nous sans la Révélation chrétienne. Si les choses que nous voyons et faisons nous-mêmes sont si difficiles à comprendre et à définir, quelle donc devait être la connaissance de l'Incompréhensible sans que Dieu s'est fait connaître! La Beauté est indéfinissable, c'est pourquoi nous ne saurons jamais tout d'Elle. Aussi le livre de Meyer Graef [sic] est plein de contradictions, mais quand même c'est extrêmement attrayant et impulsif au travail et à l'esprit." De plus en plus je vois qu'il y a deux arts: un art monumental et un art de pur sentiment - prenons comme mauvais exemple Puvis, Ingres et Delacroix. En somme tout le combat va toujours pour ces deux choses, et bien, je suis convainçu que l'avenir arrivera à les réunir. L'art de Delacroix commence surtout avec Giotto et les dernières conséquences sont les Indépendants dont vous m'écrivez. C'est logique ce développement. Il faut qu'après que l'humanité a montré dans l'Art classique jusqu'à quel point elle pouvait être objective, montre maintenant jusqu'à quel point elle peut être subjective. L'Art classique est froide, il est vraiment nécessairement; l'Art subjectif est devenu folle. Meyer-Graef [sic] dit très bien toujours il s'agit d'une convenance entre l'Esprit et le sens. Avoir trop de bon sens ou trop de sens, voilà le malheur!. Je crois que nous devrions avoir deux ateliers, un pour faire de l'Art très intellectuel, c'est à dire où on travaille avec tous les moyens spirituels qu'on trouvés, théories des mesures, coulours, etc. et un où on joué, où on étudie à exprimer la moindre des sensations, un regard . . . une idée folle qui passe." Ibid.

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In very characteristic fashion, Meier-Graefe's ideas caused Verkade to delve into his own beliefs about the history of art and its foundations in the past; simultaneously, he saw the goals of contemporary artists in light of the enduring struggle between reason and emotion, between form and expression, all of which he then applied to himself. By the second page of this lengthy letter, we find him reaffirming what he had come to accept in the very recent past, i.e., the necessity of grounding oneself in nature in order for true expression to emerge from his work.

Nature will always be our master. We must study its laws and its accidents. I have neglected the latter, that was foolish but perhaps necessary for arriving at a monumentality that I dreamed of acquiring, at that means of expression that will be mine if God gives me the time to live and the opportunity to create.³³

The attitude reflected in this statement points clearly to the direction that Verkade's work took in Aichhalden. Moreover, the fact that he presented this idea to Denis affirms their likeness of mind; Verkade knew that he had a sympathetic ear in Denis; according to Denis' son, "Denis *always* counseled Verkade to paint as he wanted, to be who he was; Denis was not impressed by Lenz's ideas and thought the works produced according to

³³"La nature restera toujours notre maîtresse. Il faut l'étudier dans ses lois et dans ses accidents. J'ai négligé le dernier; c'était bête mais peut-être nécessaire pour arriver à une monumentalité que je rêve d'acquérir, à ce moyen d'expression qui sera le mien si Dieu me donne le temps de vivre et de l'occasion à me produire." Ibid.

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them to be uninteresting."³⁴ In a letter to Verkade, dated September 1906, Denis wrote: "I am always persuaded by the vanity of formulas but, on the other hand, I always believe more in the importance of individual emotion."³⁵

Verkade's urgent plea for an opportunity "to work alone" and unencumbered by Lenzian prescription may have resulted in the Abbot's selecting him to decorate the interior of the parish church at Aichhalden. He would not be totally alone; the need for assistance caused him to seek the professional companionship of the painter, Karl Mayer, who, with two assistants, would be responsible for painting the backgrounds for Verkade's compositions. Lenz's "canon" was not altogether dispensed with either; Verkade took with him the rough sketch of a plan for the design that had been prepared by a fellow Beuroner, P. Paul Krebs.³⁶ Still, Verkade made significant changes to that design, all of which introduced a human element to the overall decoration and were grounded in a renewed reliance upon nature.

In Aichhalden, Verkade once again found himself in a quiet, peasant village, not unlike Le Pouldu or Hattem. In a manner similar to that of those other periods of transition in his life, he returned easily to his characteristic habit of painting and drawing the children of the village. And similarly in the Aichhalden project, these casual works

³⁴From a personal interview with Dominique Denis, son of the painter, November 18, 1990.

³⁵"Moi je suis toujours persuadé de la vanité des formules, et au contraire je crois toujours davantage à l'importance de l'émotion individuelle." Unpublished letter from Maurice Denis to Verkade, dated September, 1906.

³⁶See n. 17, earlier in this chapter.

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came to form the basis of his formal compositions for the church. Having successfully used several children as models for a series of angels painted in the church choir, Verkade now set about to alter Krebs' design for the nave. "The latter effort turned out so well that I formed the idea of using more of the young people of the parish as models for further figures."³⁷

Where Krebs had "called for dividing up the wall space in the nave into six large sections that were to contain texts from the Scriptures, ... my idea was to make this into twenty-two panels, each containing the figure of a saint garbed in white on a dark background."³⁸

Verkade's plan met with easy success among the village inhabitants, who recognized themselves and their children in the faces of the saints lining the walls of the church. He himself was pleased with the result. A postcard sent to Denis, and dated August 20, 1906 contains the following assessment of his work:

... my artistic crisis will soon be over. You would be pleased with my progress. For all of my saints, I have been inspired by nature. The entire village is at my disposal. Although I am content and happy, I suffer a bit from artistic solitude,³⁹

³⁷Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 134.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 134-135.

³⁹"... mon crise artistique sera bientôt fini. Vous seriez content de mes progrès. Pour tous mes saints je m'inspire sur la nature. Tout le village est à ma disposition. Quoique je suis

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If Verkade longed for an artistic opinion of his endeavors, more astute commentary was forthcoming in the critique offered by Toorop, who visited Verkade briefly in Aichhalden later that same August.

He approved most thoroughly of the division of space and the harmony of the colors, criticizing only a few minor mistakes in detail which could easily be corrected. This visit was a godsend to me, as it gave me confidence in what I was attempting.⁴⁰

Among the more interesting and ground-breaking works in the Aichhalden series are the frescoes depicting *Christ in Majesty* (Ill. 18), which is the central choir ceiling image, and the portrayal of *St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (Ill. 19), which is a self-portrait.⁴¹ An analysis of these paintings shows that the *Christ in Majesty* bears easy comparison with Filiger's "notations chromatiques," particularly *Christ Surrounded by Angels* of 1892, (Ill. 20) while Verkade's self-portrait as St. Bernard makes a clear reference in style to Denis' portrait of Verkade in the painting the former made in Beuron in 1904 of *The Monks of Beuron* (Ill. 21). What is significant about Verkade's

content et heureux je souffre pourtant un peu de solitude artistique," Unpublished postcard to Maurice Denis, August 20, 1906.

⁴⁰Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 137.

⁴¹Grecco, *Jan Verkade: From Pont-Aven to Beuron*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Queens College, CUNY, 1975. A substantive analysis of these works appears on pages 54-57.

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particular shift in style for these images, and coming at this precise moment, is that it established his return to his stylistic roots, his re-embracing of a Nabi sensibility.

Still, what had Verkade accomplished in the series of paintings for the Aichhalden church that made him declare decisively "mon crise artistique sera bientôt fini."? More importantly, was this indeed the case? While it is true that his return to nature as an inspirational source was a major step in his gradual relinquishing of Lenz's formulae, it hardly marked an impending end to his artistic crisis. What had happened in reality was that Verkade had moved through a serious transition and had come away with a firmer conviction to follow his heart; he had to resist subjecting his vision to the appeal that the intellectual rigor of theory held for him. Several factors were responsible for the renewed strength of this conviction: first, he had the opportunity to work "alone and quietly for some time," as he had long desired, and he had made progress, as he had hoped; second, his attitudes were buoyed by the like-mindedness of Denis and by the positive assessment of his work by Toorop. Verkade's sense that the crisis would soon pass was premature, however, and likely due to the renewed sensitivity and expression he found in the works he had painted. These works shared the human element evident in the 1905 pencil sketch for *Original Sin*, without having had to undergo a formulaic transformation in order to conform to the stylistic manner of *Beuronerkunst*. Thus, the shift in style demonstrated by the Aichhalden frescoes marked the seminal turning point that prepared Verkade to take the adventurous path he would follow in Munich. Verkade would soon realize, however, that his artistic crisis was just beginning; it would reach a

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climax during his eighteen months in the Bavarian capitol and would be resolved in a far more dramatic and definitive way.

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Verkade in Munich: 1906-1908

My dear friends, you have done me as well as many others a great service with your generous gifts. There is a genuine pilgrimage to my studio to see the "French." I have framed everything agreeably and they form a corner of such interest, the little "Nabi" corner!

Jan Verkade¹

Verkade's decision to follow his heart would lead him to conduct himself and his artistic pursuits in Munich quite apart from his role as a cleric. His earliest activities make clear that he had little or no intention of confining his artistic activities or his work to the regulations of a monastic community. It was just this commitment to his art at this point and place in time that intensified his artistic crisis, rendering his earlier comment to Denis decidedly premature. In the grip of this crisis, Verkade created a body of work that should establish a more significant place for him within the history of the

¹"Mes chers camarades, vous m'avez rendu grand service avec vos dons généreux et aussi à beaucoup d'autres! C'est un vrai pèlerinage vers mon atelier pour voir les "Français." J'ai tout fait encadrer convenablement et c'est un petit coin tellement intéressant, le petit coin nabique!" Unpublished letter from Verkade to Maurice Denis, undated, written late April or early May, 1907.

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Symbolist movement. At the time he created it, this work provided a formidable example of Nabi/Symbolist precepts for a new generation who would expand upon and stretch those ideas to the point of breaking new ground in the development of abstract styles of painting.

Verkade's 18 month stay in Munich, his activities and the specific nature of his influence will be the subject of this chapter, specifically, what contacts he made, what and how he painted, what he read and thought about as revealed in his letters, and how he reconciled his activities with his monasticism, or didn't, and why. Most importantly, in the ensuing discussion, I will connect Verkade to the German Expressionist avant-garde and describe his influence upon their achievements, for this is the crux of the matter.

Verkade's association with a group of artists, who would soon be called German Expressionists,² began shortly after his arrival in Munich in October of 1906. Despite

²The international exchange of ideas, characteristic of the first decade of the century, was responsible for the wide appeal of Expressionist tendencies across national boundaries. Expressionists generally favored an anti-natural approach to form and subject, which caused them to experiment with color, line, shape and texture. Still, there are important differences to be found between the French and German manifestations of Expressionist ideology. The particular character of German Expressionism was propelled by a messianic vision, which caused the artists associated with the movement to anticipate radical cultural and social changes as a result of their endeavor. German Expressionists were "more concerned with the relationships between art and society, art and politics, art and popular culture." Their paintings exuded an unhibited sensuality and vitalism, which the artists equated with freedom and creativity. These qualities were seen as the visual counterpart to their hope for an apocalyptic change that would lead to communalism, and thus bring about the utopian ideal envisioned for the future. For a lengthy discussion of the evolution of the term, from which the preceding definition has been distilled, see the Introduction to Rose Carol Washton-Long, ed., *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) xix-xxiv.

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the fact that he was living among other monks and that his officially sanctioned study was to be undertaken at the University, Verkade's characteristic interest in current developments in art led him to explore the salons, galleries and storehouses of dealers and to seek out the acquaintance of some of Munich's most important and innovative contemporary painters.³

In his memoirs, Verkade noted that, "I took up residence in a college belonging to the Benedictines of Scheyern Abbey in the Veterinärstrasse."⁴ He also made clear early on in the chapter on Munich that he intended to avail himself of the opportunity to work in less structured environments, such as other painters' studios, and that these would no doubt depart from the methods he had become accustomed to at the *Beuronerkunstschule*.⁵

His rooms on the Veterinärstrasse afforded him easy access to the heart of creative activity in Munich: he was only a short walking distance away from both the center of the city and from the bohemian district of Schwabing. He was situated directly in the midst of an educated and cultured milieu: the Veterinärstrasse begins at the center of the Ludwig Maximilian University and leads directly to the English Garden. His residence in what was perhaps Munich's most fashionable neighborhood is at least partly

³The brief review in Verkade's memoirs of the eighteen month Munich sojourn provides only the barest of facts within a sketchy chronology; nevertheless, it does offer a framework within which to set those experiences that can only be ascertained through an investigation of less readily available sources, namely bodies of correspondence as yet unpublished.

⁴Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 143. Although, Verkade did not identify the specific University at which he was to study, Boyle-Turner has determined the Verkade was officially enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts, which may have been a school of Ludwig Maximilian University.

⁵ He stated that "Nearby was the studio of the painter, Karl Hornung, where I was to be afforded facilities for drawing from life." *Ibid*, 143.

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responsible for his later association with some of the city's most prominent collectors of art, the most notable among them being Alfred Wolff,⁶ a banker and prominent social figure in the contemporary cultural milieu. Verkade's familiarity with Wolffs' social circle, as we shall see, made a significant contribution to Verkade's access to and eventual relationships with important figures within Munich's avant-garde, while simultaneously reinforcing both his connection and his commitment to Symbolist ideology.

In addition to his proximity to the artistic centers of Munich and to the city's cultural elite, Verkade's affiliation with the specific cast of characters he would meet was aided by his close friend and associate, Maurice Denis. Denis, probably the most internationally active of the Nabis, had made numerous acquaintances in his travels and through his work. He shared these contacts with Verkade via letters of introduction, which no doubt helped Verkade to establish himself in this new environment, and would have been especially helpful given Verkade's relatively sequestered existence immediately preceding the trip to Munich.⁷ Three factors intertwined to enable Verkade to make contact with the experimental painters and to begin to emerge as a prominent figure in their midst: his own enthusiasm and interest in current artistic developments;

⁶From a personal interview with the late Frau Marcella Vössler-Wolff, daughter of the banker, October 30, 1990.

⁷It is true that Verkade had been given various opportunities to travel and work outside of the Beuron cloister, particularly between 1904 and 1906; nevertheless, he had been a member of the Beuron community since 1894 and had conformed to the monastery's prescribed life style and to the artistic limitations of its painting school for 12 years, prior to his arrival in Munich. Although he continued many of his relationships with the artists of his past during this time, his freedom of movement in both life and art had been largely curtailed. Even in Aichhalden, where he began in earnest to depart from Lenzian precepts, a good measure of canonical form is discernible in the work he produced there.

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his logistical proximity to areas of the city where he could undertake his exploration and absorption of modern artistic currents; and his relationship to Denis, and others, and the contacts that they would provide for him.

Verkade's long-standing ties to Symbolism and its tenets, and his adherence to the theory generating the practices of the *Beuronerkunstschule* contained the seeds for many of the ideas that would emerge as part of the foundation for the abstract styles in the work of Kandinsky and others. An examination of each of his contacts will shed light on the significance of Verkade's thinking in relation to that of experimental artists living in Germany.

Verkade's correspondence with Denis provides us with the clearest insight to Verkade's theoretical stance at the onset of the period. In his first letter to Denis, written from Munich, we find Verkade expounding on the merits of Gauguin and van Gogh, revealing his continued immersion in a Symbolist ideology. Despite the many years that had passed and the changes of style that he had undergone since his days as a Nabis, these two masters remained for him paragons of artistic temperament. In November of 1906, he wrote:

I don't believe that there are, among the young, two or three who have so much to say, who have the intensity of soul and vision of Gauguin. He was old by the time he began, he knew that for him all skill, all science was in vain. He didn't have the time to occupy himself with it. He had something to say and, all at once, he said it. The same with Vincent. And this extreme need to speak without knowing how to speak caused him to discover many things, some of the means of expression that all the Masters have used; he had sought among the

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Masters for "the necessary element," that which supersedes/supplants love in a spiritual life. And for having brought about the synthesis of means, he became a Master, a *savant*, an initiator.⁸

At the very moment at which he was about to approach the modernist artistic temperament in Munich, Verkade's thoughts were with his Symbolist forebears and the power they brought to bear on both the communicative and spiritual aspects of painting. For Verkade the essence of art resided in its expressive qualities, "to have something to say" was a phrase that he spoke frequently and that lay at the heart of his own artistic endeavor and as well in his instructional message to all who would listen. Furthermore, as if to reiterate the universality of Symbolism as a force motivating creative expression, Verkade ended this same letter by proposing the following to Denis, "Let's remain friends and become a catholic trio, by which I mean, universal."⁹

What is of even greater importance about this letter, however, is what it reveals about Verkade's personal assessment of his recent artistic achievements at Aichhalden,

⁸"Je ne crois pas qu'il y a entre les jeunes deux ou trois qui ont autant à dire, qui ont une telle intensité d'âme et de vision que Gauguin. Il était vieux lorsqu'il commença, il savait que toute habileté, toute science pour soi, était vaine. Il n'avait pas de temps pour s'en occuper, il avait à dire quelque chose et il a tout de suite parlé. La même chose avec Vincent. Et cette extrême nécessité de parler, sans savoir parler, lui a fait trouver beaucoup de choses, des moyens d'expression, dont tous les maîtres se sont servi, il a cherché chez les Maîtres "l'unique nécessaire," ce qui remplace dans la vie spirituelle, l'amour. Et pour avoir fait la synthèse des moyens, il a devenu un Maître, un savant, un initiateur." Unpublished letter to Maurice Denis, Nov. 16, 1906.

⁹"Restons amis et faisons nous un trio catholique, ce qui veut dire universel." Ibid. Although not stated specifically here, a logical assumption would be that the third member of the "trio," to which Verkade referred, was Sérusier.

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and his expectations for his future progress as an artist. He began the letter with a lengthy explanation to Denis of his reason for taking pride in the Aichhalden project. Interestingly, this statement too affirmed his commitment to Symbolism, while simultaneously upholding the goal of expressing spiritual intensity – a major objective of *Beuronerkunst*.

My dear boy, don't be concerned if I speak proudly of my church in Aichhalden; above all, it is the contentment of the worker who has labored roughly and with determination, and who, one fine day, sees his work accomplished, that pride of the artist who believes, like a Michelangelo, to have left behind "some great examples." It's odd that you now seem haunted by pictorial perfection, whereas, for me, the response comes from the ancient conviction (which was Gauguin's power, and has also been yours) that everything depends upon the intensity of the soul, of the necessary element of Art, the sublime vision of things.¹⁰

Beuronerkunst sharpened Verkade's focus and magnified his desire to express the spiritual in art. Ultimately, however, the coldness of the works produced through its formulae directed him away from its rigorously technical method, and the tenets that

¹⁰"Mon petit, n'ayez pas peur si je parle avec orgueil de mon eglise d'Aichhalden; c'est plutôt le contentement de l'ouvrier qui a travaillé rudement, avec acharnement, et qui voit un beau jour son travail accompli, que orgueil de l'artiste qui croit avoir, comme un Michel-Ange, laissé derriere soi "de grands exemples." C'est singulier que vous à present semblez hanté de la perfection picturale, tandis que chez moi la réaction se fait par l'ancienne conviction [qui était la force de Gauguin et l'a été aussi chez vous] que tout dépend de l'intensité d'âme, de l'unique nécessaire dans l'Art: la sublime vision des choses." *Ibid.*

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supported it, back toward his Symbolist/Synthetist applications. His experiment with *Beuronerkunst* enabled Verkade to perceive a primary interconnectivity between nature and the grand design of the Lord. Thus the experiment had proved fruitful, in Verkade's terms, if not Lenz's, by intensifying for Verkade the primacy of Symbolist ideology and method. In Aichhalden, the fruits of his experiment began to come into focus and most likely made possible the clear return to Symbolist ideals that flowered in Munich.

Toward the end of his lengthy discourse to Denis, Verkade used a potent metaphor to make his aspirations clear.

I don't offer my little church ... as a masterpiece. I have said something and appropriately, it is in a holy place that edifies its simplicity and makes me happy. There is always a great volcanic rumbling within me. I re-emerge quite vehement, keeping the external sweetness. I become supposedly, strong and design with greater ease. If God gives me life, one fine day I will bellow forth all that has been hidden beneath the ashes for such a long time and with a great spurt, I will throw up my internal fire.¹¹

Even in his memoirs, where Verkade clearly attempted to underplay the impact and achievement of this period, and especially his activities in Munich, he, nonetheless,

¹¹"Moi je ne donne pas ma petite église ... pour maint chef d'oeuvre. J'ai dit quelque chose et convenablement, cela est dans un lieu saint, cela édifie les simples et cela me rend heureux. En moi cela bourdonne toujours comme dans un volcan, je redeviens très véhément, tout en gardant la douceur extérieurement, je deviens soi-disant fort et dessine avec plus de facilité; si Dieu me laisse la vie je hurlerai un beau jour ce qui si longtemps est resté couvert de la cendre et avec un beau jet je dégueulerai mon feu intérieur." *ibid.*

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made use of the same sort of metaphor to describe his work. In recounting his experiences there, he wrote: "... when I left after painting for nearly a year and a half, *my studio blazed* (my italics) with pictures [mostly still-lives] as varied in subject as were the rich colours they contained."¹² Later in the same chapter, he referred to his painting in Munich as "a feverish labor that threatened to consume, destroy." He further affirmed that "wild, impossible desires and plans that I had thought long since dead began to torment my soul. ... No longer could I control my feelings ... but instead began to force myself with a kind of wild, violent fury."¹³

What exactly happened in Munich that caused a fire to rage forth from Verkade both in terms of his own work and with regard to the influence he would exert? His

¹²Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 145. The parenthetical note in this statement indicating that Verkade painted mostly still-lives while in Munich is erroneous and was probably included to cast out doubts on the part of his monastic superiors, or perhaps even on the part of his reading public, that a monk would treat subjects of a more controversial nature. In fact, we know that Verkade painted nudes in Munich, in the studio of Jawlensky, where he worked from the nude model, and quite alone, i.e. without the company of other painters. The issue of Verkade's specific production during the Munich sojourn will be taken up later in the text.

¹³*Ibid.*, 145-146 passim. Within the context of the chapter on Munich, which is a reassessment made some twenty years later, these comments are all put forth in a manner to suggest that not only was the Munich sojourn fruitless, but that it had serious negative ramifications upon Verkade's monastic commitment. It is my contention that Verkade's later decision to cease painting was a direct result of his inability to reconcile his sincere and serious aspirations as a painter, heartfelt in 1906 and evident in the letter to Denis, with his simultaneous, and perhaps greater, devotion to his God and his catholicism, both viewed through the cloak of monasticism. In a letter written to Verkade by Denis in December, 1906, the latter states "Vous êtes le vrai moine d'autrefois, et en même temps le plus moderne des modernes." Denis intended this remark as the highest praise but the dichotomy that he spells out succinctly here could well have been Verkade's undoing as an artist. (Unpublished letter to Verkade from Maurice Denis, December, 1906, St. Germain-en-Laye.)

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associations with the artists mentioned above will begin to reconstruct this puzzle and to unravel the veil of mystery that Verkade himself seems actively to have woven.

By February of 1907, Verkade was already reasonably well-connected within Munich's artistic and cultural circles. By December of the previous year, Denis had encouraged him to visit the Wolffs in order to see the painting that Denis had made for them. "By the way, have you seen my large painting of the *Weinlaube* at the Wolf's (sic)?"¹⁴ By that time, Denis had made contact with the Belgian Art Nouveau designer, Henry van de Velde, who was arranging an exhibition of Denis' work in Wiesbaden. A letter of introduction, written by Denis, enabled Verkade to meet the Wolffs who had become familiar with Denis' work through van de Velde, after he had designed a collection of furniture for them.¹⁵

Within a short time, Verkade became a regular visitor at the Wolffs, who hosted frequent, if not regular gatherings of artists and other prominent figures in their social circle. Important collectors of contemporary German art, the Wolffs became familiar with the work of the French Symbolists/Neo-Impressionists -- Denis, Maillol and Signac -- through van de Velde. In their home, Verkade saw the work of the German artists Curt Herrmann, Christian Lautebeck, and Franz von Stück, with whom Kandinsky

¹⁴"A propos, ne verrez vous pas mon grand tableau du *Weinlaube* chez le banquier Wolf (sic)?"
ibid.

¹⁵The late Frau Marcella Vössler-Wolff, daughter of the banker, imparted this information in an interview that took place on October 30, 1990 at the former home of her parents in Munich, which is where she lived until her death in 1996. Unfortunately, the exact dates on which Verkade became acquainted with the Wolffs, and they with van de Velde, are uncertain.

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had studied for a time, and as well the work of Adolf Erbslöh, Alexander Kanoldt, and Wladimir von Bectejeff, all of whom would help to establish the Neue Künstler-Vereinigung, München in 1909 and were associates of Kandinsky and Jawlensky.¹⁶ In addition, the Wolffs' international collection included a significant painting, *The Olive Pickers*, by van Gogh, (later in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art), one by Gauguin – a Tahitian figure painting, another by Bonnard – unfortunately destroyed by fire, two paintings by Signac, one by Maximilien Luce, several sculptures and drawings by Maillol and a portrait of Mrs. Wolff by Theo van Rhysellberghe, which had been commissioned by the family in 1907, also destroyed in the same fire. The van de Velde furniture was in use at the time and ever present for study. Thus, the atmosphere at the Wolffs, in addition to providing an overview of current trends in German art, including *Jugendstil*, was pervaded by examples of a pan-European Symbolist presence that was making itself felt in the vanguard, bohemian district of Schwabing. Verkade would have been exceedingly comfortable in this artistic atmosphere; one which he, no doubt, found revitalizing at this precise moment in time.

Moreover, the Wolffs' gatherings included figures from a highly literary and prosperous social circle. Numbered among their guests, in addition to the artists were men like Dr. Schwartz, then editor of the journal *Kunst für Alle*, Curt Herrmann,¹⁷ then a member of the executive committee of the Berlin Secession, and a variety of businessmen and collectors whose support was invaluable to those artists involved in the

¹⁶Armin Zweite, *The Blue Rider in the Lenbachhaus*, Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1989, 24-26.

¹⁷Curt Herrmann, 1854-1929, German neo-Impressionist, member and second President of the Berlin Secession.

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newest developments of the avant-garde. Verkade, himself the son of a wealthy Dutch businessman proved to have no difficulty adjusting to this social milieu and is said to have been quite at ease among people of this class, despite years of living a monastic and spartan existence.¹⁸ Eventually, the Wolffs entertained the growing ranks of the avant-garde in Munich; Jawlensky and Werefkin often joined Verkade for Sunday dinner at their home and the Wolffs eventually collected paintings by all three expatriates.¹⁹

One might assume that in the company of the Wolffs, Verkade might have met Alexei Jawlensky, but this was not the case. Although they were later to spend many hours together at the Wolffs' home, Verkade actually met Jawlensky in February of 1907 at the Munich Kunstverein, where he had been invited to a private exhibition of the work of the German neo-Impressionist, Curt Herrmann, whom Verkade had met at the home Dr. Schwarz. At Herrmann's invitation, Verkade and the German painter, Hugo Troendle²⁰ attended the exhibition, where they met Jawlensky. Their conversation that day

¹⁸Frau Vössler-Wolff remarked that Verkade had a wonderful sense of humor; she remembers that even as a young girl, it was remarkably easy for her to be comfortable in his presence and that others experienced the same ease with him. Interview, October 20, 1990.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Troendle, whose work is little known, except in Germany, is important as a chronicler of events in Verkade's life. During the year that Verkade spent in Munich, Troendle kept a notebook of sketches that includes informal portraits of a number of prominent social figures with whom both artists associated. Several of these works provide visual records of gatherings that attest to the artists' relationships with each other as well as with those in Munich society, who supported their efforts. In addition, on occasion, Troendle sketched copies of several of Verkade's works; one of these depicts the banker, Wolff in a garden with several of his friends and colleagues and his daughter, Marcella, then a young girl. Across the bottom of the page, Troendle wrote, "copy of a drawing by Verkade." Further, there is an extensive correspondence that exists between the two friends, for access to which I owe a special thanks to Dr. and Mrs. Heinz Dehmel of Munich.

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apparently revealed a likeness of mind; Jawlensky invited Verkade and Troendle to visit his studio and within weeks Verkade was often to be found working there, as he would continue to do throughout the remaining year he spent in Munich.²¹ Through Jawlensky, Verkade shortly thereafter came to know Alfred Kubin and Marianne von Werefkin.

If Verkade had anticipated that Munich would provide him with an artistic and personal freedom of mind and movement, he certainly guided his activities toward this goal. Two major bodies of correspondence – in the form of letters to Denis and to Hugo Troendle, as well as less regular letters to other artists and friends, attest to Verkade's involvement with important developments and figures in the Munich art world.

Even before his departure from Beuron, he was preparing to establish himself in the German art capital by arranging contacts that he would later pursue and by studying the art of his contemporaries and, as always, of the "masters" whose work would continue to direct his own. As early as March of 1906, he wrote to Denis:

²¹Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 151. The fact that Verkade worked in Jawlensky's studio is also documented in a number of his letters to Denis. In a letter dated, April of 1907, Verkade related that he had made the acquaintance of "a good Russian, Jawlensky, very talented fellow, in whose studio I have painted a group of still-lives that you would certainly like very much." "une brave Russe, Jawlensky, garçon vraiment talentueux, dans l'atelier duquel j'ai peint une suite de nature-mortes que vous aimeriez certainement beaucoup."

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Please give me Meyer-Graef's (sic) address and a recommendation to him; I will probably have the opportunity to see him and I would like to know him. ²²

By August of the same year, he asked: "Don't you have a reproduction of the newest art?"²³ And in September, as he anticipated leaving for Munich, he reminded Denis of his request:

I thank you in advance for your reproductions, don't forget to send them to me; if you can obtain some reproductions for me of the vanguard Independents, the sensationalists, I will be very grateful for them. ²⁴

Although Denis attempted to dissuade him from becoming too enveloped in and attuned to the ideas of others,²⁵ Verkade began almost immediately to make professional contacts in Munich, and he did so, paradoxically, with Denis' help, often in the form of letters of introduction. Verkade's first letters from Munich reveal his anticipation of

²²"Donnez-moi, s'il vous plaît, l'adresse de M. Meyer-Græf (sic) et une recommandation pour lui; j'aurai probablement l'occasion de le voir et je désire le connaître." Unpublished letter to Denis, March 1906.

²³"N'avez-vous pas une reproduction de l'art tout nouveau?" Unpublished letter to Denis, August 20, 1906.

²⁴"Je vous remercie d'avance pour vos reproductions, n'oubliez pas de me les envoyer; si vous pouvez me procurer quelques reproductions des Indépendants de l'avant garde, les sensationnistes, j'en serais très reconnaissant." Unpublished letter to Denis, September 16, 1906.

²⁵"Vous êtes bien heureux de ne pas voir trop des peintres, ils risqueraient, à force de paradoxes, de vous décourager. Nous restons donc fidèles à la doctrine de Gauguin, au moins dans son principe." Unpublished letter from Denis to Verkade, November 14, 1906

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what this sojourn might hold for him. His time in Aichhalden and the stirrings of his movement away from *Beuronerkunst*, which developed there, were now at the point of potential realization and he was keenly aware of this.

I have many ideas in my head about which I would like to speak with you; I am not sure that I will succeed.²⁶

While the content of Verkade's letters to Denis continued to revolve around the significance of Gauguin and van Gogh and what they both contributed to the "spiritual" temperament of the age in painting, by June and July of 1907, Verkade began to recount more of his daily activity in his correspondence. A letter dated June, 1907, reveals that after eight months in Munich, he seemed to have found his way stylistically.

Lastly, I have already met a few Russians who would really like what you do. You would be pleased with a group of still-lives and small sketches that I have made. Surely, I am again on the road after many detours. ²⁷

²⁶"J'ai une quantité d'idées dans la tête dont je voudrais parler; je ne sais guère si je réussirai." Unpublished letter to Denis, November 16, 1906.

²⁷"Dernièrement je rencontrais déjà quelques Russes qui aimeraient beaucoup ce que vous faites....Vous serez content d'une suite de nature-mortes et petites sensations que j'ai fait.... Décidément je suis de nouveau dans le chemin après bien des détours." Unpublished letter to Denis, June 13, 1907.

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The road to which Verkade was referring in this letter is, no doubt one which he assumed would restore his Nabi vision and his ability to apply it to his painting. A freer path than he had been allowed for some time, Verkade's exploration of artistic method was accompanied by corresponding changes in his demeanor and these changes are reflective of his sense of himself as an artist taking precedence over the monastic character of his life. A review of his work from this period will clarify both the path he had chosen to follow and his success in achieving his goal.

Verkade's paintings from the Munich period display the broad range of subject matter and stylistic experimentation that are readily characteristic of a period of artistic transition. While his gradual rejection of the methods required by Beuronerkunst actually began in Italy and continued in Aichhalden, nevertheless, Verkade's ability to experiment liberally had to be held in abeyance until he was no longer living under the aegis of the Church. The Munich sojourn opened the door to a level of artistic freedom that Verkade had not enjoyed since his earliest days at Beuron. As his new-found sense of freedom emerged, Verkade began to explore possibilities in his life as well as in his work. Several threads of behavior can be detected in both the content and the form of his letters to Denis, which parallel changes in his work. We find Verkade socializing with the *literati* of Munich, traveling in circles of the bourgeoisie and the elite; he related his activities to Denis in a casual manner, knowing full well that the latter would never judge him, such was the trust between them. He spoke of his acquaintances and of his work; we read that he has returned to painting from life and has hired models who have posed nude for him and that he worked from the nude

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unaccompanied in Jawlensky's studio on Giselastrasse. There is even a suggestion that he traveled about with a young female escort.²⁸ His growing distance from monasticism is reflected in the manner in which he signs his letters to Denis — his way of addressing himself becoming less and less formal until finally closing simply as "Willibrord." In Munich, Verkade was able to act more and more as a free agent, less and less tied to his monastic posture. He had been struggling since Vienna to recapture Synthetist elements in his work but his endeavor was less than fruitful as long as his ties to the monastery were apparent. His changing demeanor in Munich is reflective of the degree to which those immediate ties were broken. While there is no evidence that his attachment to God was any less strong, it seems to have expanded to encompass a wider range of activity. We can say that Verkade became more truly spiritual during this time even as he became less religious in a monastic sense. This truer understanding of spirituality enabled him to live a less structured existence, and to find within it the means to a more perfect harmony of God and art than *Beuronerkunst* could provide. Sadly, it would make his return to the monastery a deciding moment in his life: one in which he would have to relinquish the latter for the sake of the former. What Verkade discovered about himself and his art in Munich made it impossible for him to return to the Beuron canon of art in good faith.

²⁸Sérusier, *ABC de la Peinture*, ed., Mme. Sérusier and Mlle. Boutaric, reprint of a letter to Denis, dated Jan. 16, 1908, 132-133.

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Of the many works that Verkade painted in Munich, there are several that are of concern in this chapter because they demonstrate his artistic progress in search of his Symbolist soul. Two still lifes mentioned in the June 1907 letter to Denis merit attention. A 1907 oil, *Still Life with a Green Stein* (Ill. 22) and an unfinished gouache from the same year, *Still Life* (Ill. 23) reveal Verkade's attempt to recapture the harmony of forms, textures and colors he had been able to achieve in his 1891 *Still Life with Quimper Bowl* (Ill. 1), which he had retrieved during his April 1907 visit to Paris.²⁹ In both of these works, the influence of Cézanne is clear in the modeling and resultant solidity of the forms. A stylistic link to Cézanne should not be surprising; throughout the correspondence between Verkade and Denis, there is sufficient reference to Cézanne to support both artists' appreciation of his singular vision and stylistic innovation.

Denis alluded to Cézanne's importance to the Nabis in a letter to Verkade, dated December, 1906 at the time of Cézanne's death: "Sérusier has written me a great deal, and very interesting letters, above all on the subject of Cézanne. I would like to write about Cézanne, and I require the counsel of everyone, because it is so difficult."³⁰ For Denis, Cézanne's mastery was evident in his continued reliance upon nature as the medium through which his vision was expressed. In October of 1906, Denis wrote in his *Journal*,

²⁹Caroline Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin.*, 157.

³⁰"Sérusier m'a beaucoup écrit, et des lettres très intéressantes, surtout sur Cézanne. Je veux écrire sur Cézanne, et je demande conseil à chacun, car c'est fort difficile" Unpublished letter from Denis to Verkade, dated December, 1906.

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By concentrating all of its effort toward the light (*an oblique reference to Impressionism*), modern art can turn its back on nature. From excessive imitation, the normal idea/understanding of art, the art of expression sprang up again. Cézanne said "I have discovered that the sun is a thing that we cannot reproduce, but that we can represent." Everything is represented by equivalents in art, nothing must be reproduced. 31

Within the context of his comments on Cézanne in the December, 1906 letter, Denis instructed his friend: "Try to see some of his work in Munich; I would be curious to know what effect it will have on you now."³²

Whether or not Verkade made a concerted effort to study Cézanne's work as a result of Denis' suggestion, it is apparent that Cézanne's approach to painting had already affected Verkade's own direction. Like Cézanne's own water colors, Verkade's unfinished gouache, *Still Life*, is light-filled and airy, the construction of the forms evident in the "brick-like brushstroke which enabled the painter to model his apples by juxtaposing different

31 "C'est en concentrant tout son effort vers la lumière que l'art moderne arrive à tourner le dos à la nature. C'est des excès de l'imitation que renaît l'idée normale de l'art, l'art d'expression. Cézanne disait: "J'ai découvert que le soleil est une chose qu'on ne peut pas reproduire, mais qu'on peut représenter." Tout est représenté par des équivalents d'art, rien ne doit être reproduit." Maurice Denis, *Journal*, v. II. 1905-1920 (Paris: La Colombe, 1957), entry dated October, 1906, 48.

32 "Je veux écrire sur Cézanne, et je demande conseil à chacun, car c'est fort difficile. Tâchez donc d'en voir à Munich, je serais curieux de savoir quel effet cela vous ferait maintenant." Unpublished letter from Denis to Verkade, dated December, 1906.

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colors rather than through a more traditional means of achieving light and dark."³³ In its unfinished state, we can observe Verkade's method of paint application, the building up of form through color while retaining a flat plane on which to compose the shapes. The almost glittering surface achieved through the contrast of the red and greenish yellow against the blue ground reinforces the Synthetist, decorative quality of this work.

Still life with a Green Stein has greater linearity than the gouache, although here too the forms are built up through the application of color strokes. Again, the palette is limited to three or four colors, in tonal variety, which allow for the relative flatness of the picture plane. This composition bears comparison with the *Still Life with Quimper Bowl* which Verkade must have studied in the two months since his return from Paris. Both paintings depict three apples and a piece of crockery all set on draped cloth on a table; in both, the table top is tilted forward and the objects are set against a flat, monochromatic background painted in a lighter hue of a foreground object; as noted above, the palette of each painting is limited and the viewer's eye is carried through the composition by the repetition of colors and tones at regular intervals within the space. The two paintings differ most radically with respect to Verkade's perspective and his cropping of the composition. In the 1891 painting, Verkade draws the table top at a diagonal to the picture plane and crops the objects at all four corners, thus, cutting off the edges of the table, the drapery, and the pot; this gives the image an immediacy that holds the viewer's attention by encompassing him/her within the space of the composition. By contrast, the 1907 picture is conceived as more parallel to the picture

³³Caroline Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin.*, 157.

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plane and save for the cropping of the lower, horizontal edge of the table top, the image retains its integrity within the space; the result is less commanding in that it allows the viewer to remain outside the space and disinterested. The 1891 painting is a far more successful application of Synthetist principles, nevertheless, it is instructive to note that in 1907 Verkade undertook the study of his own earlier work in an attempt to recapture the spontaneity he had lost to the rigidity of *Beuronerkunst*.

By July of 1907, Verkade's relationship with Jawlensky³⁴ had developed to the point where the latter offered Verkade the use of his studio on the Giselastrasse while he and Werefkin spent the summer months on holiday, perhaps with Kandinsky and Münter.³⁵ In a letter to Denis, dated July 25, 1907 and written in Aachen, Verkade reported that he had been made to leave Munich temporarily in order to arrange an exhibition of Christian art, similar to that in which he had participated in Vienna in 1905. His displeasure at having had to interrupt his work is made clear in the following passage:

Unfortunately, I was forced to come away from Munich, where I worked happily, to organize an exhibition like the one in Vienna, here in Aachen.

³⁴The relationship between Jawlensky and Verkade will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

³⁵See RCW Long, "Kandinsky's Vision of Utopia as a Garden of Love," (*Art Journal*, v.1, no.1, Spring, 1983, 50-60) and Sigrid Russ' chronology of Marianne von Werefkin in Bernd Fäthke, *Marianne Werefkin: Gemälde und Skizzen* (exhibition catalogue for the Museum Wiesbaden, Sept. 28-Nov. 23, 1980) for information as to the whereabouts of Kandinsky and Münter and Jawlensky and Werefkin respectively during the summer of 1907.

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What a shame that I had to leave Munich until the 15 of August! I was well on my way, having found a pretty model – female (16 years old) after whom I was making ... nudes! Do not mention this in your letters, please: I was able to use the studio of an absent friend. The model had an air, completely uncompromising and even unattractive for as long as she wore her skirts and marvelous without those rags. It's clear that when someone is well proportioned, clothing is a bad addition.³⁶

Given the strength of his monastic conviction, it might seem surprising, at first, that Verkade ventured to paint nudes, indeed, that he even related the event to Denis with an almost casual glee. In fact, what is more astonishing are the ramifications of such an action, given his vow of Holy Orders; the potential severity of the repercussions becomes clear when we consider the precautions Verkade took to conceal it. Aside from asking Denis not to mention the fact to anyone, Verkade made sure to engage in this activity alone, in Jawlensky's studio while Jawlensky was away. Further, of the few nudes that survive, one has been left unsigned and another carries Verkade's then current

³⁶"Malheureusement on m'a fait venir de Munique où je travaillais heureusement pour organiser une exposition comme à Vienne ici à Aachen. Dommage que je devais quitter Munique bien jusque 15 août! J'étais si bien en train ayant trouvé un joli modèle – fille (16 ans) d'après que je faisais...des nues! Pas de mention de cela dans votre lettres s.v.p. – je pouvais employer l'atelier d'un ami absent. Le modèle avait l'air tout à fait pas compromettante et même pas joli aussi longtemps que cela portait des jupons et merveilleuse sans ces loques. C'est clair quand quelqu'un est bien proportionné les habits donnent une addition mauvaise." Unpublished letter to Denis, dated July 25, 1907.

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nickname, "Langejan."³⁷ Later, Verkade told Denis; "You understand that I cannot show my nudes in Beuron, so you shall have one of them."³⁸

More important for our purposes, however, is Verkade's handling of the nude and how that handling corresponds to his overall quest to recapture a Synthetist/Symbolist aesthetic in his work. Firstly, Verkade's approach to the nude was emblematic of his desire to simplify and abstract from nature and to evince the "ideal" in the "good (or Beuroner) proportions" of the human body. Verkade sincerely eschewed the Church's moral code with respect to the human form; he believed, as an artist would, that the human body was a beautiful form and, as a spiritual man would, that a creation of God could carry no shame. Finally, Verkade had great expectations for the experimental nature of his Munich sojourn; as we have already seen, he approached this period primarily as an artist and only secondarily as a monastic.

Two nudes that survive to this day, entitled *Nude with a Ginger Jar* (Ill. 24) and *Nude in Jawlensky's Studio*, (Ill. 25) both conform to a Symbolist aesthetic. Both works are said to have been done between 1907 and 1908.³⁹ *Nude with A Ginger Jar* depicts a

³⁷This name, by which Verkade was christened by his Munich associates combines the German word for "long" with Verkade's given name, Jan; in referring to Verkade's great height, the name is not unlike the name that Sérusier had chosen for him – the Nabi Obelisque.

³⁸Unpublished letter to Denis, October 30, 1907.

³⁹Despite Verkade's mention in the July 1907 letter of having painted nudes, neither of these works can be dated precisely. Jawlensky later wrote in his journal that, "Verkade also painted the nude in my studio" but made no reference to specific dates. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest the months between the summer and fall of 1907 as the time that Verkade painted these works: he had free use of Jawlensky's studio – Jawlensky and Werefkin were away; he had been in Munich for 9 months – half of his proposed stay, and well into his experimental endeavor by this time.

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female figure seated on a sofa; she is cut by the frame at the hipline and is nude above the waist; a long shawl covers her head and frames her shoulders and arms. She holds an oriental ginger jar in both hands, which is poised in her lap. The figure is large in relation to the frame, occupying all but the edges of the background space, which is cut horizontally by the wood trim at the top of the sofa and interrupted at the right edge of the frame, behind the figure's left shoulder, by a decorative lampshade. The violet and red pattern of the lampshade provides a counterpoint to the blue and white pattern of the ginger jar in the figure's hands. The figure's pose is contemplative: her head is inclined to our right and forward, while her eyes are cast downward. The simplified, straightforward composition of the painting reinforces the meditational quality of the work. There is a quiet intensity, almost a private intimacy that emanates from the image. The forms are constructed of planes of color, chosen from a palette limited to earth tones that are enlivened by shades of blue, red and violet. Throughout, the illusion of light and shadow is derived from the juxtaposition of opposing tones, set down in broad strokes reminiscent of Verkade's paint handling during the Nabi period. The solidity of the forms echoes the work of Gauguin and Cézanne⁴⁰ but also clearly reveals what Verkade has learned from Lenz about proportion. In addition, the symmetry of the image is a throwback to Lenzian ideals, although Lenz would have abhorred the inherent sensuality of this work. Ever a disciple of Gauguin, Verkade has outlined the forms in blue black, in true cloisonniste fashion, although the outline is applied softly and thus the dramatic effects of separating the forms and flattening the space are minimized.

⁴⁰The painting brings to mind the image of several of Gauguin's bare-breasted Tahitian women as well as Cézanne's *Mme Cézanne in the Conservatory*.

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There is little emphasis on sexuality in the figure's semi-nudity; instead, the bare breasts are portrayed with a sensuality that emanates from Verkade's sense of the beauty of the natural form. The figure is more maternal than sexual and this tone is reinforced by the structural elements of the painting. The solemnity of the painting is likely what has led some⁴¹ to determine that the figure represents Mary Magdalene; it is almost reverential in tone.

By contrast, the *Nude in Jawlensky's Studio* is a decidedly more erotic image. The reclining figure is posed frontally with her left arm raised and her left hand resting on her head. Her right arm supports the weight of her inclined torso, while her right hand rests beneath her breasts providing a counterpoint to the raised arm. Together, the position of the figure's arms serves to frame and draw attention to her breasts. The left elbow draws the viewer's eye to the forward-thrusting left hip, which renders the pelvis parallel to the picture plane and emphasizes the triangular pubis. The blue black outline of the forms recedes, along the outer edges, into the dark color of the cover on the divan on which she rests; however, the inner forms, which detail the sexual areas of the body are all the more highlighted by this outline since they provide a strong contrast to the pale tones of the flesh. Verkade seems to have delighted in the painting of this image and one wonders if this was the work to which he was referring in his letter to Denis of July 25, 1907 when he wrote: "The model had an air, completely uncompromising and

⁴¹See Adolph Smitmans' catalogue entry in Boyle-Turner, *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling van Gauguin*, 153.

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even unattractive for as long as she wore her skirts and marvelous without those rags."⁴²

Of course, such a description in this exact letter would fix the date of the painting firmly in mid-1907. As such, the work would certainly warrant assessment in light of Verkade's recent trip to Paris (March-April, 1907) where he visited with his Nabi friends and also probably attended the Salon des Indépendants.

Although not nearly as aggressive in structure, this figure has elements in common with Matisse's *Blue Nude* (Ill. 26) of 1907, which Verkade may have seen in Paris, particularly in the forward thrust of the figure's left hip and knee, in the rounded fullness of the firm, young breasts, and in the apparent muscularity of the right arm, which supports the weight of the raised torso.

However, despite the sexuality of this figure and its apparent reference to the *Blue Nude*, Verkade resists the more assertive primitivism of Matisse and grounds himself firmly in the work of his nineteenth century forebears, most notably Gauguin. A comparison of Verkade's nude with Gauguin's *Nevermore* (Ill. 27) of 1897 reveals that a similar meditational quality permeates both images. The line in both works is more fluid and painterly than is that of Matisse, which is quite sculptural and seems almost incised into the paint. Nevertheless, all three works share a harmonious

⁴²"Le modèle avait l'air tout à fait pas compromettante et même pas joli aussi longtemps que cela portait des jupons et merveilleuse sans ces loques." Unpublished letter to Denis, dated July 25, 1907.

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interrelationship of figure with background forms that asserts the decorative quality of each painting. While Matisse's *Blue Nude* is clearly the most radical of the three, what is worth mentioning in this context is that Verkade seems to have recognized the progression in Matisse's work of Gauguin's earlier ideas about and treatment of primitive forms and decorative elements. Thus, while he asked Denis in late 1906 "...if you could obtain for me several reproductions from the Independents of the avant-garde, the sensationists, I will be very grateful for them."⁴³ he seems to have been in full agreement with Denis' pronouncement that "Gauguin triumphs!"⁴⁴

Despite Verkade's involvement in artistic experimentation and in the sheer joy of his newly earned artistic freedom, he was still invested in his spiritual underpinnings, which he felt enhanced his quest to return to a Symbolist ideal. Thus, he showed himself to be a fervent proponent of the Symbolist aesthetic. This expression of spirituality in conjunction with his attachment to Symbolism allowed for his artistic strength and formed the crux of his appeal to the generation of Russian expatriate and German artists, specifically Jawlensky, Werefkin and Kubin and possibly Kandinsky and Münter, who all identified with the Munich avant-garde in the early twentieth century. All of these artists, including Verkade, were struggling to grasp the new and reconcile it with the old; in addition, for Verkade the struggle had another dimension – it was complicated by

⁴³"...si vous pouviez me procurer quelques reproductions des Indépendants de l'avant garde, les sensationnistes, j'en serais aussi très reconnaissant" Unpublished letter to Denis, dated September 16, 1906.

⁴⁴"Gauguin triomphe!" Unpublished letter from Denis to Verkade, dated November 14, 1906.

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the force of *Beuronerkunst*, which he respected and admired but which, he recognized, had largely stifled his artistic freshness and spontaneity. Verkade's struggle to shed his reliance on proscribed formulae as an artistic means made his former attachment to his Nabis training psychologically all the stronger, and rooted him in the thinking of the nineteenth century, despite his exploration of more current stylistic trends. While he was inclined to experiment with ideas that represented a new way of thinking about painting, Verkade used these experiments as a means of renewing his ability to express his former Symbolist ideals, which he felt he had lost to training in the Beuron method, rather than for the purpose of experimentation for its own sake, a process which would later find its antithesis in the goals of the *Blaue Reiter*. In describing his new method, he wrote Denis: "It was a return to nature after many years of stylistic sterility."⁴⁵

A good example of his theoretical approach can be found in an analysis of Verkade's 1907. (Ill. 28) Verkade's familiarity with Fauvist color is apparent in this painting; although here too his innovation indicates his return to the stylistic approaches of both Gauguin and van Gogh. Probably the most daring of his Munich pictures, this painting represents Verkade's most dramatic departure from the Beuron method, despite the painting's rather traditional compositional structure. Verkade depicted himself in his monk's cassock before an easel which holds a canvas; his form is posed in a three-quarter view; it is centrally placed and fills the space within the frame. The figure is cut at the hip and at the right shoulder by the lower and left edges of the canvas, and on the left by the easel and canvas on which he is shown to be at work; the depicted easel and

⁴⁵"C'était un retour vers la nature après bien des années de stérilité stylistique." Unpublished letter from Verkade to Maurice Denis, undated, written late April or early May, 1907.

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canvas are themselves dramatically cut by the right edge of the painting's frame. Further, the verticality of Verkade's figure is additionally cropped along the lower edge by a horizontal created by his right arm, holding a palette. A paint brush, apparently held by his hidden left hand, extends from behind the depicted canvas and rests on the palette. The figure dominates the picture plane; the dark green color, tinged with blue, which describes Verkade's monastic garb and, in lighter tones, his face and hand, occupy the largest surface area of the canvas. This color is offset by a murky yellow that describes the background and is enlivened by decorative arabesques painted in red and the same dark green of the cassock and which float through the background space. The use of the more sharply contrasting red and yellow in the background serves to flatten the space by bringing the background forward and allowing the relative darkness of the figure to meld into the surrounding space.

While the green tinted face and hand are reminiscent of Matisse's rejection of descriptive color in the *Portrait of Madame Matisse: The Green Line* (Ill. 29) of 1905, Verkade's painting has far more in common with an earlier Gauguin, *Vahine no te Tiare* (Ill. 30) of 1891, in terms of its composition, its arrangement of colors and forms, and its handling of space. Gauguin's figure too is posed in a three-quarter view and dominates the picture plane; she is seated on a sofa that is cut on the left and right by the frame of the canvas, while the lower edge of the frame cuts the figure itself at the hip. The verticality of this figure is also further cut by a horizontal formed by her extended right arm and hand, which rest on her lap and cross her left arm at the wrist. Her face and hands are described in brown tones highlighted with yellow and green. The woman's dress is painted of a slate blue color, which given its prominence as the largest shape in

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the painting occupies the largest surface area of the composition. Gauguin offset this color by laying down a bright yellow background, which seems to be suspended above rather than set behind the reddish brown sofa. Both the background and foreground of the painting are splashed with floral forms that float through the scene: although one is held in the figure's right hand and another is woven into her hair, these two are rendered ephemeral by the imaginary quality of the others, most of which are painted onto the background surface. Two flowers, however, are painted to rest both on the sofa and against the wall; these are the most daring of the composition in that they directly call into question the gap between the real and the imagined, and thus they conspire to flatten the space of the painting. This flattening is reinforced by the brightness of the background colors, which assert themselves despite the size and the prominence of the figure and the more natural, descriptive shades that Gauguin used to describe her skintone.

Despite several elements in Verkade's work that are reminiscent of Matisse's style – the use of color to build planes of space, the more abstract quality of the arabesque as compared with floral shapes, and a more radical cropping of the figure within the frame – Verkade's work is more clearly connected to the work of Gauguin than it is to that of Matisse. This conclusion is born out by Verkade's own words, written in a letter to Denis during the period in which the *Self-Portrait* was painted.

Don't concern yourself too much with Matisse, etc. Gauguin is much better. It would be stupid to abandon his greatness (the great block prints have many nuances) in favor of investigating reflections and absurd distortions (anti-constructive). However, a bit more of the forceful color of Manguin. In short,

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isn't Impressionism, so quickly dismissed by yourself, redressed in many of the latest investigations by other young men of 21 or 22 years? It seems so to me. That one tries to debase the great Gauguin beside Cézanne and van Gogh. He would not be able to because he is more decorative and has greater fantasy (spiritual things).⁴⁶

Verkade's loyalty to Gauguin and his sincere commitment to Nabi and Symbolist ideas need not be doubted; nevertheless, it bears keeping in mind that in early 1907, shortly after the Gauguin retrospective held at the previous year's Salon d'Automne, which displayed 200 of his works, Gauguin was much on the minds of French and other Francophile artists. Verkade must certainly be counted among this group. His own sentiments were continuously reinforced by his correspondence with Denis. Verkade knew he had a sympathetic ear in Denis; the latter could be counted on to continue the almost reverential discourse about Gauguin. Thus, in his reply to Verkade's letter, quoted above, Denis wrote:

You're right when you say that people prefer van Gogh to Gauguin because he is more of a decorator. And I agree too that we must dream again of the art of Gauguin, and that what is good in the young artists, like Manguin comes from

⁴⁶"Ne vous occupez pas trop des Matisse, etc. Gauguin vaut bien mieux. Ce serait une stupidité d'abandonner sa grandeur (les grandes teintes plates avec beaucoup de nuances) pour les recherches de réflexions et sottises déformations (anticonstructives). Pourtant un peu plus de la coloration puissante de Manguin. L'impressionisme en somme si vite chassé par vous autres petits garçons de 21 à 22 ans revit-elle dans plusieurs recherches des tout derniers? Il me semble. Qu'on tâche d'abaisser le grand Gauguin à côté de Cézanne et van Gogh. Ne serait-il parce qu'il est plus décoratif et parce qu'il a plus de fantaisie (choses spirituelles)." Ibid.

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our earlier ideas. No doubt, it's good to hold fast to this very simple yet very logical conception of art.⁴⁷

In Germany, Verkade could be trusted to communicate all that he held in high regard about the "master" and his adherents to virtually anyone who would listen. Those who did listen included Kubin, Werefkin and Jawlensky, along with a number of younger, lesser-known German artists, among them, Karl Casper, Hugo Troendle and Ernst Kropp. Both Troendle and Kropp traveled to France at Verkade's urging in the autumn of 1907 to see the retrospective exhibition honoring Cézanne at the Salon d'Automne. While in Paris, the pair, through the intercession of Verkade, visited the studio of Maurice Denis where they were able to see first hand the works of the Nabis including Sérusier's famous *Bois d'Amour*, known as the *Talisman*, which the artist had painted directly under the tutelage of Gauguin.⁴⁸

⁴⁷"Vous avez raison pour ce que vous dites qu'on préfère van Gogh à Gauguin parce que celui-ci est plus décorateur. Et j'approuve que vous disiez que nous devons encore songer à l'art de Gauguin, et que ce qui est bien dans les jeunes comme Manguin vient de nos idées d'autrefois. Sans doute il est bon de se tenir à cette conception si simple et si logique de l'art." Unpublished letter from Denis to Verkade, dated June 2, 1907.

⁴⁸Troendle's relationship to Verkade is outlined in a recently published exhibition catalogue of the work of Hugo Troendle. The facts chronicled here are distilled from the text of two articles in that catalogue, both of which were written by Adolf Smitmans and are entitled "Einklang als Stil" and "Hugo Troendle und Jan/Willibrord Verkade." The catalogue, *Hugo Troendle (1882-1955) im Lichte Frankreichs* was prepared in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, which was held at the Städtische Galerie Albstadt und Autoren, June 27 through August 22, 1995. A copy of the complete correspondence between Verkade and Troendle, which has been made available to me through the kindness and generosity of Dr. & Mrs Heinz Dehmel, bears out the facts in Smitmans' brief description.

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An extant body of correspondence between Verkade and Troendle allows us a fairly thorough understanding of their mutual interaction and provides a clear picture of their friendship and professional relationship. The nature of Verkade's interaction with Troendle is instructive because of what it reveals about Verkade's self-confident image as a professional artist and tutor. Since Verkade's correspondence with Jawlensky and Werefkin are not nearly as consistent or extensive, it is from his letters to Troendle that a clear picture of Verkade emerges and gives strength to his central position within the German avant-garde.

Verkade's relationship to Troendle, sixteen years his junior was clearly one of mentor to student. By the time of their meeting in December of 1906, Verkade had already established himself in two distinct artistic communities. Although he had come to Munich to embark upon a period of experimentation and study, Verkade was at a turning point in his career and far from manifesting the disposition of the 23 year old neophyte he had been when he traveled to Paris in 1891 seeking direction. Troendle, on the other hand, was a young spirit, 24 at the time of his arrival in Munich, eager to absorb and experiment with all that was new. Verkade sought to provide the younger man with the means to express his individual vision; of course, for Verkade, that means had its basis in the Symbolist tradition, which he himself was expecting to recapture in Munich and to which he was completely committed at this time. Several of Troendle's activities, during the year and a half that he spent in Munich with Verkade, confirm the nature of their relationship and attest to the older man's influence on the direction that Troendle's exploration of artistic form would take. Probably the most significant and concrete evidence of his reliance on Verkade's tutelage is provided by Troendle's two

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surviving Munich sketchbooks. In one, Troendle made ink and pencil copies of a number of works by Verkade; among these, two still lives carry an inscription that summarizes Verkade's instruction:

Blue contour, dab with ink from contour outward, then smudge, then halftone, and into this fresh shining tones, then shadow, then light, then reflection.⁴⁹

Thus duly instructed, Troendle carried out his youthful artistic experimentation in Symbolist fashion, with the additional support of Verkade's French colleagues, both in the form of their work and through their personal contact with him. Verkade encouraged Troendle to visit Paris and recommended him, via letters of introduction, to Denis and Sérusier. During his stay in Paris, Troendle also met Bonnard and Vuillard; and later, in the winter of 1907-1908, Verkade arranged for Sérusier to spend the months of December and January with him in Munich, where the latter met Verkade's artist companions, Troendle among them.

Also in Troendle's sketchbook, which is actually entitled "Notes after Verkade and Paul Sérusier (1907-1908) Winter/Munich," are copies of works by Sérusier, and by

⁴⁹Kontur blau, Antuschen von Kontur aus, dann frottieren, dann Halbton und in diesen hinein mit frischen, leuchtenden Tönen, dann Schatten und dann das Licht, dann Reflex. Inscription in a sketchbook by Troendle, entitled "Notes after Verkade and Paul Sérusier (1907-1908) Winter/Munich".

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van Gogh and Denis, specifically those that were then in the collection of Dr. Wolff. During this period, Troendle also made portraits of both Verkade and Sérusier. It is likely that the portrait of Sérusier was made during the 1907-1908 winter, while the portrait of Verkade is dated 5 April, 1908. In addition to drawing after his new found "masters," as directed by Verkade, Troendle painted in oils, using Synthetist color and structure. His *Self-Portrait*, (Ill. 31) painted in 1907, depicts the artist in shades of brown, amber, red and green laid down in broad flat areas. The drawing is simplified and the composition is constructed through the building up of planes of space through color harmonies. The green tones of the face and neck are subsumed into the red jacket and amber-colored background over Troendle's left shoulder, both tones providing sufficient contrast to flatten the space. The red and amber colors are repeated in lesser intensity in Troendle's beard, which is surrounded by the greens of the face and neck. Troendle has even used decorative arabesque forms in the background, and these are reflective of the shapes created by the color swatches that construct spatial planarity in the face. This image bears comparison with Verkade's own *Self-Portrait* of the same year, discussed above, and although Verkade's work is more experimental and daring, it seems clear that Troendle was working according to the older man's ideas.

The intensity of their relationship is borne out by the evidence provided in a 1907 letter written by Verkade, which reveals both the character and strength of his mentorship of Troendle. In the fall of 1907, during his trip to the Salon d'Automne, Troendle apparently wrote to Verkade a letter (now lost) in which he compared the work

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of Cézanne less favorably to that of the Belgian painter, Henri Evenepoel (1872-99).⁵⁰ To make matters worse, Troendle apparently also criticized Delacroix's work as being weak and exaggerated in form. Verkade's astonishingly vehement reply is instructive on two counts: first, it underscores his seriousness of mind as Troendle's teacher, one who will spare no criticism; second, it reveals his own keen insights about art, as the following comments addressed to his "Dear Friend," will illustrate:

Yesterday evening I was in a boiling rage over that letter that had you said such things to me when we were in Jawlensky's studio, I would have been able to throw you down the whole flight of stairs.

Well, well, Cézanne is merely "interessant" but Evenepoel is wonderful! Damn you, damn you! I have seen enough of the latter to know that it is impossible for him to have the cultural significance of the former – that he is not able to shake souls, that he will not last a generation, that he is not strong enough to demolish anyone. And Delacroix does weak, mannerist drawing, exaggerated in form! If only you understood the depth of the word "merde" and if only all of Paris could scream it in your ear! Can someone who paints the Carrying of the Cross in Constantinople actually draw weakly? Is this

⁵⁰Henri Evenepoel was a member of the Belgian Symbolist movement at the midpoint of its heyday. He was raised in Brussels and traveled to Paris in 1892. By 1893, he had been admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts in the atelier of Gustave Moreau, where he met Matisse. Evenepoel's artistic career progressed steadily, marked by invitations to exhibit at the Salon des Artistes Français, the Salon of the Société Nationale and eventually with La Libre Esthétique. He was invited to join the circle La Palette in 1895. In October of 1896, he traveled to Algeria, where he apparently began an exploration of theories of color and composition, which, according to Marie-Jeanne Chartrain-Hebbelinck, as demonstrated in his subsequent work, "reveals him as a precursor of Fauvism." Evenepoel died of typhoid fever in December of 1899. *Belgian Art: 1880-1914*, exhibition catalogue for The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York, 1980, 95.

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something weak? When has anyone made a depiction that was so even, such a perfect whole and so adapted to temperament? What do you mean when you talk about true form; what is true – photography? There have been others who have had a greater understanding of form but instead lacked the incredible colorist gifts of Delacroix, but I find it a horrible banality, suitable for third rate newspaper scribblers, to claim that Delacroix paints "weakly."

Your trip to Paris was wasted. Probably the "cocottes" made a greater impression on you than the art of France. The instruction you should have gotten you did not get because you didn't open your heart; you looked around like a pedantic schoolteacher. You didn't recognize the inner life, the urge that is still alive in French art and which is a bigger gain for us than Leonardo's perfection.⁵¹

⁵¹"Es hat also gestern abend einen Wut in mir gekocht, die in Stande gewesen wäre, wenn Sie mir ähnliches auf dem Atelier von Jawl.(ensky) erzählt hätten, von sämtlichen Treppen herunterzuschmeissen.

So, so Cézanne bloß interessant über Evenepoel wunderbar! Verfluchter, verfluchter! Ich habe genug von diesen letzten gesehen um zu wissen dass er unmöglich die Culturelle Bedeutung hat wie der Erste, daß er nicht die Seelen so aufzuwühlen versteht, daß er keine Generation machen wird, daß er nicht einmal stark genug um auch nur jemand zum Kuckuck zu führen. Und Delacroix, schwach und maniert Zeichnung übertriebene Form. Konnte Sie doch die Tiefe des Wortchen "Merde" verstehen und möchte ganz Paris es Ihnen in Sie Ohren schreien! Zeichnet jemand der den Einzug d. Kreuz in Konstantinopel zeichnen kann überhaupt schwach? Ist es etwas schwach? Wo hat dann jemals einer eine Zeichnung gehabt der so aberall gleich ist, so aus einem Guss so dem Temperament angepasst? Was reden Sie doch von wahren Form, was ist wahr, die Photographie? Das es Leute gegeben die mehr Formverständnis hatten über dafür die coloristische Gaben eines Delacroix entbehren ist wahr, aber ich finde es eine entsetzlich Banalität, gut für Zeitungeschreiber 3 Ranges zu behaupten dass Delacroix "schwach" zeichnet.

Ihre Reise nach Paris war umsonst, vielleicht das die Cocottes besser auf eingewicht als die Kunst Frankreichs. Die Belehrung die Sie erhalten sollten haben Sie nicht bekommen denn Sie haben ihr Herz nicht offengemacht über als ein pedanten Schulmeister haben Sie herumgeschant. Sie haben nicht das innere Leben, die Triebkraft die sich noch lebendig ist in die Französische Kunst erkannt, die uns mehr nützt als Leonardo und seine perfection." Unpublished letter to Troendle, dated October 7, 1907.

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Despite the exceptionally strong tone of this letter, Verkade ended it with a reprieve. He cautioned Troendle to spend his remaining days in Paris looking beyond form for the spirit or inner life in the works of the "moderns" and to emulate them in this goal. As has been noted earlier, given the opportunity, Verkade sounded the hallmark message of his teaching:

Have something to say and I will also like what you are doing!

Well, this is the echo (of my rage). I hope you know me well enough to be able to tolerate it.... believe me, I will always be your fatherly friend.⁵²

Verkade's lesson was apparently not wasted on Troendle. By the winter of 1907-1908, he wrote in his sketchbook, mentioned above, "Changes in working influences: France, Cézanne - Verkade - Sérusier - Kropp."⁵³ By Easter of 1908, Verkade's Munich sojourn had ended and he had returned to Beuron. From there, he wrote to Troendle with the advice of a mentor.

I was in your studio and I congratulate you on your progress. Every portrait I saw had something special about it, so it was difficult to pick out the best one.

⁵²"Haben Sie was zu sagen und ich werde auch Werk lieben! So, da ist das Echo, hoffentlich kennen Sie mich genug um es ertragen zu können.... glauben Sie mir stets als ihr paterlicher freund." Ibid.

⁵³"Änderung im Arbeiten Einflüsse: Frankreich, Cézanne - Verkade - Sérusier - Kropp." Sketchbook by Troendle, entitled "Notes after Verkade and Paul Sérusier, (1907-1908) Winter/Munich."

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I would like to give you some advice – keep painting with purer, flatter colors; give every object its own color. There are still too many colors in the head. Now, it would be better for you to paint according to the method revealed in the work of van Gogh.⁵⁴

Verkade also encouraged Troendle to retain his contact with Jawlensky and recommended him to Wladyslaw Slewinski, whom he described as a disciple of Gauguin and who was in Munich at the time.

Among the painters around Gauguin, he (Slewinski) is the one who has perhaps most disappeared, but in his "heads," he has what you need, in my opinion. ...Of course, you must have contact with Jawlensky. Last time, he really started to appreciate your work and he likes your love of art. Maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea for you to stay with Sérusier for about three weeks. By the way, Slewinski knows Brittany very well and the inn of Marie Poupée in Le Pouldu, where you can see Gauguins.⁵⁵

The correspondence between Verkade and Troendle continued unabated until Verkade's death in 1946; even after Verkade stopped painting in 1914, the letters continue to include professional discourse; although more personal matters are also discussed. It is

⁵⁴Unpublished letter to Troendle, dated April 15, 1908.

⁵⁵*ibid.* According to Boyle-Turner, Troendle later made two trips to Châteauneuf-du-Faou to visit Sérusier, in 1908 and 1909. Also see Smitmans, *Hugo Troendle (1882-1955) im Lichte Frankreichs*, 31.

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not surprising that, toward the end of Verkade's life, Troendle apparently felt the need to sum up for Verkade the profound impact that their relationship had had on his life and work. His effort to do so took the following form:

My gratitude to you for your many kindness to me during those days in Munich, including the association with Sérusier and the recommendations to Denis, Vuillard, Bonnard, etc. – for all of those experiences that were incisive and essential to my life.⁵⁶

One of Troendle's last reminiscences of Verkade appear in his letter to Karl Caspar informing him of Verkade's then recent death on July 19. Dated August 3, 1946, Troendle's letter makes reference to a book that was about to be published by Denis when the latter died suddenly. Troendle's comments contain the following statement, which aptly summarizes his relationship to Verkade,

In many of Verkade's documents and also letters, one finds portrayed the interesting and curious work of this outsider who was in Munich from 1907 to 1908, when I was his student.⁵⁷

⁵⁶"die vielen Wohltaten, die Sie mir seinerzeit in München durch die Bekanntmachung mit Sérusier, durch dessen Empfehlung die Bekanntschaft mit Denis, Vuillard, Bonnard, etc. – alles Erlebnisse, die für mein Leben einschneidend und wesentlich waren... meine Dankbarkeit auszudrücken." Unpublished letter from Troendle to Verkade, dated June 18, 1943.

⁵⁷"Mit vielen Dokumenten, auch Briefen von Verkade, ist das interessante und merkwürdige Schaffen dieses Autseiters geschildert, der ja 1907 bis 1908 im München war, wo ich sein Schüler wurde." Unpublished letter from Troendle to Caspar, dated August 3, 1946.

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Verkade's relationships with Kubin, Werefkin, and Jawlensky are all marked by an element of professional exchange, with Verkade taking the lead at certain pivotal moments. Unlike Troendle, these three painters were all more established in their respective careers when they first encountered Verkade. Nevertheless, all three were searching, and like Verkade, felt themselves to be at turning points in the development of their mature styles. Verkade would provide them with a firmly grounded commitment to Symbolist precepts, which at the time corresponded to the goals they had set for themselves, and consequently enabled them to achieve those goals.

While Verkade believed that his interaction with his Munich colleagues took the form of a true exchange, as we shall see in the next chapter, Kubin, Werefkin, and Jawlensky in turn all credited him with moving them toward a more thorough understanding of the artistic means necessary to create works that would express the ideals they sought to communicate. Verkade's ability to act as mentor was reliant upon their admiration and respect for his artistic beginnings within the Nabis circle, his understanding of the modern impulse in art (i.e., a movement away from strict realism and from sacrificing content to form), his keen artistic insight, and his capacity to perceive those impulses, then being characterized as modern, in the art of the ancients. Their admiration was reinforced by Verkade's connection to Beuron, both artistically, because it revealed to them the integrative nature of Verkade's artistic searching, and personally, because as a member of a religious community, Verkade was, in earnest, living what he sought to

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express in his pictures, i.e., he had melded together his vocation and his avocation to form one continuous whole.

The absorption of Verkade's thought by each of these artists brought each in his/her own way to the understanding that led them to further develop highly individual and abstract styles of painting.

Chapter 5
Verkade and the Avant-Garde

It is my role to be the link among men.

Jan Verkade¹

Art-historically speaking, Alfred Kubin, Alexei Jawlensky and Marianne von Werefkin were among the most prominent members of a group of experimental painters working in Germany between 1907 and 1908. All of them later formed alliances with Kandinsky and Münter in the establishment of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung, München* (NKVM) in 1909. The part that Verkade played in the development of their thinking during this exploratory period, and his subsequent, indirect role in the transitional phase of Kandinsky's and Münter's work between 1908 and 1909 will be the subject of this chapter.

Kubin, Jawlensky and Werefkin all created work that demonstrates a debt to Verkade's Symbolist ideology and credited him with guiding their impulse to examine again, and more closely, the ideas and the paintings of Gauguin and the Nabis. Of this

¹"C'est mon rôle d'être le trait d'union pour bien les gens." Unpublished letter to Maurice Denis, dated August 8, 1907.

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group within Verkade's immediate circle, Kubin produced the earliest paintings to bear witness to Verkade's influence.

In terms of his complete oeuvre, Alfred Kubin can be seen as a German counterpart to France's Odilon Redon and as well, as a forerunner of the Swiss Paul Klee, both part of the Symbolist tradition in some measure. Kubin's characteristic style resulted in the creation of a pointedly fantastical universe, one that is thoroughly distant and distinct from nature and that speaks only to the deepest levels of the human psyche. However, Gauguinesque Symbolism marks Kubin's 1907 works, such as *Before Man*, *Negresses Smoking* and *Woman with Panther*; these paintings provide evidence of a departure, albeit brief, from the phantasmagoric creatures that inhabited his canvases both before and after this phase.

In her 1990 catalogue essay for the Kubin retrospective at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Annegret Hoberg notes that Kubin's impulse, in 1907, to experiment with a contrasting method was convincingly brought about by Kubin's contact with Verkade. She states that the earliest of the 1907 pictures to reveal the influence of Gauguin is a work entitled, *Before Man* (Ill. 32), and comments that this work "owes its impulse to the intercession of P. Willibrord Verkade, who was in Munich in 1907."² Hoberg also

²"Das Bild der "Vormenschen" ist hier ein erstes Beispiel für diese Periode, zu der die Vermittlung des Pater Willibrord Verkade 1907 in München den Anstoß gab." Hoberg, 270.

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confirms that Kubin had learned of Verkade through Jawlensky and Werekin as early as the spring of that year.³

The contact with Verkade came at a time when Kubin was ripe for experimentation; his memoirs (quoted later) indicate that he had undergone a period of sterility in his ability to create. Within the short span of time between their introduction in the spring and early July of 1907,⁴ Verkade assumed a strikingly mentor-like stance toward Kubin in relation to his work. Verkade's sense of himself as a conveyor of theoretical and practical issues pertaining to the making of art is revealed in both the tone and content of a letter he wrote to Kubin that contains a discussion of the latter's working method.

The letter begins with Verkade congratulating Kubin on having returned to work after a period of inactivity; Verkade gently lectured Kubin on the value of work to one's daily well-being and to one's life as a whole. In a friendly tone, he chided Kubin for not getting out to see current exhibitions and taking advantage of the opportunity to learn from other artists. Verkade then extolled the virtues of the French, by mentioning an exhibition by Cross which he had seen recently. Explaining that he had studied several Crosses alongside works by the German artists Klein, Putz and Erler, Verkade declared

³Hoberg, *Alfred Kubin*, 54.

⁴July 7, 1907 is the date of the one surviving letter from this period between them.

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Good Heavens one really sees the enormous superiority of the French. ...That is the power of the French, that they have a good past in painting and always learn from each other.⁵

Moreover, Verkade credited himself in this letter, along with Jawlensky and Troendle, for the progress he had observed in the recent work of Ernst Kropp:

Kropp has made a lot of progress over the last months and I don't doubt that he owes it to Jawlensky, myself and Troendle, a young painter from Karlsruhe.⁶

In his assumed role as mentor, Verkade felt comfortable suggesting to Kubin that the latter give up tempera painting for a while and work in oils. He further assured Kubin of the more striking effects that he would achieve if he were to follow Verkade's advice.

Let tempera painting be for a while and paint with oil on an absorptive surface or an unprepared cardboard. Kropp has made a lot of progress with this, as does everyone who tries it. One dares to use purer color because

⁵"Lieber Himmel da sieht man die enorme Superiorität des Franzosen. ... Das ist die Kraft der Franzosen, dass sie eine gute Vergangenheit in der Malerei haben und immer voneinander lernen." Unpublished letter from Verkade to Alfred Kubin, dated July 7, 1907, catalogued among the archives of the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.

⁶ "Kropp hat in den letzten Monate grosse Fortschritte gemacht und ich zweifle nicht daran dass er es Jawl. mir und Tröndle (sic) ein junger Maler aus Karlsruhe verdankt." Ibid.

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everything is better harmonized when the paint is wet and one is forced to refrain from smearing. If you try it with tempera, you will never be able to leave behind your smallness; narrow-pointed brushes always make things small.⁷

Perhaps to reinforce his words, Verkade sent along with this letter several small works of art: one study by Sérusier and four by his own hand. In the letter he notes that these works are enclosed but does not name or describe any of them except to mention that one is a landscape. Given this lack of information, it is impossible to compare one of Kubin's 1907 works to one of Verkade's, which we can be sure Kubin actually saw; nevertheless, it is instructive, particularly given the content of this letter, to examine Kubin's work from this period with an eye toward comparison with Nabi concepts, specifically as they are evident in works then current in Verkade's oeuvre and representative of those he may have sent Kubin.

Kubin's 1907 works, mentioned above, are decidedly more grounded in a humanistic emotional appeal than are his more characteristic images. His compositional style in these paintings took on a more flattened quality, his forms were drawn more broadly and

⁷"Lassen Sie eine Zeit lang das Temperamalen und malen Sie mit Oel auf saugendem Gerund oder unpreparierten Pappendeckel. Kropp hat dadurch grosse Fortschritte gemacht, wie jeder der es versucht. Man wagt reiner in der Farbe zu gehen, weil alles doch was abgestimmt wird und man ist gezwungen jedes Schmieren zu lassen, Versuchen Sie mit der Tempera kommen Sie nie aus Ihrer Kleinheit hinaus, die kleinen spitzen Pinsel machen immer klein." Ibid. Note: Verkade's German is often a hybrid of German and Dutch both in terms of its vocabulary and syntax. I owe a special thanks to Jutta Corinna Kell for translating this difficult letter, especially for her patience and skill in deciphering those passages which were particularly shrouded in mysterious departures from literary German.

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the coloration of his canvases shone with brighter, purer tones. Kubin himself credited these effects to the influence of Gauguin. According to Hoberg, Kubin wrote about this period in his autobiography:

In my work, I had come again to a turning point. I was fed up with every experiment of form and color and now turned to the complete opposite of my style, to the flattened and harmonious compositional style of the young French and German artists, who relied heavily on Gauguin.⁸

Kubin would have known of Gauguin without having met Verkade; however, there is a compelling argument to be made for the acquaintance of Verkade as having been the impetus for this startling change in Kubin's work at this precise point in time: Kubin would have recognized the Synthetist qualities in Jawlensky's 1906 *Portrait of Hedwig Kubin* (Ill. 33) the artist's wife; Verkade had been introduced to Kubin by Jawlensky and Werefkin at a time when Verkade's stylistic theory was held in great favor by the Russian pair; Kubin was at a turning point in his development of a mature style and in need of an experimental phase. Moreover, although Kubin quickly relinquished his

⁸"Bei meiner Arbeit war ich wieder an einen Wendepunkt gekommen. Aller Formen- und Farben-experimente war ich überdrüssig und griff nun zu dem vollkommensten Gegensatz meiner Arbeitsweise, indem ich mich an die flächige und harmonische Kompositionsweise der jungen französischen und deutschen Künstler hielt, die von Gauguin ihren Ausgang genommen hat." Alfred Kubin., quoted in Hoberg, 270. Wieland Schmied also quotes this passage from Kubin's book in the catalogue notes for a Kubin exhibition held at the Albertina Museum in Vienna in 1967. The quote is found on page 14 of the catalogue, which was translated by Jean Steinberg.

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Gauguinesque style in favor of his own unique vision, he attributed the renewed vigor of that vision to his brief experiment with Synthetism. "After I had gained this insight, I felt much more relieved and creative and began to work at once. I now recognized my abilities and limitations clearly."⁹ That reflection connects Kubin to a Symbolist aesthetic, especially as it pertains to theory. In overall terms, his work differs from that of Nabi Symbolism with respect to style, except for this brief moment of experimentation by which he accounted for the regeneration of his own method. This regeneration, of course, led to his greatest artistic achievement, his completion of *Die Andere Seite*, a work that, stylistically speaking, is of a different ilk, but which, nevertheless, ponders the essential, philosophical questions of the Symbolist movement.

The evidence of Verkade's intercession, particularly in light of the aforementioned letter, may be found in an analysis of Kubin's work from this period as compared with Verkade's Symbolist technique. If we begin by examining Verkade's early Munich work, we may be able to suggest at least the type of study that Verkade may have sent to Kubin as a accompaniment to his letter, with the intention of guiding Kubin toward a different approach to painting.

As has been previously noted, Verkade came to Munich to escape the stifling limitations of Beuronerkunst and to recapture in his work the freshness and spontaneity of his earlier, Symbolist painting style. To his mind, such a rediscovery was only possible in a return to nature, the motivating element for him that was completely

⁹Alfred Kubin. *From the Desk of a Draftsman*. as quoted in Wieland Schmied. *Alfred Kubin*. trans. by Jean Steinberg, exhibition catalogue for the Albertina Museum. Vienna: 1967, 14.

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absent from Lenz's prescribed "canon." It is not surprising then that Verkade's first works in Munich were neither experimental in style nor religious in subject matter; rather, they demonstrate a straightforward return to his Pont-Aven technique and the spirituality inherent in his personal encounter with nature. A painting from 1906, entitled *Washing or Laundry*, (Ill. 34) is a representative example of this method. Depicting a female figure from the back in the midst of a lush field cut by a zigzag pattern of hanging laundry, the painting is at once mundane and meditative. Verkade's method of execution here recalls all of the Symbolist precepts to which he had subscribed as a Nabi: the palette is limited to three or four tones; planes of space are built vertically along the two-dimensional surface of the canvas; drawing is simplified and details are obscured and minimized -- the laundry is so devoid of detail as to become an almost impassable wall that cuts across the field breaking it into distinct sections; the colors are laid down in a rhythmic pattern across the canvas, which works to keep the entire image on the surface, reducing the space and emphasizing its flatness. With respect to the image itself, the figure, slightly off center, is framed by both natural elements and man-made ones: the trees not far in front of and behind her, a curving path in the landscape that encircles her, and the winding, zigzag line of laundry that encompasses her on all sides. She seems caught in this maze of her own making and we read her still posture as an indication of her indecision about what to do next. Is this figure a metaphor for Verkade himself, searching for a way out of his self-made maze of conflicting painting styles, which seemed to him to be conjoined by a unified theory? A closer inspection of the work reveals that there is a break in the chain of laundry immediately beyond the figure's right shoulder. Perhaps this outlet symbolizes Verkade's Munich sojourn, especially if one considers that neither we (literally) nor he

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(figuratively) knows precisely where it leads.¹⁰ Thus the meditational aspects presented by this work raise it above the level of its mundane subject matter and, in fact, bring to mind certain works by van Gogh, *Bedroom at Arles*, for example, in which the subject matter presents us with a commonly observed occurrence but which upon closer inspection reveals and expresses a more personal and emotional content.

Kubin's meditative style was always more demonic than either Verkade's or van Gogh's; however, in 1907, he approached the ominous depth of his emotions more directly and through a means more rooted in nature than either his earlier or his later works reveal. The previously noted work, *Vormenschen* or *Before Man* is a case in point. In a totally uncharacteristic manner, Kubin here represents an earthly, if barren, landscape drawn with broad planes of simplified line and limited palette. A broad outline surrounds each shape and calls to mind Gauguin's "cloisonnisme." This technique allows the image to hold the picture plane, creating a flatness unknown in Kubin's oeuvre. Depicted in the midst of this rocky environment are two figures: a haggard-looking, pregnant female at the center, who stands looking over her left

¹⁰Boyle-Turner believes that this work may have been executed at Beuron shortly before Verkade's departure for Munich (152). Indeed, the earlier dating would give even greater claim to my theory of the painting being a symbolic autograph of Verkade's thoughts and emotions upon embarking on this long awaited venture "back to himself." I do disagree with Boyle-Turner however, with respect to her view that the tight space of the canvas represents, in its calm, Verkade's solace within the walls of the Beuron monastery. While it is true that Verkade ultimately chose the solace of Beuron over the turmoil that painting became for him, especially during the crossroads of Munich; nevertheless, he anticipated the Munich sojourn as a time when he would come to terms with his conflict over remaining true to his Nabis ideals or giving himself over to *Beuronerkunst* en toto. Verkade expected this resolution to take the form of a harmonious admixture of the two approaches to painting. At the onset of his Munich stay, he was hopeful (recent evidence makes this clear) and could not have foreseen the impossibility of that resolution.

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shoulder and away from her companion: a half-male, half-animal seated on the rocks, who confronts the female. Kubin has left their interaction to our imagination. What is implied, however, both by the image and by the title is that the human race is poised at the dawn of creation, the figures represented here being the forerunners of ourselves and a foreshadowing of human history. Kubin's painting thus portends the harshness and evil of human existence and the trials of humanity through an implicit, impending history known in hindsight to him and to us. As such, it is decidedly meditative although far more universally so than is Verkade's work, which is particularly personal. While Hoberg clearly credits Kubin's choice of a subject matter to his own firmly established artistic idiom, she, nevertheless, firmly attests to the influence of Gauguin, transmitted through Verkade, in her discussion of this painting's style and execution.¹¹

If we recall that in 1907 Kubin was restless and impatient, seeking a new direction for his work, it could be suggested then that Verkade's introduction to Kubin at this precise moment in time, and their subsequent relationship¹² allowed Kubin to redirect his energies toward an experimental phase, which ultimately proved to be a most productive means toward the establishment of Kubin's mature style.

¹¹"Während die Form der Darstellung mit ihren blockhaften, in das "Cloisonné" dunkler Konturen eingeschlossenen Flächen tatsächlich an Vorbilder des Gauguin-Kreises angelehnt ist, zeigt sich das Thema ganz im Werk Kubins verankert." Hoberg, *Alfred Kubin: 1877-1959.*, 270.

¹²Verkade and Kubin apparently held each other in mutual respect and continued to correspond over years; the only other surviving letter dates from 1920 (also in the archives of the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus) and indicates, from its tone and content, the existence of an irregular correspondence throughout the thirty-odd years of their friendship.

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Verkade's departure from Munich and his subsequent travels seem to have interrupted his contact with Kubin. Unfortunately, none of Kubin's letters to Verkade have survived and the only other letter by Verkade to Kubin dates from 1920. Despite this long hiatus, Verkade's letter is both warm and familiar in tone. In it, he briefly recounted his activities during the years since Munich, mentioning both the Jerusalem sojourn and the fact that he had begun writing a book (his autobiography), a task that was constantly interrupted by his monastic duties. He ended the letter by asking after Werefkin and Jawlensky, implying that he had had no contact with either of them for quite some time, but requesting their addresses so that he might send them copies of his book, in which they were all mentioned, when it would be published. In both the warmth and familiarity of its tone, this letter provides testament to the fondness and significance with which Verkade viewed his Munich sojourn and those with whom he associated during the brief 18 months for which it endured.

Verkade's interaction with Jawlensky and Werefkin was at least in part determined by the latter's pre-established involvement with each other. Nevertheless, distinctions may be made between their independent relationships to Verkade; these are drawn in large measure from the artists' individuality and from the separate roles each of them played in the development of abstract styles during the pivotal time in question. Both Fäthke and Hoberg attribute changes in the painting styles of Jawlensky and Werefkin in 1907-08 to their association with Verkade and to the direct and indirect contacts they made with the Nabis through his intercession.

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Having committed herself to a career as a painter long before she met Jawlensky, Werefkin oddly relinquished her personal goals in favor of cultivating the gifts she perceived Jawlensky to possess. Nevertheless, her forceful character has led one scholar to conclude: "There can be no doubt that Werefkin, who took it upon herself to encourage Jawlensky's talent, was the dominant partner in the relationship."¹³ Although, throughout the period of their involvement, Werefkin devoted her own energies to painting for only a brief time, from early 1907 to shortly after 1910, she, nevertheless, proved to exert a strong influence on the directions taken by both the *Neue Künstlervereinigung, München* and the *Blaue Reiter* movements. Of concern to this study is, of course, her brief period of painting, which overlaps her affiliation with Verkade, and the philosophical and theoretical guidance she provided to Jawlensky as well as to Kandinsky and Münter during these pivotal years. Werefkin's diaries provide us with significant insight into her thinking about art; they reveal her commitment to the concepts and constructs of the Symbolism so crucial to her definition of the artist and of art itself. It is within this context that her relationship to Verkade took root and formed a direct link for her from her own grounding in Russian Symbolism to the major proponents of French Symbolism. Verkade's affiliation with the Nabis enabled him to become a wellspring of Symbolist theory for Werefkin and Jawlensky. In addition to discussing his own ideas and work with them, he introduced the Russian pair to a number of his Nabi friends, both in person and through their canvases.

¹³Armin Zweite, *The Blue Rider in the Lenbachhaus*, 13.

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Like Troendle, Werefkin and Jawlensky also returned to France in 1907 after having met Verkade; besides visiting Paris to see the Salons, the pair again traveled to Pont-Aven, having first visited the town in 1905. Their interest in and understanding of Nabis painting had grown due to their involvement with the Nabi Obelisque; their own work during this period reflects not only their renewed interest but also their understanding of the relationship between the work of Gauguin and the Nabis as compared with that of Matisse and the Fauves. Verkade was instrumental to their renewed interest and to their enhanced understanding of this connection.

In December and January of 1907-08, Sérusier visited Verkade in Munich; during this extended stay, Sérusier met Jawlensky and Werefkin and temporarily became an active member of their small artistic circle. This personal contact with the two Nabis painters motivated Jawlensky and Werefkin to reaffirm their commitment to Symbolist ideology and to examine more closely the stylistic connection between the Synthetism of Gauguin and the Fauvism of Matisse and his circle.

As early as 1905, Werefkin and Jawlensky had visited Paris and seen the famous 1905 exhibition at the Salon d'Automne, which included the first showcase of the group to be christened the "Wild Beasts." In addition, during that same visit, they sought out the works of the Nabis, in particular, those of Bonnard, Vuillard and Valloton, and as well works by Redon and Hodler. Both Werefkin and Jawlensky perceived a definite connection between the Nabis and the Fauves; they saw, as early as 1905, the inherent similarities in the works of Gauguin and those of Matisse. This perception is especially relevant when one considers that only recent art historians attribute a stylistic change in Jawlensky's painting around 1906 to a broader impulse than the exclusive influence

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of Matisse. The German art historian, Bernd Fäthke has written extensively about both Werefkin and Jawlensky. In his work, Fäthke credits Verkade with having significantly influenced the stylistic development of each of them. Fäthke contends that Symbolism, and its Synthetist formal elements, vis à vis Verkade had a profound effect on the work of both Jawlensky and Werefkin during this period, turning both of them toward pursuing a Synthetist technique as the means of heightening the expressive and decorative quality of their painting and rendering it more purely ideist.

For Werefkin, this emphasis on the idea, and on abstraction as the means of achieving it, was a paramount goal. Like Gauguin, Werefkin's understanding of an abstract means centered on the reduction or simplification of forms in nature as these were stimulated by sensations and inspirations. A journal entry from 1904 supports Werefkin's commitment to anti-naturalism as the key element in expressing the idea. She wrote:

An art that is truly young and fresh must be based on a precise observation of nature. The ways of making the new impression must be personal and independent of existing forms. Thus it is false to think of one's work and then to copy it from nature. It is necessary for nature to inspire you with a purely physical impression. The ways of making that impression are completely in you and not in nature. But the work itself, it is life, it is nature.... Art is one sensation, a sentiment; sensations and sentiments come to us from outside. But

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the artistic thought made from the temperament of the artist, from his personality, from his received sensations, animates an appropriate form.¹⁴

Although Verkade and Werefkin did not meet for almost three more years, their respective words offer us a glimpse of their independent but shared beliefs and attitudes about painting. In a letter to his brother Eduard, written shortly after his arrival in Munich, Verkade added the following postscript:

As a painter one must do three things:

1. to look very precisely at nature and study it again and again to be alive to the beauty of God's work and to refine one's consciousness of it.
2. to express oneself in works that intend only to reflect an impression, a sensation, in whatever way.
3. to trace the geometric element, that is to say to try and synthesize the norms of infinite variations.¹⁵

¹⁴Werefkin, *Briefe an einen Unbekannten*, v III, Clemens Weiler, ed. Köln: Verlag M.DuMont Schauberg, 1960, June 24, 1904.

¹⁵Unpublished letter to Eduard Verkade, dated January 6, 1907, translated from the original Dutch by Ivan Verkade, Eduard's son. The substance of this quote is actually a reformulation of Aurier's definition of Symbolism, as published in the *Mercure de France* (Paris) II (1891), and which originally derived from Aurier's discussions with Sérusier. It is interesting to speculate whether, given the similarity between Verkade's words and Werefkin's, Aurier's text might have been known to the Russian Symbolists, among whom Werefkin may be counted. (See Jelena Hahl-Koch, *Marianne Werefkin und die russische Symbolismus*, München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1967.)

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Just preceding this description of his process, Verkade wrote "The older I become, the more I realize that all that matters is the intensity of the soul, of vision, of the sublime." In the same journal entry quoted above, Werefkin went on to say that "True art is that which renders the soul of things.... An artist is ... one who sees in life the constant ... manifestation of a force of an invisible sentiment."

It is reasonable to suggest that Werefkin was so moved by the likemindedness of Verkade's way of thinking about art to her own that this force was a determining factor in her decision to return to painting in 1907. Whatever her motivation, Werefkin's painting style in 1907 is characterized by distinct references to Nabi Synthetism, references that Verkade was instrumental in communicating to her. One work, in particular, *Die Landstraße* (Ill. 35) is evocative of many Pont-Aven pictures from the 1890s in terms of its stylistic elements and its overall emotive content.¹⁶ The painting depicts three women standing in the extreme foreground of the space at the base of a winding road that stretches vertically to the very top of the picture plane. The sheer vertical line formed by the road and its bright color against the darker shades of the women's clothing renders the picture plane immediately flat. On either side of the road lay segmented fields that also stretch vertically up the sides of the space thereby reinforcing the flatness of the image.

The three women are dressed in peasant garb; their heads wrapped in scarves that tie under the chin. Their costumes are reminiscent of the image of the Breton women who

¹⁶Werefkin's painting is also reminiscent of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, another manifestation of Symbolism.

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populated so many of the canvases of the Pont-Aven artists in the 1890s. The figures appear to be almost huddled against an invisible wind that seems to have forced them to the foreground edge of the picture plane.

The drawing of the image is highly simplified and the palette is limited, although the color harmonies are a focal point of the composition. Indeed, with the exception of the figures, the entire scene is an orchestration of color fields, the result of which is a highly abstracted composition. The effect of the stylistic components is a work that is pervaded by a feeling of isolation and refuge. Werefkin's choice of subject matter, that is, of the fields and the road, is reminiscent of paintings by van Gogh, in which the figures seem ancillary to the overall emotion created by the intense and personal interpretation of the landscape. As such, this painting is remarkably Synthetist in both its conception and execution. It is instructive to note here that Werefkin owned a painting by Verkade, a *Breton Landscape* (Ill. 36) that he had painted in 1895.¹⁷ While it is unclear exactly when and how she acquired it, it is reasonable to suggest that Verkade presented her with the work during this period of their direct contact in Munich. Interestingly, the painting is a work from Verkade's Pont-Aven period and not a work then current in his oeuvre. What Werefkin would have admired in the painting

¹⁷The date of this painting is somewhat questionable. If Verkade actually painted it in 1895, he would have done so from memory, that is, he had already been a member of the Beuron community for at least a year in 1895; moreover, the painting is handled in a decidedly Synthetist style, when Verkade had been painting according to the rules of the Beuron "canon" since his entry into monastic life. It is more likely that the painting was made earlier than Fäthke contends, perhaps in 1892 or 93.

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would likely have been Verkade's original approach to Synthetist principles, an approach that he was trying to revive in his work in 1907.

Werefkin had previously articulated ideas about abstraction in her diaries, which she completed in 1905; she wrote "Art is an eternal source -- life, and an unlimited expression, the individual" and "Color dissolves form." In a lengthy discourse on the nature of color, which she understood through her study of the works of Gauguin, Werefkin explained

Colored planes juxtaposed to each other have mutual influence on their different values. They lack, extend themselves, disappear, one in the others according to the laws of the marriage of colors.... The more an impression is polychromed, ...the less real form is possible.¹⁸

Yet despite the clarity of her vision, she did not attempt to give form to her ideas until 1907. Given the abundance of Synthetist elements in *Die Landstraße*, it is clear that Verkade's thinking had a discernible effect on Werefkin in the creation of this image; it would be far too coincidental to conclude otherwise. Furthermore, a number of Werefkin's paintings from 1907 through 1910 contain strikingly Synthetist elements and, with regard to content, fall largely with a Symbolist milieu, for example, *Washerwomen* of 1909 (Ill. 37).

¹⁸Werefkin, *Briefe an einen Unbekannten*, vol III, Sept. 12, 1905.

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Werefkin's grounding in Russian Symbolism¹⁹ and her belief in the spiritual nature and purpose of art provided a perfect foundation for the attraction she would develop for the theories Verkade transmitted to her. As an artist-monk, thoroughly schooled in the precepts of the Nabis as well as those of Beuronerkunst, Verkade's life epitomized the integration of the spiritual within the mundane. The two schools of thought that influenced his painting and his ideas were both driven by the objective of expressing the spiritual in art, and thus, of raising art to the ideal of its perceived inherent purpose. Both schools emphasized abstracting from nature as the means of achieving this lofty goal. For Werefkin, as for Verkade, the spiritual could only be conveyed through the development of abstract forms, derived from nature but filtered through the spirituality of the artist. In addition to the impact of his personal friendship with Werefkin, and his participation with the group of Russian emigrés who gathered at 23 Giselastrasse, Verkade's ideas gained further support by the contacts he made possible between Werefkin (and Jawlensky) and other Nabis painters -- Sérusier in the winter of 1907-8, Slewinski in the spring of 1908, Denis through his work and, no doubt, the ideas he exchanged with Verkade in correspondence, and, of course, the veritable gallery of Nabis paintings that Verkade had in his possession, subsequent to his trip to Paris. Despite Werefkin's lack of contact with Verkade subsequent to the outbreak of the First World War, and probably exacerbated by the break-up of her relationship with Jawlensky, her connection to Verkade remained alive in his painting of the *Breton*

¹⁹Jelena Hahl-Koch, *Marianne Werefkin und der russische Symbolismus*, München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1967.

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Landscape, which remained in her collection until her death in 1938. In that same year, Jawlensky wrote to Verkade,

Perhaps you have heard that the Baroness Werefkin died in February. It was a great shock for me. Yes, yes, sooner or later one pays for mistakes one has made and often severely.²⁰

Perhaps the best lens through which to examine Verkade's influence on Jawlensky is that which elucidates their shared inclination toward the expression of the spiritual in art. Jawlensky's devotion to the artistic expression of spiritual concerns has become the primary focus of much of the serious investigation into his work. Although Clemens Weiler pointed to this tendency as early as 1959, more recent scholarship, particularly that of Zweite, Hoberg and Fäthke, has placed Jawlensky's drive toward the expression of the spiritual at the forefront of its investigation. In this regard, Hoberg has recognized that the influence of Verkade provided Jawlensky with a spiritual foundation for his continued examination of Gauguin's theories by exposing him to the ideas and works of the Nabis. Hoberg claims that

²⁰"Vielleicht haben Sie gehört, daß im Februar Baronin Werefkin gestorben ist. Es war ein harter Schlag für mich. Ja, ja, einmal gemachte Fehler muß man früher oder später büßen und wie hart oft." Unpublished letter from Jawlensky to Verkade, dated 1938.

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In 1907 he (Jawlensky) had met and befriended the friar and painter Willibrord Verkade, who introduced him to the work of the Nabis circle. "Art is above all a means of expression" -- this was the message propagated by Paul Sérusier, the leader of the Nabis, who visited Verkade in Munich in 1907 and also met Jawlensky.²¹

The impulse toward defining and giving voice to spiritual concerns was an inchoate element in Jawlensky's work even in the early days with Werefkin and prior to their mutual contact with Verkade. Werefkin's mentorship of Jawlensky's talent encouraged his pursuit of abstracted means to enhance the spiritual quality of his work. Weiler asserts that Jawlensky's interest in a spiritual expression was actually cultivated by Werefkin in its formative stages.²² If Weiler is correct, then it is arguable that Jawlensky's meeting and subsequent association with Verkade could only serve to reinforce both Jawlensky's and Werefkin's ideas about the nature and all-encompassing purpose of painting. Surely, the direction Jawlensky's work took over the course of his life to the meditational heads of his late work provides ample and significant evidence of his sustained interest in the spiritual in art and in life.

As is true for Werefkin also, Jawlensky's relationship with Verkade proved providential not only because it encouraged the development of Jawlensky's painting toward the expression of the spiritual but also because, as a consequence of his own commitment to spiritual expression in art, Verkade proselytized about the method -

²¹Hoberg, catalogue notes on Jawlensky, in Zweite, *The Blue Rider in the Lenbachhaus*, #78.

²²Clemens Weiler. *Alexej Jawlensky*. Köln: Verlag M. DuMont Schaüberg, 1959, 38.

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synthesis, that he saw as necessary to arrive at the abstracted means to accomplish this end. His presence among them confirmed Jawlensky's and Werefkin's perception of the spirituality derivable from Symbolist ideology and Synthetist painting styles; Verkade's own work and the discussions he is sure to have had with Jawlensky as they worked together, bore fruit on Jawlensky's canvases. Verkade's particular blending of a Nabi sensibility with monasticism, as he uniquely embodied it, laid a strong foundation for Jawlensky's direct investigation into spiritual concerns and, later, to his dedication of his life to their expression.

Both Verkade and Jawlensky were concerned with the expression of the universality of the cosmos and both were able to find that expression in works that spanned eons and varying styles of art. For both men, color was the most potent and expressive element; both saw the necessity of subjugating form to the potency of color because it alone could propel emotional/spiritual content. Neither was content with the slavish copying of nature; neither saw merit in art-for-art's-sake.

Stylistic impulses shared by the two artists are less significant than the philosophical motivation behind their works; nevertheless, their relationship took root within the context of a stylistic experimentation. Their mutual ideas provided the basis for both the stylistic and philosophical direction that Jawlensky would later follow. It is appropriate then to explore the nature of the artistic exchange between Verkade and Jawlensky as a fertile ground that gave rise to Jawlensky's future developments.

Given that the two men worked side by side on numerous occasions, Verkade's exchange with Jawlensky no doubt provided a fruitful developmental period for both

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artists, fortified by their respective, independent contacts.²³ Verkade's public comments credit Jawlensky with having been the guiding force in his own development; in his memoirs, he wrote that it was to Jawlensky, "whose influence I owe the few really good things I was able to accomplish in Munich."²⁴ Verkade's comment is, no doubt, sincere, given the opportunities Jawlensky's friendship afforded him; however, when seen within the evasive and less-than-candid tone of Verkade's chapter on Munich, we must treat this comment with reserve. A strikingly different chord is struck in his personal comments to his French colleagues. In his April, 1907 letter to Denis and his Nabi friends in Paris, Verkade thanked them for their gifts of paintings, which he had brought back with him to Munich. These works formed the core of a collection of Nabi canvasses that provided a visual counterpart to Verkade's Symbolist ideology and provided further Synthetist stimuli for his own work in Munich and for that of his new colleagues. His words substantiate the significance of this collection to his Munich associates:

The trip to Paris has done me a great good and the good impressions that I have come away with from there have well matured in the frequentation of an honest Russian, Jawlensky, a very talented fellow in whose studio I have painted a series of still lives that you would certainly like. They hold their own perfectly along side of those of yours that I took with me. My dear friends,

²³Through Verkade, Jawlensky either met or was introduced to the work of Sérusier, Slewinski, Denis, Maillol and Girieud, who was actively exhibiting in Munich during the time in question; through Jawlensky, Verkade met and was introduced to the work of Kubin, Erbslöh, Kanoldt, and possibly, Kandinsky and Münter.

²⁴Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 151.

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you have done me as well as many others (my emphasis) a great service with your generous gifts. There is a genuine pilgrimage to my studio to see the "French." I have framed them all agreeably and they form a corner of such interest, the little "Nabi" corner!²⁵

The works that Verkade brought to Munich with him were the following: *Landscape with a Row of Trees* by Paul Ranson, *House with a Blue Roof* by Paul Sérusier of 1905, Bonnard's gouache of *Rabbits* of 1894, Vuillard's *Woman by a Window* and *Mother and Child* of 1900, three works by Denis: *Conversation in Loctudy*, *Landscape near St. Germain-en-Laye* of 1900, and *Angels* of 1904, which was a sketch for *Le Vesinet*. In addition, the portraits of Verkade done by Denis in 1906 and by Sérusier in 1903 were in this collection as well. (Ills. 65-70) This collection provided a formidable model of Symbolist/Synthetist ideas and techniques and served to reinforce and enhance the earlier exploration of Nabi principles that the German-based, experimental painters had already undertaken.

Armin Zweite credits the evolution of Jawlensky's mature style to his direct exposure to the works of the Breton artists. Although referring specifically to Jawlensky's 1905 sojourn in Brittany, Zweite concludes: "the main stimulus to his

²⁵"Le Voyage à Paris m'a fait le plus grand bien et les bonnes impressions que j'ai emenées de là-bas ont bien pu murir dans la fréquentation d'un brave Russe, Jawlensky, garçon vraiment talentueux, dans l'atelier duquel j'ai peint une suite de nature-mortes que vous aimeriez certainement beaucoup. Elles se tiennent parfaitement à côté de ce que j'ai emmené de vous autres Ah mes chers camarades, vous m'avez rendu grand service avec vos dons généreux et aussi à beaucoup d'autres! (my emphasis) C'est un vrai pèlerinage vers mon atelier pour voir les 'Français.'" Unpublished letter addressed to the Nabis and sent to Denis, April, 1907.

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(Jawlensky's) creative development was the experience of seeing the originals of works by French painters. ..."²⁶

Although Jawlensky and Werefkin had sought out Nabi paintings independently in 1905, the availability of characteristic Pont-Aven paintings in Verkade's possession would not only have reinforced Jawlensky's interest in these works but also, with Verkade's urging, encouraged Jawlensky to look closely at the method by which they were created. Verkade's thinking must have moved Jawlensky to value the application of pure, intense color as the means to an abstract synthesis of forms. We know that Jawlensky had been impressed by the color harmonies of both the Nabis and the Fauves as early as 1905; however, the period of 1907-08 saw a dramatic advancement in Jawlensky's work with respect to the development of bold and intense color play. Strikingly, Kandinsky later wrote to Jawlensky "I learned a lot from you back then, and I will be forever grateful for that."²⁷ He credited Jawlensky with having been the most advanced of the Murnau group in his understanding of how to stretch colors to their limit and as well, of having communicated this understanding to the others: himself, Münter and Werefkin.

The resultant expression of spirituality, evident in Jawlensky's work, was at the forefront of Jawlensky's artistic objectives. Verkade's encouragement of Jawlensky to explore Synthetist methods was continuous and all-engaging. At Verkade's urging,

²⁶Armin Zweite, *The Blue Rider in the Lenbachhaus*, 18.

²⁷"Ich habe damals viel von Ihnen gelernt und werde Ihnen dafür immer tief dankbar sein." Kandinsky, unpublished letter to Jawlensky. Reprinted in Fäthke, *Alexej Jawlensky: Zeichnung, Graphik, Dokumente*, 1984, 12.

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Jawlensky traveled to Pont-Aven again in the spring of 1907; the winter of 1907-08 brought Sérusier to Munich to visit and work with Verkade and his associates. By Easter of 1908, Slewinski had arrived in Munich and Verkade encouraged Jawlensky to spend time with the former Pont-Aven artist and, as previously noted, directed Troendle to discuss color theory with them.

Although conversations between Verkade and Jawlensky took place in person and were not recorded, the correspondence that Verkade carried on with others during this time gives evidence of the probable nature of the discussions between Verkade and Jawlensky. As has been noted, Verkade continued to make his ideas known to Denis throughout this period. The following text, taken from a letter to Denis, provides an example of Verkade's thinking that he is likely to have shared with Jawlensky as well:

No one sees contour but we must paint it as an abstraction of the object, of light and shadow, in order to give life to that abstraction. We must either extrapolate the abstract from our encounter with nature or extract the enduring abstraction, which is the immutable essence of the appearance.²⁸

²⁸"Personne ne voit un contour, il faut en faire dans la peinture, des contours comme abstraction de la chose, de la lumière et des ombres pour donner de la vie à l'abstraction. Il faut ou emmener l'abstraction à la rencontre de la nature, ou extraire l'abstraction vivable, l'essence immuable, de l'apparence." Unpublished letter to Maurice Denis, dated October 30, 1907.

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Likewise, Verkade's exchanges with Troendle and Kubin, quoted in chapter 4, provide further information about Verkade's artistic perspectives during his time in Munich.

Although Zweite sees a stylistic breakthrough in Jawlensky's work as early as 1905;²⁹ nevertheless, despite Jawlensky's early interest in the effects of Synthetist principles, his earnest investigation of the School of Pont-Aven was brought to new heights in the company of Verkade. Within the context of their association, Jawlensky studied the cloisonnist method of the Nabis and saw a clear stylistic connection between the painting of Gauguin and that of Matisse. His particular reconciliation of late 19th century artistic formulations with those of the early 20th enabled Jawlensky to concentrate his energies on the development of an abstract style, reliant upon color harmonies, as the means of achieving the spiritual expression characteristic of his mature work.

At Verkade's urging and accompanied by Werefkin, Jawlensky returned to Brittany in 1907 and there renewed his vision of the strength of color harmonies. His visit to Paris, during the same trip gave him the opportunity to recognize similar harmonies in the work of the Fauves. Thus, although Jawlensky's work of 1907-09 has often been seen in terms of its relationship to Fauvism, particularly with respect to his use of color, nevertheless, the overall mood of these works bears direct comparison to

²⁹Zweite, "it was not until 1905, when he lived and worked for a time in Brittany, that the stylistic breakthrough occurred which was to determine the future course of his artistic development." 18-19.

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Symbolist pictures created with a Synthetist approach. A particular example is *Summer Evening in Murnau* (Ill. 38). Painted between 1908-09, this work contains numerous elements that place it within a Symbolist idiom and reveal Jawlensky's understanding of a Synthetist aesthetic. The painting's somber emotional tone is expressed through the use of intense, contrasting colors arranged over the surface to compete with each other for the viewer's attention. The details of the landscape are subsumed into this color play making the whole an orchestration of mood that is at once both powerful and soft. Perspectival space is all but eliminated through the dominance of the bright orange-yellow that defines the deepest background plane as well as the most immediate foreground. All of the natural elements in the landscape are alive, almost in motion, precipitated by the perceived movement of the colors in relationship to each other. The canvas breathes with life that extends beyond the quiet life of nature and seems to evoke the presence of something larger, something indefinable.

Hoberg's discussion of *Summer Evening in Murnau*, credits Jawlensky's Symbolist/Synthetist approach directly to the intercession of Verkade and includes the following remarks:

In accordance with his concept of "synthesis," Jawlensky reduces the landscape to a set of broad outlines, with only a few sparse details in the center. In 1907 he had met and befriended the friar and painter Willibrord Verkade, who introduced him to the work of the Nabis circle, The technique of cloisonnisme, that is, a rhythmic organization of the picture in flat areas

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often bounded by black contours, was one of the distinguishing features of the art of Gauguin, who strove to interpret reality in a new subjective manner. "Art is above all a means of expression" -- this was the message propagated by Paul Sérusier, the leader of the Nabis, who visited Verkade in Munich in 1907 and also met Jawlensky.³⁰

With the encouragement of Verkade, Jawlensky pushed his exploration further toward the expression of spirituality. This driving purpose in Jawlensky's painting underscores even the more stylized works of the period from 1909-1912, in which certain characteristics of Fauvism are evident. For example, in *Still Life with Fruit* of 1910, (Ill. 39) which is influenced by Jawlensky's visits to Matisse's studio in 1907, displays evidence of Synthetism motivated by Jawlensky's Symbolist search for an interplay of form and color that would reveal what he called inner vibration.

A comparison of Jawlensky's *Still Life with Fruit* with Matisse's *Pink Onions* (Ill. 40) of 1906, which Jawlensky may have seen, and with Verkade's *Still Life with Yellow Apples* (Ill. 41) of 1907, which may have been painted in Jawlensky's studio, reveals Jawlensky's reliance upon Synthetist techniques. In terms of its overall tone and mood, Matisse's painting is by far the lightest and most playful of the three images. This is due in large measure to Matisse's experimentation with spatial elements that almost defy logic. Matisse's composition is built up in three layers, consisting of objects, tabletop, and background, each floating in front of the next, and defining no clear reference to the

³⁰Hoberg, catalogue notes on Jawlensky, in Zweite, *The Blue Rider in the Lenbachhaus*, #78.

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three-dimensional space they occupy. Three of the four edges of the tabletop are visible; however, having described none of the substance of the table, Matisse turns this solid form into a thin sheet of color that denies its relationship to the background plane and to the objects that "sit" on its surface. Each of the objects and planes that comprise the composition retains a tenuous relationship to the others and seems capable of pulling apart from the rest. Although the color modulations work to contain the whole grouping, such modulation and Matisse's unusual approach to contour is responsible for the individualized, independent aspect characteristic of each of the forms. Resisting the distinct outlining of form, Matisse instead allowed the colors to define the limits of the forms by having them bleed into each other. The result is startling for a two-dimensional image, since it replicates the manner in which the eye perceives contour, that is, through a superimposition of forms, where line seems not to exist but is perceived as a result of the changing spatial interrelationships caused by motion.³¹

By contrast, Jawlensky's painting divides the picture plane in half horizontally with the upper edge of the tabletop, deliberately cropping the lower edge, and thereby maintaining the two-dimensionality of the surface. The resultant flattening is reinforced by the coloristic similarity of the background, the tabletop and the floral motifs arranged to meld the two spatial spheres of reference into one. The sharply contrasting red and yellow of the pitcher and the fruit sets them squarely in front of and in opposition to the background colors, and creates a reference to space, albeit not one

³¹This quality foreshadows the similar, and more advanced effect that Matisse's later cutouts would produce.

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grounded in three-dimensional reality. The flattened compositional structure is further reinforced by the touches of background color in the design of the pitcher and in the glass, whose liquid reflects the predominant blue of the palette. The heavy outline of the objects further distorts and flattens the overall image and holds each object in a definite relationship to the others. The tension in this work is created wholly by the interaction of the forms and colors, which produces the desired vibration.

Verkade's *Still Life with Yellow Apples* contains many of the compositional elements evident in Jawlensky's painting. Verkade also divided the picture plane in half horizontally with the upper edge of the tabletop. He too unified and flattened the foreground and background space through the use of an almost monochromatic palette. Largely yellow-green in color, the painting's only contrast appears in the red apples and jug that sit on the tabletop. Like Jawlensky's floral motif the extends upward and into the background, a decorative apple motif dots the background of Verkade's canvas and serves to unify the upper and lower registers of the painting. Verkade's only indication of perspectival space is the result of his having cropped the canvas below the lower edge of the tabletop, thus, revealing the shadow it casts. This slight reduction in the flattening of the overall composition is offset by the outlining of forms; although in this particular painting, Verkade did not apply as deliberate an outline as is evident in either other of his paintings of the same period or in Jawlensky's composition. Still, Verkade's composition presents a harmonious balance of forms and colors, one which Jawlensky must have considered in attempting his own painting on the same theme.

Interestingly, Jawlensky painted *Still Life with Fruit* two years after Verkade's *Still Life with Yellow Apples* and nearly three years after Matisse's *Pink Onions*. Despite

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Jawlensky's great admiration for Matisse, his artistic aims, and his application of synthesis as a means of achieving those ends, were more closely aligned to those of Verkade and the Symbolists. As his work progressed, Jawlensky relied on more highly abstracted forms created through color harmonies. By 1918, Jawlensky turned almost exclusively to the depiction of the human head, which he invested with a symbolism related directly to his sustained, artistic goals. Called "meditational heads," these images codify the human face into a stylized Greek/Russian crucifix, and become archetypal representations of spirituality; they portray the face as the symbolic mirror of the soul. In a letter to Verkade, written in 1938, Jawlensky explained:

For a number of years I painted these variations and then it became necessary to find a form for the face, since I had understood that great art can only be painted with religious feeling. And for that the human face was the only vehicle. I understood that the duty of the artist is to express, through forms and colors, that which is divine in himself. Hence the work of art is a visible god, and art itself is "a longing for God."³²

As has been pointed out earlier, Verkade played the role of father confessor for many of his colleagues throughout his life; in this respect, he was more than an artistic guide. The tenor of Jawlensky's letter to Verkade provides evidence that such was the relationship between the two men. While it may never have been formalized in a strict

³²Jawlensky, as quoted by Hoberg, *op. cit.*, #85.

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religious sense, Verkade became the repository of the perceived failings, the wishes and yearnings of many of his friends, and Jawlensky seems to have been no exception. This sort of spiritual communion between them could only have served to enhance Verkade's stature in Jawlensky's eyes as someone whose direction he should heed. Despite a long hiatus in their correspondence Jawlensky seems to have taken Verkade's teachings to heart and to have been guided by them for his entire life. One could say that the ultimate direction of Jawlensky's work and the technical means he arrived at to achieve his personal expression of spirituality had been crystallized for him early on in the person of Verkade. It is fitting that Jawlensky chose to send one of his last, and most abstract portrayals of the human face to Verkade; it is a poignant testament to Verkade's influence that the work, *Meditation* (1937) (Ill. 42) is inscribed: "To my dear friend, Father Willibrord Verkade, to whom I send a splinter of my soul."³³

The late correspondence between Verkade and his Munich associates attests to their long-standing mutual respect and admiration. Despite the seemingly long hiatus in their contact, Verkade's letter to Kubin in 1920 and Jawlensky's brief notes to Verkade in 1938-9 confirm the closeness of the bonds they formed in Munich. Then too, it is probable that not all of this late correspondence has been uncovered. The apparent lack of contact between Kubin, Werefkin and Jawlensky and Verkade between 1909 and 1920, at the earliest, probably owes as much to the destruction of property and

³³"Dem lieben, verehrten Pater Willibrord Verkade schicke ich einen Splitter von meiner Seele. A Jawlensky." Inscription on one of the last paintings by Jawlensky, *Meditation* (1937), which was presented to Verkade, then living at the Beuron monastery, in tribute to their friendship and in thanks for the spiritual guidance Jawlensky felt Verkade had afforded him during the years of their acquaintance.

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voluntary displacement of persons brought about by the First World War³⁴ as it does to the serious career decision that Verkade made during those years. His decision to relinquish art altogether arose in the aftermath of the Munich sojourn, reinforced by his activities in Jerusalem and the response to them on the part of his monastic superiors. In his last letter to Kubin, Verkade mentioned the fresco of the *Deposition* (Ill. 43) that he painted in 1914 for the Carmelite Convent in Vienna-Dœbling; however, he did not report that this painting would effectively be his "last."³⁵ While this issue will be taken up directly later on in this text, suffice it to say here that it is conceivable that Verkade could not communicate his interim turmoil to his friends while it held him enthralled. The absence of contact among them during these years stands in direct opposition to the effects of their interaction during the year and a half that Verkade lived and worked with them in Munich.

³⁴Jawlensky and Werefkin moved to Switzerland as a result of the outbreak of the war; Verkade had returned to Beuron from Jerusalem as early as 1912 and the monastery walls provided a refuge from the chaos permeating the country and the world.

³⁵In fact, Verkade painted a fresco of the *Resurrection* in 1924 for the same Carmelite Convent; he seems to have agreed to do so, and, in effect, to break his own voluntary decision to retire from painting due to the urging of the nuns and of the architect of the convent chapel, Joze Plecnik. (See Smitmans in *Jan Verkade: Hollandse Volgeling von Gauguin*, 59-60.) The *Resurrection* fresco was intended as a counterpoint in both the religious subject and logistical placement to the *Deposition* fresco; the former was painted directly across the chapel nave from the latter. Interestingly, Verkade rarely acknowledges the *Resurrection* scene but continues to mention the *Deposition* even as late as 1938, in a note to Jawlensky, with which he enclosed a reproduction. For all intents and purposes then, and to his own mind, the *Deposition* was Verkade's last painting.

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Of the Munich group, Jawlensky had, by 1908 become the most proficient at understanding the impact of color harmonies and at exploiting them for their inherently intense, emotive qualities. This strength may have been what led Kandinsky to assert that as of 1908: He (Jawlensky) was my teacher; he had learned the techniques of the Pont-Aven School, how to stretch color harmonies within contours.³⁶

Münter's recollections of the time spent in Murnau in the summer of 1908 further support Kandinsky's claim and advance the contention that Jawlensky had by then become a master of a Synthetist approach to painting:

After a short period of agony I took a great leap forward, from copying nature -- in a more or less Impressionistic style -- to abstraction, feeling the content, the essence of things. ... we had lots of conversation about art with the "Giselists." I particularly liked showing my work to Jawlensky, who praised it lavishly and also explained a number of things to me: he gave me the benefit of his wide experience and talked about "synthesis."³⁷

While Verkade seemed content to be the liaison between the Munich group and his former French associates, the role he was able to play in this position was far more influential than his words reveal. His own thinking was tied inextricably to that of his

³⁶"Er hatte das Verfahren der Schule von Pont-Aven gelernt, die Farbflächen zu spannen." Münter, from her *Journal*, as quoted in Johannes Eichner, *Kandinsky und Gabriele Münter: Von Ursprüngen moderner Kunst*, München, 1957, 89.

³⁷Eichner, excerpt from Münter's *Journal*, May 17, 1911, 89.

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French comrades; that thinking drove his work, which returned in Munich to its Nabi sensibility. Together Verkade's art and his thought became a direct source of Symbolist/Synthetist inspiration for his new colleagues in his new milieu. His own words reveal his awareness of his position; he wrote Denis "It is my role to be the link among people."³⁸

In addition to his association with Werefkin and Jawlensky, Verkade was also frequently in the company of Erbslöh and Kanoldt, both of whom would become members of the NKVM. The predilection of all of these artists for abstracted styles was grounded in their desire to render visible those things that are ephemeral, that exist beyond the reality of concrete form. It is safe to assume that Verkade's discussions with Erbslöh and Kanoldt, with whom he shared Sunday afternoons at the Wolff's, also centered around art and, therefore, that the two German artists, as well as Jawlensky and Werefkin were aware of Verkade's ideas. Together with Jawlensky, Werefkin and Kandinsky, Erbslöh and Kanoldt were instrumental in the formulation of the NKVM in 1909. As Fäthke asserts, "The deciding year in the preparatory phase of the origination of the NKVM is 1908."³⁹ The NKVM is clearly the forerunner of the *Blaue Reiter* and, while Jawlensky played a more leading role in the development of the former, the participation of

³⁸"...c'est mon rôle d'être le trait d'union pour bien les gens." Unpublished letter to Maurice Denis, dated August 28, 1907.

³⁹"Ein entscheidendes Jahr in der Vorphase des Entstehens der "Neuen-Künstler-Vereinigung, München" ist 1908,..." Bernd Fäthke, *Marianne Werefkin: Gemälde und Skizzen*, exhibition catalogue for the Museum Wiesbaden, 1980, 25.

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Kandinsky and M \ddot{u} nter was pivotal to the success of both groups. The last thread to be traced in this inquiry is that leading from Verkade through Jawlensky, Werefkin, Kubin and their associates to Kandinsky and M \ddot{u} nter.

It is unlikely that Verkade ever actually met either Kandinsky or Gabriele M \ddot{u} nter; their respective whereabouts during the period in question were such that they seem not to have crossed paths at all. The one summer that Verkade spent in Munich, that is, the summer of 1907 found Kandinsky and M \ddot{u} nter traveling.⁴⁰ During that summer, Verkade spent several weeks in Aachen⁴¹ arranging an exhibition of religious art for the *Gesellschaft f \ddot{u} r Christlicher Kunst*, (a task he accepted somewhat reluctantly) and the remainder of the summer painting nudes in Jawlensky's studio on the Giselastrasse. He refers to this activity in a detailed letter to Denis.⁴² From the tenor of that letter, it is apparent that he was thoroughly preoccupied with his work and satisfied, if not pleased, to be alone. Jawlensky and Werefkin, however, also spent this summer traveling and in

⁴⁰Bern'd F \ddot{a} thke, in his chronology of Marianne Werefkin, places her with Jawlensky, Kandinsky and M \ddot{u} nter, in Murnau during the summer of 1907, as well as that of 1908. Peg Weiss' chronology of Kandinsky confirms that Kandinsky spent both summers "in the Munich area." However, Long places Kandinsky in Murnau no earlier than 1908; this determination seems borne out by M \ddot{u} nter's diary, which notes "Paris '06-'07, Berlin '07-'08, summer Munich" [See Hoberg, *Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele M \ddot{u} nter, Letters and Reminiscences: 1902-1914* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1994) 45.]

⁴¹Letter to Maurice Denis, dated July 25, 1907. In his autobiography, Verkade dates the Aachen trip earlier, placing it at Easter 1907; however, letters written to Denis from Aachen on July 25, 1907 and August 6, 1907 are clearly more reliable sources of the date of the excursion.

⁴²See letter dated July 25, 1907; Verkade also refers to painting from the nude model in letters dated June 13, 1907 and October 30, 1907; both are quoted earlier in this chapter.

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contact with Kandinsky and Münter. Further, the four spent the summer of 1908 together in Murnau and it is inconceivable that, given their then recent interaction with Verkade and his influence on their work, that they would not have communicated their then emerging ideas to Kandinsky and Münter.

In *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, Long constructed a convincing case for Kandinsky's familiarity with Symbolist thought and its direct influence upon his formulation of an abstract style of painting. Long noted Kandinsky's awareness of Verkade and the plausible transmission of the latter's ideas to Kandinsky through Jawlensky.⁴³ What is intended for this study is to shed further light on Verkade's role in the development of Kandinsky's progress. Kandinsky's development during the period between 1907 and 1909 can be shown to have been marked by an understanding of Symbolist/Synthetist aims as interpreted by Verkade, whose own work blended the aims of the Nabis with those of Beuronerkunst.

The period between 1907 and 1909 marked an experimental and transitional phase in Kandinsky's work. Just prior to the 1907 summer, Kandinsky had lived for a year in Sévres, outside of Paris. The year in France, which followed several years of extensive travel in Europe, afforded him the opportunity to explore recent developments in French painting and to absorb much of what he had observed in the artistic currents of contemporary European art. These new waves of artistic activity included not only the

⁴³Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 31.

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various manifestations of European Symbolism and *Jugendstil*, but also African sculpture and other primitive forms. Kandinsky was also aware of the early stirrings of German Expressionism as put forth by the *Brücke* in their 1906 exhibition in Dresden.⁴⁴ He also kept up with contemporary artistic developments in his native Russia.

In late 1906, Kandinsky exhibited for the second time at the Salon d'Automne. This particular Salon, in addition to displaying the second exhibition of the Fauves, was also the site of the 1906 memorial Gauguin retrospective. Further, it included an exhibition of contemporary Russian art, organized by Diaghilev, which contained works by artists associated with the Russian Symbolist exhibition group, *Mir iskusstva*. Thus, just prior to his return to Germany, Kandinsky had had the opportunity to examine a great many forms and approaches to art. Moreover, he was likely to have analyzed and assessed relationships between stylistic approaches and between those approaches and the conceptual bases out of which they arose.

Driven by his insistence that painting should stir "vibrations in the human soul," Kandinsky found much in contemporary artistic currents that was in concert with his spiritual aims. Of the multiplicity of forms he examined during this period, those that ascribed to a synthesis of form and idea, deriving from a Symbolist ideology, corresponded directly to his own vision.

⁴⁴Ibid., 47, 77.

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Beginning in 1908, Kandinsky first moved away from the quasi-pointillist technique, characteristic of his canvases from between roughly 1903 and 1907, toward a broader application of color as the primary tool of expression. In a corresponding shift, he relinquished the psychologically closed, Arthurian, fairy tale-like imagery of such works as *Farewell* of 1903 (Ill. 44) and *Couple on Horseback* of 1906-7 (Ill. 45) for more open, universal imagery. Works such as *Vor der Stadt* (Ill. 46) and *Landscape with Tower* of 1908-9 (Ill. 47) are characterized by a high degree of synthesis revealed in their scaled down detail, and in their codified forms that assert themselves through the intensity of their colors and through the harmonies inherent in the paintings' palettes. The simplification of images, while eliminating detail, was seen as an aid to intensifying expression, which was aligned to Kandinsky's striving to communicate cosmic goals, and which, like Verkade, he believed was the supreme goal of art.

The impetus behind this change in Kandinsky's work can be found in his assimilation of all that he had seen in his travels between 1904 and 1906 and during the year he spent with Münter in Sévres. One of the pivotal factors contributing to changes in Kandinsky's work at this time was his close association with Jawlensky. Both Kandinsky and Münter attested to Jawlensky's reliance upon this method of approaching the work and credited Jawlensky with imparting to them both the Synthetist technique and the theory which grew out of his contacts with the school of Pont-Aven. Eichner records that Kandinsky credited Jawlensky with transmitting to him "the techniques of the Pont-Aven School, how to stretch color harmonies within contours" and as well to assert that

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as of 1908: "He (Jawlensky) was my teacher."⁴⁵ Mūnter further suggests a tutorial relationship with Jawlensky, when she recorded that she "particularly enjoyed showing my work to Jawlensky -- who praised it lavishly and explained a number of things to me -- passed on what he had experienced and learned -- talked about "synthesis."⁴⁶

Several paintings by Kandinsky, from the period immediately following his and Mūnter's close association with Jawlensky and Werefkin provide visual evidence of Kandinsky's experimentation with the technique of Synthetism. The strongest influences that can be noted in his work from this period were those which expanded the expressive potential of the work while simultaneously elevating its emotional content from the quotidian to a more ephemeral, spiritual realm.

Most scholarship points to the summer of 1908 as the pivotal experimental phase in the development of Kandinsky's work. An even more compelling case can be made for Jawlensky's having passed on the theories and techniques of the Pont-Aven school to his colleagues in 1908, especially if we recall Jawlensky's experiences just prior to that date. He had traveled to Pont-Aven again in the spring of 1907, at Verkade's urging; he had spent the winter of 1907-08 getting to know Sérusier, who had come to Munich to visit and work with Verkade and his associates; he had met the Nabi, Slewinski, who had arrived in Munich before Easter of 1908 and he had been encouraged by Verkade to embrace Slewinski as a tutor in the methods and ideas of the Pont-Aven school.

⁴⁵Eichner, 89.

⁴⁶Gabriele Mūnter, in a journal entry from May 17, 1911 as published in Annagret Hoberg, *Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Mūnter: Letters and Reminiscences, 1902-1914*, 46.

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For Kandinsky, as for Verkade, all artistic technique was subordinate to the overall intention of the creation. Both artists saw formal elements as tools in the service of the expression. Given the direction that Kandinsky's thought was taking at this time, it is plausible to suggest that Verkade's ideas and their relationship to those of others associated with Symbolism -- Denis, Maeterlinck, Steiner, Shuré, Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé (whom Verkade had known personally), reinforced Kandinsky's comprehension of Symbolist ideology. The direct interaction of his compatriots, Jawlensky and Werefkin with a member of the Pont-Aven school at the precise moment of Kandinsky's quest to arrive at a theory and form appropriate to communicating the spiritual in art cannot be underestimated. Nor should Verkade's clerical status/role be overlooked. His commitment to his faith brought a living presence of spiritual commitment to his interactions.

In exploring Kandinsky's theories as laid out in *Über das Geistige*, Long provides a myriad of connections between Kandinsky's ideas and the Symbolist sources of them. She provides detailed evidence of his investigation of the theories of Steiner and Shuré and describes Kandinsky's interpretation of Maeterlinck's elusive and repetitive use of words in poetry as leading to Kandinsky's own development of the theory of hidden imagery. Long also notes Kandinsky's awareness of Verkade's involvement with the work of Shuré and his attendance at a production of one of Shuré's plays, *Le Drame d'Eleusis* in Munich in the spring of 1907. Kandinsky may also have known that Verkade had designed sets for the Nabis production of Maeterlinck's *Les Sept Princesses* in 1892 (Ills. 48, 48A) while still in Pont-Aven. One of these designs bears a striking similarity to a 1907 drawing by Kubin, *Meine Stadt* (Ill. 49) in the delicate quality of

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the line, the somber overtones, and the medieval, fantasy-like quality of the setting. Although the design in question is now in a private collection, several others from this undertaking, as well as preliminary drawings, are currently a part of the Beuron monastery's collection of Verkade's work. This provenance and the fact that Verkade retrieved many of his Pont-Aven paintings during his March 1907 trip to Paris (and kept these with him in Munich), lends credibility to the suggestion that Verkade may have been in possession of these stage designs while in Munich and that Kubin may have seen them. Thus, in addition to Jawlensky and Werefkin, Kubin was another likely source of Verkade's ideas for Kandinsky and his subsequent development. Further, given Long's assessment that Kandinsky probably did not undertake a close scrutiny of Denis' work until as late as his 1906 stay in France,⁴⁷ it is reasonable to suggest that Kubin, who attributed his awareness of Denis directly to his association with Verkade, further encouraged Kandinsky's investigation of Denis' theories on art. Although by 1907 Denis' theories were widely published, Kubin's admiration for Denis was most likely intensified through discussions with Verkade whose professional and personal respect for his lifelong friend, confidante and colleague never faltered.

Further prominence is given to Verkade's role as a conduit of Symbolist principles when we recognize that Kandinsky's understanding of the relationship between numbers and the absolute corresponds to Sérusier's and Denis' view that numbers held the key to grasping the "harmonious perfection of the universe."⁴⁸ Verkade, who had shared their

⁴⁷Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 44.

⁴⁸Denis understood and accepted this principle theoretically; however, unlike Sérusier he did not attempt to construct a system to implement his theorizing.

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view while they had worked together in the 1890s had gone on to study Lenz's "canon of sacred proportions," which Lenz had developed in the context of his study of the proportions of Ancient Egyptian monuments. Through this investigation, Verkade had gained an even greater respect for the mystical properties of numbers as a means of intensifying monumentality, and thus, universality of expression, which was his primary goal in the creation of art. Likewise, Kandinsky's desire to come upon a means of expression that was universally communicable, and in so being, a revelation of inner truth/spirituality was the cornerstone of his work. Sérusier, Denis, Lenz, Verkade and Kandinsky all investigated the mystical properties of numbers, whether through gematria, theosophy, or other occult sciences.

Über das Geistige, while published in 1912 reflects Kandinsky's thinking during his earlier transitional phase of 1908-9, for which a Symbolist perspective was critical. Most notable is the basis for Kandinsky's three mystical elements that is to be found in Denis' subjective and objective deformations. According to Long,

Kandinsky... drew upon Denis's concept of subjective and objective deformations... when he was writing *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. In that essay, Kandinsky explained that to create a work of art the artist must build from the "three mystical necessities," which he defined as "the personality of the artist, the spirit of the age, and the eternal and timeless qualities of art."⁴⁹

⁴⁹Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 50.

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Long explained that, Kandinsky's "eternal and timeless qualities of art," reflected Denis' "eternal laws of beauty" and Lenz's "canon of sacred proportions;" all were concepts that sprang forth from the artistic impulse to create works which were monumental and timeless and which could approach a spiritual realm. Although, Lenz would never have accepted that any hint of subjectivity could be present in works that were truly monumental; nevertheless, Denis' idea of subjective deformation was imbedded in Kandinsky's idea. Further, Denis had encouraged Verkade to find his own voice and not rely upon the dictates of others, and Verkade had come to Munich expressly to determine the sound of that voice. As he wrote in 1906, "What are the means that correspond to my expression?"⁵⁰

The interconnectedness of color and form and the utility of formal elements as tools of expression were concepts germane to the thinking of Denis, Verkade, and Kandinsky, and even, to some extent, of Lenz. Far from arriving at an abstract style through his early experimentation with *Jugendstil*, for Kandinsky, the flowing and rhythmic quality of its characteristic line was useful for its expressive properties but never an end in itself. Verkade, who had been forced to abandon the expressive quality of line as a result of his adoption of Lenz's "canon." had come to Munich to recapture just that quality. For

⁵⁰"Quels sont les moyens qui correspondent à mon expression." Unpublished letter to Denis, dated March, 1906.

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both Verkade and Kandinsky, and also for Denis, form and the image were always subordinate to the overall expression, propelled by color.

In all of their artistic ideologies, including Kandinsky's late constructivist style, he as well as Verkade, Denis and Lenz were committed to examining alternate art forms, particularly related to religious art: Pre-Renaissance Italian Primitivism, ancient Egyptian monuments; Russian icons and religious folk art.

Both Kandinsky's and M \ddot{u} nter's work from 1908-1909 reflect Symbolist themes and moods. Despite the intensity of the color and the apparent looseness of the brushwork, often the mood of their paintings is more solemn than that of the Fauves. M \ddot{u} nter's 1908 *Graveyard* (Ill. 50) and Verkade's 1892 *Farmhouse at Le Pouldu* (Ill. 5) have strikingly similar structures. Both paintings depict a small building set in a landscape. In each, the manmade structure is set close to the periphery of the scene and is cut by the edge of the canvas. M \ddot{u} nter's building is set in the foreground of the space, while Verkade's occupies the middle ground; yet both structures appear to float on the surface of the picture plane. Rather than create a space that recedes, the compositions promote a flattening of illusional depth brought about through the construction of reduced forms and a broad application of deep, pure color that pervades each scene. In both works, the forms are outlined in the Synthetist fashion and the drawing is simplified to convey generalized forms in the landscape; plants and trees are unidentifiable as to particular species of vegetation. Although both scenes are devoid of figures, both are animated by a flowing and rhythmic line that suggests an organic presence and guides the viewer through the space, creating a harmony of form and color. Even the limited palettes of the two paintings correspond, both are reduced to tones of only red, blue, yellow and green.

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Münter's cropping of the scene is also similar to Verkade's; foreground shapes are clipped radically, allowing for an immediacy of access to the space. Most importantly, both paintings evoke a meditative and tranquil mood, projected by the emptiness of the scenes, both of which are uninhabited and invite the viewer's introspection.

Another comparison can be drawn between Münter's 1908 *Kochel-Straight Road* (Ill. 51) and Verkade's 1892 *Decorative Landscape II* (Ill. 4), a work originally attributed to Gauguin. In these paintings, a Synthetist flattening of the space is taken to an extreme, and the resulting, perceived two-dimensionality of the picture plane exaggerates the decorative quality of both images. Although the images and their compositional arrangements differ, both of these paintings also invite contemplation as they aim to distill the essential elements and qualities provoked by the subjects.

Anne Mochon credits Jawlensky and Verkade with the change in Münter's style that became apparent in 1908; Mochon writes

Jawlensky's experience and practical advice stimulated both Münter and Kandinsky during 1908 when their art underwent rapid stylistic changes. ... his contact with the painters Paul Sérusier and Jan Verkade introduced him to the Symbolist concept of "synthesis," the reduction and abstraction of color and form to convey essential meaning.⁵¹

⁵¹Anne Mochon, *Gabriele Münter: Between Munich and Murnau*, exhibition catalogue for the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Boston: Harvard University, 1980, 27.

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Münter, in recounting the events between the experimental summer of 1908 and the *Blaue Reiter*, later identified the sources of her absorption of Symbolist principles; she recalled: "If I set myself any model, as was the case to some extent from 1903 to 1913 -- it was probably van Gogh seen through the eyes of Jawlensky and his theories (his talk about synthesis)."⁵²

We can trace the direct path of ideas from van Gogh (and Gauguin) through Verkade (and Sérusier) to Jawlensky (and Werekfin), as has already been established. What Münter's statement makes clear is that she (and Kandinsky) also became adherents to the principles embodied by Symbolism. The quest to restore the primary purpose of art, the goal of all of these artists, that is, to convey that which is essential, universal and thus, spiritual, and to do so through the synthesis of form and color, was recognized and accepted by Kandinsky and Münter and lay at the heart of their stylistic endeavor in the seminal years leading to the development of abstract styles of painting.

Shortly after the summer of 1908, Münter began in earnest to paint works with distinctly religious motifs, *Tombstones in Kochel* of 1909 (Ill. 52), *Still-Life with St. George* of 1910 (Ill. 53), and *Madonna with Winter Flowers* of 1911 (Ill. 54); the treatment of such subjects was complemented by her experimentation with the tradition of Bavarian glass paintings, the discovery of which she also attributed to Jawlensky. The transformation of religious images: gravestones with their crosses and saintly

⁵²Eichner, excerpt from Münter's journal, dated May 17, 1911.

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statuettes, and the mood they evoke, particularly when set in interior scenes, attest to M \ddot{u} nter's preoccupation with the expression of an other-worldly aura. These images confirm her adherence to a tradition established by Gauguin, who likewise transformed and mystified religious icons as codified emblems of an anti-materialist age. However, whether her subjects were intentionally focused on religious themes or her own deformations of the landscape, M \ddot{u} nter seems to have absorbed thoroughly the lessons of Symbolist ideology and its Synthetist technique. Even her late paintings, such as *Mountain View* of 1934 (Ill. 55), are cast in a Symbolist/Synthetist mode.⁵³

An analysis of his work and a review of comments made by Kandinsky about his artistic progress during the period from 1907-1909, confirms that Verkade's thinking was known to Kandinsky as well. In many respects, Kandinsky's view of the communicative power of visual expression paralleled Verkade's. Both were convinced of the spiritual potency of that expression, namely, that art, which emanated from the soul of the artist, had the power to move souls. Both Kandinsky and Verkade insisted that "the artist have something to say." Inherent in that prescription was Kandinsky's understanding that his quest to reveal the unseen forces of the universe and his sense of an impending apocalypse, dictated that Kandinsky establish new formal qualities for painting that were no longer reliant either upon the traditional values of narrative or

⁵³In 1909, M \ddot{u} nter made a painting entitled *Landscape with Monk*. One wonders if discussions about the painter-monk, initiated by Jawlensky and Werefkin, might have been the source of such a subject and if the painting may have represented M \ddot{u} nter's anonymous tribute to Verkade. See Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting*, 183.

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upon the accepted parameters of beauty as defined by nature. This conceptual basis of Kandinsky's approach to painting was in part an outgrowth of the ideas and ideals of a Symbolist aesthetic.

This is most clearly revealed in his canvases from 1908-1909, among which number *Vor Der Stadt (Before the City)* 1908 (Ill. 46), *Eisenbahn bei Murnau (Railroad at Murnau)* 1909 (Ill. 56), and *Murnau - Grüngasse* also of 1909 (Ill. 57).

Kandinsky's treatment of the subject in *Vor Der Stadt* is richly expressive and vibrant. The almost riotous application of color and apparently quick rendering recalls certain of Matisse's works, particularly those from Collioure, such as *Brook with Aloes* (Ill. 58) of 1907. Still, *Vor Der Stadt* is a dark picture, one in which synthesis is employed as a means of evoking an ominous, underlying current. The image is explosive, the color intense; Kandinsky has absorbed the "lessons of the school of Pont-Aven -- to stretch color harmonies within contours."⁵⁴ Thus the technique, and Kandinsky's motive in applying it, resulted in a painting that is far less a cityscape than a riot of emotion barely contained by the frame of the canvas.

In her discussion of Kandinsky's *Painting with Houses* of 1909, Long found his approach to hidden imagery to have a possible impetus in a painting by Denis, *Orange Christ* of 1889-90.⁵⁵ Long sees a similarity between Denis' non-linear approach to color to create a Christ figure of ghost-like quality, and Kandinsky's imbedding, and thus

⁵⁴Eichner, op.cit., 89.

⁵⁵Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, p 44.

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hiding, the figure in the landscape through his manipulation of color and form. Kandinsky used a similar technique in *Vor der Stadt*. The figures in the lower right of the picture plane are so imbedded within the color structure of the picture as to be, at first, barely discernible and to come into focus only upon closer inspection.

Verkade's *Church at St. Nolff* of 1892 (Ill. 59) displays a similar quality. In this image, Verkade literally hid the church among the trees. This effect was captured through his broad application of pure color, which is reinforced by the planar flatness of the composition. The hidden imagery evokes a meditative quality that is pervasive in the paintings of Denis, Kandinsky and Verkade and makes them distinct from Matisse's *Brook with Aloes*, which revels in a exuberant application of color but carries none of the inherent symbolic content of the aforementioned works. Kandinsky appreciated Matisse's approach to color and paint application, as is evident in *Vor der Stadt*; however, his insistence upon the expression of an other-worldly quality in his painting sets his work apart from that of Matisse.

Murnau - Grūngasse, 1909, evokes a similar intensity of spirit or emotion. The relative stillness of the image is more in keeping with the mood evoked by many of Gauguin's pictures, particularly those from the South Seas, for example, *Day of the God* (1894). Although Gauguin's painting is more symbolically interpretational than is Kandinsky's, both artists worked to expand their content beyond the subject at hand and to suggest more ephemeral feelings projected by the harmonious composition of colors and shapes. Being less rooted to a symbolic and particularized subject, *Murnau - Grūngasse*, with its haunting shadows and glaring light, is a more universal expression;

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this result would indicate the degree to which Kandinsky understood the aims of the school of Pont-Aven, as well as their correspondence with his own objectives.

Railroad at Murnau is a decidedly childlike image, the tension it emits arises from the contrast between the highly simplified forms and compositional format and the skillfully thought out arrangement of colors that carries the eye through the scene to convey the movement of the train across the canvas. Tension is further heightened by the contrast of bright, warm colors of the landscape and the blackness of the train and the smoke spewing from its stack. Perhaps the most symbolic of these three paintings, Kandinsky here juxtaposes the technology of the modern age with the rural quiet of the landscape. In this way, *Railroad at Murnau* exposes the threat of the materialist world, which the Symbolists were loathe to aggrandize. Lastly, the image of the small child waving a handkerchief in the lower left corner of the painting is only a minor foreshadowing of Kandinsky's desire to enshroud imagery in his paintings; replicating the red and yellow of the building in the background, these two forms become a point and counterpoint to the black, snakelike train passing between them.

Equally childlike is Verkade's watercolor of *St. George and the Dragon* (Ill. 60) from 1893, a subject Kandinsky treated continuously. Painted while he was in Italy, Verkade's watercolor is highly illusionistic: the figures are simply drawn and occupy a space that is conceived in part to resemble a set design, but also makes spatial reference to the works of the Florentine and Sieneese painters that Verkade was studying at the time. The mythical quality of the theme is enhanced by this primitive treatment of the space, which is anti-naturalistic, and by the exceptionally limited palette of red and green on a neutral ground. It is likely that Verkade had this work in his possession while in

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Munich; the background figure of a running female figure reappears as the central figure of Verkade's 1907 *Woman with Deer* (Ill. 61), which he exhibited at the 1908 *Gesellschaft für Christlicher Kunst*.⁵⁶ Although stylistically different from Kandinsky's images of St. George, the illusionistic quality of the watercolor and its connection to the work of the Italian Primitives, set it firmly within a spiritual context. Were it in Verkade's possession during his Munich stay, this quality would not have been lost on Jawlensky and Werefkin.

In each of Kandinsky's paintings discussed here, as well as in other works from the period during and immediately after the 1908 summer in Murnau, Kandinsky demonstrated his awareness of multiple artistic currents. His work makes clear that he reconfigured and adapted numerous ideas and stylistic methods in order to fulfill his unique aims. All of the artistic manifestations, which may have informed Kandinsky's experimentation during this seminal stage in his development, proceeded forth from a shared vision of the communicative power of art. That vision, as revealed in artistic thought and production in the two decades surrounding the turn of the century, had one of its bases in Symbolism.

⁵⁶*München Leuchtete*, 145 Additional evidence that Verkade may have had the watercolor with him in Munich is imbedded in the provenance of the work. Currently in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, the work is one of a group of Verkade's works that were given to the Museum by the Verkade family. That original collection was comprised of works from Munich and Jerusalem, which Verkade sent directly to his family and which seem not to have entered the Beuron monastery.

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It stands to reason then that Franz Marc also shared this vision, that his work reflects the universal and spiritual goals associated with Symbolism. Although he did not become acquainted with Kandinsky and Mūnter until 1910 and there is no evidence that he knew Verkade, as late as 1910-11, Kandinsky, Mūnter, and Kubin, along with the others in their company, were still sufficiently taken with the Symbolist ideas transmitted by the painter-monk, Verkade, that they spoke of him and communicated those ideas to their new colleague and associate in the *Blaue Reiter* enterprise. As noted by Frederick Levine, Marc had been profoundly moved by the art of van Gogh, which he saw on his trip to Paris in 1907.⁵⁷ In his writings, Marc acknowledged van Gogh as: "the most authentic, the greatest, the most poignant painter I know."⁵⁸ Marc's work subsequent to his Paris trip was guided by the objective "to paint only the simplest things (for) only in them are the symbolism, the pathos, and the mystery of life to be found."⁵⁹ Such affinity with Symbolism, on Marc's part, would have made him particularly susceptible to the thought not only of Kandinsky but also of the Nabis and of Verkade. It is interesting to note that Marc made a trip to the Benedictine Monastery of Beuron in 1912, where he may have painted *Deer in a Monastery Garden* (Ill. 63).⁶⁰ Although this work reveals Marc' familiarity with Futurism and especially with the work of Robert Delaunay, *Deer in a Monastery Garden* projects the symbolic, spiritual

⁵⁷Levine, *The Apocalyptic Vision*, 41-42

⁵⁸Ibid., 42

⁵⁹Klaus Lankheit, *Franz Marc, Watercolors, Drawings, Writings*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1959, 14.

⁶⁰Hoberg, *The Blaue Reiter in the Lenbachhaus*, #9.

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aura of animals in harmony with nature that is so characteristic of Marc's overall production.

While this group of experimental painters, working in Munich in the first decade of this century, were influenced by many of the concurrent developments in art: Matisse's experiments with color, the Futurists' experiments with motion and momentum, etc., through their association with Verkade, they came to understand that the underlying basis in Symbolism was aligned in theory to their own quest to arrive at a form appropriate to the ideals they wished to communicate. For each of these painters, Verkade elucidated the vision of Symbolist ideology and offered a means, via the Synthetist technique of Gauguin and the Nabis, that expanded their search for an abstract style, which they believed would convey the spiritual in art.

Chapter 6
The Decision for God

There is a thought that makes me desolate, that I am no longer a Beuronier¹

Soon, I will leave Munich...²

Jan Verkade

Munich was a tumultuous time for Verkade. As noted earlier in this text, the chapter in his autobiography devoted to his experiences in Munich lead the reader to believe that the time spent there had been fraught with difficulty and that his experiment had come to naught. The chapter opens on a negative note "... my stay in Munich was, alas, not among the most progressive periods in my life," and continues in a confessional tone as Verkade attempted to make sense for his reading public, and perhaps still for himself, his manner of having negotiated his priestly way in a "...turbulent, pleasure-loving world,"

¹"Il y a une chose qui me désole, c'est que je ne suis plus Beuronien." Unpublished letter to Maurice Denis, dated December 30, 1907

²"Bientôt, je quitterai Munique..." Unpublished letter to Maurice Denis, dated February 2, 1908.

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where he was "... forced to fight and conquer for the second time those attractions of worldly life and pleasures he had mastered once (or so he thought) for good and all."³

As the chapter proceeds, Verkade makes constant reference to the struggle that Munich posed for him. He speaks of "Prayer" becoming "a minor thing," and of having to reckon with "wild, impossible desires and plans that I had thought long since dead" which "began to torment my soul."⁴ Throughout his summary recounting of his experiences in Munich, we can hear two distinct voices: one of the artist giving his entire being over to his art, the other of the quasi-lapsed monk experiencing the pain of his own transgression and seeking redemption.

It must be kept in mind that Verkade wrote these memoirs some twenty-five years after his return to Beuron, that he had long since relinquished his artistic persona for that of the father confessor, and that he seems to have accepted that decision as penance for whatever sins against his monastic vows he may have committed, such as neglecting his priestly duties as his art consumed more of his time and attention. Nevertheless, the degree to which he chastises himself in this chapter indicates the severity of the failing, in his perception, which he attributed in retrospect to his Munich activities.

But the operative phrase here is "in retrospect." Does the chapter on Munich give us a clear picture of Verkade's assessment of the period, as he was preparing to return to Beuron? His correspondence with Denis indicates otherwise. In a letter dated February

³Verkade, *In Quest of Beauty*, 144-145, passim.

⁴*Ibid.*, passim.

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2, 1908, just two months before his scheduled departure on April 1, Verkade appraised his Munich experiment as follows:

Perhaps I have not yet succeeded altogether, but one thing is certain: I have learned much this year and when I gather my paintings and arrange them together, one would rejoice at the freshness of my work and be taken with the individuality that exhibits itself in each little piece.⁵

In yet another letter of February 1907, Verkade wrote, "I am sure that you would like what I have done this year"⁶ The following month found Verkade anticipating a visit from Denis in Munich; he wrote to Denis' wife, expressing his desire to visit the museums with his old friend and to share his observations. "Before the masterpieces I can also speak with him about what I have found in them." In the same letter, he declared, "I would so much like to show my work here."⁷

Even after his return to Beuron, Verkade continued to hold his Munich experience in high regard. On June 16, 1908, he wrote to Denis,

⁵"Peut-être je n'ai pas encore tout à fait réussi, mais une chose est certaine que j'ai beaucoup appris cette année ici et que lorsque je réunis mes travaux, je mets tout ensemble, on est réjoui de la fraîcheur de mon oeuvre et pris par la personnalité qui se montre dans presque chaque petite chose." Unpublished letter to Denis, dated February 2, 1908.

⁶"Je suis sûr que vous aimerez ce que j'ai fait cette année ici." Unpublished letter to Denis, dated February 1908.

⁷"Devant les chefs d'oeuvre je peux lui parler aussi de ce que j'ai trouvé là-dedans." "Je préférerais de beaucoup si je pouvais montrer ici mon travail." Unpublished letter to Mme. Denis, dated March 11, 1908.

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Well, I think I'm able to judge at the moment, now that I am far removed from my state of mind in Munich. I can say calmly that I have talent and that my works have a great allure. I am content about that at the moment. I feel that I have given a start to what I have under my skin. If I die tomorrow, I will die with joy because the beginning is there. I have had a very rich life and have done everything.⁸

These hardly seem the words of someone who thought his time in Munich had been wasted; they hardly anticipate the severe revision of his views in his later assessment. What they could have accounted for Verkade's change of heart, or at least the appearance of such in his memoirs? Fäthke notes that Jawlensky believed that Verkade's nudes were discovered by his monastic superiors and that the discovery led to Verkade's having been sent to Jerusalem between 1909 and 1911.⁹ Jaworska relates that Verkade had painted an image of the Madonna asleep, called the *Dormitio*, which had displeased the Abbot and led to Verkade being made to destroy the work himself.¹⁰ Verkade's great-nephew, son of his brother Eduard, claims that some event surely occurred between Verkade and the officials of the monastery, unknown to the family in its detail, that affected Verkade's

⁸ "Eh bien, je crois pouvoir juger à présent maintenant que je suis bien en dehors de l'état d'esprit de Munich. Je peux dire tranquillement que j'ai du talent et que mes choses ont une grande allure. Je suis tranquille là-dessus à présent. J'ai le sentiment que j'ai donné le commencement de ce que j'ai dans la peau. Si je meurs demain je mourrai avec joie, car le commencement y est, j'ai eu une vie très riche et fait de tout." Unpublished letter to Denis, dated June 16, 1908.

⁹Fäthke, *Jawlenskys Japanische Holzschnittsammlung*, 25.

¹⁰Jaworska, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*, 172.

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decision to cease painting in 1914. Any and all of these intimations and claims are plausible and possible; nevertheless, nothing of any dramatic nature need have occurred. Highly likely is that Verkade felt renewed artistic vigor as a result of his Munich sojourn but that his stylistic advances, yet further removed from the Lenzian ideal, were incompatible with *Beuronerkunst*. Further, and far more serious in its impact, is Verkade's logical realization that given the scope of his freedom in Munich and the nature of the activities it allowed, Verkade's continued pursuit of art could not endure at Beuron. One could say that Verkade's life as a monastic in Beuron stood in direct contrast to Verkade's life as an artist in Munich. Having made a commitment to monasticism and the priesthood, a choice which for him was irredeemable, Verkade would soon have to accept that the two passions to which he had devoted his life were irreconcilable.

Just prior to his departure for Munich in 1907, Verkade had written to Denis "mon crise artistique sera bientôt fini." While his statement was premature with respect to the artistic exploration that was about to begin, in fact, the revelations of the Munich experiment produced a far more attenuated crisis for Verkade. The sum total of Verkade's experiences through his eighteen months in Munich, precisely because of the fruits they bore, caused him to choose ultimately between his God and his art. The resolution of that crisis would come to define the virtual remainder of his life.

That reality presents itself in the lengths to which he went to conceal and "cover his Munich tracks," so to speak. Although Verkade's autobiography is at least a reliable source, for the factual details it contains about many aspects of his life, the chapter

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devoted to his eighteen month Munich sojourn is remarkably vague and lacking in such detail. The sheer brevity and opacity of the information provided lends credibility to the argument that Verkade was being deliberately elusive about divulging the nature and scope of his activities during this time. The very facts that have come to light in the current investigation should serve to make clear why Verkade's autobiographical exposition on this period is overtaken by obfuscation.

As he wrote his memoirs, living again within the confines of the monastery, and looking back over his life, Verkade would no doubt feel a need to justify his choices not only for his audience but also likely for himself. In my attempt to uncover the work of this seminal period in Verkade's career, it occurred to me on more than one occasion that Verkade had gone out of his way to make any such discovery on the part of future historians both daunting and difficult. My guess was that he wished at some level to remain unrevealed despite the recognition that his Munich activities might secure for him. To relinquish art, his first love was Verkade's choice. The resultant spirituality of his life would continue to serve as a source of inspiration to his former colleagues, especially to those with whom he remained in contact. He had strengthened Jawlensky's commitment to the spiritual in his own art; he had seen Jørgensen through his conversion, his life remained a model of religious fervor to his colleagues among the Nabis, particularly Maurice Denis, and to many others of his friends and associates.

In the end, he chose to embrace his vows for all that they offered him and to present himself to the world as a religious convert whose striving to find God was his life's crowning achievement.

Conclusion

Verkade's Contribution to Modernism

I have become an important personality by the power of my seclusion. There are many "Willibrordian" legends, a bit everywhere: in Berlin, in Munich, in Florence, in Paris. This is naturally because I am a student of Gauguin, a friend of Maurice Denis, and a monk.

Jan Verkade¹

Sérusier and I continue to preach the good word at the Academy Ranson, which now has 55 students. It is not uncommon to meet students from Munich who know of Father Verkade. Enclosed here is a newspaper clipping that will inform you further about your great celebrity.

Maurice Denis²

One of the earliest assessments of the work of Jan Verkade to be made within the wider context of a history of the Modernist movement was written by Julius Meier-Graefe. In his description and analysis of the School of Pont-Aven, Meier-Graefe spoke admiringly of the genius of Gauguin and wrote of his followers

¹"Je deviens une personnage important à force de me cacher; il y a beaucoup de légendes 'willibrordiennes' un peu partout à Berlin, à Munique, à Florence et à Paris. Tout cela naturellement parce que je suis élève de Gauguin, ami de Maurice Denis et moine." Unpublished letter to Maurice Denis, undated, written in the autumn of 1908.

²"Sérusier et moi nous continuons à prêcher la bonne parole à l'académie Ranson qui arrive à 55 inscriptions! Il n'est pas rare de voir des élèves de Munich qui connaissent le Père Verkade. Ci-joint une coupure de journal qui vous renseignera d'ailleurs sur votre grande célébrité." Unpublished letter to Verkade from Denis, dated March 14, 1909.

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They looked heavenward too. ... Landscape was replaced almost en bloc by devotional pictures. Denis, Seguin, and Verkade in particular carried this Christianity to extreme conclusions. When they had the form, they added the content. It forced its way beyond the form. It was a wild sort of Christianity. ... they began to show less repugnance to Seurat's efforts to discover the mathematical rules of composition; Sérusier and Verkade in particular achieved results by such means. But woe to him who ventured to recommend his invention as a doctrine of universal application! Was it, perhaps, fear of the spirits he had called up which finally drove Gauguin out to the other savages.

Verkade, too, left the country. He went to Germany. Chance made the existence of the Beuron art school known to him. He contributed to the fame of this later San Marco.³

Of course, Meier-Graefe wrote that passage several years before Verkade traveled to Munich, and during the period in which Verkade had all but disappeared from the public eye. Surprisingly, although he barely mentioned it in his letters, Verkade actually met Meier-Graefe in Munich: the latter visited Verkade in his studio and appraised his work. Verkade wrote to Denis only the following comment, in the autumn of 1907: "Meier-Graef (sic) has been to my studio and congratulated me on my progress."⁴

³Julius Meier-Graefe, *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*, v.II, trans. by Florence Simmonds and George W. Chrystal (London: William Heinemann, 1908), 70-71.

⁴"Meyer-Graef (sic) a été chez moi et me félicitait de mes progrès." Unpublished letter to Denis, dated October 30, 1907.

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With so little information about their exchange during this meeting, it is difficult to imagine or even to suggest what Meier-Graefe might have written about Verkade had he not yet published *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Modernen Kunst*. Certainly though, in 1907 not nearly enough time had passed for the evidence of Verkade's influence to have come to the fore. Neither the summer of 1908, which marked the dissemination of Verkade's ideas, nor the *Blaue Reiter* experiment, which gave witness to the distillation of his thinking, had yet occurred. Additionally, Meier-Graefe's great work was centered on the French 19th century experiment in modernism and treated only the less radical currents in contemporary German art: Hans von Marees, Arnold Böcklin, Anselm Feuerbach, and the like. There is no mention of the Secession groups, nor of the undertakings of the *Därmstadt* or the *Worpeswede* communities, let alone of the stirrings of the *Brücke*. Meier-Graefe then, could not have imagined Verkade to be a conduit of ideas from his Pont-Aven experiences to the new experiments in German art that gave rise to an equivalent, modernist vision.

Then too, Verkade's activities subsequent to his Munich sojourn, both voluntary and involuntary, only helped to obscure his place within the annals of the modernist movement. His seclusion in Jerusalem between 1909 and 1912, according to the dictates of his monastic superiors, and his own decision in 1914 to forego painting as a career contributed to the relative oblivion in which much of his significant artistic contribution came to reside. While he had never gained great renown, even as a member of the Nabis, surely his subsequent achievements were even less apparent.

Verkade first came to our attention as a follower of Gauguin. The ideas and ideals to which he aspired during the early days of his career molded his personality and

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engendered the choices he made throughout his life. The spirit of the age marked him as well; he carried within him a mission characteristic of the *fin de siècle*, to defeat the materialist wave of industry and technology that had swept across Europe and its art during the 19th century. To do so, he and his comrades had endeavored to restore art to its primary and lofty purpose, the evocation of the spiritual realm. Whether passed through the sieve of Theosophy, the occult, or Christianity, the images they created were less about discernible subjects than about the moods or expressions they communicated. "To have something to say," suggestively, although not literally, became the mantra of the Symbolists. To reach their goal they worked to reconcile form and color and to subordinate both to the overall expression of the painting. Gauguin had begun a revolt against the painting of the mundane and the ordinary. His followers attempted to alter the taste and the vision of their own generation of Europeans.

Jan Verkade was a converted disciple and his conversion to Symbolism was as zealous as was his conversion to Catholicism. As he proselytized about Christianity to the pilgrims who came faithfully to Beuron each year, he had proselytized about Symbolism to a generation of earnest artists, seeking to fulfill the same anti-materialist goals as his former comrades-in-arms. To those seeking to convey the spiritual in art, Verkade brought the message of Symbolism.

Most of the artists whom Verkade encountered in Germany had explored the same range of mystical and exotic subjects that had engaged the Nabis: Theosophy, the occult, the writings of Shuré, Maeterlinck, and Mallarmé. They investigated the mystical properties of numbers and thought of color in musical terms, exploitable for its emotional effects. Their experiments had one aim, to convey the spiritual in art. His

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formal grounding in a Symbolist aesthetic, his serious commitment to his monastic vows, and his experience with *Beuronerkunst* wove a fabric of monumental and timeless spirituality around him that made Verkade's influence possible.

Between the autumn of 1906 and the spring of 1908, Verkade lived and worked among a community of contemporary artists in the bohemian district of Schwabing in Munich. Some of them, Jawlensky, Werefkin and Kubin, like himself were expatriates, others, like Erbslöh, Kanoldt and Troendle were native born. Throughout his time in Munich, Verkade kept up a professional and personal correspondence with Maurice Denis and maintained contact with many of his Nabis colleagues. Verkade's artistic exchanges with Denis were most likely characteristic of his dialogues with his German companions. His focus was largely on Gauguin, van Gogh and the Symbolist impulse of which he still considered himself a part.

But beyond mere discussion, Verkade consistently encouraged his German and Russian friends to study the art of his Symbolist comrades and their forebears. He made it possible for them to do so easily; he kept a small collection of the works of his Nabis friends on display in his apartment, he arranged to have Sérusier visit him for two months in Munich and work among his German peers. He provided countless letters of introduction, enabling his French and German colleagues to become engaged with each other. Due, in large measure to Verkade's urging, Jawlensky and Werefkin traveled back to Brittany, Troendle went to Paris, Kubin examined the work of Gauguin, all of them were moved to strive for a synthesis of color and form in their work. Verkade was convinced that Synthetism was the means to arrive at the communication of the spiritual in art.

Conclusion

Just prior to his departure from Munich in the spring of 1908, Verkade brought to fruition the wish he had expressed to Mme. Denis: "I would like so much to show my work here."⁵ At the Musiksaal on the G oethestrasse, he mounted a small exhibition. It contained his collection of the work of his Nabi colleagues, which they had given him during his 1907 trip to Paris, along with important canvasses of his own, painted during the Munich sojourn. (See checklist of the exhibition, appended). In some ways, this exhibition can be seen as Verkade's final statement about the significance and impact of Nabi Symbolism for his own work and that of his associates in Munich. Surrounded by the canvasses of the Nabis, most of them painted in the 1890s, Verkade's own work bore testament to his belief in and reliance upon the power of the Symbolist aesthetic. We may only assume that the painters with whom Verkade worked in Munich were present at this exhibition and witnessed that power for themselves. Such a display formed the visual legacy of Verkade's dialogue with them for the time that he worked among them.

In the summer of 1908, Verkade's message of synthesis reached Kandinsky and Gabriele M unter, both then experiencing a transitional phase in their work. Ripe for experimentation, their works bear the stamp of Synthetism. But more than a stylistic influence, Verkade's message to Jawlensky contained the grander goal of spiritual expression. Verkade's presence, his priestly bearing, his immersion in Symbolist ideology and his affiliation with the *Beuronerkunstschule* had a far greater impact than

⁵"Je pr f rerais de beaucoup si je pouvais montrer ici mon travail." Unpublished letter to Mme. Denis, dated March 11, 1908.

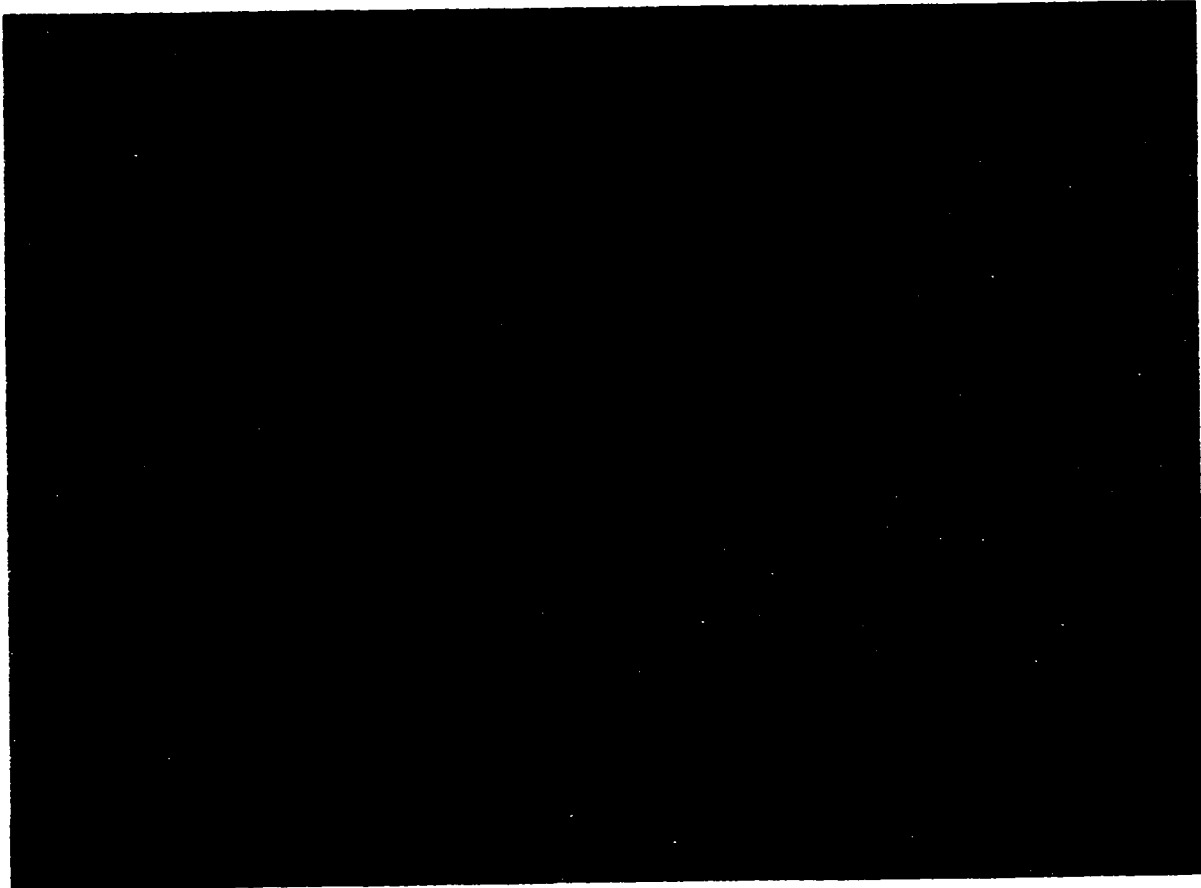
Conclusion

could have been the case had he been a secular painter. His dual devotion to his artistic vision and his monastic vows were seen to be one and the same, or at least to be mutually interdependent. In a way, Verkade became their spiritual/artistic advisor and it was just this blending of his two spheres of reference that enhanced his own communicative power.

Verkade's insistence that the artist have something to say was a requirement that he strove to achieve in each of his paintings. While he was initially satisfied, if not encouraged, by the works he produced in Munich, later he would claim that Munich had showed him what he had lost of his Symbolist past to his absorption in *Beuronerkunst*. Rather than in the images he created, in the end Verkade's most significant contribution was contained within the potency of the message he imparted to other artists and which took shape in the milestones they would attain.

ILLUSTRATIONS

ILLUSTRATION 1



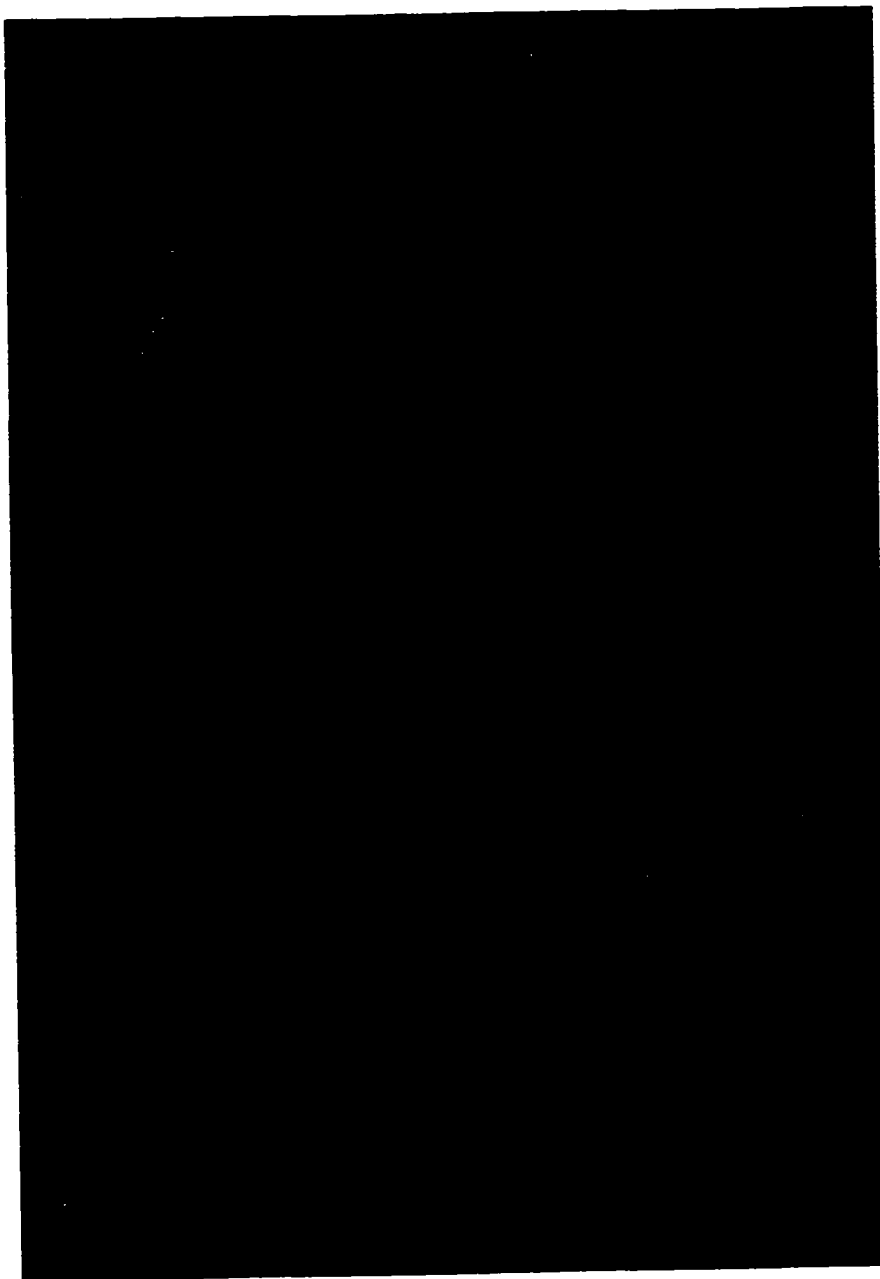
JAN VERKADE 1891
STILL LIFE WITH A QJIMPER BOWL

ILLUSTRATION 2



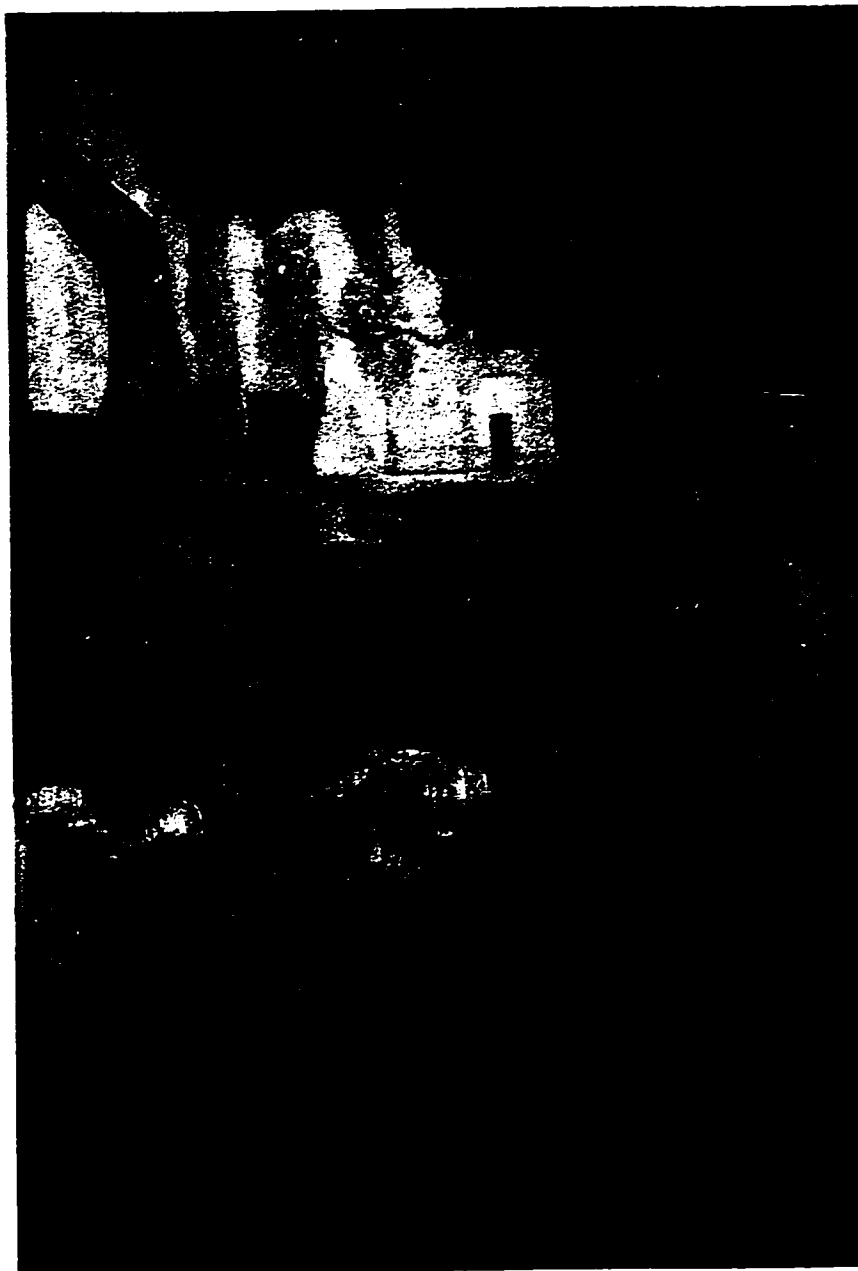
JAN VERKADE 1892
HEAD OF A BRETON WOMAN

ILLUSTRATION 3



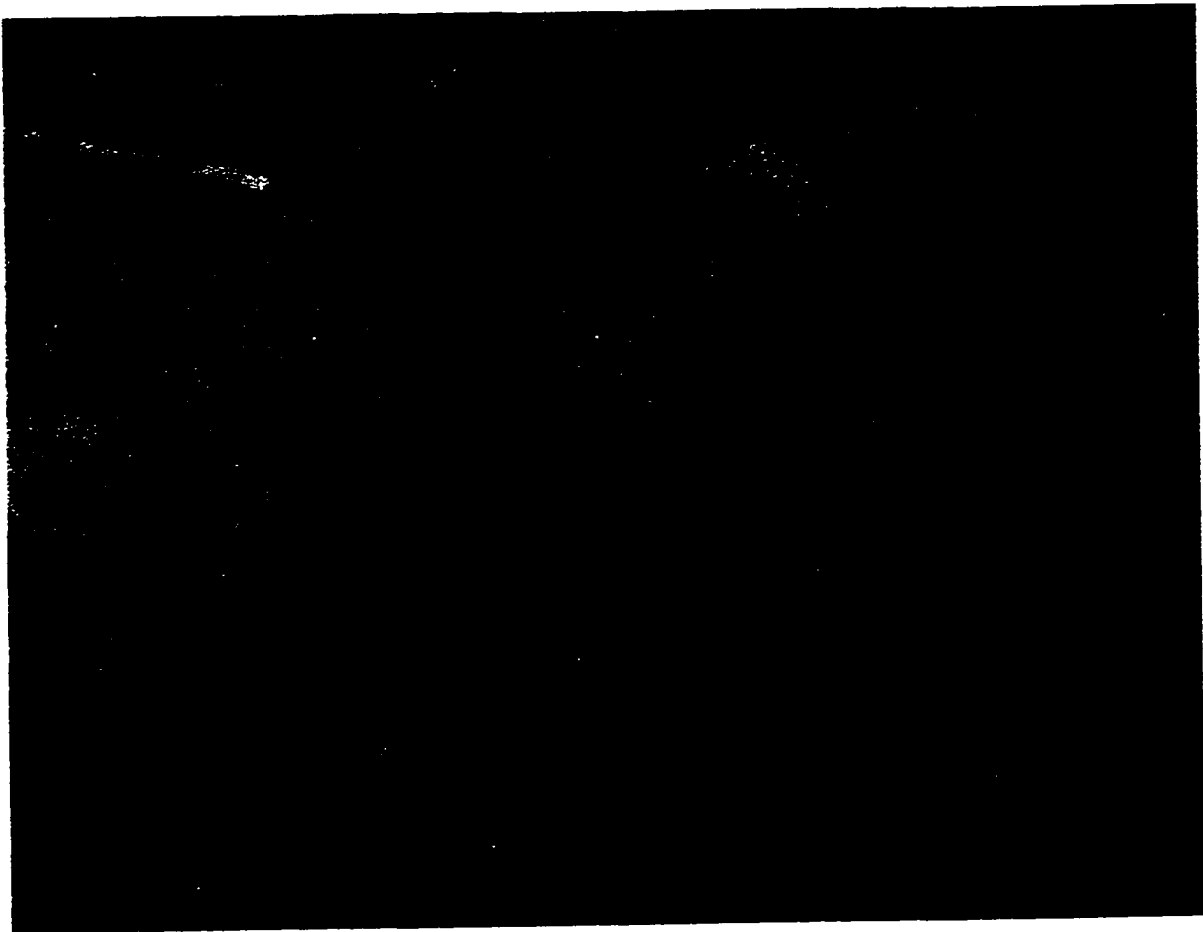
JAN VERKADE 1891-2
DECORATIVE LANDSCAPE I

ILLUSTRATION 4



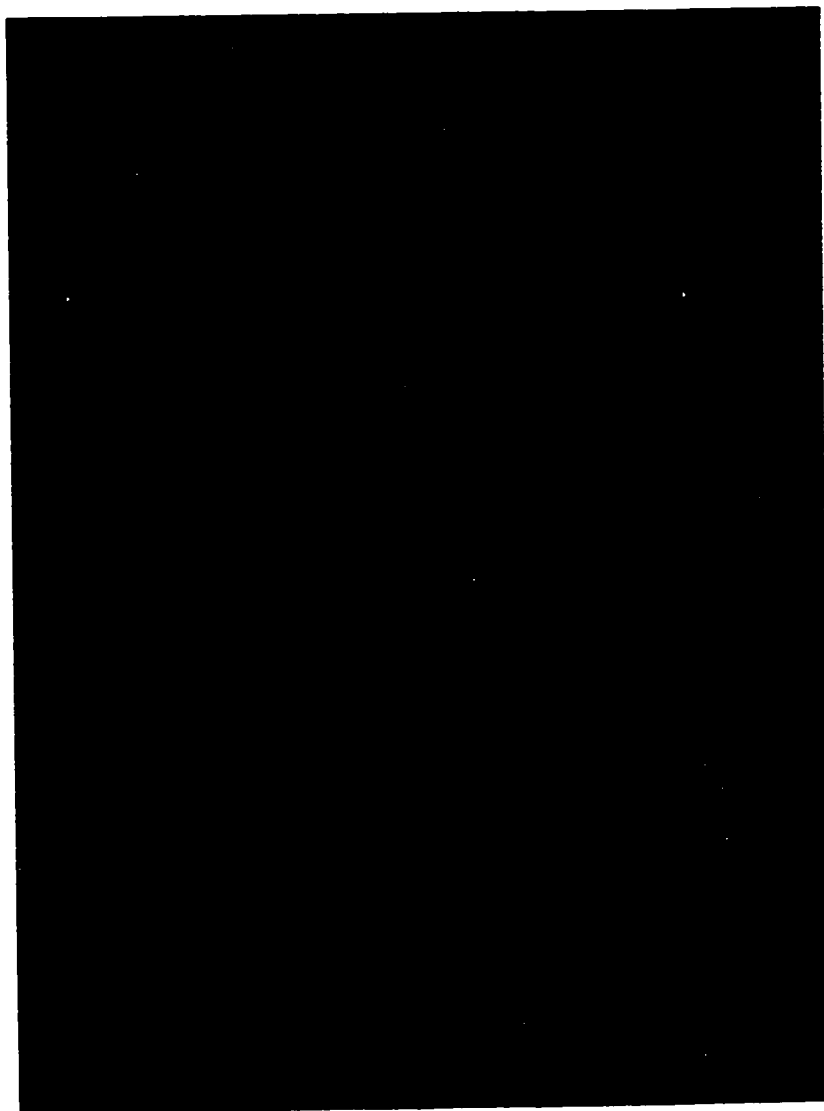
JAN VERKADE 1891-2
DECORATIVE LANDSCAPE II

ILLUSTRATION 5



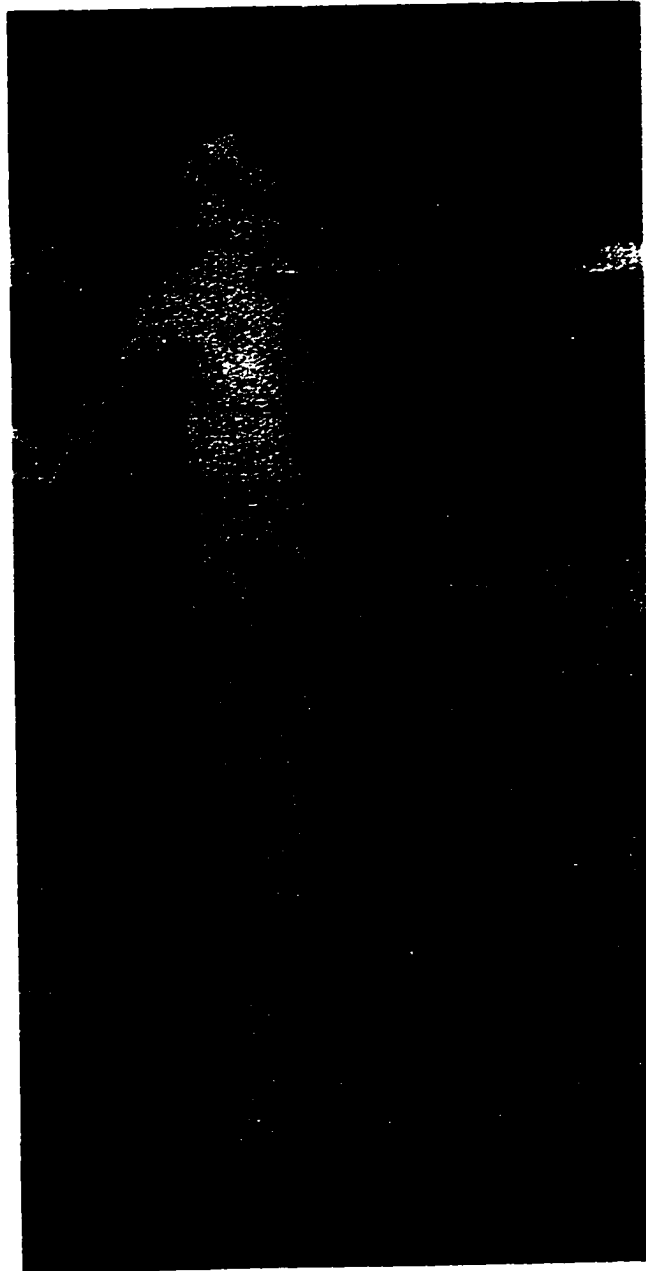
JAN VERKADE 1891
FARM AT LE POULDU

ILLUSTRATION 6



JAN VERKADE 1894
MADONNA AND CHILD

ILLUSTRATION 7



JAN VERKADE 1892 Ballin prov.
St. Sebastian

ILLUSTRATION 8



JAN VERKADE 1892
ST. SEBASTIAN

ILLUSTRATION 9



JAN VERKADE 1892
ST. SEBASTIAN

ILLUSTRATION 10



SPENCER STANHOPE
VENUS RISING FROM THE SEA

ILLUSTRATION 11



JAN VERKADE 1893
ST. FRANCIS

ILLUSTRATION 12



JAN VERKADE 1892

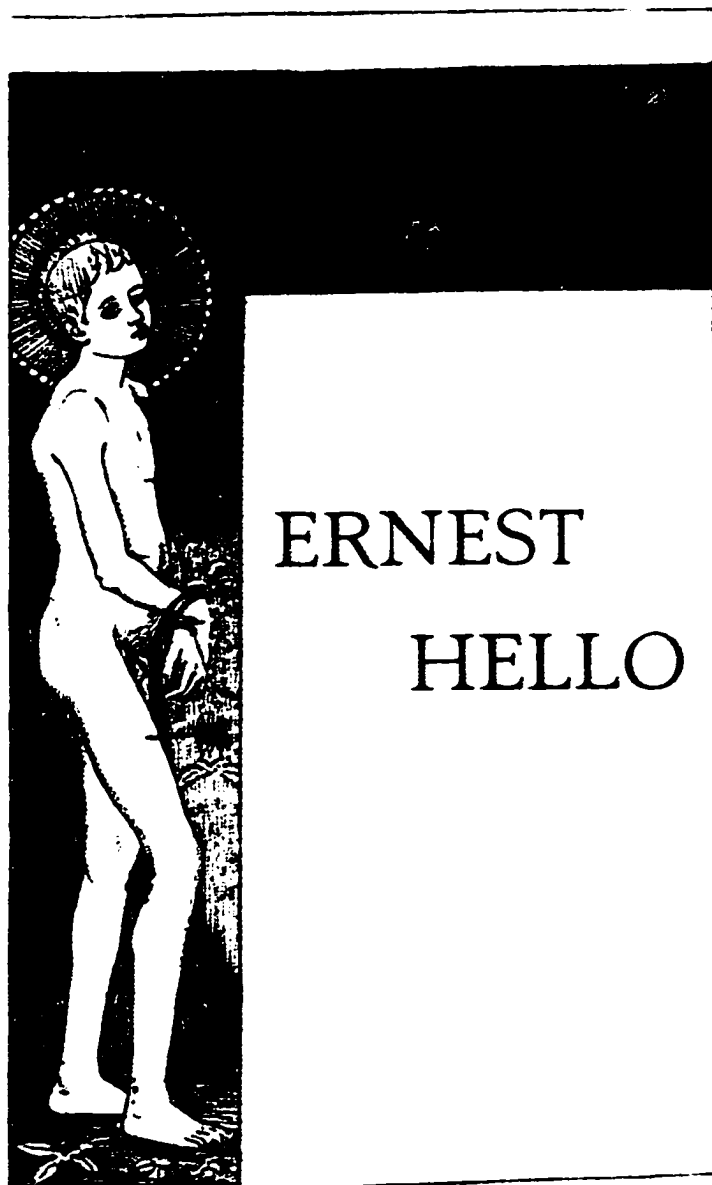
MARIANNE AND HER COW

ILLUSTRATION 13



JAN VERKADE 1893
MONK ASLEEP

ILLUSTRATION 14



JAN VERKADE 1894

ST. SEBASTIAN TAARNET

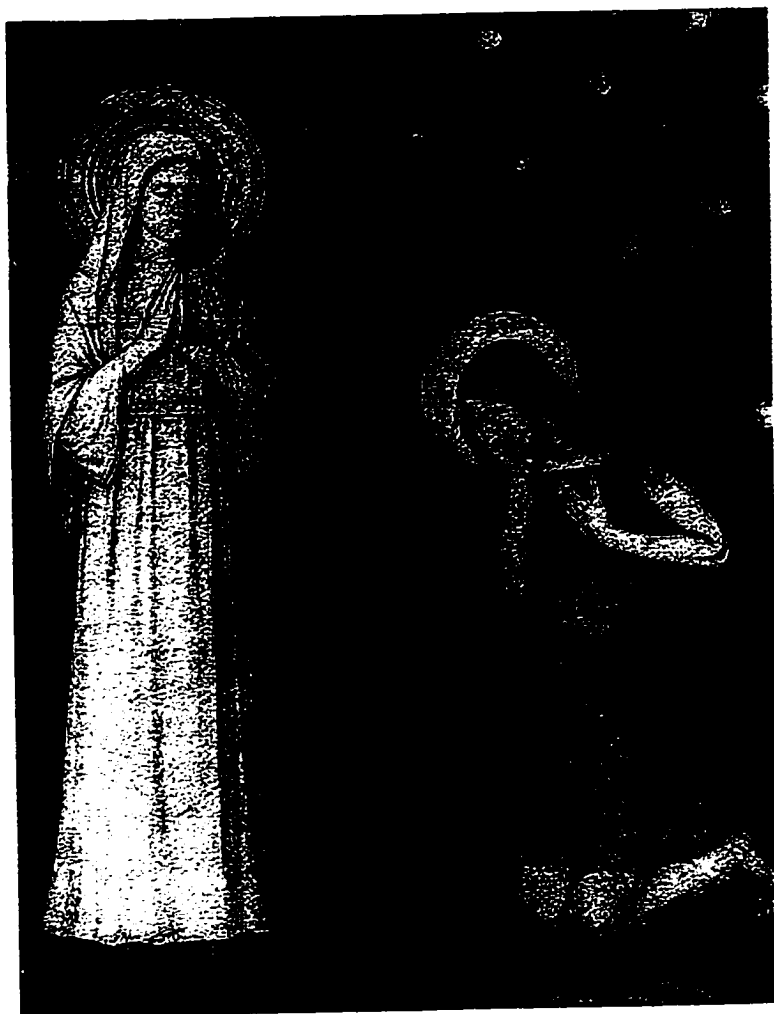
ILLUSTRATION 15



JAN VERKADE 1905

EVA AND MARIA pencil

ILLUSTRATION 16



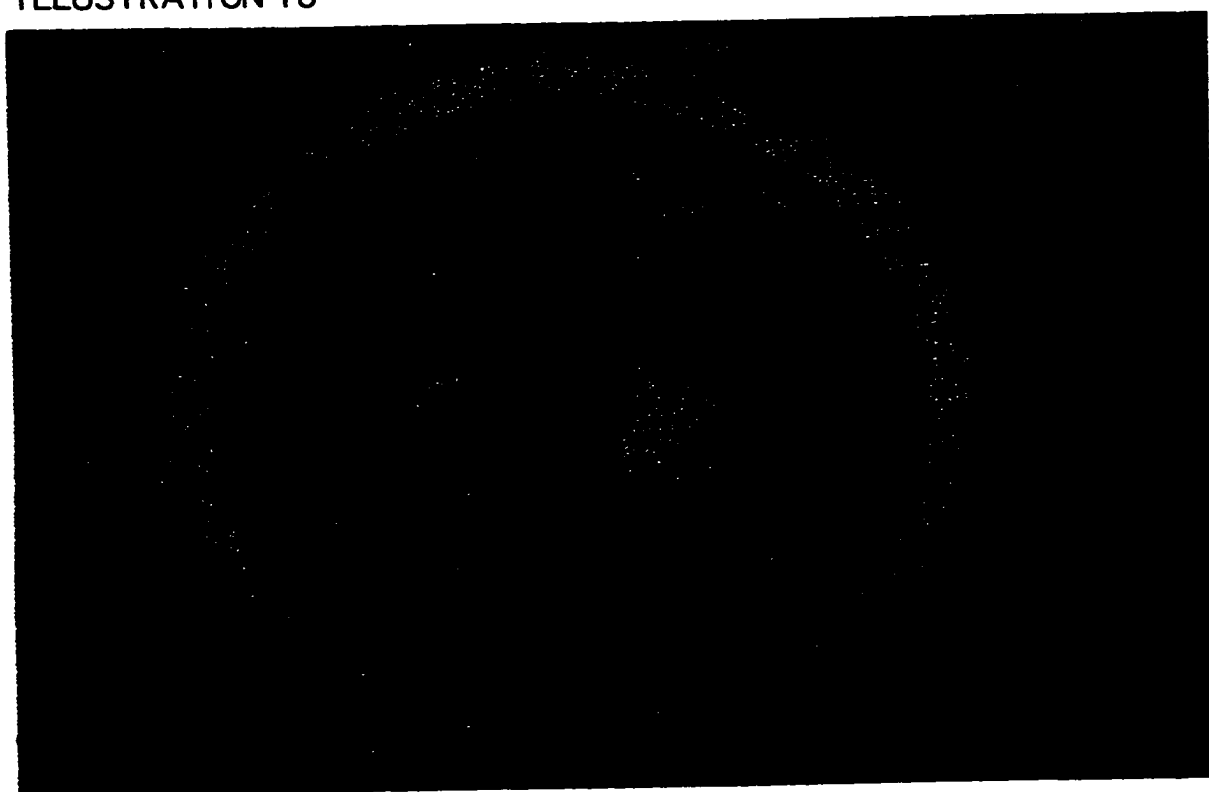
JAN VERKADE 1905
EVA AND MARIA charcoal

ILLUSTRATION 17



DONATELLO 1454-55
MARY MAGDELENE

ILLUSTRATION 18



JAN VERKADE 1905
CHRIST IN MAJESTY

ILLUSTRATION 19



JAN VERKADE 1905

ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

ILLUSTRATION 20



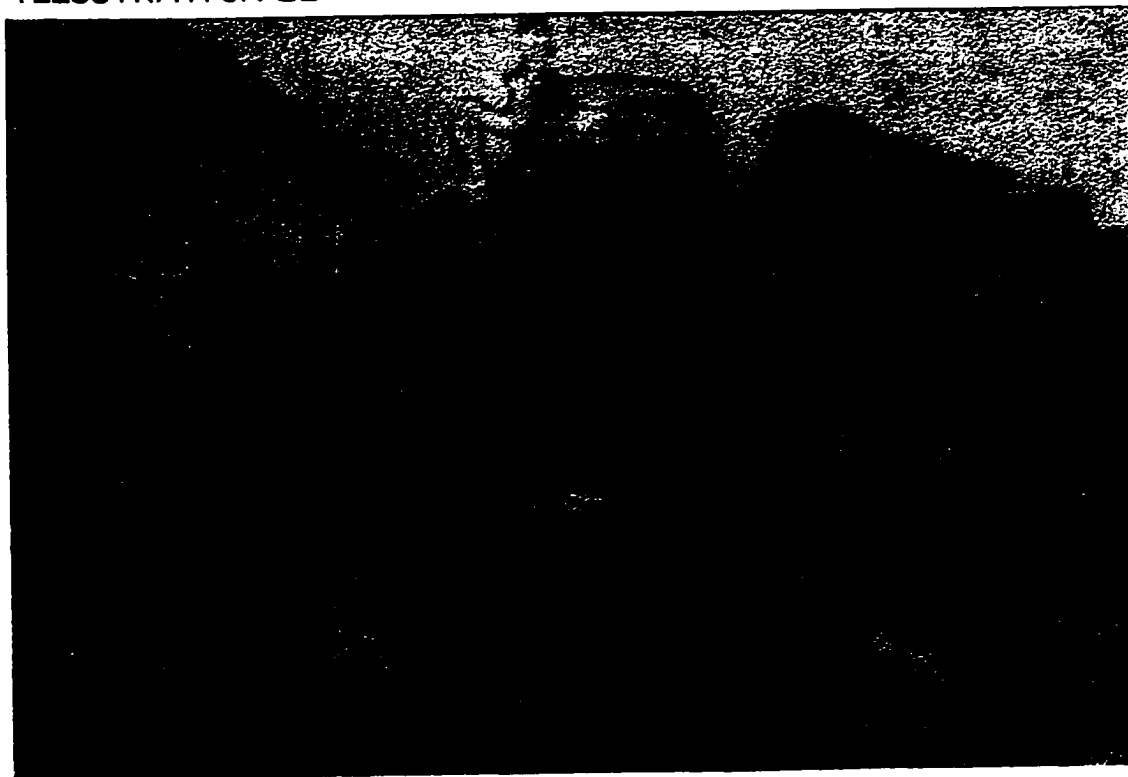
CHARLES FILIGER 1892
CHRIST SURROUNDED BY ANGELS

ILLUSTRATION 21



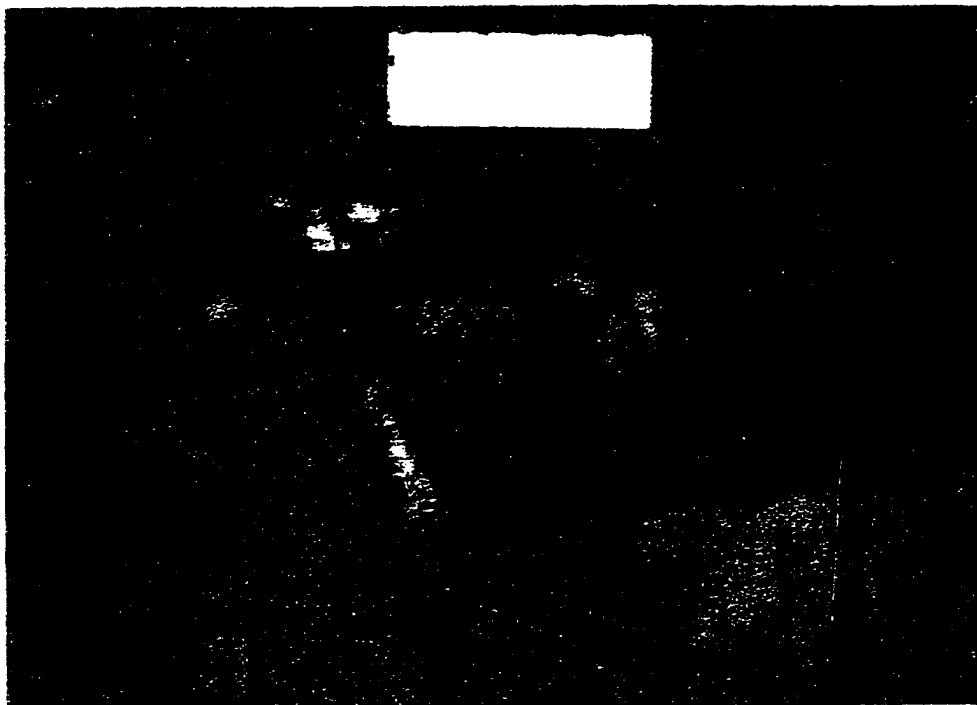
MAURICE DENIS 1904
THE MONKS OF BEURON

ILLUSTRATION 22



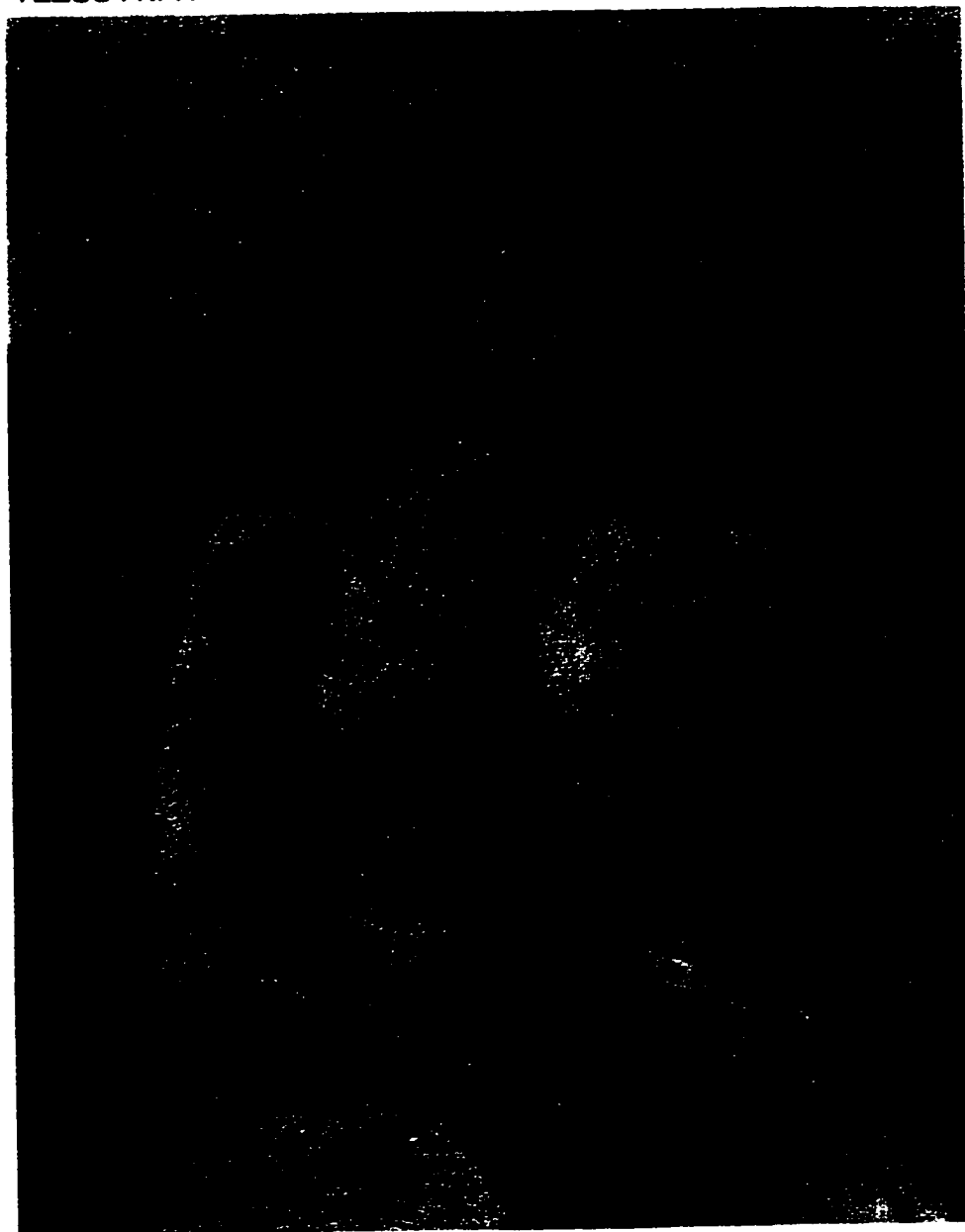
JAN VERKADE 1907
STILL LIFE WITH A GREEN STEIN

ILLUSTRATION 23



JAN VERKADE 1907
STILL LIFE unfinished

ILLUSTRATION 24



JAN VERKADE 1907-8
NUDE WITH A GINGER JAR

ILLUSTRATION 25



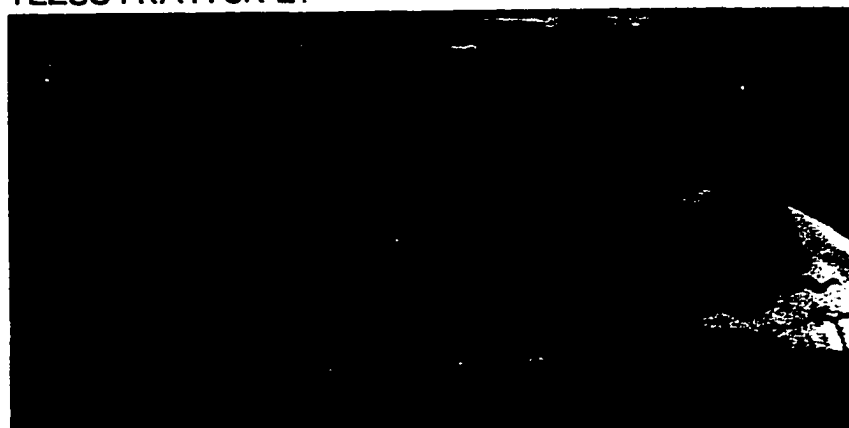
JAN VERKADE 1907-8
NUDE IN JAWLENSKY'S STUDIO

ILLUSTRATION 26



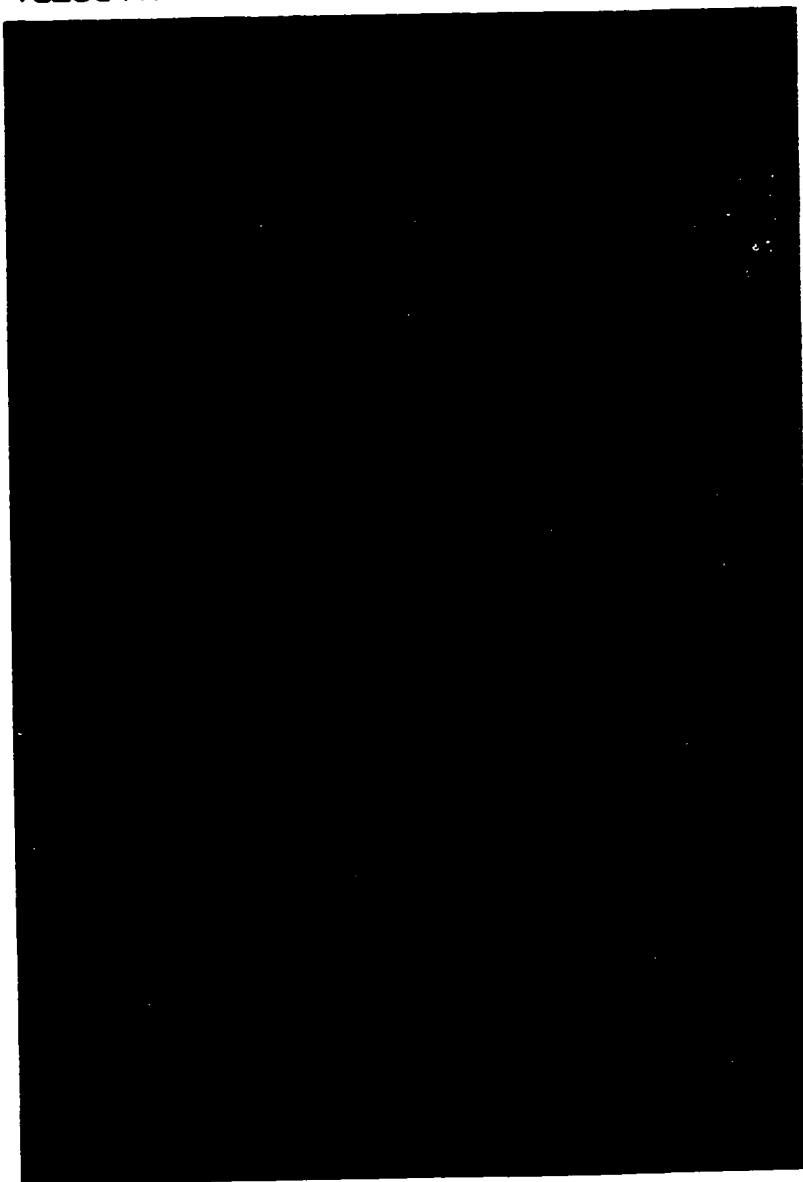
HENRI MATISSE 1907
BLUE NUDE: SOUVENIR OF BISKRA

ILLUSTRATION 27



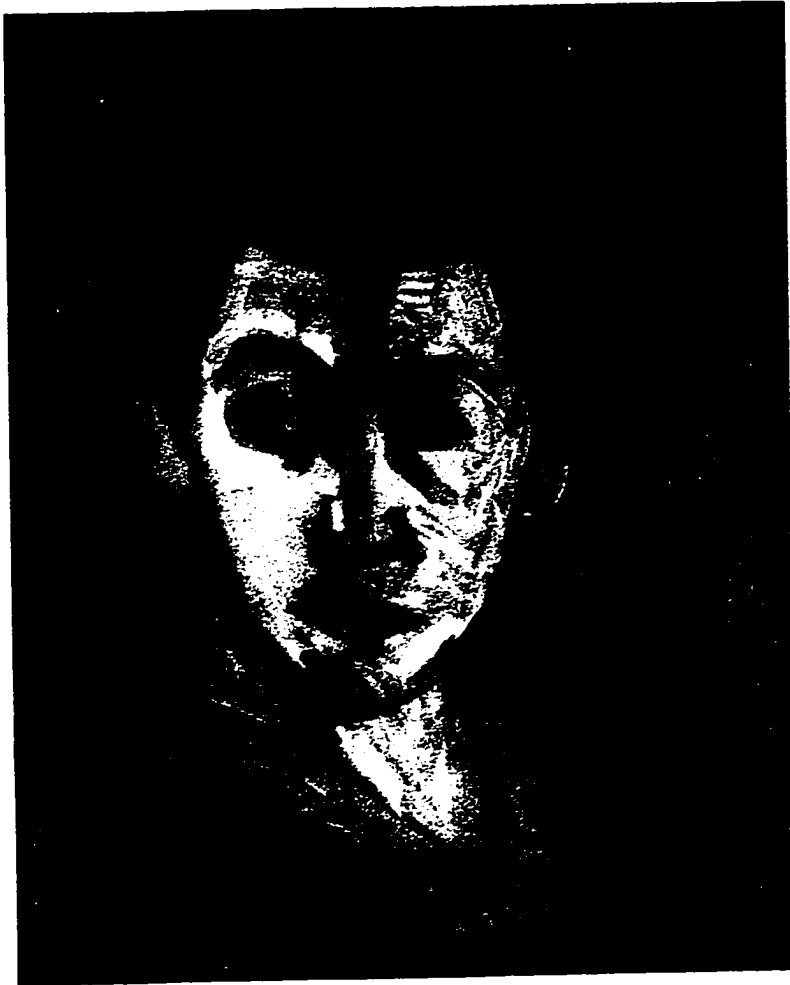
PAUL GAUGUIN 1897
NEVERMORE

ILLUSTRATION 28



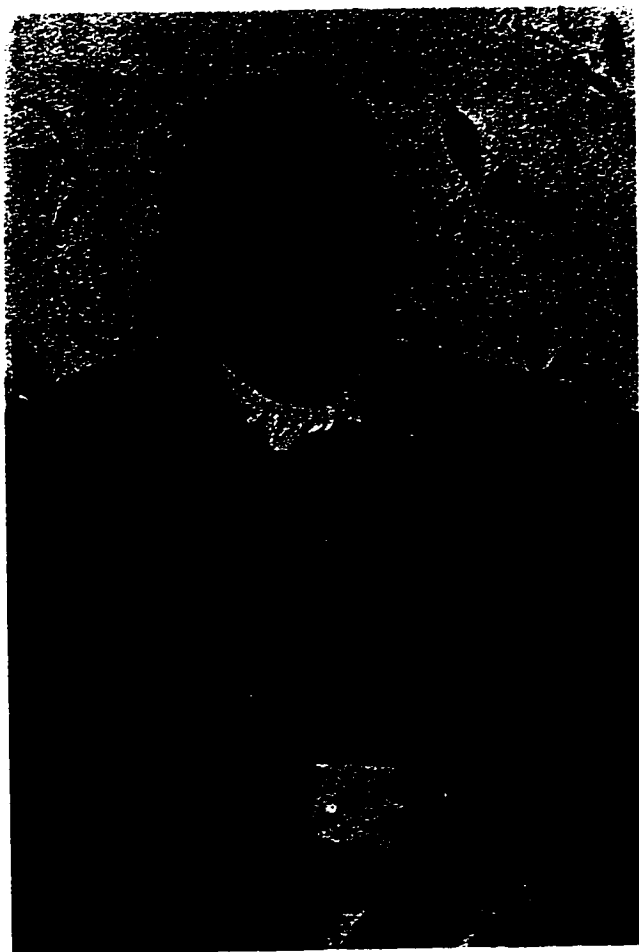
JAN VERKADE 1907
SELF-PORTRAIT

ILLUSTRATION 29



HENRI MATISSE 1905
PORTRAIT OF MME MATISSE: THE GREEN LINE

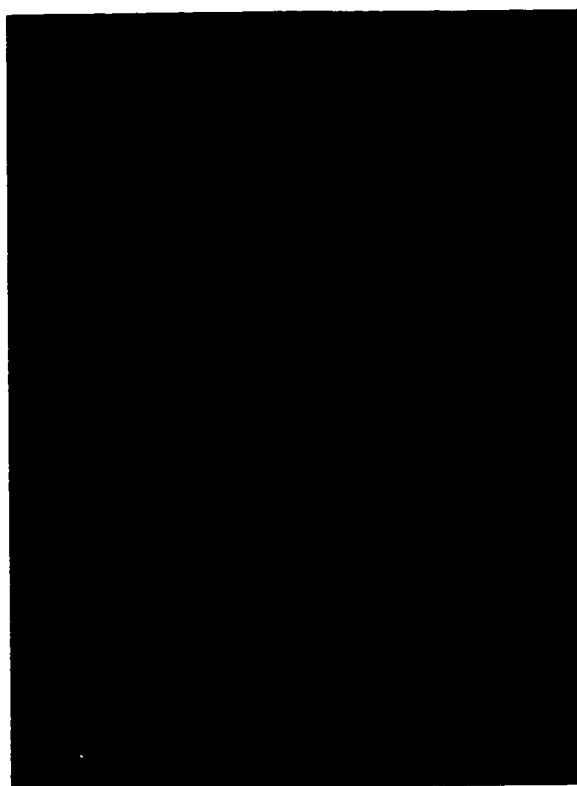
ILLUSTRATION 30



PAUL GAUGUIN 1891

VAÏNÉ NO TE TIARE

ILLUSTRATION 31



HUGO TROENDLE 1907
SELF-PORTRAIT

ILLUSTRATION 32



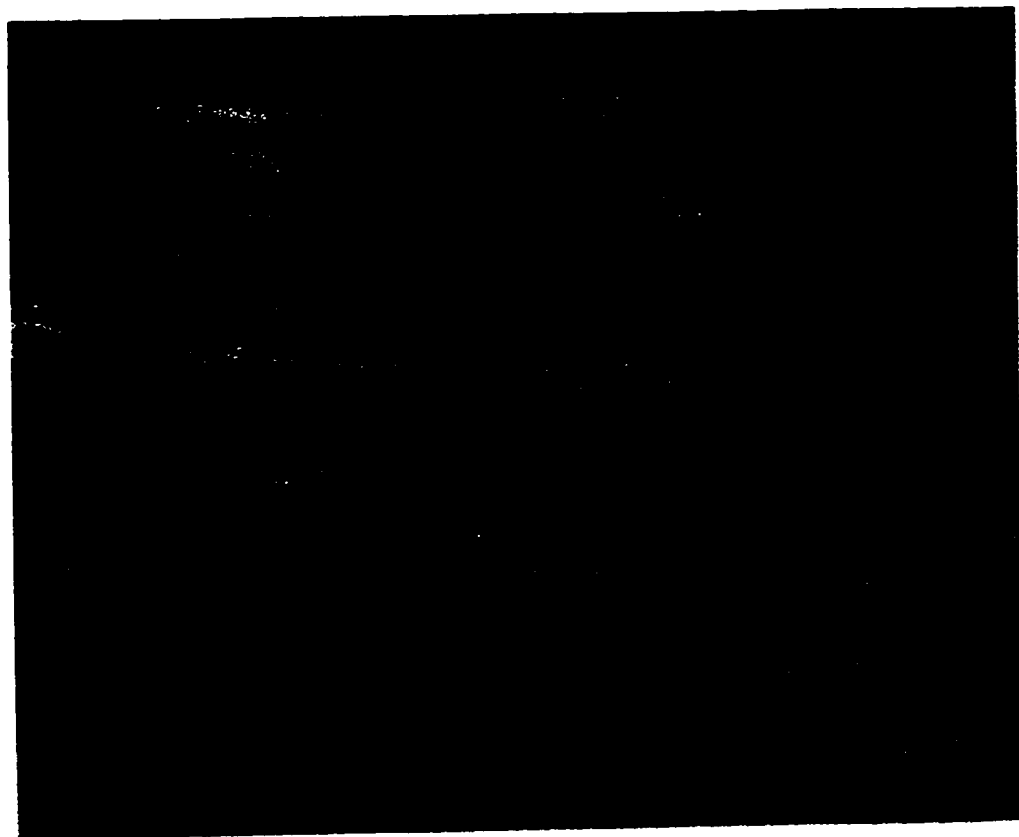
ALFRED KUBIN 1907
VORMENSCHEN (BEFORE MAN)

ILLUSTRATION 33



ALEXEI JAWLENSKY 1906
PORTRAIT OF HEDWIG KUBIN

ILLUSTRATION 34



JAN VERKADE 1906
LAUNDRY

ILLUSTRATION 35



MARI ANNE VON WEREFKIN 1907
DIE LANDSTRASSE

ILLUSTRATION 36



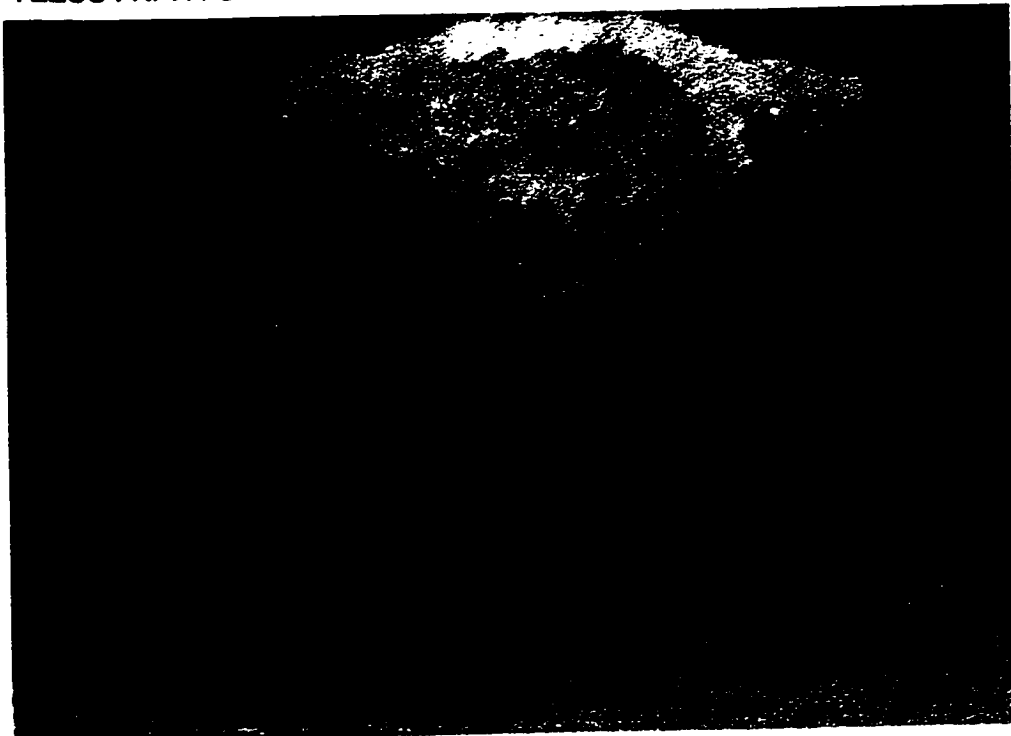
JAN VERKADE 1895
BRETON LANDSCAPE

ILLUSTRATION 37



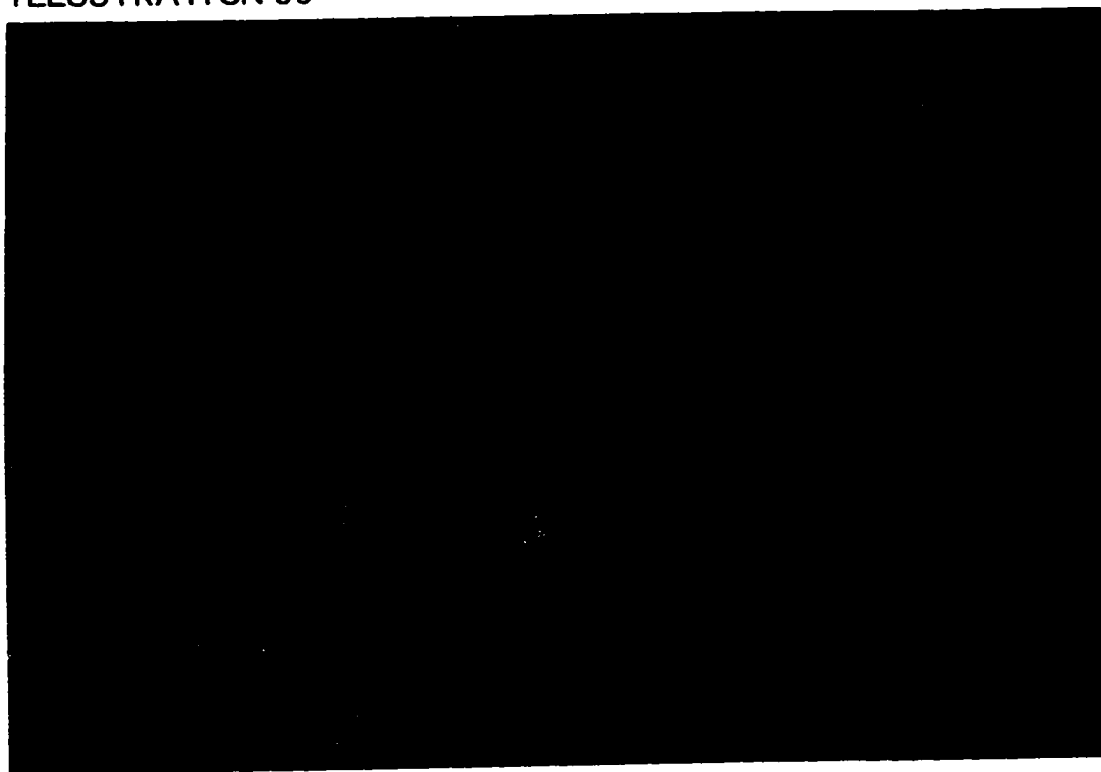
MARIANNE VON WEREFKIN 1909
WASHERWOMEN

ILLUSTRATION 38



ALEXEI JAWLENSKY 1908-9
SUMMER EVENING IN MURNAU

ILLUSTRATION 39



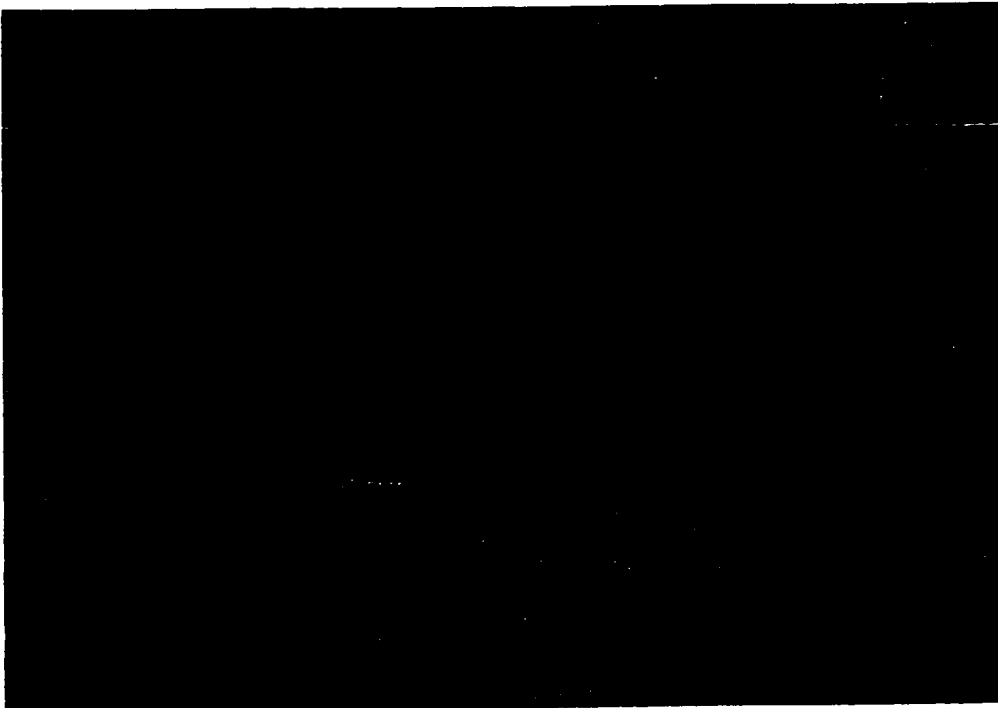
ALEXEI JAWLENSKY 1910
STILL LIFE WITH FRUIT

ILLUSTRATION 40



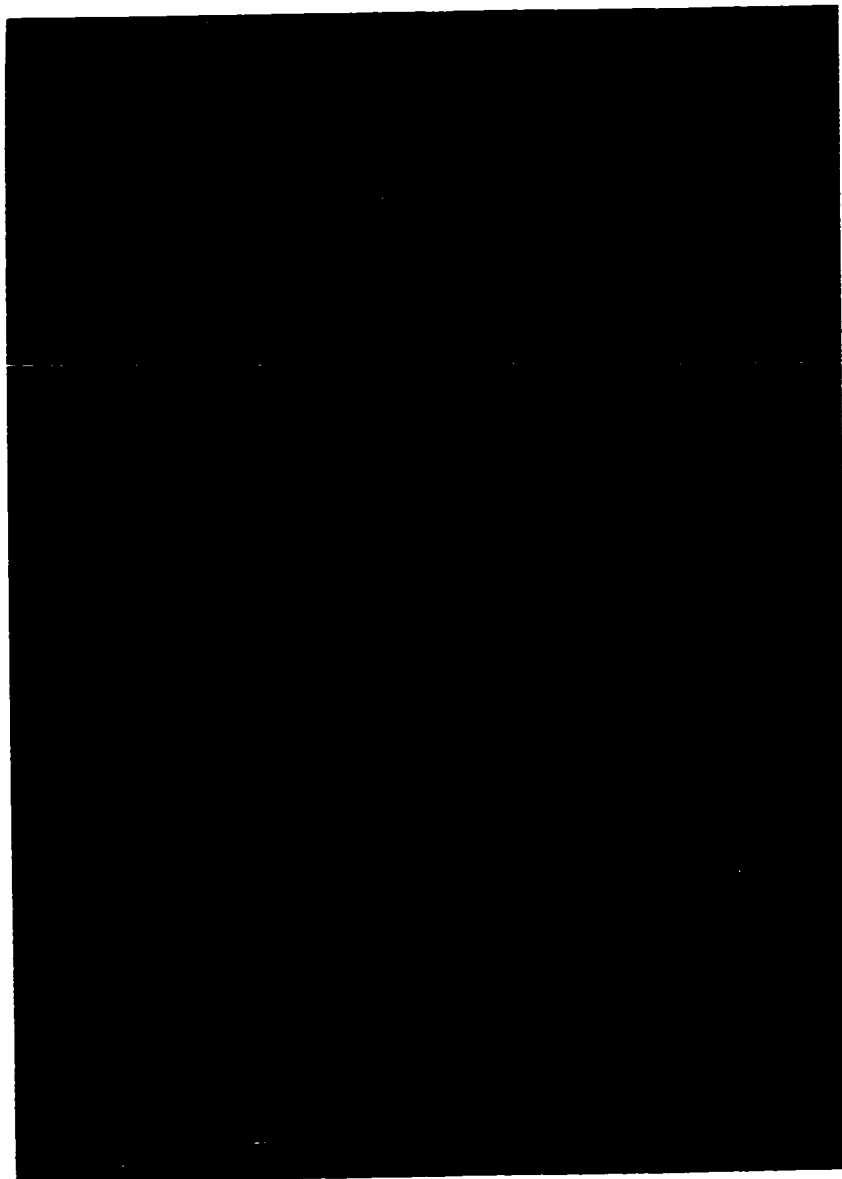
HENRI MATISSE 1906
PINK ONIONS

ILLUSTRATION 41



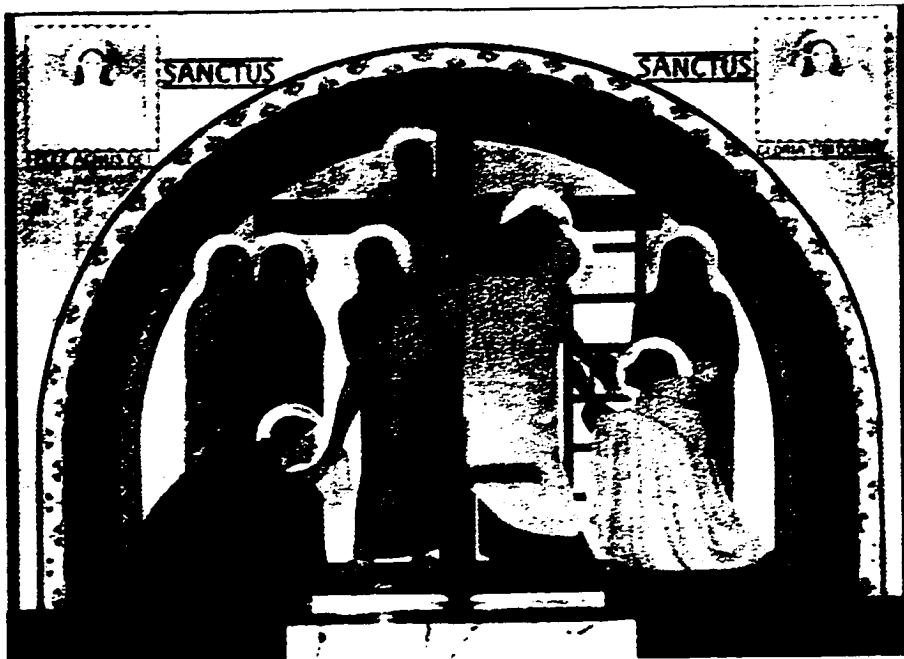
JAN VERKADE 1906
STILL LIFE WITH YELLOW APPLES

ILLUSTRATION 42



ALEXEI JAWLENSKY 1937
MEDITATION

ILLUSTRATION 43



JAN VERKADE 1914
DEPOSITION

ILLUSTRATION 44



WASSILY KANDINSKY 1903

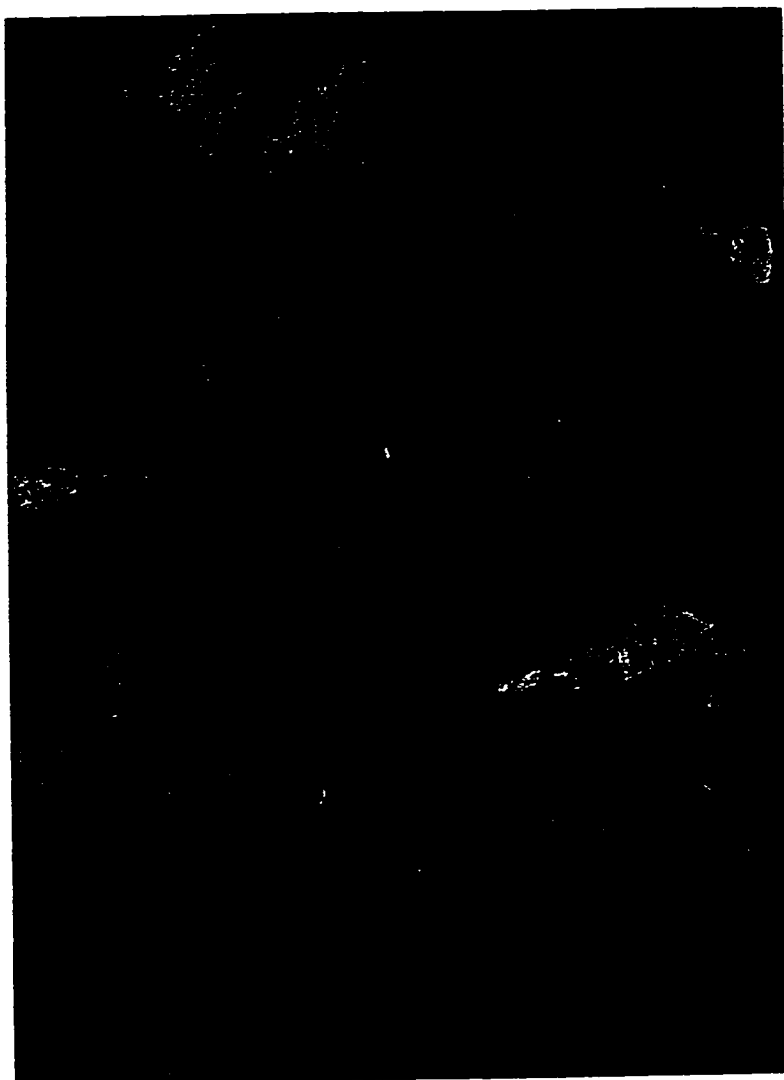
FAREWELL

ILLUSTRATION 45



WASSILY KANDINSKY 1906-7
COUPLE ON HORSEBACK

ILLUSTRATION 46



WASSILY KANDINSKY 1909
VOR DER STADT (BEFORE THE CITY)

ILLUSTRATION 47



WASSILY KANDINSKY 1908

LANDSCAPE WITH TOWER

ILLUSTRATION 48



JAN VERKADE 1892
LES SEPT PRINCESSES set design

ILLUSTRATION 48A



JAN VERKADE 1892

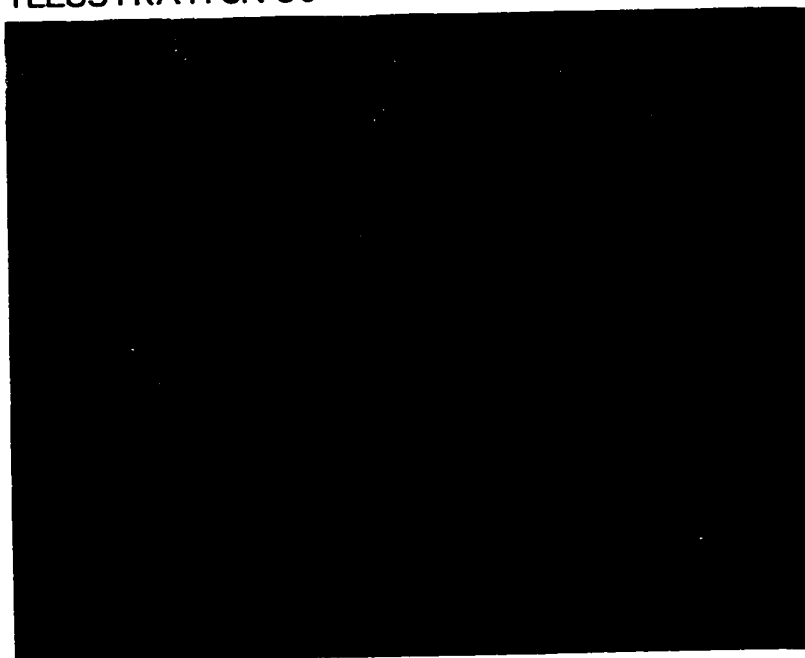
LES SEPT PRINCESSES sketch for set design

ILLUSTRATION 49



ALFRED KUBIN 1907
MEINE STADT

ILLUSTRATION 50



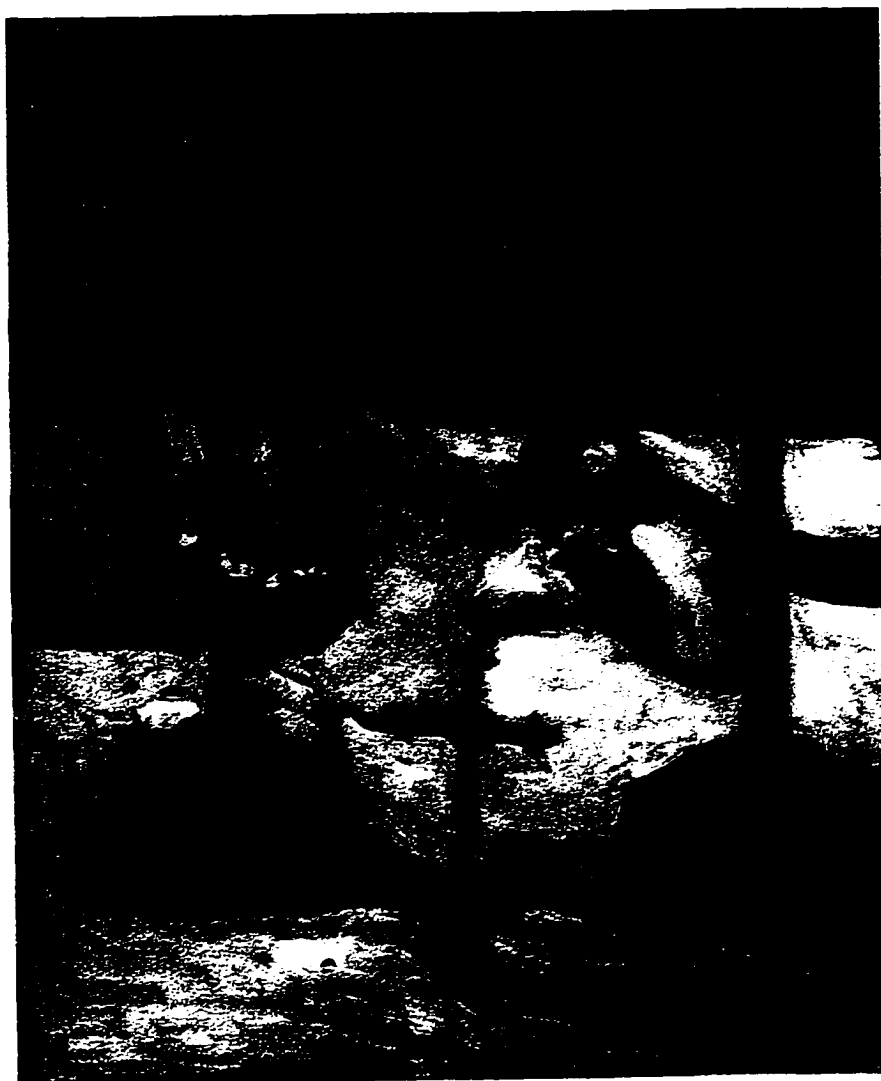
GABRIELE MÜNTER 1908
GRAVEYARD

ILLUSTRATION 51



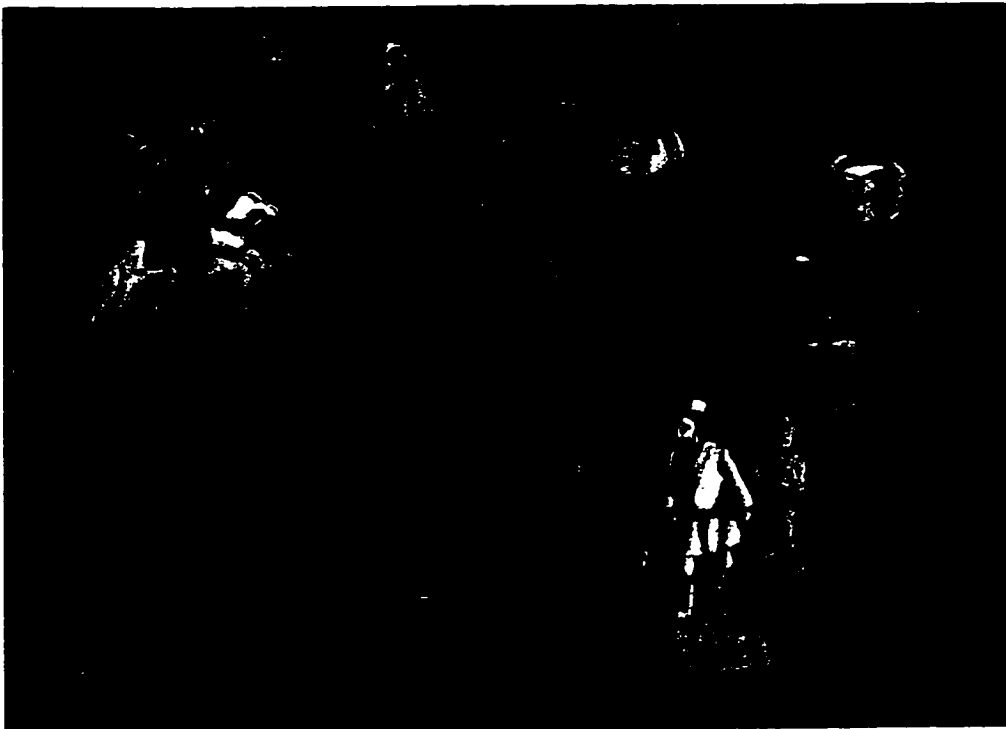
GABRIELE MÜNTER 1910
KOCHEL - STRAIGHT ROAD

ILLUSTRATION 52



GABRIELE MÜNTER 1909
TOMBSTONES IN KOCHEL

ILLUSTRATION 53



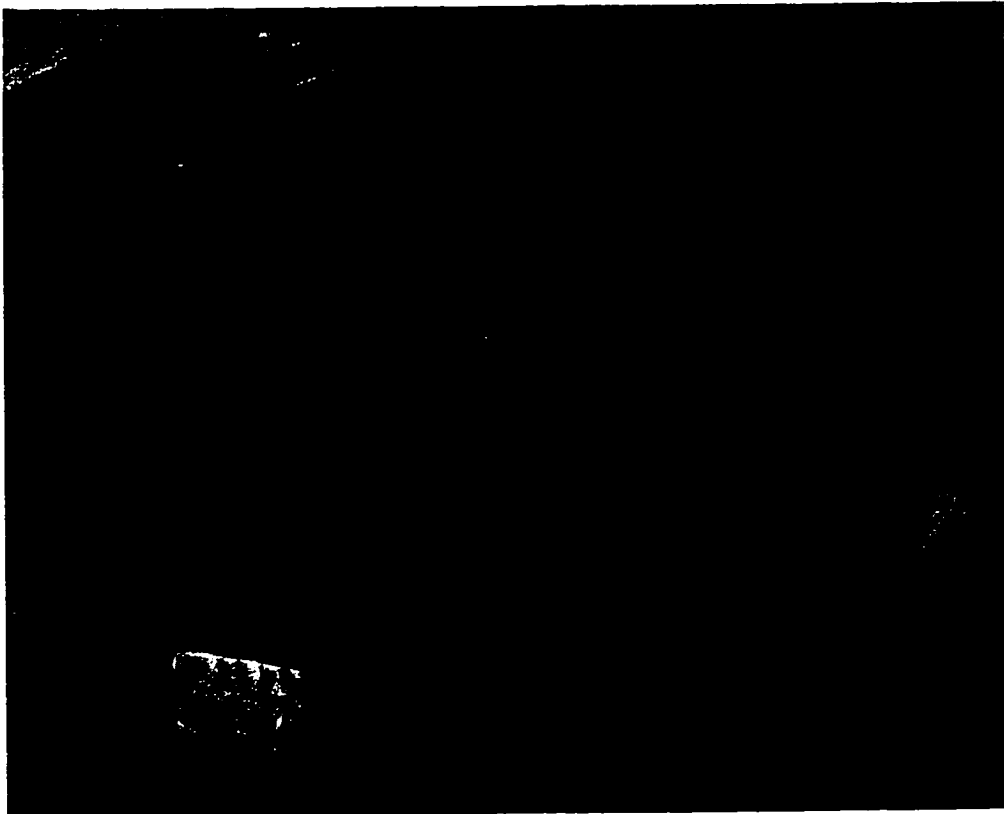
GABRIELE MÜNTER 1909
STILL LIFE WITH ST. GEORGE

ILLUSTRATION 54



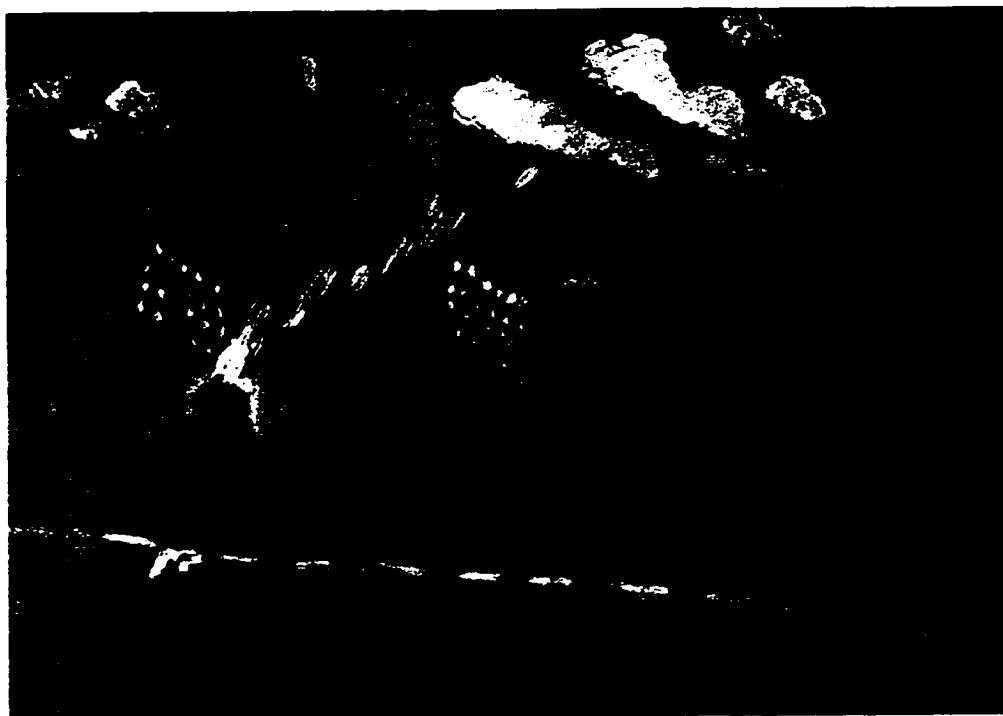
GABRIELE MÜNTER 1911
MADONNA WITH WINTER FLOWERS

ILLUSTRATION 55



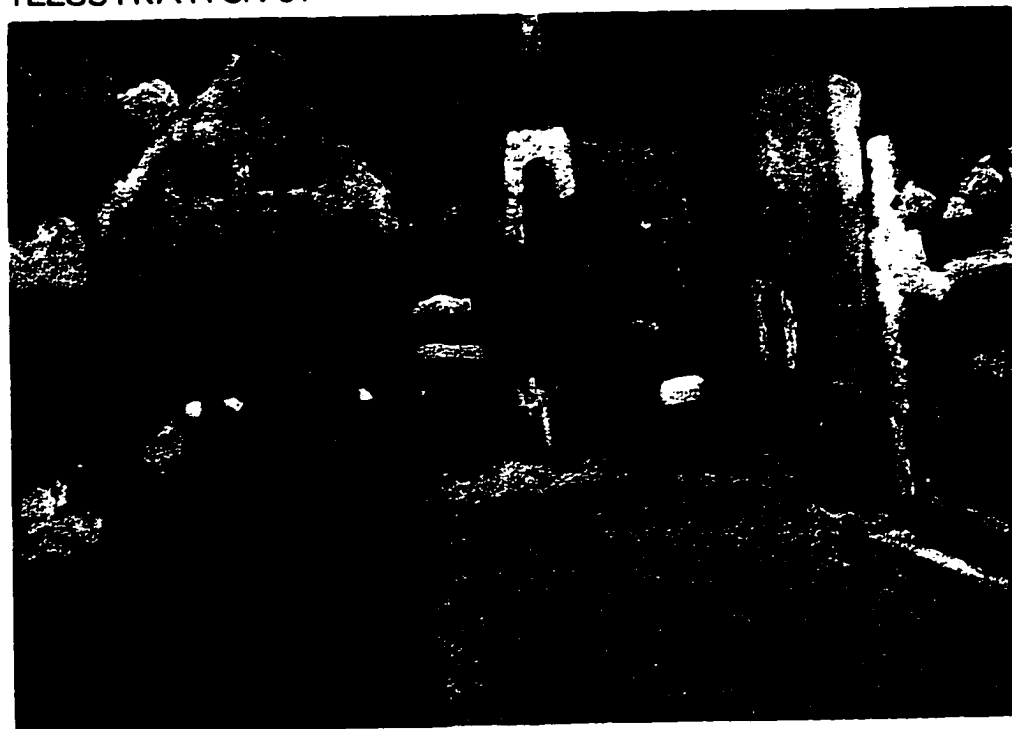
GABRIELE MÜNTER 1934
MOUNTAINVIEW

ILLUSTRATION 56



WASSILY KANDINSKY 1909
EISENBAHN BEI MURNAU (RAILROAD AT MURNAU)

ILLUSTRATION 57



WASSILY KANDINSKY 1909
MURNAU - GRUNGASSE

ILLUSTRATION 58



HENRI MATISSE 1907
BROOK WITH ALOES

ILLUSTRATION 59



WASSILY KANDINSKY 1909

PAINTING WITH HOUSES

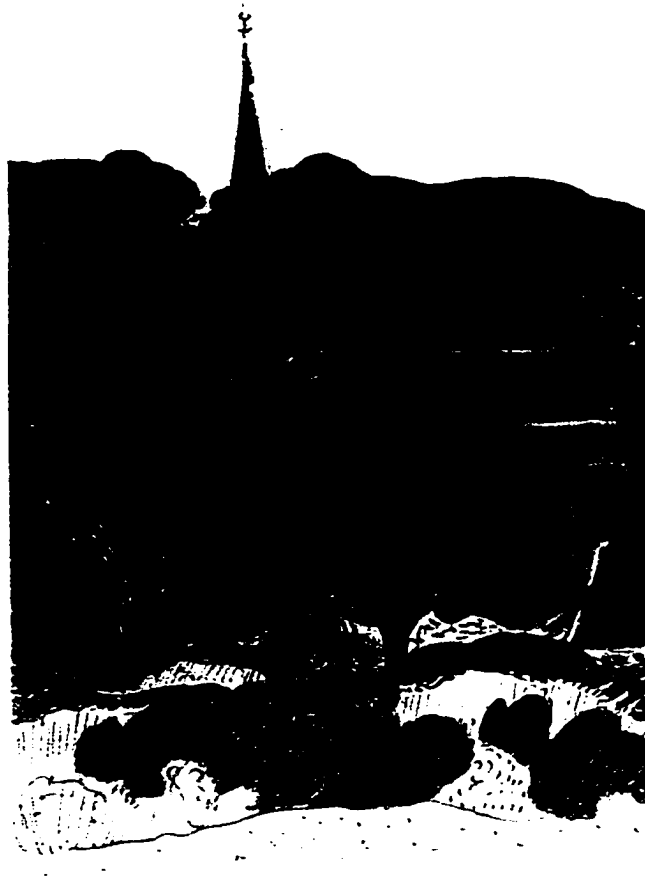
ILLUSTRATION 60



MAURICE DENIS 1889-90

ORANGE CHRIST

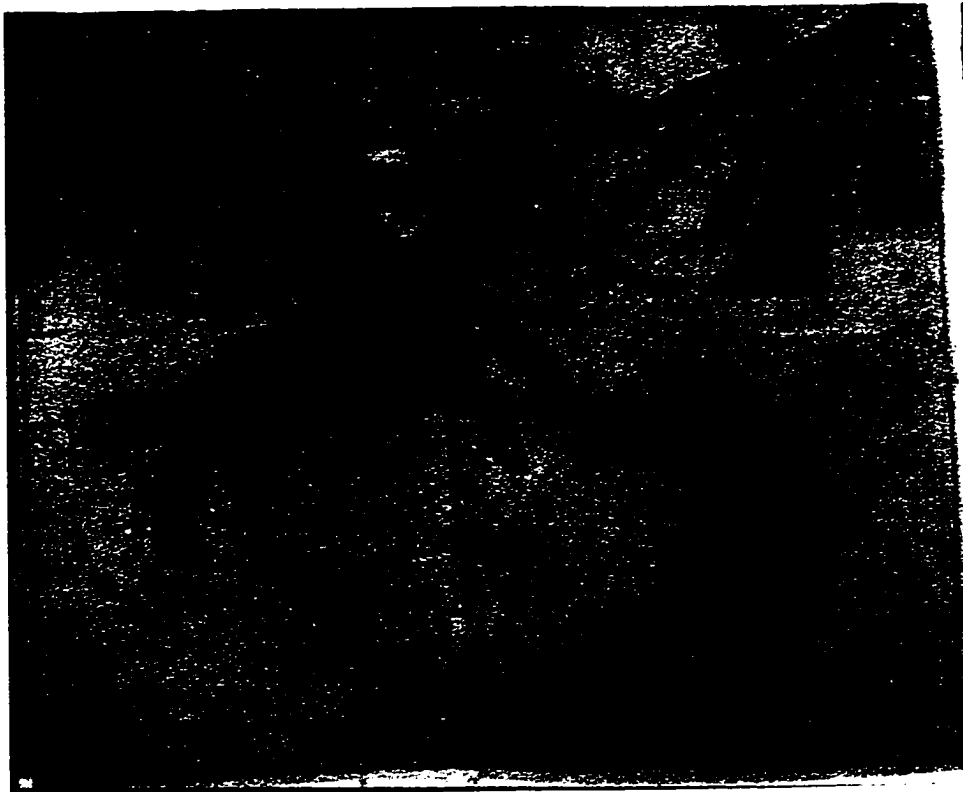
ILLUSTRATION 61



SM. 32

JAN VERKADE 1893
CHURCH AT ST. NOLFF

ILLUSTRATION 62



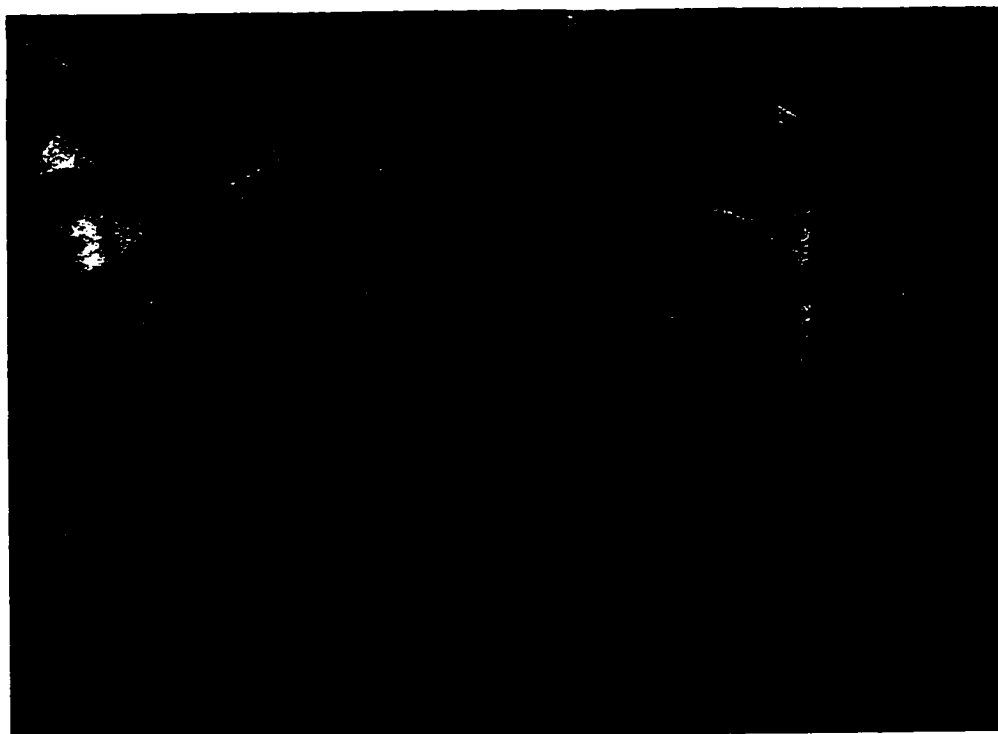
JAN VERKADE 1893
ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

ILLUSTRATION 63



JAN VERKADE 1903-5
WOMAN WITH A DEER

ILLUSTRATION 64



FRANZ MARC 1912
DEER IN A MONASTERY GARDEN

ILLUSTRATION 65



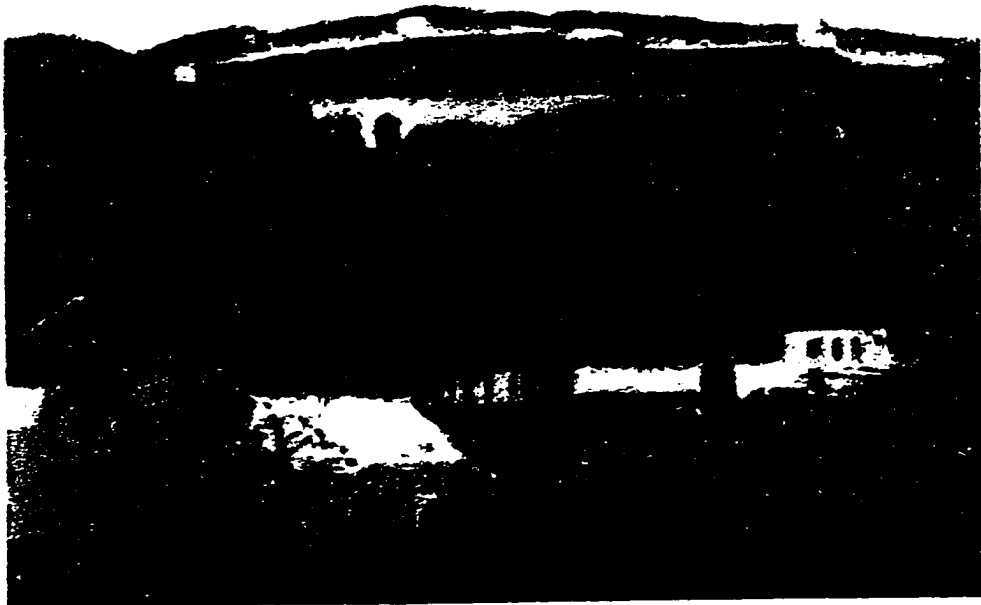
PAUL RANSON
LANDSCAPE WITH TREE

ILLUSTRATION 66



PAUL SERUSIER 1905
HOUSE WITH BLUE ROOF

ILLUSTRATION 67



MAURICE DENIS 1900
LANDSCAPE AT ST. GERMAINE-EN-LAYE

ILLUSTRATION 68



MAURICE DENIS 1904

ANGELS sketch for *LE VESINET*

ILLUSTRATION 69



MAURICE DENIS 1906
PORTRAIT OF VERKADE

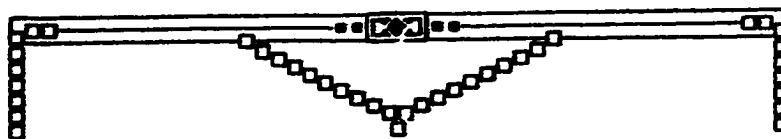
ILLUSTRATION 70



PAUL SERUSIER 1903
PORTRAIT OF VERKADE

APPENDIX

: Erste Etage : Im Musiksaal :
 MODERNEN KUNSTAUSSTELLUNG
 64 GOETHESTR. MÜNCHEN GOETHESTR. 64
 Telefon: München 8335 • Telegrammadr.: BRAKL MÜNCHEN



1	Maurice Denis	Skizze zu einem Deckenbild in der Kapelle von Vezinet	
2	Maurice Denis	In der Bretagne (Skizze)	
3	Maurice Denis	St. Germain	
4	Vuillard E.	Interieur	
5	Bonnard P.	Interieur	
6	Bonnard P.	Zwei Hasen	
7	Roussel H.	Pastell	
8	Roussel H.	Septazeichnung	
9	Sérusier	Landschaft	
10	Ranson Paul	Landschaft	
11	Verkade Jan W.	Blumentuch	Privat- besitz Mun
12	Verkade Jan W.	Stilleben mit der Gurke	250
13	Verkade Jan W.	Azalia	150
14	Verkade Jan W.	Wäsche (Landschaft)	50

CHECKLIST OF VERKADE'S 1908
EXHIBITION AT THE MUNICH MUSIKHAAL

APPENDIX

		<small>Mark</small>
15 Verkade Jan W.	Weisse Felsen	50
16 Verkade Jan W.	Mandarinen	250
17 Verkade Jan W.	Der schwarze Topf	<small>Privatbesitz</small>
18 Verkade Jan W.	Das kleine Blumentuch	250
19 Verkade Jan W.	Die Milchkanne	<small>Privatbesitz</small>
20 Verkade Jan W.	Der Balkon	300
21 Verkade Jan W.	Gelbe Aepfel	150
22 Verkade Jan W.	Die weissen Blumen	200
23 Verkade Jan W.	Die roten Blumen	200
24 Verkade Jan W.	Aus meinem Fenster	150
25 Verkade Jan W.	Kühe	150
26 Verkade Jan W.	Stilleben	250
27 Koch Peter	Baseler Bahnhof	500
28 Koch Peter	Japaner Stilleben	600
29 Koch Peter	Stilleben Zigarren	500
30 Koch Peter	Interieur: Bibliothekzimmer des Herrn Sidney Brown	900
31 Koch Peter	Stilleben Feldstecher	500
32 Koch Peter	Marktplatz in Neustadt (Nachtstimmung)	800
33 Koch Peter	Stilleben Eier	200
34 Pissarro C.	Mädchen mit Kind (Pastell)	150
35 Pissarro C.	Im Fleischerladen (Aquarell)	150

Druck von Franz X. Seltz, München.

CHECKLIST OF VERKADE'S 1908
EXHIBITION AT THE MUNICH MUSIKHAAL (con't)

2

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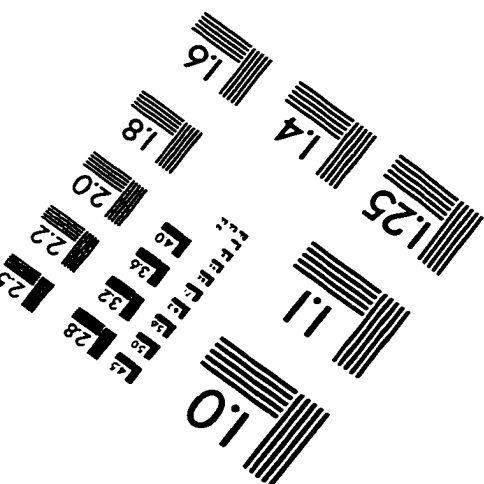
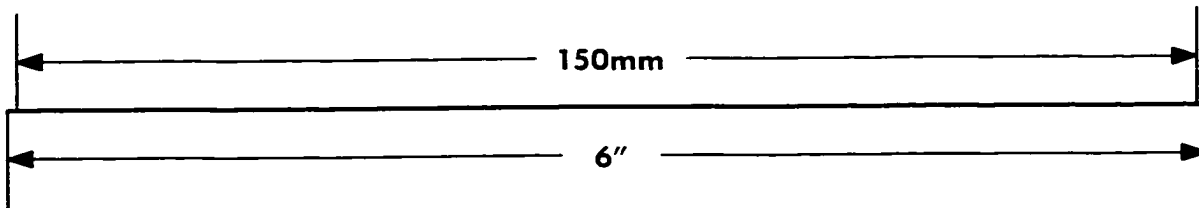
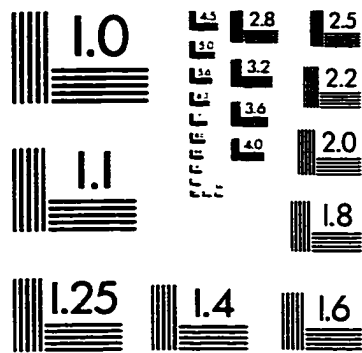
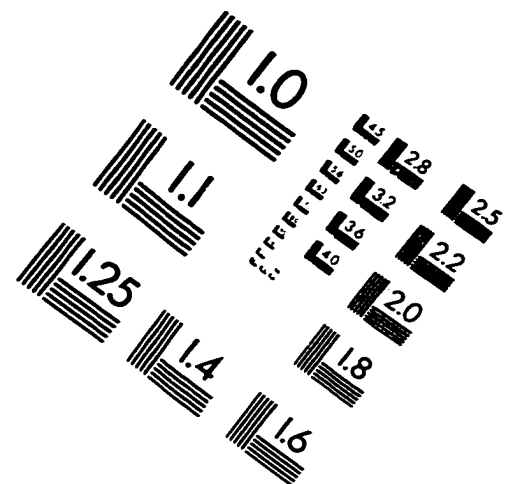
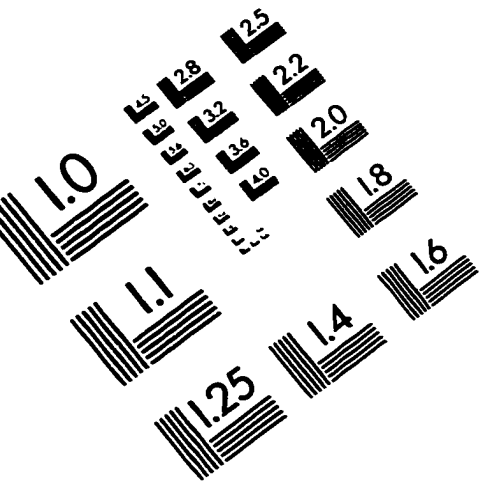
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